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**Memoryscapes:
Women Chart the Post-Trauma City in 20th- and 21st- Century Latin America**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

Katharine G. Trostel

June 2017

The Dissertation of Katharine G. Trostel
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Abstract

Katharine G. Trostel

*Memoryscapes:
Women Chart the Post-Trauma City in 20th- and 21st- Century Latin America*

I bring together two areas of scholarship – memory studies and theories of built space – in order to examine cultural responses to trauma in late 20th- and 21st- century Latin America. Each chapter charts the work of Latin American women writers of the post-trauma or post-dictatorship generation: the aftermath of dictatorships in Chile (Nona Fernández) and Argentina (Tununa Mercado), the legacies of the Tlatelolco student massacre in Mexico (Ana Clavel), and responses to the Shining Path in Peru (Karina Pacheco Medrano). My study is the first to bring these lesser-known women authors – joined together by their political engagement with the tension between spaces of collective and individual memory – into comparative analysis. They mark a shift in writing about trauma; each revisits unfinished histories from a perspective of temporal and/or spatial distance – through the lens of exile, of an “inheritor” of memory, or of a member of the second generation. Forming a “shadow canon,” these texts articulate a gender-specific reading of trauma through the female body’s interaction with the built environment. Within these fictional responses to trauma, corporeally experienced events become enmeshed in relationships to public space.

Through fiction-writing – a practice central to the process of political critique in Latin America – these authors react to the deliberate altering of cityspaces by authoritarian regimes. Their literary return to potential sites of collective memory

(monuments or memorials) marks absence, and seeks to reclaim what was lost in the radical transformation of the urban landscape. I focus on the way that the past is publicly encountered or mapped onto the contours of the city, as the authors place the reader in the ethical position of engaging in conversation with urban sites of memory.

This literary undertaking engages the collective political unconscious, and advances social healing. My work underscores the importance of understanding the social systems and urban trajectories of societies emerging from dictatorship and colonial histories – where the bodies of ethnic minorities and women indicate a continuing pattern of oppression. Fiction allows for a fuller articulation of diverse subjects living in complex urban spaces, and examines the intellectual and social work of extending human freedom.

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Introduction

“For me, the ghosts are like the in-between messengers – they could be dead or they could be alive – but they stay in the world ... *Also – ghosts could be invisible, just like women, could be powerless, just like women – and yet, they have a haunting power, they have an extraordinary power that is almost intangible. And I think the work of memory often is intangible, because you have to work on intangible ideas and thoughts until you create a corpus of remembrance*”¹

Overview and Theoretical Engagement

In this dissertation, I bring together two distinct areas of scholarship – memory studies and theories of built space – in order to examine cultural responses to trauma in late 20th- and 21st- century Latin America. Each chapter focuses on the works of a particular female writer within a specific national context: the aftermath of dictatorships in Chile and Argentina, representations of the legacies of the Tlatelolco student massacre in Mexico, and responses to the effects of the Shining Path in Peru. I examine the monument or memorial in the urban environment and the way in which these built spaces are re-mapped via fiction; I study how collective memory and cityspace are placed together, and how within these fictional responses to trauma, corporeally experienced events become enmeshed in relationships to public space in the following literary works: *En estado de memoria (In a State of Memory)* (1990) by Tununa Mercado (Argentina) to be read in conjunction with two of her essay collections *La letra de lo mínimo (The Letter of the Small)* (1994) and *Narrar después (Narrating After)* (2003); *Los deseos y su sombra (Desire and its Shadow)* (2000) by Ana Clavel (Mexico); *Mapocho* (2002) by Nona Fernández (Chile); *La sangre, el*

¹ Personal Interview with Marjorie Agosín on October 27th, 2016, emphasis added.

polvo, la nieve (*Blood, Dust, Snow*) (2010) by Karina Pacheco Medrano (Peru) to be read in conjunction with two short story collections, *Alma alga* (*Seaweed Soul*) (2010) and *El sendero de los rayos* (*The Path of Lightning*) (2013).

My study is the first to bring these lesser-known women authors into a comparative analysis – works that are joined, I argue, by their political engagement with the tension between spaces of collective and individual memory; their writing transcends the realm of fiction as they incorporate into their narratives both an involvement with, and a critique of, monuments and built spaces of memory. My dissertation maps the way in which literature can contribute to the discussions and debates surrounding the process of memorialization and the push to commemorate these traumas collectively in the public sphere. I focus on how this memory can be publicly encountered or mapped onto the contours of the city itself, as the authors place the reader in the ethical position of engaging in conversation with these urban sites of memory. As their protagonists walk the streets of the city, they re-encounter an urban space radically transformed by the legacy of authoritarianism. Contributing to the study of Latin American literature, I argue that these four women mark a shift in writing about trauma; each revisits unfinished histories from a perspective of temporal and / or spatial distance – through the lens of exile, of an “inheritor” of memory, or of a member of the second generation. Forming a kind of “shadow canon,” these texts articulate a gender-specific reading of trauma through the female

body's interaction with built space.² The writers, through their fictional landscapes, theorize the ways in which individual memories are processed and transformed into collective memories, and how the past is incorporated into the memory of the present. I engage with the axis of women's studies and offer new readings of the contemporary Latin American city.³

In this dissertation, I interrogate the role of the literary in symbolically representing and untangling the kinds of social formations enforced by historical violence. These texts offer a different kind of memory mapping, as they chart alternative trajectories or paths through the city. In imagining the cityscape as a site that can be "read," I am in dialogue with Dominick LaCapra, who suggests in *History*

² For example, Mark R. Cox's anthology *El cuento peruano en los años de violencia* (2000) includes only those authors born between 1944-1961; Mary Beth Tierney-Tello's work *Allegories of Transgression and Transformation* was published in 1995, and thus does not include any fiction published after this date; Idelber Avelar's *The Untimely Present* (1999) ends with *En estado de memoria*. My work starts where Avelar's ends, looking at questions of memory transfer, post-memory, and memories of the second generation.

³ As Mary Beth Tierney-Tello asserts in her 1995 study of female authors writing about the dictatorships of the Southern Cone, literature is a space where women are able to contest the imposed uni-vocality of the dictatorial, patriarchal regimes, and to open up spaces of alternative understandings of history and societal structures. I use her study as a way of contextualizing these newer works within a larger tradition of women writing about trauma and dictatorship: "Certainly, male writers also used sexuality, the body, and gender differences in order to refer to and denounce the power relations at work under authoritarianism. I am more interested, however, in exploring in depth how several selected women writers confront and respond to patriarchal, authoritarian discourses and representations, how processes of gendering come under attack in their texts, and how they manage to open new imaginary repertoires for women writers to create new possibilities for female subjectivity" (7). Other critical works that explore the topic of trauma in a broader context include Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), and in a specifically Latin American context Idelber Avelar's *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999) – among others. One might also consider how these works differ from the earlier "dictator novel," a genre in which male writers of the "Boom" went back to explore the legacy of 19th century dictatorships through literature. (For example, Gabriel García Márquez's *El general en su laberinto* [1989] or Miguel Ángel Asturias' *El señor presidente* [1946]).

in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory (2004) that when one is faced with traumatic memories, it is of the utmost importance to articulate that experience through the act of storytelling – in other words, to *narrate* the event.⁴ I contend that it is possible to conceive of urban sites as a kind of non-verbal narrative – as places capable of conjuring forth the memories of those bodies no longer actively present in the space of the city.⁵ As the protagonists engage with memorials, monuments, ruins, or rubble in a city reconfigured by trauma, they stir up place-based stories – stories that take on new meaning within the new historical context.

I argue that these texts help to bring memories of these difficult histories into the public sphere, as they move the “burden of memory” from a body that directly experienced the trauma, to a collection of individuals who actively participate in the construction of a communal urban fabric. The authors take up the issue of post-memory (Marianne Hirsch), and conceive of space as a means of negotiating the

⁴ In doing so, one should strive to, “...recount events and perhaps ... evoke experience, typically through nonlinear movement that allow trauma to register in languages and its hesitations, indirections, pauses, and silences ... narrative may help performatively to create openings in existence that did not exist before” (208).

⁵ Here, I turn to Donatella Mazzoleni’s “The City and the Imaginary” (1993), in order to build upon her assertion that architecture has a certain ability to narrate collective experience via the language of the body-in-space. In her view, the city communicates through its geography that which its individual inhabitants cannot speak; she envisions architectural spaces as extensions of the very bodies that dwell within them. John Frow elaborates upon the connection between built space and the housing of memory in “Tout la Mémoire du Monde: Repetition and Forgetting” (2007). Frow seeks to examine how memory can be thought of as something both visual and spatial – as a process that follows the logic of inscription and deposit. A memory is simply stored information: “How can memory be thought as *techné*, as mediation, as writing?” (151) Following Frow, I consider the *physical* quality of memory-traces. Frow speaks to this relationship between memory and spatial-cognitive maps, drawing on the work of Mary Carruther’s medieval memory systems, from which he quotes: “...anything that encodes information in order to stimulate the memory to store or retrieve information is ‘writing’” (152). Using this definition of memory, I view both physical and literary sites as “texts,” capable of housing, narrating, and preserving the traces of the past.

transformation of private, individual memories into collective remembrances. I engage Hirsch's important question – one she poses in her recent work, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*: “If postmemory is not limited to the intimate embodied space of the family, how, by what mechanisms, does it extend to more distant, adoptive witnesses or affiliative contemporaries?” (6).⁶ I consider the issue of the “transfer” of difficult memories or suppressed pasts: how do we “pass on” memories that are so dependent upon bodily experience? I note that within these particular literary responses to moments of trauma, corporeally experienced events become enmeshed in relationships to public space; I focus on the way in which this memory can be publicly encountered, passed on, remembered, or mapped onto the planes or contours of the city itself by women. I grapple with the following questions: Where does the memory reside – in the urban space or in the literary text (or both)? What is the relationship between these two forms of housing memory?

Even as I am aware of the specificity of each text's national context, in bringing these works together, I suggest that they form a particular kind of constellation. As Andreas Huyssen outlines, Mexico's student massacre and the dictatorships of Chile and Argentina are historical events intimately linked to the post-68 generation.⁷ I argue for the inclusion of works about the Shining Path in this

⁶ In order to look at this concept of “post-memory” from a particularly Latin American perspective, I turn also to Ana Ros' *The Postdictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay: Collective Memory and Cultural Production* (2012) and Susana Kaiser's *Postmemories of Terror: A New Generation Copes with the Legacy of the “Dirty War”* (2005).

project, as this case represents an additional moment of violence that ushered neo-liberal policies into the national sphere. Focusing my work further, I examine literary production by women in the post-'89 era, works that *look back* at the promise of '68 and consider the legacy of authoritarianism in the post-Cold War period in the specific context of Latin America. Through the space of the literary, these authors question the aftermath of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, policies of exclusion and inclusion, the consequences of exile, trauma, and violence, and the effects of the end of the Cold War and the subsequent transition into neo-liberal policies as they are felt and experienced by Latin American women. In bringing together these specific regional instances of historical trauma, I join Jean Franco in her desire to understand what she terms, "cruel modernity." In her 2013 *Cruel Modernity*, she questions, "Why, in Latin America, did the pressures of modernization and the lure of modernity lead states to kill?" (2) She writes, "To consider the exercise of cruelty in Latin America moves the debate into a different and complex terrain that links conquest to femicide, the war on communism to genocide and neoliberalism to casual violence without limits..." (5). I view this grouping of texts as engaging in exactly this type of "long historical" view, as the works analyze a larger network of overlapping and layered traces of violence.

In order to think through the relationship between place, memory, and history, I contextualize the literary works within a broader geography by looking at memory

⁷ Huyssen writes in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*: "Thus, the memory park in Buenos Aires is more than a national monument. It is also part of the global legacy of 1968, together with the shooting of students in Mexico City and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia" (105).

sites that appear within each specific national context. In the case of Argentina, I include the monuments El parque de la memoria in Buenos Aires (“The Memory Park” inaugurated in 1997) and the *Reloj de Sol de Villa María, Córdoba* (“Sun Dial” inaugurated in 1993), which I contrast to other types of memorial sites such as preserved detention centers (El Olimpo or La Escuela Mecánica), grassroots neighborhood projects such as *Baldosas para la memoria* (“Paving Stones for Memory”), or natural spaces such as the Río de la Plata (The River Plate). In Chile, I consider the Villa Grimaldi Peace Park in Santiago (inaugurated in 1997), the General Cemetery and Patio 29, which houses a plaque dedicated to the *desaparecidos* (nationally recognized as a site of memory in 2006), as well as the natural sites of the Atacama Desert and the Mapocho River. Mexico’s memorial landscape includes La Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Plaza of the Three Cultures) and the plaque (inaugurated in 1993) commemorating those killed in the 1968 student massacre. Finally, in the Peruvian context I will examine Lika Mutal’s 2005 monument, *El ojo que llora* (“The Eye that Cries,” Lima) – as well as the many “ojitos” (“little eyes”) that have popped up in response to this memorial project in several highland villages.

By situating the texts within their cultural and historical frameworks, I push for an understanding of the different power dynamics and forces of contestation that orbit each site.⁸ It is important to note that many of these built interventions are not

⁸ Much work has been published on the reception, inauguration, and creation of the abovementioned monuments. Argentina: Elizabeth Jelin’s *Los trabajos de la memoria* (2002) and *What Memories Are We Talking About?* (2003); Elizabeth Jelin and Susana G. Kaufman’s “Layers of Memory: Twenty Years after in Argentina” (2000); Elizabeth Jelin and Victoria Langland’s *Monumentos, memoriales, y marcas territoriales* (2003); Silvia R. Tandeciarz’s “Citizens of Memory: Refiguring the Past in Postdictatorship Argentina” (2007). Chile: *Where Memory Dwells: Culture and State Violence in Chile*

state-sponsored projects, and even if they are, represent a very different kind of “monument” as they commemorate violence committed by the nation *itself*. Here, Elizabeth Jelin’s and Victoria Langland’s *Monumentos, memoriales, y marcas territoriales (Monuments, Memorials, and Territorial Markers)* (2003) Robert Bevan’s *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (2006), Andreas Huyssen’s *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003), and James E. Young’s *The Texture of Memory* (1993) help me to think through the category of monument, as well as the ways in which space can actually be “read.” In this dissertation, I view the built environment as a kind of “script” for encounters with memory. I further suggest that through the process of translating urban space into the world of fiction it takes on even more “texture” to use Young’s term – one he employs to describe the layered nature of memory that attaches itself to place, a three-dimensional complexity that one should seek to preserve, rather than codify.⁹

(2009) by Macarena Gómez-Barris; Teresa Meade’s “Holding the Junta Accountable: Chile’s ‘Sitios de Memoria’ and the History of Torture, Disappearance, and Death” (2001); Diana Taylor’s “Trauma, memoria y performance: Un recorrido por Villa Grimaldi con Pedro Matta” (2006). Peru: Roxana Chirinos’ interview in *Agenciaperu.com* (2006), “Conversación con Lika Mutal”; Paulo Drinot’s article in the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesía* (2009), “For Whom the Eye Cries: Memory, Monumentality, and the Ontologies of Violence in Peru”; Katherine Hite’s article in *A Contracorriente* (2007), “‘The Eye that Cries’: The Politics of Representing Victims in Contemporary Peru” and her book-length work, *Politics and the Art of Commemoration: Memorials to Struggle in Latin America and Spain* (2013); Cynthia E. Milton’s “Public Space for the Discussion of Peru’s Recent Past” (2007).

⁹ In his 1993 *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, Young writes: “To this end, I enlarge the life and texture of Holocaust memorials to include the times and places in which they were conceived; their literal construction amid historical and political realities; their finished forms in public spaces; their places in the constellation of national memory; and their ever-evolving lives in the minds of their communities and of the Jewish people over time. With these dimensions in mind, we look not only at the ways individual monuments create and reinforce particular memory of the Holocaust period, but also at the ways events re-enter political life shaped by monuments. Taken together, these stages comprise a genuine activity of memory, by which artifacts of ages past are invigorated by the present moment, even as they condition our understanding of the world around us.

In drawing together text and monument, I am in dialogue with Young who calls for a porous boundary between the built environment and the space carved out by literary texts; I echo his argument that the narratives we create about monuments in part structure their meaning. In 1993, Mercado read her essay “Piedra de honda” (“Slingshot Stone”) (included in her essay collection *La letra de lo mínimo / The Letter of the Small*) at the inauguration of the monument *Reloj de Sol* (“Sun Dial”) in Villa María, Córdoba. In her piece, she engages directly with the idea of “the monumental,” as she manipulates the form of the memorial in the space of her imagination: “Cerraba los ojos y veía una transparencia muy interior, se diría una luz brotante que se superponía a la propia luz del aire y creaba un efecto de liviandad sobre los cuerpos del entorno, y correlativamente, en las piedras, una energía del impacto, que así podría llamarse la capacidad para lanzarse a un blanco y regresar a esa latencia que ha de ser el deseo de las piedras hasta avizorar el próximo blanco” (69).¹⁰ I highlight a specifically feminine interaction with the built memorial landscape within the realm of the literary, and consider its importance within the long

On a more general level, we might ask of all memorials what meanings are generated when the temporal realm is converted to material form, when time collapses into space, a trope by which it is then measured and grasped. How do memorials emplot time and memory? How do they impose borders on time, a façade on memory? What is the relationship of time to place, place to memory, memory to time? Finally, two fundamentally interrelated questions: How does a particular place shape our memory of a particular time? And how does this memory of a past time shape our understanding of the present moment?” (14-5).

¹⁰ “I closed my eyes and saw a transparency deep down, one might say a budding light that imposed itself over the light of the air and created an effect of lightness in all the surrounding bodies and, correspondingly, an energy of impact on the stones – one might call the ability to careen towards a target and then return to the latency that must be the desire of the stones, until honing in on the next target.” (my trans.)

history of patriarchal, state sponsored monuments: how can such traditionally masculine forms of remembering be re-imagined through a feminine interaction with this space?¹¹

The writings I examine are ones that engage directly with the built contours of the urban environment. The fictional trajectories depicted in the literary works circle around sites of collective memory – some of which are marked, and some of which remain hidden or whose histories are concealed beneath layers of structural injustice. For example, *Mapocho* contains a scene where a father visits the General Cemetery of Santiago – a site which today features a plaque dedicated to those “disappeared” under Pinochet’s regime and where historically, unidentified bodies were buried. And yet, much of the novel interrogates this memoryscape: where is the “real” monument or space of memory in Santiago’s post-dictatorial landscape? As the work suggests, one must dig beneath the shiny facades of modern office towers and the space of the neoliberal city in order to uncover the ruined fragments of what was lost. In some ways, one such tower itself becomes an unrecognized monolith whose shadow marks

¹¹ The memorial projects themselves invite an examination of feminine interaction. For example, *El ojo que llora* was designed by female, Dutch artist Lika Mutal, whose project was inspired by the form of the Pachamama. Likewise, the Memory Park in Buenos Aires contains many sculptures created by women, or featuring the female form. Roberto Aizenberg’s sculpture, for example, depicts three abstract figures, each meant to represent a person “disappeared” by the dictatorial regime; one of the figures is noticeably a pregnant woman. This image of the “maternal” becomes an important part of the monument. The concern is echoed by the memorial wall of names, in which the word “embarazada” is etched on the plaques bearing the names of women who were pregnant when captured – a gesture that represents the double loss of life. On the topic of state-sponsored monuments and their connection to projects of nation-building, see Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) and Homi K. Bhabha’s edited collection *Nation and Narration* (1990), particularly Ernest Renan’s “What is a Nation?” (1882). See also Paul Ricoeur’s *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004).

the absence of the destroyed working class neighborhood, La Chimba. Likewise, *Alma alga* – although the majority of the work is set in the Peruvian context – contains a story that centers upon this very same memorial site – Santiago’s General Cemetery. The author gestures towards those places where traumatic traces remain unmarked – the space of the Atacama Desert or abandoned detention centers – forcing the reader to question what kinds of spaces are truly capable of “housing” memory. In *Los deseos y su sombra*, Clavel re-animates monuments to forgotten national heroes on the Avenida Reforma – figures who now speak their histories in a radically different context and in a post-Tlatelolco cityscape. Beyond the legacy of Tlatelolco, the reader is pushed to question the continued state of authoritarianism and the relentless process of modernization advanced by the politics of the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*). In Clavel’s Mexico City, the Tlatelolco tower is ever-present – hovering in the background as a site whose traumatic history remains un-named, a haunting reminder of the painful memories that have not yet been put to rest. In each of the literary works I selected, the authors begin to untangle the relationship between place and the corresponding stories, histories, and memories that attach themselves to the built environment.

In order to think through the process of spatially based narration, I turn to the recently published *HyperCities: Mapping in the Digital Humanities* (2014) by Todd Presner, David Shepard, and Yoh Kawano; while this book primarily explores the implications of digital mapping technologies, I am drawn to the authors’ use of the concept of “thick mapping” – a practice with which I argue these literary works

engage as they weave a thick map of memory – what might be thought of as a “textured” memory to borrow Young’s term yet again: “Thickness means extensibility and polyvocality: diachronic and synchronic, temporally layered, and polyvalent ways of authoring, knowing, and making meaning ... Thick maps are conjoined with stories, and stories are conjoined with maps, such that ever more complex contexts for meaning are created. As such, thick maps are never finished and meanings are never definitive ... In essence, thick maps give rise to forms of counter-mapping ... In this sense, ‘thickness’ arises from the never-ending friction between maps, counter-maps, construction, and deconstruction, mapping and counter-mapping” (19). I argue that one can read these literary works as an enactment of precisely this kind of mapping and counter-mapping, and that these stories add yet another layer of histories, a new “thickness,” to our understanding and perceptions of the complex site of post-trauma cityscapes.

I further argue that one’s active engagement with “reading” an urban text has important consequences. I turn to the work of Silvia R. Tandeciarz, who asserts in her article, “Citizens of Memory: Refiguring the Past in Postdictatorship Argentina” (2007) that our very paths through the cityscape allow for a certain kind of transformation of the “performance of citizenship.”¹² Analyzing representations of city space, I argue, is of particular concern in the Latin American context. As theorist Ángel Rama makes clear in his work, *La ciudad letrada* (*The Lettered City*) (1996),

¹² She writes: “Because each historical subject is also the product of the paths he or she has chosen, changes in the landscape can help shape new forms of civic engagement. How individuals inhabit this geography, which routes they choose, and what they encounter along the way can have profound consequences for the construction of their subjectivities and the articulation of civil society” (152).

control over the contours of the city has long been important in Latin America; since the time of the Conquest, the privilege of “reading” and “writing” urban space was a practice guarded by the city’s elites, the *letrados*. Therefore, a re-writing or re-interpretation of the urban within the space of feminine narrative is a powerful gesture in that it imagines a new kind of civic engagement.

I borrow from Serge Gruzinski the term “strange zones” (39) (one he uses in *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization* [2002]) to describe the Latin American landscape after the Conquest). However, in my work, I use the phrase to draw attention to those disconcerting remains, ruins, or rubble that can be re-captured in the space of the literary in order to create a distinct vision of the history of the urban environment. These often devalued or overlooked traces of violence can be re-appropriated to construct a different kind of historical telling. I am supported in this claim by Avelar, who writes in *The Untimely Present*: “If the dictatorships have resignified every corner of the city, if the catastrophe is blocked from public memory by the absence of monuments to the dead, postdictatorial literature depicts the urban space as an allegorical ruin. It is through these ruins that postcatastrophe literature reactivates the hope of providing an entrance into a traumatic experience that has seemingly been condemned to silence and oblivion” (10). Likewise, Nelly Richard in her work, *Cultural Residues: Chile in Transition* (1998) views these ruins and traces that escape the totalizing system as the vehicle through which alternative, suppressed, or subaltern histories of trauma can be

recovered.¹³ In order to expand my understanding of the ruin in the Latin American context, I draw from Vicky Unruh and Michael J. Lazzara's edited volume, *Telling Ruins in Latin America* (2009). To complicate this notion of "ruin," I additionally utilize the volume, *Imperial Debris: On Ruin and Ruination* (2013) edited by Ana Stoler. In the introduction to this collection, Stoler calls for an understanding of ruin that is more complex than imagining an inert pile of stones; she urges her readers to consider "ruination" as a *process*. Complementing this view is Gastón Gordillo, whose essay "Ships Stranded in the Forest" (2011) claims that "...ruins, like all places, are not univocal reified objects, but dynamic social-spatial processes that can become sites of contestation over the meaning of the past and onto which social actors project manifold, often contradictory imaginaries and memories" (142). These theorists allow me to address the question of circulating stories – how are sites in the urban landscape named, labeled, or written about? I utilize this concept of "ruin making" in my readings as a counter-point to my examination of the process of monumentalization or memorialization that simultaneously marks these urban, fictional, landscapes.

¹³ As Richard argues, in the context of the Chilean transition from dictatorship to democracy, despite an attempt to create a "consensual model of a 'democracy of agreements'" by those in power, there remained "overflows": "an overflowing of memories (the tumultuous reinterpretations of the past that maintain the memory of a history open to an incessant struggle of reading and meaning..." (15). Of the literary works that responded to the government's whitewashing of this complex history, Richard writes: "Instead of wanting to suture the gaps left by the representational voids with a discourse of reunifying ... these 'poetics of crisis' devised by Chilean art and literature of the eighties preferred to restylize cuts and fissures, discontinuities and eruptions ... art and literature of the 'new scene' explored the zone of conflict through which 'forgotten figures' unwilling images and the detritus of memory retake the road toward language sufficiently splintered so as not to again mortify what has been wounded with new categorical totalizations" (29).

I echo Michael Rothberg's call for an examination of memory that is "multidirectional"; in his work, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), he argues that each publicly commemorated trauma simultaneously hides and reveals other moments of historical injustice.¹⁴ I argue that these literary works engage with a very specific understanding of the built environment, and that they consider space as a kind of palimpsest, whereby layered historical traumas (some of the texts begin as early as the conquest of the Americas) come to *mark* the contours of the urban environment and allow for a place-based reading of history. These are spaces most recently transformed (or even re-traumatized) by the violence of modernity, globalization, and neo-liberal policies, but whose contours also speak to a whole network of linked historical injustice. The literary pieces engage directly with monuments, memorials, neglected corners of the city, and ruins – and it is through the female body's fictionalized trajectory across the urban environment that a long history of violence and trauma is unraveled.

In this dissertation, I explore how this "shadow" canon participates in the long view of "cruel modernity" presented by Franco, in the sense that each author examines the roots and origins of moments of extreme cruelty – moments that directly preceded the neoliberal policies of the late 20th and 21st centuries. How does fiction unbury these neglected memories, and how does this imagined cityscape interact with the tangible built space of the "real" urban environment? Finally, I

¹⁴ He writes: "It is precisely that convoluted, sometimes historically unjustified, back-and-forth movement of seemingly distant collective memories in and out of public consciousness that I qualify as memory's multidirectionality" (17).

question who – to use Franco’s term – is considered to be “alien” to modernity, a question which allows me to interrogate the consequences paid in each national context for entry into the neo-liberal, globalized world.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1:

The Infinite and the Intimate: Monumental Ruins and Scales of Memory in the Works of Tununa Mercado
(Argentina: Responses to the violence of the “Dirty War,” 1976-1983).

In the introduction to the English translation of Tununa Mercado’s *En estado de memoria* (1990) (*In a State of Memory* [2001]), Jean Franco writes that the novel might be described as depicting a “post”-traumatic landscape “whose historical memory has been deformed” (x) by an experience of dictatorship – one that has “stretched the limits of the believable” (xvi-xvii). Building on Franco’s observations, I pair my analysis of the novel with two of Mercado’s essay collections – *La letra de lo mínimo* (*The Letter of the Small*) (1994) and *Narrar después* (*Narrating After*) (2003) – in order to explore the process of re-encountering urban space post-exile. Avelar calls *En estado de memoria* “a prolegomenon to postdictatorial writing in that it narrates the possibility for writing after a catastrophe” (228) – a novel that: “...inquires into the mode, the modality, in which another relationship with the future can be established” (228-9). As I look at later examples of post-traumatic fiction by Latin American women writers, I also view this book as a kind of “hinge” – as a model for shaping a terrain where writing post-dictatorship or post-trauma is possible.

The novel, I argue, provides a testing ground in which to think through scales of trauma; the “everyday” has been disturbed, and “normal” ways of inhabiting the

city space of Buenos Aires are no longer possible: “For those who return, the country is not an open container, and it is futile for them to try to lose themselves within the existing structures; there are no cubby holes to slip into, no houses in which to hide” (130).¹⁵ The narrator feels a sense of paralysis as she attempts to reintegrate herself into the urban fabric of daily life – a trauma she necessarily experiences at a remove; she was not there to witness the violence of disappearances and repression directly, and must come to terms with a landscape she can no longer recognize. Her time in exile, as she describes it, was a “time in parenthesis” (50).

Here, I will engage the work of Esther Peeren on the chronotope, which she develops in a 2006 article, “Through the Lens of the Chronotope: Suggestions for a Spatio-Temporal Perspective on Diaspora.” In her analysis of the figure – typically considered to be an exclusively literary concept – Peeren proposes expanding its function to embody *cultural processes*.¹⁶ According to Peeren, the way in which individuals and societies inhabit time and space is “established and maintained by means of repeated social practice” (71). I argue that we can read Mercado’s works as attempting to carve out a new relationship to time and space in the difficult terrain of

¹⁵ It is precisely these “spaces” of memory – both exterior and interior – that I will explore in this chapter of the dissertation. As Mercado’s protagonist tries to make sense of her experiences, she imagines a number of interior shelters – all of which contrast to the “real” space of the spectral city where she can only see absence: cellular chambers, the interior of a Chinese pomegranate, bottomless bird cages without exit, ever-expanding houses, and even a great wall that ultimately blocks her from the life of the city outside her apartment window and that can only “fall” through the process of writing memory; throughout the work, the protagonist actively negotiates her relationship to both space and time.

¹⁶ “... I will conceive of it as a formally constitutive category of all social and cultural realities. We all exist within time-space constructions that make us who we are and that govern our lives ... Subjects do not stand above a chronotope as its masters, but are *within* it, or indeed, of it” (68-9).

Argentina post-dictatorship, and that one of the protagonist's primary concerns is locating and learning to inhabit those places capable of "housing" traumatic memory.

I push for a reading of Mercado's work that explores this very challenge: how do we "house" traumatic memory? And, how can we view the space of writing as a kind of call on the part of Mercado to resist the tendency to "monumentalize?" Here, I turn to Mercado's essay collections, which help to elucidate her idea of memory "scales." I argue that Mercado, through her focus on the aesthetic of the small (she describes her writing on the back cover of *La letra de lo mínimo*: "mini-ensayos, poemitas, mini-relatos, 'universitos' ... el libro los trenza o hilvana en una novela mínima..." / "mini-essays, tiny-poems, mini-stories, small universes ... the book braids or stitches them together into a minimal novel") tries to combat a certain kind of monumentalization of memory. I build upon Franco's observation that Mercado, in her work, seeks to resist "...the tendency to commute individual memory too rapidly into social or collective memory..." because it "...can be monumentalized in ways that frustrate the complexities" (xvi). Through the process of experimentation via writing, Mercado invents for herself a new, more nuanced, method of memorialization – a way of ethically forging a collective memory that can transcend the individual through a practice of writing "the small."

Chapter 2:

El Archivo Muerto: Ghostly Memories and Haunted Topographies in Ana Clavel's Post-Tlatelolco Mexico City
(Mexico: Responses to the Tlatelolco Massacre, October 2nd, 1968).

In this chapter, I focus on Ana Clavel's *Los deseos y su sombra* (*Desire and Its Shadow*) (2000) – a work which, as Jane Elizabeth Lavery points out in her 2007

article, “Beyond the Shadows of Solitude: Self, Desire, and (Dis)embodiment in Ana Clavel’s ‘Los deseos y su sombra’” has received little critical attention (1053).¹⁷

Lavery’s recent work, *The Art of Ana Clavel: Ghosts, Urinals, Dolls, Shadows and Outlaw Desires* (2014) begins to add to this analysis. As Lavery highlights, key to the novel is the relationship between the female body, traumatic memory, and physical space.¹⁸ However, while her work takes a psycho-analytical approach to the novel, focusing on Clavel’s use of queer and outlaw sexualities, I instead focus on the role of urban space and collective memory-making. I utilize both memory studies and studies looking at the role of city space in order to explore the tangible traces that the violent history of the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco left on the script of the city. I question: how do the remains of a violent past overlap with other topographical records left on the surface of the city, and how are they uncovered by the female protagonist’s “spectral” gaze? I argue that this novel seeks to mark those very figures previously erased from the urban landscape – removed from view by the same patriarchal powers that eventually transform the protagonist, Soledad, into a literal ghost. Yet, despite her invisibility, it is only through her eyes that she (and we) are able to read between the lines of the hegemonically scripted city in order to recover

¹⁷ An additional article on this work is Isabel A. Quintana’s “Topografías urbanas de fin de siglo: Las formas de ‘La mirada’ en la literatura mexicana” (2004) – although it only mentions Clavel’s novel in passing.

¹⁸ “Soledad’s journey of self-discovery and re-mapping of her own body in the megalopolis feminizes the traditional male quest in the Mexican urban novel. The notion of the city as a whore, which provides a space for male journeys over what is depicted as a prostrate female terrain, continues to hold sway in Mexico’s masculine literary (postcolonial) imagination” (105-6).

the subaltern voices squeezed below, and into, the hidden recesses of urban environment.

In order to address the protagonist's ghostly nature, I turn to Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters*. I question: How do these spaces of the past haunt the present – erupting through the city's surface? Gordon states: "Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present and the future" (xvi), adding that an occurrence of haunting marks a certain "something-to-be-done" (xvi). As I analyze the novel through the lens of haunting, I note that Soledad's state of limbo allows her to "read" the entangled scripts that cover a landscape multiply haunted by overlapping and interconnected historical traumas. The ever-present Tlatelolco tower hovers in the background of the text, as Soledad struggles with both exterior and interior labyrinths of memory. Foundational traumas mark her body – the death of her friend's brother, Miguel, in the student massacre of '68; her childhood molestation at the hands of "el Desconocido" / "The Unknown" – but the reader also gets the sense that larger injustices are at play – structural injustices that unfold over the face of the city. As she wanders through the urban space, Soledad's body seems to fuse with its surface.

I argue that the novel records and re-animates traumatic memory spatially, and that by exploring the trajectory of Soledad's pathways through the city, the reader begins to see the inherent power in the *naming* of space, and in the control of the stories that circulate about each geographical node; these practices become powerful weapons against those who wish to erase traces of historical injustice, and against

systems of extreme patriarchy. While the book ends with the image of a missing person poster describing Soledad, Soledad herself simply becomes one of the many “disappeared” city-dwellers made visible only through the text – the reader now views the city’s script with fresh eyes. Through her novel, interwoven with photographic theory (and heavily influenced by Roland Barthes’ assertion that it is the photograph that serves as the evidence of existence), Clavel calls for the reader’s participation in recognizing the traces of those bodies that have been made invisible in the urban environment: what does it mean to “see” or capture absence?¹⁹

Chapter 3:

City of (Post) Memory: Memory Mapping in Nona Fernández’s 2002 *Mapocho* (Chile: Responses to the Dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, 1973-1990).

In the third chapter of my dissertation, I focus on the space of post-dictatorship Chile as it is depicted by Nona Fernández’s 2002 novel, *Mapocho*. This work opens up my analysis to issues of second generation memory, post-memory, and memory “transfer”: how does the fictional urban space allow for memory to be “read”

¹⁹ Here, I am in dialogue with Isabel A. Quintana, (although her article, “Topografías urbanas de fin de siglo: Las formas de ‘La mirada’ en la literatura mexicana” / “Late Century Urban Topographies: Forms of ‘The Gaze’ in Mexican Literature” [2004] only mentions Clavel in passing.) She writes: “La ciudad ... es el escenario en donde las miradas, en su lucha por abarcarla, se delimitan, anulan o exceden otorgándole *visibilidad*. Al mismo tiempo, lo ocular es el recipiente donde los deseos e idealizaciones de los personajes (del narrador y también del autor) se proyectan en el diagramado de una geografía particular. De este modo, la literatura crea topografías por las cuales se busca fijar un sentido a través de determinados objetos ... y, en ocasiones, resquebraja las fabulaciones ordenadoras al dejar ingresar heterogeneidades diversas que le otorgan una densidad particular a la ciudad representada” (249) / “The city ... is the scene where looking, the struggle to take it in, is bounded – it annuls or exceeds – giving visibility to the city. At the same time, the ocular is the recipient where desires and idealizations of characters (the narrator and also the author) are projected on the diagram of a particular geography. In this way, literature creates topographies on which a feeling is fixed through certain objects ... and, at times, shatters the ordering fantasies as diverse heterogeneities – which give a particular density to the represented city – are permitted to enter.” (my trans.) How does the space of fiction help to create alternative ways of viewing or gazing upon the city and its record of traumatic memory?

topographically? In my study of this novel, I build upon the work of Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012).²⁰ As the ghostly narrator, la Rucia – again, like Soledad, a female urban wanderer who exists only in the liminal state between life and death – returns from exile to explore the equally ghostly city of Santiago de Chile, her footsteps awaken dormant memories contained and preserved in the hidden folds of urban space.

The novel explores the layered history of structural injustices in the La Chimba neighborhood (traditionally working-class and indigenous), as la Rucia confronts her father, Fausto in this space. Her father (once the neighborhood storyteller/professor) is now charged with the creation of an “official” version of state history. I argue that it is precisely la Rucia’s paths through the city that challenge her father’s betrayal of the local, grounded history, (by uncovering the stories that used to freely circulate in a space that now lies literally ruined beneath her feet), as she digs beneath the modernized façade of the city to unbury the suppressed subaltern past. Her wanderings interrogate the categories of memory and history, and awaken the ghosts whose existence depends upon recognizing specific modes of inhabiting space.

I build on the analysis of Daniel Noemi Voionmaa, whose essay “The ‘Uchronic’ City: Writing (after) the Catastrophe” is included in the 2006 edited

²⁰ Hirsch describes the phenomenon of postmemory as follows: “Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension” (5).

volume *Unfolding the City: Women Write the City in Latin America*.²¹ Voionmaa points to the novel's exploration of the neoliberal strategies of spatial organization imposed by Pinochet's dictatorship – a strategy that he views as an attempt to freeze time and space. I add to this analysis, however, that la Rucia's feminine connection with the city allows her to read beneath its surface – to notice the debris, the ruins, and the markers of trauma that have escaped the totalizing forces of dictatorship and its neoliberal policies. Here, I again invoke the work of Richard, who calls for a certain kind of attention to the "...overflowing of names (the discordant ways in which social subjectivities break the ranks of identity normalized by the political script...); an overflowing of memories (the tumultuous reinterpretations of the past that maintain the memory of history open to an incessant struggle of reading and meaning..." (15). I argue that one can read exactly these un-erasable remainders on the surface of urban topography in this novel's depiction of the city.²²

In this chapter, I additionally utilize Michael Lazzara's *Prismas de la memoria: narración y trauma en la transición chilena / Chile in Transition: The*

²¹ He writes of Fernández's *Mapocho*, contextualizing the novel among other works by women writers in post-dictatorship Chile: "In one sense, to talk about 'after catastrophe' is an oxymoron, because it is an ongoing event, therefore without an 'after.' But at the same time it has continuously already happened. In other words, it is precisely the oxymoronic disappearance of time, history, and memory that allow us to maintain the possibility of the 'after' of something that has not ended. These writings are dealing precisely with that possible impossibility" (111).

²² As Fernández suggests in her novel, the city has its own kind of agency – its own power to tell and record stories: "El Barrio vive. Se le intuye más allá de las vitrinas y los anuncios de neón. Está sepultado por construcciones, por publicidades ... a veces, cuando la tierra se sacude en un temblor pasajero, el Barrio suspira y deja ver con claridad pedazos de su carne" (189) / "The Neighborhood lives. You feel it beyond the shop windows and neon signs. It's buried by construction, by ads ... sometimes, when the earth shakes itself off in a passing tremor, the Neighborhood breathes and clearly shows pieces of its flesh." (my trans.)

Poetics and Politics of Memory (2007). In this work, Lazzara argues that under dictatorship, the city of Santiago became a giant crime scene and that “hoy es difícil mapear los vestigios de la violencia política en el actual espacio urbano modernizado y neoliberal de la capital chilena” (201) / “Today it’s difficult to map the traces of political violence on the actual, modern and neoliberal urban space of the capital city of Chile.” (my trans.) I explore how Fernández’s novel serves exactly this purpose – that of uncovering “hidden” monuments²³ or spaces of memory that are in need of a kind of re-awakening. I question: How do we recognize those spaces that are already marked by traumatic memory, but that lie dormant in the urban landscape?

Chapter 4:

The Eye that Cries: Macro and Micro Narratives of Memory in Peru Post Shining Path in the Works of Karina Pacheco Medrano (Peru: Responses to the Violence of the Shining Path, 1980-1992 – Decline after the Capture of Leader Abimael Guzmán).

In 2000, Mark R. Cox published an anthology entitled: *El cuento peruano en los años de violencia (The Peruvian Short Story in the Years of Violence)*. In its introduction, Cox marks 1986 as the year in which literary works about the political violence stemming from government conflicts with the Maoist guerilla group, Sendero Luminoso / The Shining Path, began to emerge. His collection includes authors born between 1944 and 1961 – individuals who he claims participate in a kind of “boom” in Andean literature made possible in part by a certain kind of

²³ At the center of the fictional cityscape depicted by *Mapocho* is a modern office tower – a building that almost serves as a monolith, marking the long history of the un-named dead that haunt the neighborhood; Fernández also includes a detailed scene that takes place in Patio 29 – a section of the General Cemetery where many of the “disappeared” were buried clandestinely – but that was not named a national monument until 2006, four years after the publication of the novel.

international interest in the theme of political violence. However, my work adds to this history by extending the analysis to include an author who was a child and adolescent during the time of violence – Karina Pacheco Medrano (born 1969 in Cusco – almost a decade after the youngest authors represented in Cox’s anthology).²⁴ An anthropologist by training – and one who has worked extensively on issues of human rights – Pacheco Medrano’s work traces the intersections between the public and the private, the macro and the micro. She uncovers a layered history of historical injustice that continues to mark the landscape of Peru, contextualizing these themes in networks of both local and global scale. I pair her own literary production with her involvement in the foundation of an independent press – one she aptly named “Ceques Editores” (a name that evokes the imaginary lines that linked the city of Cusco, the central node of the Incan Empire, to the world at large.) I emphasize the fact that these literary projects re-center Cusco as a site of knowledge *production*, as a “different” center (or *ombligo*) of the world.

Building on Gordon’s idea of “haunting,” I also utilize the work of María del Pilar Blanco, *Ghost Watching American Modernity: Haunting, Landscape, and the Hemispheric Imagination* (2012) in order to untangle the various layers of historical trauma and global networks of memories that erupt in Pacheco Medrano’s work. Del Pilar Blanco claims that haunting occurs when spatiotemporal dimensions clash, and that as readers, we must be attentive to the “...spatiotemporal coordinates that merge

²⁴ In a 2010 interview with *Proyecto Patrimonio*, Pacheco Medrano addresses the legacy of the traces of violence that continue to haunt her generation; I will discuss the details of this interview within the chapter itself.

to produce a site of haunting ... what is ungraspable about the present, changing, and developing landscapes” (6). Returning to the tradition of the Latin American vanguards, Pacheco Medrano utilizes an anti-realist, anti-mimetic aesthetic as a way of (somewhat counter-intuitively) accessing a more “real” reality; through their ghostly forms, women avoid the grasp of authoritarian control, and are able to speak back to power. As overlapping memories collide within the space of fiction, a history of erasure and historical re-writings emerges. I call for a reading of Pacheco Medrano’s work that employs both memory theory and theory of built space, and that recognizes that the city itself emerges as a prompt for memory-work.²⁵

In this chapter, I look carefully at the way in which Pacheco Medrano explores the traces of political violence through her emphasis on literary memorial sites. Her short story collections, along with her novel *La sangre, el polvo, la nieve* (*Blood, Dust, Snow*) (2010), create spaces in which the physical landscape acts as a merger between highly public histories, and deeply personal memories – often tracing the process of “ruination” as it unfolds across the surfaces of buildings. In her novel, Pacheco Medrano narrates this process through the story of a slowly crumbling house

²⁵ Here, I again echo and build upon the work of Voionmaa. Although he is writing about the novel, *Mapocho*, I think that his analysis also applies in this distinct “post”-catastrophe context: “This is the (permanent) catastrophe the writers are facing, not only a political and economic catastrophe, but also a human catastrophe. The writer deals with the ruins of history, and the cities and the bodies that circulate through them constitute a testimony, traces of that history. These texts become the possibility of memory, while at the same time they visualize how memory is being erased over and over again. Confronted with a new chrono-geo-body where space and time are first blurred and then erased, these narratives imply that we must persist in bringing flashes of the past into the present, to take time back to us and thus create new spaces of hope, or, from another perspective, give back to politics its previous visibility, attacking and dismantling the prevalent idea of politics as the art of suppressing the political. This is the only potential way to reveal hegemony’s fissures and thus resist” (119).

in the heart of Cusco, which stands under the shadow of the older ruins of the Incan temple of Sacsayhuamán, from 1900 to the destructive force of earthquake of 1950. It is the house *itself* that she assigns the burden of memory – the task of passing down and “telling” stories that were ultimately un-narratable by the various family members who inhabit the space; memories and histories: “...fueron incrustados entre el adobe y la cal de las paredes” (21) / “...were encrusted between the adobe and the lime of the walls.” (my trans.) As Pacheco Medrano highlights the shifting remnants of historical trauma and the debris encountered by bodies moving through space, she plays with the contrast between presence and absence, uncovers networks of collective injustices (from racial structures to dictatorship, and from political persecution to global warming), and explores the relationship between private and public secrets.

Conclusion

In the epilogue, I take a comparative approach to the works, as each grapples with a distinct urban environment produced by what Franco would call the violence inherent in “cruel modernity.” Additionally, each of the four authors published their writing after significant built interventions (monuments and memorials) were constructed, and it is my argument that they engage with this idea of the connection between memory and the architectural environment. Their fiction explores the question of history and its circulation through lived urban space – histories that might be revived and maintained through the practice of dwelling in a “city of memory.” It

is through a recognition of the presence of these overlapping versions of the past that these novels and short stories help to produce a new kind of urban map.

As Avelar notes, the privileged place of literature in Latin America is upset by the implementation of neo-liberal regimes (21); however, importantly, he claims that: “...the labor of mourning has much to do with the erection of an *exterior* tomb where the brutal literalization of the internal tomb can be metaphorized” (9). Central to my analysis of these works are the following key questions: How do these novels seek to move the burden of memory from the individualized, traumatized body to the collective sphere and to the contours of public space? How do these four female authors “think” the city, tracing or discovering in the folds of the cityscape that which has escaped the totalizing system – and what is the role of literature in this process?²⁶ How can the urban be “read” as a palimpsest-like narrative of historical trauma? This dissertation allows me to question: how does the space of fiction help us to imagine the post-trauma city differently?²⁷

²⁶ In an interview with *Lima en escena* (June 20th, 2013), Karina Pacheco Medrano states:
En un país donde se quiere pasar rápida sobre esos hechos y sobre las víctimas, a veces la literatura ha logrado tocar fibras y convocar más atención del público que algunos excelentes libros de ciencias sociales. Tal vez porque la narrativa aborda estos temas de una manera más personalizada e íntima, permite que los lectores sientan mayor empatía con esas lecturas; mientras las ciencias sociales bordan una figura más completa y generalmente más compleja pero este tipo de relato, además con un lenguaje más frío y académico, pocas veces cautiva al gran público (n/p) / “In a country where people want to gloss over the facts about the victims, literature has sometimes managed to touch a nerve and attract the public's attention more than some excellent social science books. Maybe because narrative takes on these subjects in a more personalized and intimate way, it allows readers to feel greater empathy with the readings; the social sciences paint a more complete and generally more complex picture, but this type of storytelling – in addition to [having] a more cold and academic language – rarely captivates the broader public.” (my trans.)

²⁷ As I continue to think through the particular constellation of memories associated with each urban space, it will be useful to untangle the various layers of memory present at each site. One might

consider several ways of categorizing the different spaces of memory in this project. To start: the space of un-built memorials, representing an absence of visible memory; the space of official monuments; the spaces of memory that are reconstructed within the literary text, etc.

Chapter 1

The Infinite and the Intimate: Monumental Ruins and Scales of Memory in the Works of Tununa Mercado

Argentina: Responses to the violence of the “Dirty War” (1976-1983)

In an essay entitled “Historias, Memorias,” (“History, Memory”) Argentine author and journalist Tununa Mercado (Córdoba, 1939) makes explicit the connection between adequately representing complex and entangled histories, and the role of fiction: “¿La novela va a ser la forma de representar una historia que se entreabre cada vez que se la roza?” / “Could the novel be the way to represent a history that cracks open every time it’s brushed against?” (*Narrar* 144).²⁸ In this chapter, I explore the memory work undertaken by Mercado – whose writings are in part a response to the two periods she spent in exile, first in France (1966-70 when Argentina was under the rule of General Juan Carlos Onganía) and later in Mexico (1974-1986 during the military dictatorship of Jorge Videla and the conflict known as the “Dirty War”). I view her writing as a kind of “hinge” – a body of literature that opens the door to a new way of thinking about literary production in the aftermath of trauma. As Mercado works through the struggle of both exile and return, she marks a shift in the narration of the experience of difficult pasts in post-dictatorship Latin America; she writes through the lens of exile, distant temporally and spatially from the event itself.

²⁸ All translations are my own, except those originating from the English version of *En estado de memoria* (*In A State of Memory*), which was translated by Peter Kahn (2001).

Faced with the residual effects of a conflict in which an estimated 30,000 individuals were “disappeared” from the collective fabric – a violence she witnessed only at a remove, from her position of exile²⁹ – Mercado struggles to find spaces that can house the ghostly traces of absence and loss; she confronts the voids she encounters upon her return to Argentina through the fictional landscapes she creates in the pages of her works. Through the act of writing, she endeavors to, as she phrases it, “narrar después” or “narrate after” (subsequently the title of her 2003 short essay collection). Building on Idelber Avelar’s claim that “...the labor of mourning has much to do with the erection of an *exterior* tomb where the brutal literalization of the internal tomb can be metaphorized” (9), I examine Mercado’s search to adequately house traumatic memory within the spaces she constructs in her writing. Mercado’s texts wrestle with the form these exterior “tombs” or places of memory and mourning might take; she is very concerned with the idea of transfer: How do we narrate these histories in such a manner that traumatic memories – which are in many ways dependent upon physical and bodily experiences – are able to be passed from one generation to the next? I argue that through Mercado’s works, one notes a transition from the internal to the external housing of memory, as well as a complex consideration and critique of what form that exterior “tomb” should take; Mercado challenges the “monumentalization” of memory, and instead embraces a memory of the “small,” of the fragment, and of the trace. Although rooted in the space of the

²⁹ Mercado moves back to Argentina permanently in 1986 after spending twelve years in exile (1974-1986).

“micro,” she uses her miniature aesthetic to situate her period of exile within broader, global networks of memory and trauma. For Mercado, both the global and the public sphere are always anchored in highly personalized, local experiences. I further assert that this shift of focus and these literary innovations are central to later practices of writing in the space of “post”-memory in Latin America; a discussion of Mercado’s works sets the parameters for the later chapters of this dissertation.

In this chapter, I map the trajectory of three of Mercado’s texts – the novel *En estado de memoria* (*In a State of Memory* 1999) and two essay collections *La letra de lo mínimo* (*The Letter of the Small* 1994) and *Narrar después* (*Narrating After* 2003) – in order to chart the evolution and shifting of scales that I trace in her work.

Drawing from the critical material produced by Jean Franco, Idelber Avelar, and Annette H. Levine, I suggest that Mercado’s work takes on even more complexity if the reader is attuned to the progression and evolution of mourning that unfolds throughout the corpus of her writing as a whole, beginning with her collection of what has often been termed “erotic” short fiction, *Canon de alcoba* (*Bedroom Canon* 1988) and extending through her most recent essay collection *Narrar después* (2003).³⁰ As characters, scenes, and places are “re-cycled” (individual stories are often picked up again in later pieces), Mercado adds layers of reflection to these points and moments of memory – a practice that maps or models for her reader a certain kind of evolutionary process in the working through of trauma. Even the genre

³⁰ “Taking into account that undoing traumatic entrapment is a process, one can read Mercado’s short narrative, from *Canon de alcoba* to *Narrar después*, as progression through this process of working through or writing through trauma” (Levine 111).

in which these memories, stories, and histories are encased changes over time; although the vignettes that comprise *En estado de memoria (In a State of Memory)* are categorized as autobiographical fiction, the two essay collections I subsequently analyze in the later part of this chapter were written for public consumption, including speeches, blurbs for inclusion in pamphlets for museum exhibits, and dedications for public sculptures. While many of the same characters and themes are repeated in these works, the way in which they are presented to the reader shifts; Mercado's work becomes less interior and more engaged with the public sphere – her private memories are increasingly woven into the fabric of urban space and communal experiences.

First, I will examine the work *En estado de memoria (In a State of Memory)*, which I view as a kind of “testing ground” in which Mercado struggles with the task of re-locating and re-positioning herself within the space of a nation whose contours have been radically transformed by historical violence. In this work – which I categorize as autobiographical and testimonial fiction – Mercado-as-narrator struggles to identify those sites that can adequately contain or house traumatic memory, and pushes herself to overcome her anxiety and aversion to interacting with a landscape in which she can see only the ghosts and traces of absent bodies and state-sponsored violence. Then, I move to an analysis of her first essay collection, *La letra de lo mínimo (The Letter of the Small)*, where I observe Mercado “zooming-out” from her experience of “exile and return” in order to examine, with broader scope and greater historical breadth, the idea of national belonging within the space of Argentina, as

well as the loss of belonging in the space of exile; I note also a certain desire to locate herself within webs of global exilic identities – to create links and connections with other instances of trauma and loss. Finally, I argue that in her third essay collection, *Narrar después (Narrating After)*, Mercado pushes towards a discussion of “post”-memory – of thinking about how memories get passed down and across generations. This collection contains a more explicit examination of concrete spaces and memory-places, as well as an overt critique of, and engagement with, memorial practices.

It is from this place of tension, I argue, that Mercado writes: between history and memory, between the individual and the collective, between the push to commemorate publicly and the conflicts that arise from projects of collective remembrance.³¹ Mercado plays with these seemingly un-resolvable tensions within the space of fiction; through writing, various sites of memory can coexist, can be imagined differently. By translating the memorial space into the pages of fiction, the author is able to tap into the potentials for recycling, metamorphosis, flexibility, and creation of new and unpredictable meanings. Franco echoes this concern, asserting

³¹ Pierre Nora also maps this tension between the “living” nature of memory, and the potential pitfalls of a more static, reconstructed version of the past embodied by the genre of history: “Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation, and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past” (8); “Memory is blind to all but the groups it binds . . . memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, hence its claim to universal authority. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative” (9).

that both Mercado and others struggling for human rights causes and commemoration have encountered similar problems: “The tendency to commute individual memory too rapidly into social or collective memory means that it can be monumentalized in ways that frustrate the complexities. And it is precisely here in this intersection between the subject and the social that Tununa Mercado’s remarkable and uncompromising novel . . . is situated” (xvi). Or, as Mercado expresses in an early interview (1993) with Erna Pfeiffer, published in *Exiliadas, Emigrantes, Viajeras: Encuentros con diez escritoras latinoamericanas (Exiles, Emigrants, Travelers: Encounters with Ten Latin American Women Writers* 1995), when asked about whether or not there is a “strict separation” between the public and the private: “Eso sería lo que prefiero llamar el milagro del texto, porque yo no lo he pensado así, ni lo he hecho consciente mientras escribía” (138-9) / “That’s what I like to call the miracle of the text, because I haven’t thought of it that way, and I haven’t done it consciously while writing.” (my trans.) It is this “miracle of the text” – fictional spaces’ capacity to hold the opposing categories of public and private in permanent tension – that I outline in this chapter. I question: Why does Mercado privilege the space of the novel (or short essay) as the container for memory-work, and how does her writing critique more “monumental” forms of remembrance? Central to Mercado’s work is the exploration of what forms these new community practices should take, as well as what stories of place should circulate – become a part of the

collective tapestry in the post-dictatorship period.³² As she engages with a national landscape radically altered by dictatorship, Mercado searches for appropriate containers for these difficult memories; it is around this exploration of memory-sites that I center this chapter – a thematic anchor that, I assert, connects each of Mercado’s works.

Public Spaces of Memory; El parque de la memoria

In order to think through Mercado’s essays or works of fiction, I first briefly turn to a consideration of sites of physical memory that are currently housed within the space of Argentina. Debates surrounding the construction of memory parks, the now-iconic presence of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and grass-roots commemorations all form the backdrop against which Mercado composes her texts. I note in her evolution as a writer across time an attentiveness to new and evolving

³² As Gina Saraceni describes in *Escribir hacia atrás: herencia, lengua, memoria*, Mercado-as-narrator’s central search revolves around “...la pérdida de un espacio simbólico de pertenencia en el que reconocerse y desde el cual establecer un diálogo con el mundo” (148) / “...loss of a symbolic space of belonging in which to recognize oneself and from which to establish a dialogue with the world.” (my trans.) And, in learning how to re-establish this dialogue: “La narradora no tiene certezas, no reconoce los lugares que le fueron familiares, ha perdido toda la naturalidad con la experiencia social, profesional y cotidiana, se siente extraña en todos los roles que desempeña y en los lugares que ocupa. Su única pulsión es la de escribir. Decide entonces usar este recurso para interrogar los fantasmas de su memoria lo que dificulta sus intentos de establecer una relación con el presente, pero que a la vez le otorga un espacio desde donde autoanalizarse y reaprender a relacionarse con el mundo” (148-9) / “The narrator has no certainties, she doesn’t recognize the places that were once familiar to her, she has lost all naturalness in social, professional, and daily experience, she feels strange in all of the roles she carries out and in all of the places she occupies. Her only compulsion is to write. So, she decides to use this resource to interrogate the ghosts of her memory, which complicates her attempts to establish a relationship with the present, but at the same time designates a space from which she can self-analyze and re-learn to relate to the world.” (my trans.); “Una foto, un nombre, un objeto, un gesto, un baúl, una blusa, un paseo, una lectura, experiencias cotidianas e íntimas, rituales privados y personales, arman un discurso de la falta, de la palabra que falta pero que habla desde la impotencia y la desarticulación, que reclama y muestra su desacuerdo ante el ‘mal de archivo’ y la ‘desmemoria’” (151) / “A photo, a name, an object, a gesture, a trunk, a blouse, a walk, a lecture, daily and intimate experiences, private and personal experiences, arm the discourse of loss, of the word that is lost but speaks from a place of impotence and disarticulation, that denounces and expresses its disagreement before the ‘archive fever’ and ‘forgetfulness.’” (my trans.)

memorial practices both within the contours of the physical landscape of Argentina itself and beyond the national borders.

In each of her works, Mercado is particularly attentive to the process of memorializing or commemorating loss. “Disappeared” bodies have created gaps and holes in the urban fabric; these ghostly figures no longer play a palpable role in the urban collective, but their memories have attached themselves to physical sites – cartographical points – in the metropolis. This sense of absence is augmented by the mystery of the whereabouts of the physical remains of many of these victims. In her fiction, Mercado in part uses the built environment or cityspace as a kind of script for encounters with memory. The topographical contours of the city of Buenos Aires themselves often prompt Mercado to narrate the history of her complex relationship to space, guiding her into new and difficult confrontations with place.

Buenos Aires is a city brimming with “sites of horror,” one of which is a major feature of the natural environment – El Río de la Plata. The river, once a silent witness, now stands as a visual reminder of this difficult history. In 1997, after extended debate and discussion (and seven years after Mercado’s first novel, *En estado de memoria* [*In a State of Memory*] was published), the city legislature selected a site for a memorial on its banks in an attempt to physically connect the river to a citywide network of spaces marked by violence. The project takes the form of a memory park, including a commemorative wall of names, a museum, a gallery space, and a sculpture garden. I note that as these national debates take place in the

public sphere, Mercado responds to the challenges surrounding the act of public memorialization through the pages of her fiction.

Surrounding the edges of the park is an installation entitled, “Carteles de la Memoria” (“Street Signs of Memory”) – a project that reemphasizes the connection between memory and geography. Here, the reality of disappeared bodies is made explicit using signs meant to mimic road markers. Yellow traffic signs bear black and white graphics depicting simplified images, such as airplanes with bodies on board, or armed men kicking down doors in an attempt to break and enter. Signs also mark the approximate distance to other sites of memory, such as the ex-detention centers el Olimpo, Campo de Mayo, and the ESMA. As this project suggests, memories of the traumatic past might be tangibly marked as obstacles on routes through the urban environment; the signs equate the act of remembering these difficult pasts to road hazards such as potholes or sharp turns ahead. These memories, the installation seems to suggest, are ones that must be confronted on a daily basis, as one takes everyday paths through the city.

It is with this network of hidden sites of trauma and memory that Mercado engages in her fiction. By incorporating some of the debates surrounding the creation of physical memorial sites into her writing – and by adding some of her own points to the geographical matrix that comprises this memory-map – she makes more complex and textured the cartography of memory in Buenos Aires, in Argentina, and beyond. This model of narrating urban sites of memory might be thought of as a layer of

meaning that clings to the façade of everyday spaces, whose presence, once signaled, can radically alter one's relationship to the built environment.

As Andreas Huyssen asks in a reflection on the space of the park – a project whose marginal position on the fringes of the city has been criticized, “How can such a monument be made to function as part of a network of urban relations, rather than standing disconnected from city life and ultimately referring only to itself?” (101) As I will demonstrate in my analysis of each individual text, I argue that Mercado addresses this very question by pulling monumental spaces into the pages of her fiction; by writing about these seemingly static memorial sites, she adds dynamic layers that resist ossification, and integrates often overlooked spaces into webs of memory. While it is not certain that the park will be able to open up a broader dialogue, it has provoked heated discussions in Buenos Aires. Critics have noted not only the isolation of the park from the space of the city (the project was initially conceived as part of a bigger urban planning initiative for a unified university campus that ultimately failed in the aftermath of Argentina's 2001 economic troubles), but also its incompleteness and its lack of visitors. Mercado, too, seems to be critical of such “monumental” projects of memory-making: How can fiction interact with these memorial spaces?

As I re-engage with the memorial space of Argentina through the works of Mercado, shifting my attention to the role of writing as an alternative resting place for memory, I keep these various physical monuments in mind. As Mercado herself struggles within the pages of her text to encounter sites capable of housing traumatic

pasts, these public projects of collective memory unfold in the urban space of post-dictatorship Buenos Aires and beyond; they are memorial practices that form the backdrop of her own exploration of trauma and memory. I contend that these non-literary debates surrounding the housing of memory become integral to Mercado's thinking about what Nora would call "vehicles for memory." Her texts engage with spectral city spaces, missing bodies, and physical memorial sites as she simultaneously searches for a kind of resting place for her losses capable of embodying her commitment to an aesthetics of the small.

En estado de memoria: Exilic Return

Many critics have cited Mercado's first novel, *En estado de memoria* (*In a State of Memory* 1990) as a piece that radically breaks from previous works that addressed writing about trauma and loss in the "post"-dictatorial landscape of Latin America. As Mercado returns from exile, she pushes to move the burden of these difficult memories from the individual body that directly experienced the trauma to a collection of individuals who actively participate in the construction of a communal urban fabric. And, as Avelar acknowledges, this move is the unique contribution to thinking through trauma made by Mercado's text; he sees *En estado de memoria* as the point from which writing about "post" dictatorship or "post" trauma is possible, calling her work: "...the most radical postdictatorial prose I know." (xi). Defining what genre this radical prose falls into, however, is somewhat difficult, as Mercado's text hovers between short novel, short story collection, autobiography, and fiction: How does one describe or categorize this "radical post-dictatorial prose"?

On the back cover of the Seix Barral 2008 edition of the piece, the publishing house defines the book as one written in “un estilo absolutamente singular y admirable” / “an absolutely unique and admirable style.” (my trans.) They go on to describe the work as follows: “En los dieciséis relatos que componen *En estado de memoria*, Tununa Mercado recupera episodios, personas, núcleos y claves encapsuladas en algún lugar de la memoria ... gradualmente, en un crescendo irresistible, las palabras les dan vida y el sentido que irradian es el sentido mismo de nuestro tiempo” / “In the sixteen stories that comprise *In a State of Memory*, Tununa Mercado recuperates episodes, people, nuclei, and codes encapsulated in some part of memory ... gradually, in an irresistible crescendo, the words give them life, and the meaning that they radiate is the very meaning of our time.” (my trans.) Because of its unique configuration, it is not easily categorized: it is a piece that is narrated from a semi-autobiographical stance, that reads at times like a testimonial and at times like a memoir; it is a work that can be read in its entirety, cover-to-cover, but whose chapters do not necessarily depend upon one another; it is a record of an epoch and an act of *testimonio* and witnessing, but also borrows from the form of the novel in order to carve out a place in the realm of fiction for the imaginings of potential futures. While the piece has been labeled by critics in various ways (as a short novel, as a collection of semi-autobiographical short stories, Avelar calls it a “testimonial novel” [211] ...) the fictional spaces presented in this book share a common theme; all of the “chapters” seek to negotiate the experience not only of exile, but also of confronting

the *return* from exile, and do so through the intimate, through the lens of the highly personal and particular.

Although the stories do not necessarily rely upon one another, and do not have to be read in order, they do form a certain narrative whole; they work in conjunction to paint a more complete picture of the various memory-fragments that together form an understanding of Mercado's complex experience.³³ In order to maintain the hybrid nature of the novel, and to preserve the myriad genres the work embraces, I categorize the piece as a kind of redefined testimonial and autobiographical fiction – one that embraces the possibilities for future-thinking permitted by creative imaginings in the realm of fiction, but that at the same time values the lived experiences of Mercado-as-narrator, the record of her witnessing, and that recognizes the real need for *testimonio* in the post-dictatorship era. Although I will refer to the text as a novel throughout my analysis, I ask the reader to keep the importance of the complexity of its mixed genre in mind. For, it is through fiction that Mercado can begin to unravel her experience, and at the same time, to explore the possibilities for

³³ The back cover provides a summary of the major themes and topics for the reader: “La imposibilidad de un muro percibido a través de la ventana, la casa en que fue asesinado Trotsky, algunas escenas vividas en la infancia, un hombre que se instala en un banco en la plaza Rodríguez Peña, ciertos ritos celebrados en los años del exilio son temas, pero aún son motivos de exploración, interrogantes vitales: la pérdida, la intemperie, la perplejidad, lo irracional, el exilio personal y ajeno, son rescatados del olvido para dar lugar a una reconstrucción de una identidad. Tununa Mercado produce una ficción que se libera de toda convención de los géneros para llegar a algo nuevo, a la literatura, la mejor, como experiencia de vida” / “The impossibility of a wall perceived through the window, the house where Trotsky was assassinated, some scenes lived in childhood, a man who installs himself on a bench in the Rodríguez Peña Plaza, certain rites celebrated in years of exile – these are themes, but also reasons for exploration, vital questions: loss, exposure, perplexity, the irrational, exile of the self and the other – are rescued from oblivion and give rise to a reconstruction of identity. Tununa Mercado produces a fiction that frees itself from all generic conventions, and arrives at something new – at literature, a better one, as life-experience.” (my trans.)

reconstructing herself as subject within a different national landscape – creating a new identity in the wake of the loss and dis-identification that her time in exile had produced. Through the act of composing the novel, Mercado writes herself back into the memory of the nation; she creates a new self through the process of constructing her biography.

Each chapter of the novel “zooms-in” to a particular vignette in the life of Mercado-as-narrator, as she negotiates the experience of exile and return during and after the period of dictatorship in Argentina; the work jumps in space and time from early memories of her childhood, to moments of exile in Mexico, to her return to Buenos Aires after years abroad – weaving together these memory-capsules to create a certain kind of narrative whole that depicts the arc of her journey, as well as her desire to reconstruct herself as subject in its destructive aftermath. In my reading, I focus on Mercado’s search upon her return from exile for those containers for traumatic memories that do not force narrative closure, but that rather open up radical new possibilities for memory work. Refusing monumental sites of memory, Mercado’s fiction carves out intimate spaces for the housing of infinite grief. Franco sums up the nature of this work as follows: “The events described in this book, whether factual or not, form part of both the individual and collective experience; the violence of separation from one’s homeland produces a vacuum in the life of the protagonist as well as in the flow of life for an entire nation, and this book represents an effort by one person to confront and fill that void” (x). I argue that this piece focuses on the language of housing – the contrasting categories of shelter and

exposure – in an attempt to locate the appropriate container or vessel for memory. Many of the chapters’ titles included in this work allude to this primary concern: “cellular chambers”; “houses”; “containers”; “exposure” “the wall.” Mercado searches through her writing to invent the appropriate vehicle by which to transmit her memories and experiences – one that does not simplify their complexities, but that still moves her remembrances from the interior of her private self into the public sphere as they are read. She confronts the great expanse of traumatic experience through the fragment; the space of the intimate is somehow more capable of housing boundless trauma.

As Mercado’s social practices are disrupted – first through the experience of exile, and then again through the process of returning to a radically altered nation-
scape – she must forge a new relationship to space and history; the site of fiction is in part, I argue, an experiment in finding new and radical categories of dwelling in this period of ruptured or disrupted space-time. I echo translator Peter Kahn’s concern: What does it mean to inhabit a national space “whose historical memory has been deformed by dictatorship”? (x) In this section of the chapter, I question: How does one narrate from a state of exception, where stable categories of space and time have been disrupted and it is no longer possible to inhabit the normal patterns and flows of routine life? As Mercado describes, upon returning from exile, “Se sale a la calle *en estado de memoria*, ya sea que se la bloquee o se la deje en libertad de prenderse a los datos de la realidad” (162) / “One steps into the street in a state of memory, either having blocked memory out or having left it at liberty to grasp the substance of

reality” (103); she suggests that the exile’s interaction with the polis upon her return occurs as if she “estuviera envuelta ... de una membrana que la separa del mundo” (161) / “...were swaddled in a membrane separating [her] from the world” (103). I argue that this novel seeks to break through that membrane and to begin to lay the foundation for a new relationship to the flux and flow of urban life in Buenos Aires in the “post” dictatorship period.

I turn first to Mercado’s description of her relationship to space and time in exile. I argue that this text is about a certain kind of *return* from the dead for Mercado-as-narrator, who finds that during her time in exile, she has been “written out” of nation’s script and transformed into a kind of living ghost erased from the fabric of national life. However, Mercado-as-narrator finds it very difficult to give up her identity as a spectral figure; she even goes so far as to define her profession as that of a ghost-writer: “Ser escritora fantasma, estar en las bambalinas, detrás de las páginas escritas por otros ... Frase a frase mi frase moría, muere, se extinguía, se extingue, es correcta, se enmascara, se alinea, sonrío, corregida” (29)³⁴ / “To be a ghostwriter, to remain hidden in the wings, behind the pages written by others ... Phrase by phrase, my phrase was dying, it dies, it was fading out, it is correct, it is masked, it takes shape, it smiles, corrected” (15-6). Mercado paints a spectral protagonist, whose existence on the page is covered up, whose identity is always borrowed and provisional. Not even her writing is completely her own – and she

³⁴ Although, of course, Mercado may also be alluding to the fact that she was a professional translator and editor of books before she began publishing her fiction.

depicts instead both her body and her prose as having ghostly contours difficult to define; she is without an officially recognized place. However, Mercado uses the topographical space within this novel to recuperate this lost identity. It is through the act of composition (from the particularities of her own experiences and memories), that Mercado begins to make sense of the experience of exile and return.

Mercado in part experiences the traumatic effects of exile through a certain disjointed relationship to space and time; she passes through her daily life at a remove. In “El frío que no llega,” (“The Cold that Never Comes”) Mercado begins to set up the conditions for confronting this new configuration of time-space, after the realization that the “exceptional” period of exile has ended, and that time in Argentina has not stood still in her absence. She describes her time in exile as an upward-extending brushstroke, a sea whose waves never break against the shore: “...el tiempo sucede más allá ... no se lo quiere percibir porque se supone que el destierro va a terminar, que se trata de un paréntesis que no cuenta en ningún devenir” (34)³⁵ / “...time takes place in the far beyond ... one prefers not to perceive it because one

³⁵ In a later story, she describes this time in exile through a similar image – one that equally suggests infinite repetition: “Con el abanico abierto y la conciencia de la falibilidad espacio-temporal, ya no me podía echar atrás ... imaginé ... una línea que asciende, curva, y luego regresa en círculo sobre sí misma para relanzarse. Ese trazo que me recogería y me despediría fue la idea en movimiento que me sirvió para explicar mi regreso ... La imagen obró también como conjuro: volver, el acto recursivo cuya promesa de repetición infinita no me era extraña puesto que el tiempo no había transcurrido para mí durante el paréntesis mexicano, iba a ser como el beso del príncipe que despierta a la durmiente” (79) / “With the fan laid open and conscious of spatiotemporal fallibility, it was too late for me to turn back ... I imagined an ascending line, one that curved upward and circled back on itself and then rose again. This line that lifted me up and whipped me along my trajectory was the idea in motion that served to explain my return ... This image also worked as a kind of incantation: to return, the recurring act whose promise of repetition did not seem at all strange to me given that there had been no passage of time during my Mexican parenthesis, it was going to be like the kiss of a prince that awoke the sleeping beauty” (50).

assumes that the banishment will end, that it has all been some kind of parenthesis unrelated to the future” (19). However, when the period *does* end, she is suddenly confronted with the magnitude of unsorted, uncategorized memories that come crashing down, overwhelming her to the point of terror: “No se podía imaginar entonces que una vez terminado el paréntesis ... lo que concluiría sería visto como un todo abigarrado, como una masa recorrida por múltiples laberintos cuyo corte transversal provocaría una sensación tan mordiente; las capas o estratos que ese corte muestran, en efecto, parecen haber sido antiguos hormigueros ahora deshabitados pero que producen la misma sensación de espanto que si estuviera llenos” (35)³⁶ /

³⁶ In a related passage, Mercado describes a similar sensation of the “crashing down” of time-not-experienced – or perhaps time only passively lived: “Decía antes que hubo un primer exilio hasta fines del 70, luego del golpe del 66, y un segundo desde 1974 a 1986, lo cual hace un total de dieciséis años fuera del país por culpa de golpes, dictaduras y contubernios represivos cívico-militares. La suma no es baja, aun comparándola con el exilio español. Resultan, a la postre, muchos años ... Yo me fui, por ejemplo, al <<primer exilio>> antes de cumplir veintisiete años; regresé poco antes de cumplir los treinta y uno; me fui de nuevo a los treinta y cuatro y volví a los cuarenta y siete; las épocas volaron como tornados creándome estados repentinos de confusión sobre el paso del tiempo. Durante esas insanias no era excepcional que trocara hemisferios o distorsionara puntos cardinales. El Oriente se iba al Occidente, el Sur al Septentrión y viceversa y la noción no se corregía con el razonamiento compensatorio de que todo dependía del punto en el que uno estuviera situado” (75-6) / “I have already mentioned that my first exile lasted until the end of 1970, following the coup of 1966; my second exile was from 1974 to 1986, which made for a total of sixteen years living outside the country due to coups, dictatorships, and complicit civil-military regimes. Not a low count by any measure, even when compared with the Spanish exile experience. All in all, the years added up: I have to admit, however, that of those sixteen years, three can be discounted because we could have returned to Argentina sooner, immediately following the end of the Falkland Islands war, as many people did, or in the wake of the elections and the restoration of democracy, as did many more, but, in any case, those years, for a person of any age, were very significant. I left the country, for example, in my ‘first exile,’ just before my twenty-seventh birthday; I returned just before turning thirty-one; I left again at thirty-four and returned a woman of forty-seven; the periods flew by, tornado-like, leaving me in sudden states of confusion concerning the passage of time. During the insanity, it was not unusual for the hemispheres to seem to merge or for the cardinal points to get lost or distorted. The East shifted over toward the West, the South toward the North, and vice versa, and I could not shrug this sensation off merely by reasoning that it all depended on where one stood at any given moment” (48).

In a later passage, Mercado describes her visit to a therapist, as her years in exile begin to exert a physical toll on her body: “Los años no corrían en ese largo paréntesis. Tal vez esta dislocadura fuera consecuencia, o síntoma paralelo, de una desestructuración del exilio mismo, pero nadie se permitía analizar esas cuestiones y a nadie se le ocurría poner en hora el reloj biológico del destierro. El tema

“One could not have imagined that once the parenthesis had ended ... what had ended would be perceived as a dense and variegated whole, as one single massive entity coursed through with multiple labyrinths whose cross sections would provoke such a gnawing sensation; the layers or strata thus exposed, in effect, rise up like ancient anthills, now abandoned, yet producing the same sensation of terror as if they were still teeming with life” (20). This image of an almost infinite structure – the single massive entity, a gigantic maze-like anthill, filled with intimate chambers, multiple labyrinths, tiny cross-sections – is one that recurs throughout the novel: What is the relationship between the space of the infinite and the space of the small in processes of containing and housing these memories?

From within this warped relationship to space-time, there does not seem to be any feasible way of housing memory, of sheltering the self that has been “ghosted” from the flux of city life. Many of Mercado’s stories struggle with the search for

fue propuesto por mí al psicólogo que me atendió cuando los dorados atacaron mi organismo; le dije que me desesperaba no cumplir años, que tenía la descabellada idea de que el tiempo no transcurría pero que, así como el presente parecía estar detenido, el futuro se hacía extenso e infinito; ya entonces me daba cuenta de que esta ilusión era en realidad un estancamiento y vaticinaba que cualquier día habría de producirse una cuenta regresiva cuyo monto inicial tendría un desarrollo imprevisible ... En efecto, diez años después de esta intuición imprecisa, en mi primer viaje a Buenos Aires, en un solo segundo, se me agolparon todos los años y el embotellamiento fue tan brutal que me quedé sin respiración” (76-7) / “The years ceased to roll along during that long parenthesis. Perhaps this dislocation was a consequence, or a parallel symptom, of a destructuralization of exile itself, but no one ventured to analyze such questions, nor did anyone attempt to set their ‘biological clock-in-exile.’ I brought the subject up with my psychologist, the one who treated me when my throat was attacked by golden blisters; I told them I was upset about missing my birthdays, that I had this crazy idea that time was standing still, and that, inasmuch as the present seemed to be frozen, the future had become vast and infinite; I was acutely aware that this illusion was really a kind of suspended state portending that at any given moment we would have to begin a countdown from a starting point whose outcome was wholly unpredictable ... Sure enough, ten years after that rather imprecise premonition, on my first trip back to Buenos Aires, all in a flash, the years crashed down on me, and the assault was so brutal that I found myself gasping for breath” (48-9).

containers that can house these difficult pasts, that can help Mercado-as-narrator to move forward with her process of mourning. Upon returning to Argentina, she is confronted with a topography overwhelmed by the presence of loss. The density and raw force of her unsorted memories, and the absence of bodies in the now unfamiliar streets of Buenos Aires circle around her. In order to make sense of it all, she deploys the following image:

La imagen que se me ocurría era: *la marcha va dejando atrás, en dobleces regulares y a un ritmo implacable, un recorrido que se parece al de la memoria, hecho de postas, relevos, súbitos oscurecimientos bajo arboledas tupidas, puntos ciegos en el horizonte, enormes pozos de sombra, tenues resplandores que parecen disipar la noche en ciernes y dotarla de luz. Hacia atrás a medida que avanzamos, va quedando, así lo imaginaba, una gigantesca vela henchida por el viento (y cribada por el tiempo), un telón por el que las partículas se cuelan hasta desaparecer muy lejos y muy a nuestras espaldas.*

Esas partículas, me dio por imaginarlo, *eran muertos que entraban por mis ojos y salían por mi nuca, arremolinados en las ráfagas de la memoria, suspendidos en el camino hasta que la gran vela los remontase al pasar. Ninguno se proyectaba en particular ni hacía esfuerzos por instalarse en mí de manera predominante; estaban allí a la espera de una suerte de selección de mi conciencia, como si apenas pretendieran tener una legitimidad en esa primera página que yo escribía, en el asiento trasero de un auto. Y lo que es más extraño todavía en esas figuras suspendidas a mi alcance es que no desplegaban sus historias grandilocuentes sino que dejaban sentir, en su pura singularidad, los ademanes, palabras y actos menores que habían tenido alguna significación para mí, los gestos más representativos, por así decirlo, que los unían a mí (47-8).³⁷*

³⁷ “The image that occurred to me was this: *our progress leaves behind, in regular folds and at an implacable rhythm, a trail that resembles memory, marked by posts, relays, sudden dark patches of dense tree groves, blind spots on the horizon, enormous pits of shadow, delicate glimmerings that seem to melt away the burgeoning night and infuse it with light. Receding behind us, in the measure that we continue our advance, there remains, this is how I imagined it, a gigantic sail, billowing in the wind (and sifted by time) a screen through which the particles are strained and then disappear far into the distance behind us.*

She battles concurrently with the immensity of this undertaking and with the “smallness” of her simultaneous need to pay attention to the particularities of each individual. Mercado-as-narrator is tasked with selecting from these experiences – represented by the particles or nuclei of raw remembrance that pass through her – the material for her stories; she is left with the call to sort and house within the pages of her fiction the fragility of these ephemeral memories. Unable to contain their “grandiloquent” stories, she instead focuses on the details and particularities of each case. In a later passage, explains that because the imagined cemetery that contains these lost souls is infinite, it is only through a very individualized and specific memory – a hug, a hand that holds her own – that she is able to make her selection. By discovering this relationship to the underlying aesthetics of the small, she can begin to confront that “vacuum” left behind by displacement and exile in the post-dictatorship cityspace.

The struggle begins as an internal one, and Mercado describes in great detail the way she envisions the search for an organizing mechanism for these overwhelming memories. However, her pursuit is not an easy one, and the narrator is forever in danger of being consumed by the vast quantity of memories for which her

These particles, I imagined, *were the dead who entered through my eyes and exited through the nape of my neck*, whirled through the mill of memory, left suspended in the road until the great sail would stir them up again with its passing. They would not plant themselves in my path or, for that matter, impose themselves on me; they were there as if waiting to be selected by my conscience with a certain legitimacy for appearing on that first page I was writing, there, in the backseat of the car. And what is stranger still in those figures suspended within my reach is that they did not presume to tell their grandiloquent stories but, rather, allowed me to feel, through their pure singularity, the gestures, words, and small parts they had played that meant something for me, their most representative actions, so to speak, that united them to me” (28-9).

body serves as a vessel or container. In one chapter, entitled “Celdillas” (“Cellular Chambers”) she describes this sensation of the forever-expanding yet claustrophobic space of her mind. She deploys a number of images in an attempt to find a structure that encapsulates her internal feeling of simultaneous constriction and expansion, landing on the metaphor of the interior of a pomegranate:

...paredes blancas, una vez desprendidas las semillas del fruto queda una carne dúctil y elástica con hondonadas y correlativas protuberancias agudas, separando los nidos de implantación – o de la nuez de Castilla, con los meandros y senos de sus circunvoluciones interiores, pasaba a un intento de explicarme los mecanismos con que unas y otras figuraciones se imprimían en mí y me afectaban. Espacios de encaje, cadenas que se aparean, combinatoria incesante de lo cóncavo y lo convexo, de geometrías en las que una línea disparada por el lápiz y al azar sobre el papel se repliega, espontánea, sobre sí misma y cóncava a otra a encerrarse en su interior y aun a otra a rodearla y a reproducir, a su vez, con otras líneas quebradas en medio círculo, formaciones similares en un desarrollo creciente, constituían mi manía perpetua de encerrar y de abrir, de difractar y refractar las partículas de lo real (105).³⁸

She is fearful that this internal “fábrica oculta” (109) / “hidden factory” (70) will reproduce to the point of taking over her entire body, “...dejándome convertida en un hoyuelo, ocupando el terror todo el espacio” (109) / “...rendering me an empty shell, and all of space filled with terror” (70). Mercado-as-narrator struggles with the tension between the compulsion to write this difficult past, to begin to find “homes”

³⁸ “...white partitions separating the seeds of the fruit, once the seeds have been dislodged, are a ductile and elastic meat with hollowed contours and sharp protuberances, separating the nests of implantation – or the walnut, with its meandering channels and inner convolutions. Interlocking spaces, chains of paired objects, the incessant combination of the concave or the convex, of geometries in which an arbitrary line drawn in pencil across a sheet of paper would turn upon itself, spontaneously merging with another line, enclosing it within its interior, then surrounded by another line reproducing, in turn, other broken lines, all in half circles, similar formations in a constantly intensifying and self-multiplying process, constituted my perpetual mania for enclosure and aperture, for diffraction and refraction of particles from what is real” (67).

for these memories, and the fear that this practice will completely overwhelm her – will take over her person.

The juxtaposition between the intimate space of the narrator's interior mind and her fear of uncontrollably expansive memories is one that is continuously investigated throughout the novel's various segments. She attempts to find a stable relationship to time and space, to return to the realm and rhythm of the living city by finding the appropriate place for the memories that haunt her. Mercado continues this search by focusing on her inability to "house" memory in a section literally entitled "Casas" ("Houses"). Here, Mercado contrasts the pull that Argentine exiles had towards Leon Trotsky's home-turned-museum in the space of Mexico – the rituals they form within the shell of what was once a dwelling-space-in-political-exile – and her inability to find a rooted space within her *own* transitory experience. She notes that she cannot comprehend that any home belongs to her, cannot even accept that the clothes on her body are her own (92). The phrase, "*Nada de lo que me rodea me pertenece*" (144) / "*Nothing around me belongs to me*" (92) echoes through her mind both in the space of exile, and in the space of return. Within the shelter of walls that should offer her comfort, Mercado only feels a sense of uncanny unsettlement. The places she tries to call "home" are haunted.

In her nightmares, Mercado-as-narrator confronts subconsciously her inability to contain the self (and subsequently her traumatic memories) within the neat bounds of "home." In the houses of the landscapes of her dreams, intimate places become uncontrollable – they are transformed into sites that are both claustrophobic and

infinitely expansive. The juxtaposition and tension between these two aesthetics are captured in such lines as: “Soñé que en la cocina de esa casa había una gran jaula colgando del techo en la que revoloteaban unos pájaros; la jaula no tenía piso, pero los pájaros chocaban contra los barrotes y no atinaban a huir, condenados a su prisión” (145) / “I dreamed that in the kitchen of that house there was a great cage filled with fluttering birds hanging from the ceiling; the cage had no bottom; nonetheless the birds crashed against the bars, unable to escape, condemned to remain in their prison” (93) or “La casa reduplicaba sus espacios, sus paredes se iban hacia arriba y el techo se ahuecaba hacia un embudo invertido por el que mis mejores energías se escapaban ... ella era una gran esfera en cuyo interior estaba condenada a rodar para la eternidad” (146) / “The house reduplicated its spaces, the walls loomed upward, and the ceiling hollowed and tapered like an inverted funnel through which my best energies escaped ... it was a vast sphere in whose interior I was condemned to drift for all eternity” (93). Mercado is trapped within a vast and infinite cell – a structure that has made the safe-space of the home (the domestic) impossible to inhabit.³⁹

Haunted by these anxieties, she begins to attend therapy. However, the sessions do not help her, and she receives no definite answers. Instead, her therapist seems to believe that these fears and nightmarish spaces represent a necessary phase in her evolution – in her working through of trauma: “...se podía decir, sin margen de

³⁹ This structure of infinite space recalls Jorge Luis Borges’ short story, “The Aleph” – first published in 1945. This is a story that explores the idea of infinity; from a single point in space, all aspects of the universe can be seen – and comprehended – all at once.

error, que esa vida precaria y provisoria era tal vez *la que correspondía a la forma de mi deseo*, frase que he acariciado desde entonces y que me ha permitido ser según la forma de mi deseo, aprovechándome de la noción fatalista de destino que esa frase implica” (144-5) / “...it could be stated, without margin for error, that this precarious and provisory life was perhaps *what corresponded to the form of my desire*, a phrase that I have nurtured ever since and that has enabled me to live my life according to the form of my desire, taking full advantage of the fatalistic notion of destiny that the phrase implies” (92). What does it mean to live in a permanent state of provisionality – and that this dimension of provisionality is something that corresponds to the form of Mercado’s desire? How does the subconscious refusal to accept rootedness, a sense of home, in the space of exilic literature speak to Mercado’s wish to complicate the process of housing traumatic memory – forcing both the reader and herself to avoid easy answers, to keep debates open through the pages of fiction and creative essay?

When at last Mercado is able to return “home” to Argentina – when the “time in parenthesis” – the space of exile – has finally come to a certain kind of close, the anxieties do not dissipate. Rather, they intensify as she realizes that even her past home, maintained lovingly in her imagination – the house she left behind in her memory – no longer exists after her thirteen-year absence. She continues to dream of houses that contain secret and vast voids, empty caverns, and an infinite number of unexplored rooms hidden behind closet doors. Even after seeing the concrete space of the new apartment in Buenos Aires, her fears do not disappear: “Aún ahora, después de años de vivir en ella, todavía descubro al despertar que he estado atenta a los

ruidos difusos y acolchonados de una vida secreta detrás de una puerta, o que he percibido llamadas desde un espacio entre muro y alcoba, un entremedio que da cuenta a otra realidad” (147-8) / “Even now, after years of living in the apartment, I still discover upon waking that I have been aware of the vague, muffled noises of a secret life behind closed doors or that I have perceived summons from within the spaces between the walls and the alcove, an intermediate space giving notice of another reality” (95). And, this inability to interact even with the “home” – a place that cannot shelter her, a site where the haunting dangers of trauma and difficult memories lurk behind every dark corridor – extends beyond the walls of the apartment. The home becomes a microcosm for Mercado’s inability to approach the space of the city at large – a site that now lacks all familiar contours, that now contains only marks of absence and signs of what was lost to her during her years of exile.

In her initial moment of return, Mercado-as-narrator experiences an extreme aversion to engaging with the city; she cannot overcome her agoraphobia. She describes her first outing, walking along Vicente López Street towards Junín Street, taking in the communal space of the municipal market, of the walls of the Recoleta cemetery, of the café La Biela. Suddenly, she is struck by an attack of “emotional gastritis,” and is unable to continue to interact with the public sphere; she barricades herself from this painful urbanscape: “A partir de ese momento sólo salí de la casa para tareas de reconocimiento: la calle donde viví, la calle donde mataron a Fulano, la calle donde vi por última vez a Mengano, la plaza desde donde levantaron a

Perengano; Fulano, Mengano, Perengano, pobres sustitutos nominales que tiene la lengua española para no nombrar ni connotar y que al no designar sólo enumeran” (80) / “From that moment on, I only went out of the house for purposes of reconnaissance: the street where I used to live, the street where they killed ‘Fulano,’ the street where I last saw ‘Mengano,’ the plaza where they kidnapped ‘Perengano’; Fulano, Mengano, Perengano, poor nominal substitutes in the Spanish language to avoid naming or connoting a person, and that, by not naming, merely enumerate” (51-2). This is a landscape that the narrator cannot process as one that is living; she observes the city through a liminal position – existing in the present, but seeing through the lens of the past. For this reason, she is only able to register absence, ghostly traces, and loss. Mercado-as-narrator is simultaneously searching for a space capable of housing memories – without neutralizing them – and for a space capable of housing her own body as the nation once did before her forced exile.

These everyday sites form the points in the landscape from which I map the closing portion of this novel. I argue that through this confrontation with space, Mercado delves into an exploration of the appropriate means of housing traumatic memory – one that will spill into her later pieces. For, ultimately, the narrator struggles to carve out a place for herself in the present, living city. In order to do so, she must find a way to productively house the past in a manner that allows her to break through the membrane that separates her from the polis, and to engage with the present moment.

In the final section of this piece, “El muro” (“The Wall”), Mercado at last confronts the barrier between the self and the public space of the city – a symbolic action, one she takes in order to begin to re-define a certain relationship between the individual and the collective, as well as between private traumas and processes of public memory-making. The story takes place in the container of the narrator’s apartment – one whose view to the outside world is obstructed by the presence of a vast wall, an edifice that blocks her from fully engaging with the city below. She labels this structure her “muro testigo” or “witness wall” – a wall that acts as a kind of metaphorical barricade: “...cuando vi el acantilado de Dover clavado en el corazón de la manzana, tan vasto como mi propio corazón, y tan blanco como el muro de pena, cuando vi la gigantesca pantalla para la película que haría rodar sus escenas en ese recommienzo...” (217) / “...when I saw the Dover cliff sunk into the heart of this city block, vast as my own heart and as white as the Wailing Wall, when I saw that gigantic movie screen upon which the scenes of this new beginning were to be projected...” (145). As she contemplates the wall’s immensity, she feels helpless before it. She senses the power it has over her, as she struggles to adjust to the “end” of her exile during the first months of her return to Buenos Aires in 1984. The narrator describes how she cannot stop herself from alternately laughing and crying as she confronts the reality of her homecoming, all the while trying to find a way to interact with the wall: “Había que hacer pie en esa condición redescubierta, anidar en el hueco del desfiladero con el muro enfrente, ir del cielo a tierra, planear sobre la ciudad y admitir, incluso, sus escamoteos, lo que habría de develarse sin darme

señales para el reconocimiento” (217) / “It was necessary to take a stand in that rediscovered condition, to make a nest in that hollow in the cliff across from the wall, to go from the sky to the earth, to soar over the city, and even to accept its deceptions, which I would have to discover for myself, unaided” (145-6). And yet, the wall seems like the ultimate barricade – difficult to penetrate – making it almost impossible to reintegrate herself in the cityspace beyond its borders.

Embarking on a ritual of immersing herself tentatively into the flow of city streets, Mercado recognizes her apartment’s centrality and importance in the former life of the city of Buenos Aires before the dictatorship. She locates the La Paz café, where intellectuals gathered in the fifties and sixties, but where “cacerías” or “hunts” for people took place in the seventies (219); she notes her discomfort as she observes that “...generaciones habían hecho de él su rincón de fantasías y desconocidos volvían ahora al lugar del crimen como atraídos por la miel, y la humareda delataba la succión y la expulsión de la ansiedad” (219) / “...generations had made it their fantasy bar, and now complete strangers returned to the scene of the crime like bees attracted to honey, and the thick cloud of smoke betrayed the suction and expulsion of their anxiety” (147). She zooms out from the bar to contemplate the street at large – Corrientes Street – at the very heart of the city; however, as she reflects, the period of exile has not left this space untouched. After fifteen years, she notes that “la muerte se había enseñoreado del sitio” (220) / “death had gained mastery over the place” (148). While she observes that she was lucky to have never formed an ideological or historical attachment to the street, she is still overwhelmed by imagining the great

loss that marks the site: “...me sobrecogía ver en ella a los ausentes, o percibir en ella la ausencia de los que no estaban ... La memoria no seleccionaba a nadie en particular e incluso permitía una evocación reparadora” (220) / “...it overwhelmed me to envision the absentees in this street, or to perceive the absence of those who were no longer there ... My memory did not choose to recall anyone in particular but, rather, offered a kind of restorative evocation” (148). And so, in an attempt to undertake this restorative mission, she walks Corrientes itself, only later coming to realize consciously that this site holds for her personal significance. On this street was the newspaper office where she had worked before her time in exile, and from which many people were disappeared – including the newspaper’s director, Rodolfo Walsh.⁴⁰ She categorizes this lapse of memory – this aphasia – as “la fuga involuntaria de un espacio” (222) / “this involuntary escape from space” (149). Her body reacts strongly to the practice of walking and of recovering old sites (including the site of her former home) with psychosomatic symptoms: “...morirse para no ver, recuperar o recordar” (222) / “To perish so as not to see, recover, or remember” (150). As Mercado traverses the streets of her neighborhood, she does so at a remove, still covered in that membrane that both protects her from painful memories, and makes it impossible to experience the living city.

⁴⁰ Rodolfo Walsh (1927-77) was an Argentine journalist considered by many to be the founder of investigative journalism. His last piece of writing, entitled “Carta Abierta de un Escritor a la Junta Militar” / “Open Letter from a Writer to the Military Junta” (1977) pointed out the human rights abuses of the dictatorship. A day after composing this piece, Walsh was murdered on the street by military forces.

However, as Mercado-as-narrator comes to realize, through writing, she can begin to crack this literal and metaphorical wall that stands as a barrier between her and the city at large. She describes her process of tackling the wall with language in the following passage – one that closes both the section and the book as a whole:

Con caracteres pequeños, caligrafía desgarrada y desde el ángulo superior izquierdo empecé a escribir ... con textos y sobretextos en líneas y entrelíneas ... Encerré los bloques más reducidos dentro de otros y la dilatada página se pobló de núcleos rodeados de zanjas que a su vez eran recubiertos por lazadas cada vez más amplias que se iban alejando, sin perder las primeras cápsulas, y el muro, sobrecargado de una violenta energía, traspasado y transido por la grafía, expuesto a una intemperie desconocida hasta entonces, constreñido por su foso y dominado por un prolongado sitio, se fue cayendo, literalmente, sobre la línea recta de su base; no se desmoronó arrojando cascotes como edificio de terremoto, sino que se filtró sobre su línea fundante, como un papel que se desliza vertical en una ranura (228-9).⁴¹

In this final scene, the wall crumbles through writing – although perhaps not permanently. As the last line of the passage suggests, the wall might resurrect itself, may need to be confronted over and over again; it falls neatly into a slot. While language fragments the wall, it does not destroy it, does not prevent the possibility of return.

Avelar calls Mercado's mini-novel a "prolegomenon" to postdictatorial fiction because it "narrates the conditions of possibility for writing after a

⁴¹ "In small, awkward letters, in the upper-left hand corner, I began to write ... with texts and overlapping texts, I enclosed the smallest blocks within more blocks, and the distended page was soon crowded with nuclei surrounded by grooves that in turn were covered by stitches continuing outward without losing the initial form of the capsules, and the wall, overloaded by a violent energy, pierced and racked by graffiti, exposed to an inclemency heretofore unknown, constrained by the chasm and dominated by a prolonged siege, began to crumble, literally, upon the straight line at its base; it did not collapse and fling rubble in all directions as a building might during an earthquake, but, rather, it slid down into the line at its very foundation, like a sheet of paper sliding vertically into a slot" (154-5).

catastrophe” (228). While he notes that the novel as a whole deals with Mercado-as-narrator’s attempt to confront the “pathology” of trauma, he signals that this last scene is of particular significance in that it turns what might seem to be a very “introspective” text into one that directly intervenes in the polis; only through this final act of writing can Mercado actively imagine a relationship with the future:

... writing, the singular event as of yet unimaginable, becomes the only desirable mode of relationship with the future, beyond all finalist, teleologic, apocalyptic, and historicist cushions ... a novel obsessed with the impact of the past, reveals itself as a thoroughly future-oriented text. More than asking what future can be imagined after the dictatorships, however, it inquires into the mode, the modality, in which another relationship with the future can be established (228-29).

Coping with this traumatic experience through the practice of writing is revealed to be a process – the wall can always rise again. This final story sets the stage for an evolutionary memory-work, one that delves into the complex terrain of the working through and untangling of Mercado’s experience of exile and return. This is a journey that will continue throughout the trajectory of her writing post-*En estado de memoria*, and that will span decades. This slim novel becomes the testing ground for several future-oriented projects that continue the experiment of working through trauma within the pages of text.

As a whole, the novel struggles to find a site from which these memorial practices can be adequately articulated; Mercado is searching for “places of memory.” As Nora eloquently maps in his now-famous essay, the contemporary environment places new demands on the functions of memory and history. In, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*” (1989), he writes: “Our interest in *lieux de*

mémoire where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory” (7). However, the case of Argentina adds another layer of complexity to this model; the search for memory vehicles becomes increasingly complicated for Mercado. She faces the almost impossible task of housing the traces and fragments of traumatic experience within the sphere of post-dictatorship Argentina – a trauma she has witnessed from the perspective of exile – as she additionally considers the sites of memory that have already emerged within the national landscape (and beyond). It is in the space of her writing that she is able to play with this memorializing process, and to consider how the creation of these various Argentine *lieux de mémoire* function in the public realm.

As I analyze later works by Mercado, I highlight her search for these very vehicles for memory. However, Mercado is often frustrated by this journey; she struggles with the idea of “collective” memory formation, of balancing the highly particular memories of an individual with a practice that would bring these memorial acts into the public realm, as shared experiences of the past. Franco describes this push-and-pull between the individual and the collective as it relates to *En estado de memoria*: “...nor can the narrator take refuge in memory as if it offered some translatable lesson or meaning. Memory is, for her, so intimately bound up with

particularities ... that it becomes inscribed as *habitus* but on no account can it be commuted into social or collective memory. Is there such a thing as a common or shared memory?" (xx) This question haunts the trajectory of Mercado's texts; as the author-as-narrator enters and exits the intimate spaces of others, as well as the recesses of her own historical memory, she weaves through the details of these very specific and personal moments of historical violence a larger tapestry of wider historical breadth. For, as Franco notes, an equally important and contradictory question simultaneously haunts Mercado's work: "Can history mean anything if it does not become part of individual memory?" (xx)

La letra de lo mínimo (The Letter of the Small): The Aesthetics of the Small

On the back cover of *La letra de lo mínimo (The Letter of the Small 1994)*, Mercado outlines the philosophy behind what she defines as an "aesthetics of the small":

Los textos reunidos en este volumen fueron escritos "por demanda de circunstancia": un viaje, un libro que pide comentario, una muerte que quiere consuelo, una obra plástica que se expone al juicio y al placer de la mirada, un discurso que incita, un acto que provoca. Pequeños desafíos, en suma. Y en esa dimensión que se confiere al objeto replicante, la pequeñez, *La letra de lo mínimo* quizás no sea sólo un título sino también una manera de ver y de escribir. Es la escritura lo que agranda la imagen, es ella el lente que gira hasta encontrar el foco, es decir la nitidez del perfil y, aun lo que está más adentro y se descompone y recompone en sucesivas transparencias. Mini-ensayos, poemitas, mini-relatos, "universitos," como el de la niña de Chiapas que teje su más grande mundo en el telar más diminuto del mundo, el libro los trenza o hilvana en una novela mínima.⁴²

⁴² "The texts gathered in this volume were written 'by circumstantial demand': a trip, a book that begs for commentary, a death that needs comforting, a piece of artwork that exposes itself to judgment and to the pleasure of the gaze, and a discourse that incites, an act that provokes. Small challenges, in sum. And in that dimension that permeates the responding object, smallness, *The Letter of the Small* may be not only a title but also a way of seeing and writing. It is writing that makes the image bigger, that is

It is interesting that Mercado labels the text in this description “una novela mínima” / “a minimal novel” because the vast majority of these collected essays appeared in, or were read, in public places. A short note at the front of the work explains, “Algunos de estos textos aquí reunidos aparecieron en los siguientes medios” / “Some of the texts that are gathered here appeared in the following media”: “*Primer Plano, Clarín, Revista de Occidente, Feminaria, Debate Feminista.*” This slim collection of essays, poems, and fragments of a travel diary set the stage, I argue, for Mercado’s more ample essay collection, *Narrar después* (*Narrating After* 2003), published almost a decade later. In this work, she re-opens, in a more contained form and in a new genre, the discussion of those very same issues that dominated the landscape of *En estado de memoria* and that continue to push to the forefront of *Narrar después*.

In *La letra de lo mínimo*, Mercado takes up again the narrative thread that explores the relationship between history and memory, but this time seems to come to a more mature conclusion – one that has been further developed and been given more texture through a layered process of continual writing: “Me desperté de uno de esos sueños de escritura con una frase aislada que parecía clausurar el texto nocturno: ‘la escritura no es otra cosa que la memoria’... La memoria es lo ya muerto, y escribir en ella es un acto melancólico, me dije, pero instantáneamente tuve la certeza de que los

the lens that turns until it finds its focus — the sharpness of the profile — and what lies even deeper inside, and it decomposes and recomposes itself in successive transparencies. Mini-essays, micro-poems, mini-tales, ‘universe-lettes’, like the one from the Chiapan girl who weaves her biggest world on the world’s smallest loom, the book weaves them or bastes them together into a minimal novel.” (my trans.)

núcleos que ofrece la memoria para la evocación están encerrados vivos, esperando que uno venga a liberarlos” (32).⁴³ With this view of the relationship between writing and memory – the fusion of two categories in her mind – she uses the space of the text to “free” some of her own memories, to bring them new life, through the pages of her book.

In my analysis, I am interested in the development of Mercado’s philosophy of the aesthetics of the small, as well as in how she uses this method of writing and viewing the world to capture experiences that seem unable to be narrated in their immensity and complexity; she sees the intimate within the space of the infinite. In a video interview with *Periplo* magazine in Buenos Aires, Mercado explains how this worldview developed (“Bajo la lupa. Entrevista a Tununa Mercado. Año II. Vol. XIV Mínimos”) While in exile in Mexico, Mercado began to write and reflect upon the aesthetics encompassed by the handicrafts that surrounded her – sweets, weavings – all objects that fall under the category of what she calls “barroco mexicano” / “Mexican baroque.” Pursuing her fascination with the aesthetic conventions of these plastic arts, she enters a weaving workshop where she learns – alongside many indigenous *serape* weavers from Oaxaca – the French technique of “Gobelins” tapestry making – a technique that is almost painterly in its extreme attention to detail; she describes how the weaver almost “paints” with thread each flower petal, or

⁴³ “I awoke from one of those writing dreams with an isolated phrase that seemed to close the nocturnal text: ‘writing is nothing but memory’ ... Memory is what is already dead, and writing within it is a melancholy act, I told myself, but instantaneously I had the certainty that the nuclei that memory puts forth for evocation are buried alive, waiting for someone to come and liberate them.” (my trans.)

the details of a bird's wings. Upon Mercado's return to Argentina, she continues to experiment with the plastic arts, and recalls attempting to capture the great expanse of a 400-year-old oak tree in her patio in Córdoba; she can only represent its breadth through the fragment. As she describes, she applies this same technique to her writing, preferring to dwell in the "morosidad de la frase" / "the delinquency of the phrase."

As I explore this play with scales, I utilize Esther Peeren's "Through the Lens of the Chronotope" (2006) as a theoretical angle through which to guide my attentiveness to constructions of time and space. In her essay, Peeren extends the concept of the "chronotope" – originally developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, and most generally understood to be a unit of linked space and time that can "travel" – to apply not just to literary contexts, but to the realm of the social as well: "The chronotope prompts a view of diaspora identities as predicated on a removal not only from a particular location in space and moment in time, but also from the particular social practice of time-space through which a community conceptualizes its surroundings and its own place in them" (67). Although Peeren is speaking specifically in terms of diaspora, I argue that this concept can also be applied to the works of Mercado as she depicts her experience of both exile and *return*. Mercado struggles with her relationship to time and space – both from the position of exile, and from the position of returning to a country whose social practices have been radically transformed by the period of dictatorship. It is my argument that Mercado's play with scales is in part her desire to discover a new relationship to time-space formations – one that she must

forge through repeated interactions as she readjusts to an Argentine community she no longer recognizes. Peeren describes this process as follows:

Viewing diaspora as dischronotopicality prompts a view of identity not as involving some “true self” that can be recovered by returning to a homeland presumed to have stayed frozen in time-space, but of identity as a continuous becoming that is predicated on the various constructions of time-space encountered and performatively enacted by the subject. Identity then becomes plural and refers itself not exclusively to the past but to a yet-to-be futurity (75).

Throughout this struggle, Mercado-as-narrator dwells in what Peeren would call “dischronotopicality,” as she searches, through the small, for a way to balance her commitment to practices of memorialization, while simultaneously repositioning herself within a living and evolving national landscape.

Following my reading of what it means to write the “letter of the small,” I will unpack two essays included in this collection, each of which juxtapose the monumental and the tiny; they serve as models for a final short essay collection, *Narrar después*, in which I argue Mercado makes concrete suggestions regarding how to publicly engage with the cityscape, public, or polis – as well as what forms of memory preservation are most adequate. Mercado always addresses the monumental through the lens of the small.

In “El arte de lo mínimo en México” / “The Art of the Minimal in Mexico” (1992), Mercado sketches for her readers how she came to embrace this aesthetic philosophy. She starts by describing what is “monumental” about Mexico: “Si desde un punto distante de México evocáramos lo particular de su espacio, la imagen que aparecería sería un vasto escenario de ruinas, zócalos que no ahorran perímetro,

estatuaria gigantesca, pinturas murales” (71).⁴⁴ However, for Mercado, this is not the most important visual lens necessary to capture the landscape: “Sin embargo, paradójicamente, acaso en ningún país se perciba con tanta intensidad como en México la dimensión estética de lo pequeño, y aun de lo nimio, como si el trasfondo monumental necesitara ser compensado con la tenue filigrana trabajada en una joya, en un bordado, en un pan de azúcares o en la propia piedra de una estela” (72).⁴⁵ She goes on to describe the sumptuous feasts served within the baroque facades of convents, Sor Juana’s meticulously detailed cookbooks, and finally a girl’s woven sash in which two figures, masculine and feminine, appear clearly on the diminutive surface: “La decisión artística en este caso es ‘minimáxima,’ si con este término se puede describir esta capacidad de llevar el discurso elocuente de la pareja, del juego, del transcurso (que es infinitud), de conducir toda una dialéctica y con toda la ambición que esto implica, a una simple cuenta de hilos. El prodigio: hacer (decir) lo más con lo menos” (77).⁴⁶ This capacity to say more with less, the “mini-maximal,” is one that is carried throughout her work: “Una salvedad: Lo pequeño no es

⁴⁴ “If from a distant point in Mexico we evoked the particularity of its space, the image that would appear would be a vast scene of ruins, sprawling zócalos, gigantic statues, mural-sized paintings.” (my trans.)

⁴⁵ “Nevertheless, paradoxically, perhaps in no other country as in Mexico does one perceive with such intensity the aesthetic dimension of the small, and also the trivial, as if the monumental background needed to be compensated for by the finely crafted filigree in a jewel, in a border, in a sweet bread, or in the very stone of a stele.” (my trans.)

⁴⁶ “The artistic decision in this case is ‘mini-maximal,’ if the term can be used to describe the ability to channel the eloquent discourse of the pair, the game, the course (which is infinity), to condense an entire dialectic – and with all of the ambition that this implies – into a simple story of threads. The wonder: to do (to say) the most with the least.” (my trans.)

fragmentario. Una mujer condensa en su bordado un *universito*, y no se ve muy bien por qué no se podría desafiar a la lengua y poner en diminutivo palabra tan enorme. Pues en México todavía se puede” (77).⁴⁷

It is precisely this ability to capture the universe itself in the capsule of the language of the small that I explore in the second essay of this collection, “Piedras de honda” / “Slingshot Stones”, which deals specifically with the struggles to find appropriate houses for a collective memory of trauma in Argentina. It is in this piece that Mercado applies the worldview she has developed in the baroque space of Mexico to her working through of the vastness of historical violence in Argentina.

At the bottom of “Piedras de honda” – a brief, two-page essay – Mercado includes a footnote that calls attention to the literally monumental occasion during which this piece was read, and for which it was composed:

Texto escrito el 1 de marzo de 1993 para la inauguración del Monumento a los siete desaparecidos de Villa María, Córdoba, víctimas de la dictadura militar. Las siete piedras, enormes, fueron traídas al parque de la ciudad junto al río en enormes camiones, pero no desde la Pampa de Achala, como yo había imaginado, sino desde el río Primero o Suquía, a la altura de La Calera, y puestas en círculo (69).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ “A qualification: The small isn’t fragmentary. A woman condenses in her embroidery a “universe-*lette*,” and it’s not clear why you couldn’t defy language and make such an enormous word diminutive. But in Mexico you still can.” (my trans.)

⁴⁸ “Text written on the 1st of March, 1993 for the inauguration of the Monument to the seven disappeared in Villa María, Córdoba, victims of the military dictatorship. The seven enormous stones were brought to the city’s park next to the river in enormous trucks, but not from La Pampa de Achala, as I had imagined, but rather from the River Primero o Suquía, at the height of La Calera, and put in a circle.” (my trans.)

As she reflects on this memorial space, Mercado seems to resist all of the qualities that contribute to its very monumentality – the physical scale of the rocks, their feeling of permanence and solidity: “Pensaba en estas siete piedras y tenía que hacer un esfuerzo para imaginarlas grandes ... Yo sabía entonces que eran grandes, monumentales, pero las quería al alcance de la mano, rompiendo la estática, arrojadas al espacio en una parábola cuyo punto de llegada es también el principio por la fuerza del arrojo y la elipsis de ida y vuelta siete veces trazada por siete manos y siete impulsos” (69).⁴⁹

She goes on to manipulate the monument through the space of her imagination – through the pages of her fiction. Mercado animates these rocks, turning them into pebbles for slingshots, granting them the agency that the disappeared individuals they represent lack: “Las sabía monumentales, pero no las quería monumento y me ponía a trabajarlas en sueños” / “I knew they were monumental, but I didn’t want them to be a monument, and I set about sculpting them in dreams” (69). Closing her eyes, she imagines a budding light that makes it possible to manipulate the rocks like pebbles used in slingshots – launching them from plaza to plaza, from target to target (69). In this way, they are given what she describes as a certain “energía de impacto” / “energy of impact” (69). Instead of perceiving the stones as “funerary,” she calls upon her audience to envision them as “palpable” – as pebbles that can be handled,

⁴⁹ “I thought about these seven stones, and I had to make an effort to imagine them big ... I knew then that they were big, monumental, but I wanted them within reach, breaking the static, hurled into space in a parabola whose destination is also the point of origin, due to the force of the launch and ellipsis of the round trip, seven times traced by seven hands and seven impulses.” (my trans.)

collected, whose roughness can be tangibly felt and tactilely experienced. Naming each of the victims, she individualizes the abstract symbols of the rocks; by miniaturizing the monumental stones, by touching and observing their surfaces, one can:

...tomarlas en la palma de la mano y dejarlas correr por el patio, por la vereda, tomarlas de a dos y de a tres y arrojarlas al cielo como piedras de payana. Y, como el hondero entusiasta ... estirar el resorte, enfocar la horqueta y disparar, no dejar de disparar contra la infamia, contra el olvido, contra el general, contra el grupo atareado en la muerte, contra el sepulturero y su lugarteniente ... Y, con las siete piedras, un programa liminar: que en todas las plazas de este país haya piedras múltiples de estos siete que hoy hemos echado a rodar (70).⁵⁰

The public present at this inauguration – and later the reader, re-living this event through the space of memory – is asked to envision this site differently; to resist the monumental, and to insist that memory lives in the small details of the daily rhythms of life. For Mercado, the vastness of trauma and grief can only be captured in the small scale of everyday particularities. And, it is this very lens that propels Mercado's future work, as she continues writing against the backdrop of a nation increasingly aware of memorial practices in the public sphere – practices she both engages with and actively critiques. Mercado always insists upon an attentiveness to particularity even as she acknowledges the vastness of the scope of these traumatic histories and their corresponding memorial forms.

⁵⁰ "...take them in the palm of the hand and let them run about the patio, on the sidewalk, scoop them up by twos and threes and toss them into the air like jacks. And, like a slingshot enthusiast ... pull back the sling, focus the fork and shoot, and keep shooting at disgrace, at forgetfulness, at the general, at the group preoccupied with death, at the gravediggers and their deputies ... And, with the seven stones, a preliminary plan: that in every plaza in this country there be stones, multiples of the seven that today we have set rolling." (my trans.)

It is my argument that Mercado's play with scales is one that allows her to explore at once the great expanse of traumatic memory, and at the same time to combat a monumentalization of this trauma; she critiques the construction of a History from the space of the intimate, rooting her experiences in the particularities of the "small" – an aesthetic choice she outlines in great detail in *La letra de lo mínimo*. She simultaneously locates this particular memory within the space of the national and the global. Mercado illustrates her fascination with the language of the "minimal" – employed in her works to combat both the vastness and impossibility of adequately addressing the scale of loss, and to challenge more "monumental" approaches to memory-making.

Narrar después: Housing Memory, Networked Memory

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to Mercado's 2003 *Narrar después / Narrating After* – a piece that continues in the journalistic style of *La letra de lo mínimo / The Letter of the Small*, and is in many ways envisioned by the author as a continuation of her earlier project. As the author's note, featured in lieu of a summary on the back of the book, clarifies, the essays gathered in this collection were originally written for other purposes⁵¹ – "notas, ponencias, presentaciones, relatos,

⁵¹ In *Cry for Me, Argentina*, Annette Levine also addresses what she sees as the key differences and continuities between *La letra de lo mínimo* and the later *Narrar después*:

Composed of six thematically arranged chapters, *Narrar después* is structurally more defined than the seemingly fragmented layout of Mercado's previous work. Her journalistic edge charges these brief thought-provoking entries – spanning the anthropological, sociological, and cultural – with an urgency that links them intimately to the moments in which they were written. Although somewhat similar, stylistically and thematically, to *La letra de lo mínimo*, *Narrar después* is considerably longer and even more politically oriented. Most importantly, *Narrar después* solidifies Mercado's commitment to Simón Dubnow's last words before being executed by the Gestapo in 1949: "Shreibn un fashreibn!" (Write and

homenajes”: “De manera menos secreta de lo que parece estos textos proponen entre todos una crónica, una aproximación a nuestro tiempo: literatura, paisaje, erótica, memoria.”⁵² As she revisits many of the themes she has already touched upon in both *En estado de memoria* and in *La letra de lo mínimo*, I argue that in this work Mercado is more explicitly political. Here, Mercado pushes her engagement with public space, revisiting some of the same sites she addressed in earlier works, re-writing new layers into the life-stories of previously described figures, and in general adding more maturity and texture to the narratives she brings alive (again and differently) in the space of *this* text. I begin this section with an analysis of the essay “La letra de lo mínimo”⁵³ – in which Mercado renews and complicates her relationship to writing the diminutive. However, in this piece, Mercado more precisely highlights what she identifies as the political dimensions of this aesthetic choice, locating the practice of writing the large through the small as one that is rooted in feminist and leftist causes.

Opening the essay is the image of Mercado’s confrontation with an environment she describes as a “bosque jurásico” / “Jurassic forest” – a space so large

document history!) Indeed, “Un aire entra en el recinto cerrado” (Air Enters an Enclosure), where the Dubnow anecdote is found, lies at the heart of the collection, in the third chapter.

In the first two chapters, Mercado emphasizes her writing style; her relationship with *lo mínimo*, the often overlooked yet meaningful minutiae; and key historical events defining *después*, the aftermath, in which she writes – the Spanish civil war, World War II, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the death of Ernesto Che Guevara, and the tragedy of Tlatelolco in Mexico... (137).

⁵² “Notes, papers, presentations, stories, homages: In a less secret way than it seems, these texts together suggest a chronicle, an approximation of our time: literature, landscape, eroticism, memory.” (my trans.)

⁵³ Not to be confused with the book of the same title.

that it could never be entirely comprehended, fully registered by the human eye. As she recalls collecting mushrooms in the woods of France, she conjures forth the childhood stories and fairytales that are set against this very backdrop – ones that evoke the primeval fear of the unknown and unknowable, of unending expanses:

Estar en lo pequeño no es una elección modesta, aunque aparezca como un recurso para defenderse del terror arcaico del bosque o de la selva, que por su inasibilidad son abismo, que por su inabarcabilidad son vacío. Precisamente, para conjurar el pánico del borde en el que toda escritura se sitúa, acepté el reto de provocar el vacío y batirme con él en una lucha desigual. Y, aunque parezca paradójico, la confrontación con el vacío se hace con el arma de lo mínimo (14-5).⁵⁴

However, Mercado goes on to explain how this attention to the small can combat the vastness of experiences that seem un-graspable in their immediate magnitude; she describes the way in which a child interacts with and understands the space of the forest, feeling the trees' bark, following the trails of ants, noticing the detailed patterns on the leaves; it is the *latent* potential of these details – the storing up of images and fragments of the totality – that for Mercado hold the promise of radical new possibilities: “Escribir lo mínimo es previamente haberlo atesorado” (15) / “Writing the small is to have previously treasured it.” (my trans.) She notes that in the space of writing, these seemingly insignificant details and stories of the small can be opened to reveal the hidden potential that lays buried within them: “...provocados por

⁵⁴ “To dwell in the small is no modest choice, though it may seem like a resource for defense against the archaic terror of the forest or the jungle, which for their ungraspability are abyss, which for their inaccessibility are emptiness. Precisely to conjure forth the panic of the margin, in which all literature is situated, I accepted the challenge of provoking the void and throwing myself into an unequal fight. And, even though it appears paradoxical, the confrontation with the void is undertaken with the weapon of the minimal.” (my trans.)

el acto de escribir, esos refugios se abren o transparentan sus muros y dejan ver una filigrana cuya existencia nunca se sospechó ... La filigrana, si se la quiere escribir, exige una apropiación minuciosa, lentes de enormes grosor, lupa de gran alcance para poder percibir lo que se sustrae no tanto para negarse como para dejarse desear”

(15).⁵⁵ Though these memories may be housed in small and partial containers, when viewed in the correct manner and when opened through the act of writing, they reveal these “filigrees” and textured truths that are enveloped in the detail.

She compares the art of the small to the art of “capital letters” (16), using Mexico as an example once again; Mercado considers how the entire world of the baroque can be contained in the mini-universe of the thread of a weaving, just as it is represented by statues, murals, and architecture (16). The act of writing – and in turn of viewing the world – through the lens of the small can only be accomplished by letting the things themselves speak; each object contains its own complex texture of stories and memories inscribed upon its surface: “La letra de lo mínimo,” “...no ha sido solamente un título ... sino un modelo para mí, cuyo reconocimiento me permite escribir ahora y ensamblar varias operaciones de mi persona, perfectamente concatenadas y unidas por hilos a la escritura misma, reconocibles incluso en todo lo que escribí, que fue breve, diminuto, miniatúrico. ‘Las cosas hablaban,’ ‘dejar hablar

⁵⁵ “...provoked by the act of writing, these shelters open, or make their walls transparent, revealing a filigree whose existence was never suspected ... The filigree, if you want to put it down on paper, demands meticulous examination, enormously thick lenses, a far-reaching magnifying glass, in order to glimpse what shies away, not so much to negate itself as to let itself be desired.” (my trans.)

a las cosas” (17).⁵⁶ Continuing down this path, Mercado reflects that this method of writing bears a lot in common with the act of cooking in that each material requires its own kind of precision and attention to form: “La materia de la escritura tiene una vida propia similar, su cocción no se detiene fuera del horno y sigue produciéndose de manera autónoma, segregando jugos y sustancias que hay que saber concentrar en el texto. Templar un texto es haber respetado su cocimiento hasta el final:

consistencia, textura, rectificaciones diversas, pero sobre todo haberlo dejado ser tal y como quería ser.” (17-8).⁵⁷ Just as a skilled cook realizes that the act of preparing rice is not over once the pot is removed from the stove’s flame, a writer of the small recognizes that individual stories and memories must be treated with the appropriate attention to detail in order to allow them to be “cooked” to perfection. Writing the small means being attentive to the particular ingredients contained within the composition, treating the raw material of each narrative as unique and as requiring the appropriate form of preparation.

This back-and-forth discussion of the connection between narration and cooking leads Mercado to explain to her readers that attention to the small is not merely a method of writing, but also a way of life: “...no hay discontinuidad entre

⁵⁶ “...it hasn’t been just a title for me ... but a model whose recognition now allows me to write, and to piece together various operations of my persona, perfectly concatenated and united by thread to writing itself, even recognizable in everything I wrote, which was brief, diminutive, miniature. ‘Things spoke,’ ‘let things speak.’” (my trans.)

⁵⁷ “The ingredients of writing have a similar life of their own – they don’t stop cooking once they’re out of the oven and continue to roast themselves autonomously, separating juices and substances that one must understand how to concentrate in the text. To temper a text is to respect its cooking to the very end: consistency, texture, various adjustments, but above all to let it be exactly as it wished to be.” (my trans.)

una percepción *para* la escritura y una percepción *para* lo cotidiano” (19) / “...there is no discontinuity between a sense *for* literature and a sense *for* the everyday.” (my trans.) For Mercado, there is no strict divide: “‘para la vida de la escritura’ y ‘para la vida doméstica’” (20) / “‘for the life of writing’ and ‘for domestic life.’” (my trans.) And, from this blurred boundary, Mercado is able to describe what she sees as the very political, feminist nature of her election to write the small. Recognizing that feminist theory always unites the private and public realms, she makes the claim that writing itself is a political act, and should be regarded as a weapon that women can use to invent new realities in the face of novel and evolving challenges. Mercado argues that like women’s traditional place in the kitchen – where attention to detail makes the perfect dish – feminist writing can employ the small as an aesthetic choice.⁵⁸ The conscious election to “write the small” defies the grand narratives of state-sponsored patriarchal Histories, and instead opens up a space for powerful subaltern histories – histories whose impact and power might have been overlooked due to the impartial or seemingly insignificant scale of their containers. Through writing, Mercado suggests, women can open up the potential that lies hidden in the diminutive:

La escritura es política ... La escritura, tal como yo la concebiría en este retrato hablado, es la llamada a crear el nuevo lenguaje político de fin de siglo que reemplace en belleza, eficacia y convicción al viejo y repetitivo discurso que nuestras generaciones vimos desfallecer ante

⁵⁸ This connection between cooking and philosophy echoes Sor Juana de la Cruz’s “Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz” (1691) (“Reply to Sister Philotea”) – a letter written in response to the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, who stated that women should not engage in certain philosophical questions. Sor Juana refutes his arguments by pointing out that women could enter into philosophical thought even while undertaking simple, domestic tasks – such as cooking dinner.

los embates neoliberales. No se sabe aún cómo será ese lenguaje saliendo de la escritura que en algún lado se está gestando. Las feministas han sido invitadas a inventarlo y ya lo que escriben las mujeres dice mucho más que las consignas lanzadas por el movimiento para reclamar el uso de la palabra. Más que el uso de la palabra: las mujeres usamos la escritura, y hacerlo debería ser nuestra reivindicación actual (21).⁵⁹

The question remains: How does Mercado view her propensity to “write the small” – to write the detail – as participating in this struggle to invent a new language capable of defining a generational struggle against what was lost to neoliberal projects?

In a compelling passage, she compares writing to “micro-surgery.” For Mercado, the act of composition, which is for her none other than the process of analysis itself, can regenerate – stitch together – that which has been damaged or rendered fragmentary: “La operación es de microcirugía, como cabe para la letra de lo mínimo, y consiste en reparar zonas necrosadas, bloqueos del decir, parálisis y depresión” (22) / “The operation is micro-surgical, as is fitting for the letter of the small, and it consists of repairing necrotized zones, blocked speech, paralysis, and depression.” (my trans.) And, she goes on to argue, her attempt “operate” through this particular form and style of narration carries for her a particularly feminine quality:

En algún momento, me detuve a pensar que mi afición a desarmar la miniatura, entendida como un cúmulo muy denso de atributos y valores, a esculcar en lo pequeño desafiando el sentido hasta que no dé más, para después rehacerlo desde su agotamiento, era un gesto de

⁵⁹ “Writing is political . . . Writing, as I conceive of it in this spoken portrait, is the call to create a new, turn-of-the-century political language that with beauty, effectiveness, and conviction replaces the old and repetitive discourse that our generations saw fall before the attack of neoliberalism. No one knows yet how this language – born of writing, gestating somewhere – will be. Feminists have been invited to invent it, and what women are writing already says a lot more than the slogans launched by the movement to reclaim the use of the word. And beyond the use of the word: we women use writing, and doing so should be our contemporary vindication.” (my trans.)

escritura que traía marca femenina ... Se trata de un concentrado de “materia prima” que se ofrece al recorte, al modelado, a la costura, al bordado, al plisado, y otras acciones de desmenuzamiento para las que hay que tener curiosidad y pericia. La incitación es como la que puede provocar un adoquín: no hay nada, y de pronto se empiezan a ver las vetas. La búsqueda de la forma será desestratificar el bloque hasta hacerlo transparente. Y esa es tarea fina y femenina, por aprendizaje y por norma (42).⁶⁰

As I continue to look at other essays in this volume, I keep Mercado’s assertion in mind: Mercado’s prose, combating the vastness of the forest with the latent power and potential contained in the small, is an explicitly feminist and political project. Exploring other pieces, which focus more centrally on the question of housing and memorializing traumatic memory, I maintain these parameters – parameters that while developed in earlier works by Mercado, are more fully fleshed out in the pages of this text.

Perhaps the most relevant section of this essay collection carries the compelling title, “Cementerio de papel” / “Paper Cemetery.” What does a “paper cemetery” mean for Mercado, and how does this image of containing memory contrast or complement her earlier attempts to engage with this problem of the “housing” the past – the passing of memories from the realm of the private to the realm of the public?⁶¹ I note that in addition to turning towards writing as the

⁶⁰ “At some point, I stopped to think about how my fondness for dismantling the miniature – understood as a very dense heap of attributes and values – for sifting through the small and challenging my senses until they gave out, only to do it all again in exhaustion, was a gesture of writing with a feminine touch ... It involves a concentration of ‘primary material’ that is suited for cutting, shaping, sewing, embroidery, pleating, and other acts of scrutiny for which one must possess both curiosity and expertise. A cobblestone can rouse the same kind of incitement: there’s nothing, and then suddenly the grout begins to show. The search for form will be the de-stratifying of the block until it is transparent. And that is a fine and feminine work, by rule and by training.” (my trans.)

⁶¹ See also Levine who discusses this section of Mercado’s work on “paper cemeteries” (138).

receptacle for memory-work, Mercado also uses the space of her essays as a way to add new dimensions to physical places that already have been built and that circulate in the urban landscape beyond her text. By recording a variety of stories that revolve around specific memory-sites, Mercado both complicates and engages with the relationship between built-memorials and the practice of storytelling and testimony, creating a picture of memory spaces that travel, change, and evolve through the act of narration.

The first essay I analyze in this section is entitled “Reapariciones” / “Reappearances” (1999). What is the image of reappearances, reoccurrences, returns (possibly even of a kind of resurgence) that Mercado suggests in this textual space? She opens the piece with the abstract image of a civilization destroyed – one whose foundations have been used to form the base for the conqueror’s new edifices, whose buildings have been reduced to rubble. And yet, as the cinematic trope of the child pulling a doll out of the remains of her destroyed home implies, there is always the chance of some kind of recuperation or regeneration (101). Throughout this essay, Mercado traces her initial confrontation with the extent of the trauma that occurred in the space of Argentina, and then continues this discussion by examining the ways in which this memory has been represented or commemorated in various instances. Her exploration covers both textual and physical memorials, juxtaposing and blurring the boundaries between the space of the fictional or the textual, and the space of the monument.

The first part of this essay describes her 1979 encounter (from the site of her Mexican exile) with some of the first testimonial evidence that emerges from Argentina – testimonies compiled by the Comisión Argentina de Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (The Argentine Commission for the Defense of Human Rights) in Madrid and that circulated internationally via Amnesty International. As she describes, however, the narrative space of these particular testimonies was not one created for posterity, but rather, one that demanded urgency; these stories were being written not as retrospective meditations, but as immediate calls for action. They were objects not of memorial reflection, but rather of documentation:

Eran narraciones como las que habían escritos los sobrevivientes de los campos nazis, pero con una diferencia, no eran textos que se hubieran escrito *después* como memoria de acontecimientos que había que recordar en el futuro, ni eran un testamento de los horrores padecidos. Más aún, no eran monumentos, eran documentos cuya actualidad suponía un carácter operativo, puesto que los campos estaban en su vigencia plena y todavía habrían de seguir cobrándose víctimas varios años más y cada vez con mayor dosis de terror (102).⁶²

The living nature of these documents means that unlike Holocaust testimonies, they did not serve as places of memory-storage but rather engaged directly with the present. Mercado recalls, however, the suspicion with which these texts were met in the space of exile. Many Argentines in her circle believed that they were falsified, written by forces of the dictatorship themselves (102). However, as Mercado puts it,

⁶² “They were stories like those that had been written by the survivors of Nazi camps, but with a difference, they weren’t texts that had been written *after*, like a memory of events that needed to be recorded for the future, nor were they a testament to the horrors suffered. Moreover, they weren’t monuments, they were documents whose immediacy assumed an operative character, given that the camps were in full use and would continue collecting victims for many more years and with ever-larger doses of terror.” (my trans.)

“Por otro lado, el NO a los testimonios tuvo consecuencias cuyos alcances tal vez estamos todavía lejos de poder evaluar con libertad y franqueza” (103) / “On the other hand, the “NO” to testimonies had consequences, whose extent we might still be far from able to evaluate with freedom and frankness.” (my trans.) By placing the testimonies into the pages of her text, Mercado is able to bring new life to the debate; writing *over the top* of the text she adds a dynamic force to the work that was initially dismissed by its reading public.

Mercado remembers with particular clarity reading a three-hundred page document written by a survivor of the La Perla detention camp, one that was later subject to a process of censorship by the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo as the witness’s personal testimony moved into the space of the collective. Mercado analyzes what is lost in this transition, as the woman’s personal memories came into contact with the politically charged space of the public. Although she is quickly mailed a “corrected copy,” Mercado nevertheless finds it impossible to part with the original document:

Cuando éste llegó se habían eliminado de él todas las partes en las que se hablaba de *traslados* de prisioneros, que en ese texto y en otros se consideraban por lo que significaban, por lo que eran, es decir *la ejecución*, es decir *la muerte*. Confieso que nunca hubiera podido, sin violentar fuertemente mi ética más elemental, prender fuego ni destruir por cualquier otro medio el grueso volumen de verdad que contenía el documento originario (103-4).⁶³

⁶³ “When it arrived they had eliminated from it all of the parts that spoke of *transfers* of prisoners, which in this text and in others were considered for what they signified, for what they were, which was *execution*, which was *death*. I confess that I never was able, without strongly violating my most fundamental morals, to burn or destroy by other means that thick volume of truth that contained the original document.” (my trans.)

She notes that she never had the force to directly oppose those who wished to censor, deny, and in her words, to inflict a “second death” or a “sub-death” upon the bodies who the testimonies represented (104). And, she contrasts this moment of the absolute disappearance of dead bodies to a later period in which the media was saturated with graphic images of terror and death: “hizo espectáculo de la muerte, saturando todos los espacios con las imágenes del terror que pretendía haber desconocido durante una década. De la desaparición a la saturación” (104) / “It made a spectacle of death, saturating all of the spaces with images of terror that for a decade they had claimed to be unaware of. From disappearance to saturation.” (my trans.) Mercado ends this section by painting the image of all of those individuals who “buscaban estrategias para vivir con sus desaparecidos” (105) / “looked for strategies, so that they could live with their disappeared” (my trans.); after reminding the reader of the specific opposing methods contained in the censored testimony and in the televised media, she notes that the process of locating appropriate forms of memorialization is a slow one: “...sólo paulatinamente se fue tejiendo una contracultura de la desaparición” (105) / “...only slowly did a counter-culture of disappearance begin to weave itself together.” (my trans.) The remaining section of this essay explores the diversity of these commemorative practices. Mercado refuses to let these memorial spaces settle into stagnancy. Instead, she multiplies the potential of the projects by inscribing new layers of meaning on top of their surfaces, by incorporating them into the pages of fiction – a site where new imaginings are always possible.

Mercado opens with examples of physical monuments. The first is in Bet Shemen, Israel. The second is a re-thinking of the *Reloj de Sol* monument (Sun Dial) in Villa María, Córdoba, initially presented in *La letra de lo mínimo* where Mercado's inaugural speech is reproduced; in this volume of essays, both sites are manipulated, or made more rich and meaningful, through the process of storytelling and narration. In her first illustration, Mercado paints a picture of the international scope of this once-seemingly (and perhaps deceptively) nationally focused trauma, as Israeli families of the disappeared in Argentina commemorate their loss. Located in Bet Shemen, a site between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, this monumental space was inaugurated on January 24, 1992 by the Comisión Israelí de familiares de desaparecidos en la Argentina (The Israeli Commission for Families of the Disappeared in Argentina) and titled *Memoria* (*Memory*). However, rather than create a traditional monument or memorial to the dead, these families instead planted a forest:

“No quisimos erigir un monumento de piedra o bronce –señaló en el acto Luis Jaimovich, padre de Alejandra, desaparecida en Córdoba–, sino plantear árboles. Erguidos, resistiendo vientos y tempestades, esparciendo sus semillas” (...). “En un instante los arrancaron de su tiempo y de su espacio, los vejaron, torturaron y asesinaron, escondieron y eliminaron sus restos. Pero no lograron acallar sus voces y sus fuerzas. Esas voces y fuerzas continuarán en nuestros árboles.” Yo añadiría así como sus nombres. José Hochman, hermano de Abraham, desaparecido, recordó en esa ocasión que “existe en el judaísmo una tradición: cuando muere un joven se graba sobre su lápida un árbol truncado.” “Nuestros seres queridos son como árboles que fueron truncados. Por no tener lápidas, quisimos para ellos un bosque de árboles enteros, un bosque rebosante de vida.” En el lugar pusieron juegos para niños, mesas, bancos, y la gente va allí a pasar el día. El recogimiento del duelo no desaparece, pero cobra una dinámica comunitaria que excede incluso el espacio propiamente argentino y

hay otros latinoamericanos que eligen ese lugar para honrar la memoria de los suyos. Es un cementerio sin lápidas y las tumbas son árboles de la vida, términos que junto a su carácter emocional y simbólico han sido revestidos por una intención política de resistencia (106).⁶⁴

As the passage highlights, the memorial space created by the tree-filled park is dynamic, a lived-space – one that spills over national borders, and that exceeds the confinement of a national sphere. Although the pain of absence does not disappear, José Hochman’s words echo the idea that even with the lack of marked graves and physical remains, communities can fight the immensity of loss by incorporating this very absence into the lived contours of places designed for public use.

Mercado continues with a second vignette, juxtaposing the Israeli site with a return to the memorial built in Villa María, Córdoba – one she so artfully manipulated via her inaugural address into a dynamic space. She again covers the history of the project – “la memoria sin tiempo que quería representar el reloj de sol” (107) / “timeless memory that the sundial meant to represent” (my trans.) – pioneered by two mothers of disappeared individuals, Liliana Felipe and Jesusa Rodríguez in 1993:

⁶⁴ “We did not want to erect a monument of stone or bronze,” Luis Jaimovich, father of Alejandra, disappeared in Córdoba, indicated at the event, “but rather to plant trees. Erect, resisting winds and storms, scattering their seeds . . . In an instant they pulled them from their time and their space, they made them old, they tortured them, hid them and eliminated their remains. But they did not succeed in silencing their voices and their strength. Those voices and strength will continue in our trees.” And also in their names, I would add. José Hochman, brother of Abraham, disappeared, remembered on that occasion that “there exists in Judaism a tradition: when a young person dies, a cut tree is engraved on their tombstone.” “Our loved ones are like trees that were cut down. Since they don’t have tombstones, we wanted for them a full forest of trees, a forest brimming with life.” There, they put a playground, tables, benches, and people go there to spend the day. The concentration of grief does not disappear, but acquires a communal dynamic that exceeds even the strictly Argentine space, and there are other Latin Americans that choose this place to honor the memory of their loved ones. In the cemetery without tombstones, the graves are trees of life, terms that along with their emotional and symbolic character are reinvested with the political cause of resistance.” (my trans.)

“Podíamos leer y pronunciar sus nombres, en la piedra recuperaban la identidad que el terror trató de arrebatarles” (107) / “We could read and pronounce their names, in stone we recovered the identity that the terror tried to snatch from them.” (my trans.)

However, in this mention of this site, Mercado moves the debate from a practice of building structures, to a practice of reading. The rocks’ inscriptions and the ritual act of inauguration allow the spectator to listen to the memories of those who have been lost, incorporating these narrative acts into the array of stories that circulate the site. The graves themselves become the inscription; in the absence of bodies and physical remains, the names carved into the surfaces of the rocks must stand in for absence.

Mercado uses the example of the powerful act of writing about physical space to move the reader into a third form of commemoration – that of the public death notice published in newspapers in the post-dictatorship period. For, as she describes, this genre changes against the backdrop of the absences inflicted by the authoritarian regime:

La nota necrológica, cuya redacción en la prensa tradicional suele responder a un estereotipo, cambió de signo: al pasar a un diario de oposición, se convirtió en una herramienta de esa memoria que en los adjetivos que la acompañan – memoria activa, memoria viva – estaba señalando una valoración política obstruida, a la que costaba regresar, o al menos a la que costaba darle forma por la carga afectiva personal que soportaba. Esa decisión de publicar los recordatorios fue un acto de arrojo, y una muestra de creatividad política; la reapropiación de bienes de una cultura (208).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ “The death notice, whose wording in the traditional press tends to conform to a stereotype, changed its form: upon passing to an opposition newspaper, it became a tool of a memory that through its accompanying adjectives – active memory, living memory – marked an obstructed political valuation, one that was difficult to return to, or at least to give form to, due to the affective personal weight that it bore. That decision to publish the death notices was an act of bravery, and a proof of political creativity; the re-appropriation of cultural goods.” (my trans.)

Mercado focuses on those notices published in *Página 12* by Fanny Brudny in 1994, and on the process of compiling the names of the dead for the archive. She notes the difficult and laborious task of data collection undertaken by the newspapers, as families struggled to locate exact information regarding the disappearance of their loved ones. And unable to let these death notices lay static in the archive, Mercado continues to breathe new life into the announcements by engaging them yet again in the process of composition – annotating them, copying down names and dates, re-animating the words through the incorporation of these notices into her own writing: “Ahora que describo mi manera de hacerlo advierto que ya me había dejado atrapar por esos textos y que, al reproducirlos, los recreaba, los escribía yo misma, como sucede con cierta forma de lectura que convoca a una nota al margen, al subrayado o a la marca con cruz, círculo o tilde, según la índole del señalamiento” (109).⁶⁶ And, as Mercado notes, this act of writing and revision could go on forever; how does one transform the genre of the “recordatorio” into a dynamic practice that resists closure?

Much like her treatment of monumental built space, Mercado seems to feel that the appropriate solution is to write over top of writing – to layer and texture the memorial inscription. And as she describes, the process is both future-oriented and indefinite – can last for as long as one is willing to engage with the re-composition and palimpsestic layering of text. By “adjusting” the formal model of the death

⁶⁶ “Now that I describe my way of doing it, I should say that I had already let myself be trapped by those texts and that, upon reproducing them, I recreated them, I wrote them myself, as happens with certain forms of reading that call for a marginal note, for a highlighting, or a mark with a cross, circle, or accent, according to the nature of each assignation.” (my trans.)

notice, Mercado claims: “Se trataría de dilucidar en qué medida han llegado a ser objetos con una dinámica que genera sus propios recursos para condensar las cargas y descargas que provoca la figura de la desaparición. Desaparición que irradia muerte sin sepultura, que es puro enigma sin solución ni respuesta” (110).⁶⁷ But, the question remains: What does the act of reading and re-writing do to these kinds of texts? For Mercado, it reanimates social webs, re-positioning the disappeared, and placing these individuals back into a network of communal relationships that were lost to them when they were erased from the public sphere:

...exigiría múltiples cruzamientos. Sólo hace unos días encontré un libro que podría constituirse en modelo si nos propusiéramos prolongar esos textos insinuantes e inconclusos y hacer una sobreescritura de esas historias latentes, la Antología de Spoon River, colección de poemas en forma de epitafios del poeta norteamericano Edgar Lee Masters, en la que los difuntos cuentan en primera persona sus avatares y la red se convierte en el mapa subjetivo de un pueblo y de una comunidad, uno de los efectos más genuinos que suele lograr la literatura (111).⁶⁸

As she collects, organizes, marks, and categorizes these clippings, the record of names and dates becomes a part of her. Mercado describes how the papers begin to

⁶⁷ “It would involve elucidating to what degree they had become objects with a dynamic that generates their own resources for condensing the loadings and unloadings that the figure of disappearance provokes. A disappearance that irradiates death without burial, that is pure enigma without solution or answer.” (my trans.)

⁶⁸ “...it would demand multiple crossings. Only a few days ago, I found a book that could serve as a model if we resolved to extend those suggestive and inconclusive texts and do a “write-over” of those latent histories, The Spoon River Anthology, a collection of poems in the form of epitaphs by the North American poet Edgar Lee Masters, in which the dead describe their avatars in first person, and the network converts itself into a subjective map of town and community, one of the most genuine effects that literature can achieve.” (my trans.)

cover her table, spilling over onto the walls and floors of her apartment, as she creates her own paper cemetery, her own death rituals within the space of her home (112).

Mercado closes the essay with a reflection on the category of the cemetery itself, expanding the term to include the tiniest of spaces. Instead of limiting the physical act of memorialization and the final resting place to monumental structures, she extends the practice to include some of the smallest rituals undertaken by the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, to include the reading of the newspaper death notices, to include the lists of all of the memorial practices rooted in the diminutive that she has mentioned thus far in the collection. She sums up the experience with the line: “Los recordatorios son epitafios en nuestro cementerio, pero lo que llevan escrito son los hechos de un tiempo, una escritura que es más documento que monumento, más presente que pasado y, siéndolo, una historia cuya lógica será cada vez más patente a medida que se la escriba” (114).⁶⁹ The closing lines of this essay are powerful, as they bring together all of the forms of memorialization and monumental practices that have taken place against the backdrop of national remembrance – and this is exactly the landscape against which Mercado writes. All of these collective memory-practices can be, for Mercado, kept alive and active through their re-inscription in the pages of writing.

⁶⁹ “The death notices are epitaphs in our cemetery, but what’s written on them are the facts of the time, a writing that is more document than monument, more present than past, and as such, a history whose logic will become increasingly clear as it’s written.” (my trans.)

I close my analysis of this collection with a piece entitled, “Historias, Memorias” / “Histories, Memories” (2002)⁷⁰ because it captures what I argue is Mercado’s attempt not just to recreate lived networks of disappeared bodies within the national sphere of Argentina, but to extend this interlacing of traumatic experience to include other instances of 20th century violence. In this piece, Mercado brings together three very different survivors of 20th century trauma – a web whose central node is comprised of Mercado-as-interlocutor. It is through Mercado’s listening and writing (her role as witness) that these stories become a part of her own working through of trauma and exilic identity. They are offered up to the reader in conjunction with essays rooted in a particularly Argentine experience.

Mercado begins her narration from the space of Mexico in 1975, thirty years after the end of the Second World War. She describes how she was hired by a local newspaper to interview a Holocaust survivor, Eva Alexandra Uchmany, as part of a memorial retrospective. However, Mercado is unable to experience this event in a detached manner; rather, the act of interviewing Uchmany becomes for Mercado intrinsically linked to her own experience of exile: “Sin embargo, esas fotografías que habrían de ilustrar mis entrevistas y esos recuerdos que habría de escuchar ya estaban en mí y en el trasfondo de mi propia oscuridad, entretejiendo un manto entre cuyos repliegues yo también existía, pensaba y hasta evocaba y que el exilio en México

⁷⁰ A note at the end of the essay explains the public context in which this piece was initially presented before forming part of the anthology: *Primer Coloquio Historia y Memoria. Perspectivas para el abordaje del pasado reciente*. 18, 29, 20 de abril de 2002. Comisión Provincial por la Memoria. La Plata.

había comenzado a labrar intensa y profusamente aunque de manera secreta” (137-8).⁷¹ The borders between Uchmany’s experience and her own begin to blur.

Uchmany grants Mercado an unprecedented interview; as she later finds out, Uchmany had consistently denied speaking about her experience to journalists. However, she finds in Mercado – after thirty years – an interlocutor capable of receiving her story; Uchmany’s history finds a home in the body of Mercado-as-exile:

... me dejó entrar cuando supo que era argentina y exiliada, como si ... ella me considerara una igual, alguien con quien podría hablar, una extranjera ... Mientras ella hablaba ... su historia tomaba forma acompasadamente a medida de que se desencadenaba y encontraba en mí un sitio dónde recogerse, como si hubiera llegado hasta mí para descansar de un viaje largo (138).⁷²

In the exilic space of Mexico, these two disparate figures are brought together.

Uchmany and Mercado find in each other a means through which to tell their stories:

“El relato de Eva abrió la caja de mi memoria” (139) / “Eva’s story opened the box of my memory.” (my trans.) In Mercado’s words, the exchange allows her to pull down the great wall of history with a capital “H,” as she writes in the space of the small one story of one survivor whose experience resonates in the repositories of Mercado’s own memory-bank.

⁷¹ “Nevertheless, those photographs that were to illustrate my interviews and those memories that I was to listen to were now in me and in the background of my own darkness, weaving a cloak between whose folds I also existed, thought, and even remembered, and that the exile in Mexico had begun to cultivate in a secret way.” (my trans.)

⁷² “...she let me come in when she found out that I was an Argentine and an exile, as if ... she considered me an equal, someone she would be able to talk to, a foreigner ... As she spoke ... her story took form, rhythmically, as it unleashed itself and found in me a place to dwell, as if it had come to rest from a long journey.” (my trans.)

The essay then changes focus to re-address the figure of Ovidio González Díaz (Gondi), the Spanish Republican Civil War exile who Mercado first introduces in *En estado de memoria*. Once again, she recounts her journey back to Gondi's hometown in Asturias – a quest she undertook as a kind of proxy – re-walking the steps of her friend through his village: “La segunda historia que voy a contar me permite discernir entre lo que sería un depósito para la memoria ajena y un legado que se refracta sobre la memoria del que lo recibe y le permite constituirse como sujeto” (139)⁷³; this is an interesting distinction – one between an individual serving as a place to store outside memory, versus serving as a depository for a legacy that “refracts itself,” that allows one to constitute oneself as a subject within it. Unlike Mercado's act of witnessing Uchmany's story, here, Mercado is able to “fill in” for Gondi-as-subject as a protagonist in a story that in reality is not her own. As she continues the narrative, Mercado explains that unlike Gondi, her experience of exile comes to a close. Yet, she becomes an inheritor of *his* exilic memory.

On a trip back to Mexico, Gondi has turned eighty, and over a decade has passed since Mercado made the journey back to Spain in his place. On a last visit together, Gondi gifts Mercado a card – one that is later revealed to be a letter written by his father, Perfecto, the night before he was executed by a firing squad in 1942: “Pero cuando Gondi me la confió, la carta hizo memoria en mí, como habían hecho

⁷³ “The second story that I'm going to tell allows me to distinguish between what might be called a storehouse for the memory of others, and a legacy that refracts through the memory of whoever receives it, allowing him to establish himself as a subject.” (my trans.)

memoria en su padre los versos de Rizal antes de morir.” (142).⁷⁴ This will be her last interaction with Gondi, who passes away shortly after this encounter – but Mercado’s line continues to haunt its readers “la carta hizo memoria en mí” / “the letter made a memory in me.” What does it mean for an outside experience to leave its marks within someone else’s memory-spaces? How do memories pass from one person to another?

Finally, Mercado turns to a third figure her readers first encounter in *En estado de memoria*, but who in this essay takes on more dimension – Pedro. (This character’s story will later expand to encompass the entire space of the novel *Yo nunca te prometí la eternidad* [*I Never Promised You Eternity*, 2004]). In *En estado de memoria*, Pedro is portrayed as a Spanish exile who “stuck” to the Argentines, the newest group of exiles to arrive in the space of Mexico:

Tal vez se unía a nosotros porque la reproducción del vacío era estado propio del exilio ... y nuestro exilio era ... fresquito, recién estrenado, receptivo, por lo tanto, a la veterana experiencia española y, al mismo tiempo, para el amigo español, un campo fértil para el ejercicio de la faltancia. Por las mismas razones que él se acercaba a nosotros, nos acercábamos nosotros a otros pares del destierro y, arrancando desde muy lejos en la cronología exiliar, nos uníamos a guatemaltecos y de ahí en más hasta llegar a chilenos y uruguayos (132-3).⁷⁵

⁷⁴ “But when Gondi entrusted me with it, the letter made a memory in me, as the poems of Rizal had made a memory in his father before he died.” (my trans.)

⁷⁵ “Perhaps he joined us because re-creation of the void was the characteristic condition of living in exile ... and our exile was ... fresh, recently premiered, receptive, and therefore, for the veteran Spanish experience and, at the same time for our Spanish friend, a fertile ground for the exercise of lack. For the same reason that he was drawn to us, we were drawn to other exiles like ourselves, and beginning with the most distant from us in the chronology of exile, we banded together with the Guatemalan, and from there on down the line until we reached the Chileans and Uruguayans” (85).

However, Mercado notes that much like her relationship with Uchmany, her relationship with Pedro is mediated by the links of a shared experience of exile; she realizes within the space of this piece that Pedro has never told her *his* story. When Pedro reads Mercado's description of him in *En estado de memoria*, he invites her to his home to speak with her. Echoing the very line that Gondi used when he entrusted Mercado with his father's final letter, Pedro also has "algo que confiarte" ("something to entrust you with") (143). Mercado receives from Pedro his mother, Sonia's, diary, which traces her life during WWII as a German Jew married to an exiled volunteer republican Spanish soldier. And, once again, Mercado uses the intimate and particular space of Sonia's experience of exile depicted in the pages of the diary to think about her own ability to preserve and transmit traumatic memory to later generations and to distant contemporaries. Mercado writes of her relationship to the piece: "El designio: escuchar, en el silencio que impone la escritura, esas voces que empezaron a hablar cuando leí el diario de Sonia, buscar las huellas personales en la masa de acontecimientos, trazar junto con esa mano que se aferra a las palabras para resistir, trazar con Sonia. ¿Estamos ya en la literatura? ¿La novela va a ser la forma de representar una historia que se entreabre cada vez que se la roza?" (143-4).⁷⁶

I repeat this last line, which I pulled forth at the start of the chapter, because it truly echoes and encapsulates the concerns that I have traced through the trajectory of Mercado's works: the image of the traumatic past she paints within her writing, the

⁷⁶ "The intent: To listen, in the silence that writing imposes, to those voices that began to speak when I read Sonia's diary, to find the personal imprints on the mass of happenings, to trace along with that hand that clings to words in order to resist, to trace with Sonia. Are we now in literature? Is the novel going to be the way to represent a history that half-opens every time it's brushed against?" (my trans.)

central theme of the housing of memory, and her troubled interaction with a physical environment radically altered by historical violence. These are processes that can be partially worked through in the intimate space of “writing the small”, and in personal and individual histories, but that are truly infinite projects. These are histories, after all, that continue to unfold, that contain layers inside of their layers, that are open to myriad networks and global connections, “that half-open every time they are brushed against.” While her stories are never complete – while characters and scenes are written and re-written and the map of the post-dictatorship period continues to evolve – Mercado charts a territory from which this kind of writing begins to be possible. Only through a narrative practice that embraces the letter of the small from a feminine space, and by insisting on examining History through individual experience, focusing on the details of each square inch of the forest’s floor, can Mercado begin to approach and comprehend the vastness of the great expanse of the woods.

Writing the letter of the small becomes a political election – one that combats the monumentality of memory imposed on the public by certain memorial projects, one that opposes the desire to forget, and one that requires a constant attention to detail, refusing to lose what is particular about each memory and memory-space. And for Mercado, the means by which to maintain the openness of these projects is through a continual practice of writing – a practice that will scratch onto the surface of each memory-vessel more texture and complexity, that will allow new stories to enter the orbit of physical space. For Mercado, the creation of viable sites of memory and the act of storytelling are intrinsically linked.

Chapter 2

El Archivo Muerto: Ghostly Remains and Haunted Topographies in Ana Clavel's Post-Tlatelolco Mexico City

Mexico: Responses to the Tlatelolco Massacre (October 2nd, 1968)

“...hay una alegoría de las que ofrece la novela: no hace falta ser visto para estar en el mundo.” / “...The novel offers a certain kind of allegory: one doesn't need to be seen to exist in the world.” (my trans.)⁷⁷

At the close of Ana Clavel's 2000 novel, *Los deseos y su sombra* (*Desire and Its Shadow*)⁷⁸, all that remains of the protagonist is her ghostly trace – the quickly disappearing evidence of her absence in the space of Mexico City:

Contrario a lo que Soledad hubiera deseado, su madre pidió ayuda al Centro Nacional para la Localización de Personas Desaparecidas y Extraviadas. En varios puntos de la ciudad pegaron volantes con su fotografía y señas particulares. Modesta, que le había llevado a Carmen la maleta, los papeles y la cámara Leica que rescató del cuarto de azotea, la ayudó también a precisar uno de los datos con que terminaba la descripción: “Desaparecida el 23 de junio de 1985.”

La mayoría de los carteles se amarillaron o se desgajaron. Entre los que sobrevivieron un poco más hubo uno que quedó pegado en un poste de luz de la avenida 20 de Noviembre. Soledad no llegó a verlo pero le habría gustado leer el mensaje que alguien garabateó al pie:

⁷⁷ From an interview with Ana Clavel by César Güemes, *La Jornada*, July 25, 2000.

⁷⁸ The novel, Clavel's first after beginning her career with collections of short stories, was a finalist for the *Premio Internacional Alfaguara* in 1999. The book took her seven years to complete. A prolific writer of short stories, novels, and essays, she has also published the following works, listed in chronological order and organized by genre, starting with the most recent: **Novels** *El amor es hambre* (2015, novela); *Las ninfas a veces sonríen* (2013, novela); *El dibujante de sombras* (2009, novela); *Las violetas son flores del deseo* (2007, novela); *Cuerpo náufrago* (2005, novela); *Los deseos y su sombra* (2000, novela). **Essay Collections** *A la sombra de los deseos en flor: ensayos sobre la fuerza metamórfica del deseo* (2008, ensayo). **Short Story Collections** *Amor y otros suicidios* (2012, cuentos); *Paraísos trémulos* (2002, cuentos); *Amorosos de atar* (1991, cuentos), *Fuera de escena* (1984, cuentos). **Microfiction Collection** *CorazoNadas* (2014, minificción).

Su cuerpo no la contiene (307).⁷⁹

Clavel's novel haunts its readers. At the end of the story, we are left standing face-to-face with an unsolved mystery – a disappeared body – the reality of the ghost. What is left of Soledad is the “evidence” of her having once existed – her fading photograph. *Los deseos y su sombra*, influenced by the work of French-theorist Philippe Dubois' study of photography (1983), seems to capture with this eerie last snapshot of Soledad's lingering image his assertion that the photograph has the ability to save or preserve something by (paradoxically) making it disappear: “*salvarlo de la desaparición haciéndalo desaparecer*” (149).

But what does the ghost of Soledad communicate? And, what do we do with the photographic trace of a disappeared body? The novel's surreal and twistingly complex plot make answering this question difficult, as we wander with Soledad through the streets of the capital city, encountering, as the back cover of the English translation of the book describes, “the undercurrents of the mysterious, often cruel streets of downtown Mexico City, where the blind can see, ghosts talk to those who will listen, and shadows both ancient and modern meld together...” The artistic

⁷⁹ (All translations, excluding those from the English version of the novel – translated by Jay Miskowicz – are my own.)

Contrary to what Soledad might have desired, her mother asked for help from the National Center for the Localization of Disappeared and Missing Persons. In various parts of the city they put up flyers with her photo and physical details ... “Disappeared June 23, 1985.”

Most of the flyers turned yellow or tore away. Among those that survived a little longer, one remained stuck on a lamppost on 20 de Noviembre Avenue. Soledad never saw it but she would have liked the message someone scrawled beneath it:

her body can't contain her (227).

sequencing of the book does not match its chronological sequencing, as the third person narration⁸⁰ takes the reader – from the perspective of the ghostly Soledad – backwards in time into the history of photographic traces (from her earliest childhood memories dating back to the mid-60s, to the book’s “present” [the year of Sol’s final disappearance] in 1985), demonstrating how individual trauma is always connected to collective traumas. From monuments that spring to life, to the living-ghosts of Santo Domingo’s lost street children, Clavel’s ghostly tale animates history as we, the readers, question: How do we recall and narrate the past?

Perhaps understanding the figure of the ghost is intrinsically linked to attentively tracing its spatial trajectory; as María del Pilar Blanco, in her 2012 *Ghost-Watching American Modernity* writes: “I take the simple position that ghosts need to be read in their specificity. They are embedded in the story about a place” (8). Building upon this claim, I interrogate the space of Clavel’s Mexico City, seeking to untangle the threads that compose a haunting history whose curves play out across a cityscape where bodies often “disappear” from the urban script. The plot of Clavel’s novel, bookended by the traumatic event of the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre, and the looming shadow of the impending 8.0 magnitude earthquake of September 1985 in Mexico City, explores the troubled period in which the reality of the failures of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*’s (PRI) projects of *desarrollismo* and neo-liberal reform is revealed, disrupting the foundational myths of national belonging

⁸⁰ It is important to note that this is not an omniscient narrator. Rather, its voice is “doubled” in a sense, guiding the reader through Soledad’s split personality and the labyrinth of her memories.

and historical “truth.”⁸¹ The student massacre, considered a part of the PRI’s “Dirty War” against the political and opposition movements challenging its authoritarian

⁸¹ Clavel’s novel is responding to a particular historical moment; published in the year 2000, the author’s own life trajectory includes the fall of the Berlin Wall in ’89, the reign of capitalism, and neoliberal reform. In Mexico, this meant a growing wealth gap and increasing inequality – the kind of marginalization that sparked the student protests of ’68, but that became increasingly acute in its aftermath. While the 71-year reign of the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) was interrupted by the election of President Vicente Fox (2000-06) of the National Action Party (PAN) and Felipe Calderón (2006-12), Enrique Peña Nieto’s victory in 2012 returned the power to the PRI.

Several generations of Mexican writers and critics struggle to define this moment in history; many critical works take the approach of exploring the historical periods before and after the Tlatelolco student massacre in order to situate the event in relation to other important junctures. One important example is Carlos Montemayor’s *La violencia de Estado en México: Antes y después de 1968* (2010). His book explores the before and after of the key moment of ’68, examining how it has been read and portrayed as a watershed event. As the editors to edition explain,

En los ... ensayos de este libro explica que en países considerados de normalidad democrático, a salvo de procesos de excepción como las guerras civiles o los golpes de Estado, opera una estrategia de guerra para enfrentar diversas modalidades de la inconformidad social. Aquí Carlos Montemayor sitúa su análisis sobre la violencia de Estado en México durante la segunda mitad de siglo XX contra núcleos sociales vulnerables, sectores gremiales, regiones aisladas, partidos políticos, movimientos subversivos, manifestaciones populares. En esta perspectiva, el autor demuestra que el arrasamiento de las leyes, su manipulación política y represiva, la anulación del derecho mismo por la violencia de Estado, es un retroceso social; “permanece como una marca indeleble de la imperfección y arrogancia política de un Estado contra su propio pueblo” (n/p).

In the ... essays of this book he explains that in countries considered to be democratically normal, save exceptional processes such as civil wars or coups, a strategy of war is used to confront diverse modalities of social non-conformity. Here Carlos Montemayor situates his analysis of state violence in Mexico during the second half of the 20th century against vulnerable social groups, unions, isolated regions, political parties, subversive movements, popular movements. From this perspective, the author demonstrates that the devastation of laws, their political and repressive manipulation, the annulment of law itself by state violence, is a social setback; “it remains like an indelible mark of the political imperfection and arrogance of a State against its own people.” (my trans.)

A second important work on the topic is Carlos Monsiváis’ *El 68: La tradición de la resistencia*. With this book, Monsiváis asks, what was the ultimate legacy of this popular movement? Was anything gained or learned from the student uprising? His claim is that this symbolic year marks a moment of the defense of human rights in Mexico, and a shattering of the presidential image when Díaz Ordaz refused to recognize the “ethical energy” (13) that erupted from the movement’s demands, and instead insisted upon maintaining an illusion of complete power and control. Looking back at this particular historical moment from the vantage point of 2008, Monsiváis writes:

A cuarenta años del Movimiento estudiantil de 1968, el consenso es definitivo: *El 68* (el término que engloba al Movimiento, la matanza de 2 de octubre, la detención de los líderes estudiantiles, el linchamiento mediático, “la conquista” de la ciudad por las brigadas, la lucha

por la memoria histórica, los mitos y las leyendas, la incorporación de la experiencia de los patrimonios familiares y colectivos) es el fenómeno más significativo de la historia de México en la segunda mitad del siglo XX (22).

Forty years from the student movement of 1968, the consensus is definitive: 68 (the term that encompasses the movement, the slaughter of October 2nd, the detention of student leaders, the media lynching, the “conquest” of the city by brigades, the fight for historical memory, the myths and legends, the incorporation of the experience of personal and collective patrimonies) is the most significant phenomenon in the history of Mexico during the second half of the 20th century. (my trans.)

While the PRI emerged in the aftermath of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, purporting to uphold these revolutionary values, scholars such as Samuel Steinberg have called the political party a “Mexican dictatorship” that was “never fully intelligible as a repressive regime” (9):

While it preserves the names of revolutionary figures like Emiliano Zapata in the pantheon of national heroes ... the PRI did not generally pursue his demand for land and freedom beyond the mere capture of that rhetoric. This rhetoric, in turn, was deployed in order to assert the PRI’s claim to be the embodiment of popular sovereignty, which it alone commanded for some seventy years – until late 2000 – as the ruling official power in Mexico, and which it now commands even more perversely following its reentry after twelve years of exile from the presidency, a period throughout which it nevertheless continued to dominate state politics. The PRI fashioned itself as the guarantor of the claims of the Mexican Revolution, in effect asserting itself as an edifice that subsumed the plurality of political desire for which the various combatants in the Revolution (and, indeed, their enemies) struggled; that is to say, it represented the containment of Mexico’s profound social antagonisms, holding “together” however tenuously and at great human cost, the war called Mexican society, sutured by the architecture of its twentieth-century state form (10).

Writes Octavio Paz on the party in 1975:

The Institutional Revolutionary Party is not a majority political party: It is Unanimity itself. The President is not only the highest political authority: he is the incarnation of all of Mexican history, Power itself in the form of a magic substance passed on from generation to generation in unbroken succession, from the first *Tlatoani* down through the Spanish viceroys to each president as he takes office. Unlike the Hispanic and Latin American pattern of dictatorship by *caudillos*, Mexican authoritarianism is legalistic, and the roots of this legalism are religious in nature. This is the real explanation of the terrible violence visited upon the students. The military attack on them was not only a political act; it also assumed the quasi-religious form of *chastisement from on high*. Divine vengeance. Exemplary punishment. The morality of a wrathful God the Father Almighty. This attitude has profound historical roots; its origins lie in the country’s Aztec and colonial past. It can be traced back to a kind of petrification of the public image of the head of the nation, who ceases to be a mere man and becomes an idol to be worshipped. It is yet another expression of the *machismo*, and above all of the pre-eminence of the *father* in the Mexican family and in Mexican society ... In a word, in the Mexico of 1968, men once again made history with their eyes blindfolded (x).

rule, left upwards of three-hundred university and high school students dead (although officially reported deaths hovered around 30) after a peaceful protest in Mexico's Plaza de las Tres Culturas. Just days before the opening of the Olympic Games, under the direction of President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, government forces opened fire on the protestors, trapped by the geography of the enclosed city-square. While the evidence of the violent killings was quickly "erased" and covered up, surviving photographic images of the dead students stand in as a tangible marker for the tangle of forces that led to this ultimate explosion of violence.⁸² It is this knotted web of occurrences that Clavel explores through fiction: what stands *behind* the image of the missing body? What forces caused it to disappear?

In the novel, the third-person narrator presents the reader with an anti-mimetic, experimental testimonial – a fictionalized urban chronicle from a feminist point of view that reveals the intimate connections between city space, trauma,

For the important perspective of the government during this student uprising, see the 1999 work of Julio Scherer García and Carlos Monsiváis: *Parte de la Guerra, Tlatelolco 1968*. The book fills the important gap of outlining the government's thinking and actions as they responded to these grassroots movements.

⁸² In fact, the opening pages of Elena Poniatowska's 1971 *La noche de Tlatelolco* – an urban chronicle composed of fragmented "testimonios" collected from those who witnessed and participated in the events leading up to, during, and after the massacre – serve as a photographic gallery. The images are presented as testimonial snapshots – the visual proof that corroborates the stories told throughout the chronicle. (The work, translated into English by Helen R. Lane in 1975, titled *Massacre in Mexico*, actually includes additional photographs.) The images include: a haunting picture of a cadaver of a dead child with the caption "Quién ordenó esto? ¿Quién pudo ordenar esto? Esto es un crimen" (n/p) / "Who gave orders to do this? Who could possibly have ordered such a thing?" (n/p); parents at the morgue attempting to identify the cadavers of their children (captionless); and a particularly poignant image of shoes abandoned by their owners accompanied by the following description, "Quedaron tirados en el suelo entre jirones de ropa y plantas machucadas, muchos zapatos, sobre todo de mujer; mudos testigos de la desaparición de sus dueños" (n/p) / "Strewn about on the pavement, among the torn clothing and the plants trampled underfoot, were many shoes, most of them women's" (n/p). Interestingly, the last line is not translated in the English version: "Mute witnesses to the disappearance of their owners." (my trans.)

memory, and gender divisions. Soledad struggles throughout the book with the problem of secret desires (which – when fulfilled – always turn out for the worst). The reader races to keep up with Soledad, as the complexity of her character is quickly revealed: she floats between her own personality and that of her alter-ego, Lucía – an imaginary friend who lives at the center of a labyrinth inside a Chinese vase, guarded by a dragon, where Soledad stashes her most secret desires. The novel allows the reader to explore the pathways of Soledad’s schizophrenic interior trajectory, while simultaneously tracing how this internal tangle of footsteps maps onto her experience of the exterior façade of Mexico City. We begin by accessing Soledad’s foundational memories (the trauma of her friend’s brother’s death in the Tlatelolco massacre, her childhood molestation by *el Desconocido* (The Stranger), the rigidly patriarchal family structure under which she was raised), and then move forward in time to memories of her tumultuous romantic relationship with Hungarian photographer, Peter Nagy (who teaches her about the dualities of light and shadow), and her work in the “dead archives” of the Palacio de Bellas Artes. Finally, the reader is drawn into the present reality of Soledad’s existence as one of Mexico City’s many “invisible” citizens. As this journey unfolds through both real and imagined city spaces, the reader’s picture of the protagonist is always partial, fragmented, and incomplete. We are allowed to see only glimpses.

This is a story of the search for an ego – of a self without a voice, of a lost soul. Dominated by authority figures and far from heroic, Soledad’s journey to invisibility becomes a kind of path towards redemption. Ironically, the reader is only

able to “see” Soledad as “whole” when she disappears completely. The final section of the novel traces the act of Soledad finding her place *through* her invisibility, exploring and connecting with the underworld and forgotten corners of Mexico City. She finds her voice by losing her body. Returning to the haunting image of the photograph at the close of the novel, I consider the observation by Roland Barthes that, “a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see” (6). This static image of Soledad that closes the novel mirrors the now static moments of traumatic history she has lived through. The book acts as an invitation to look beyond the freeze frame and the still image by wandering with Soledad both through the physical space of Mexico City and through the internal city of her memories, whimsically constructed as a labyrinth hidden in the depths of the Chinese vase.

As Clavel writes, she adds layers of both fictional and historical memory to the urban contours of Mexico City. As she dialogues with the dead (a kind of Rulfian gesture), she re-grounds this novel in a specific time and place. By borrowing the form of the urban chronicle – in and of itself a hybrid genre that can embrace other, liminal genres – and refashioning it with elements of the anti-mimetic (an act reminiscent of the Latin American vanguard) – Clavel creates the means by which one woman is able to chart her experience. The novel becomes Soledad’s testimonial, a coming-of-age story for a particular generation of women who grew up under the shadow of historical trauma and patriarchal oppression. It is only by disappearing that Soledad is able to escape the gaze of the reader, of her boss, of her brother, of her critical and traditional mother, and somehow gain agency. And, in doing so, her

character acquires access to, and narrates, histories that have likewise been marginalized, hidden, and swept into the forgotten corners of both the past and the city at large. This is a novelized urban chronicle that serves as the final act of testimony of an invisible body – of an individual who has allegedly “disappeared” from the everyday rhythms of the city, but who carves out a space for her own voice in the gap opened up by her liminal position between life and death.

Clavel’s exploration of the theme of invisibility within the folds of urban space is the means by which historical trauma is uncovered. As she explains in an article published in *La Jornada* by Carlos Paul (August 2nd, 2006), the question of invisibility lies at the heart of her novel – a narrative thread that is maintained through the body of her protagonist, the “doncella transparente”: “Qué es lo que puede llevar a la invisibilidad a una persona, fue una de las cuestiones que acometió la autora cuando escribía ese trabajo...” (n/p)⁸³ But, what ultimately causes Soledad to disappear – to lose her body? Is she physically and clinically dead? Has she *actually* died of exposure to hepatitis as the book hints at times (107)? Has she died of a broken heart? Has she been condemned to exist in a state of limbo – somewhere between life and death? Or, has her most secret desire to become invisible simply come true? This is a question shared by both the reader and Soledad alike; we struggle alongside the protagonist to understand the terms of this new state of being.

⁸³ “One of the questions that the author posed when writing this piece was, ‘What can lead a person into invisibility?’” (My trans.)

As Soledad later learns from other ghosts who emerge on All Saint's Day, "...los que van a morir por violencia comienzan a vivir en un limbo donde ni el dolor ni la alegría los tocan y que, a veces, ese limbo les impide ver hasta sus propias manos..." (46).⁸⁴ But the violence that causes Soledad to become invisible is not immediately palpable, nor can it be linked to a single or tangible moment in time. Rather, Soledad is haunted by overlapping traumas.⁸⁵ As she moves through the landscape of Mexico City, gradually losing her body, the triangular tower of Tlatelolco hovers in front of her, dominating the skyline; it stands as a marker of a history that has been silenced, of a story whose script is not read on the face of the city, as an invitation to dig beneath the modern surface and discover what lies buried beneath. Ultimately, Soledad's disappearance is a matter of her most secret desire ("Se trata de su deseo más secreto" [13]).⁸⁶ Being invisible does not erase her presence, but – paradoxically – gives her greater agency.

Paz describes the '68 massacre seven years after its occurrence: the moment of violence ripped open the thin veneer that disguised Mexico as "modern" and "developed," and "bared what lay concealed behind it: the other Mexico, the Mexico in rags and tatters, the millions of desperately poor peasants and the masses of the

⁸⁴ "...those who will die by violence begin to live in a limbo where they are touched by neither pain nor happiness, and at times this limbo prevents them from seeing even their own hands" (30).

⁸⁵ As I mentioned earlier, these traumas include: her childhood molestation in the hands of *el Desconocido*, oppressively patriarchal social structures, the death of her father – and perhaps most importantly, the death of Miguel, her childhood friend's brother, in the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre.

⁸⁶ "...It's a matter of your most secret desires" (5).

underemployed who emigrate to the cities and become the new nomads of our day – nomads wandering about the urban desert” (xv). Soledad, who wishes to disappear under the crushing weight of patriarchal pressures, joins these nomads in the urban desert; Clavel’s book holds open the gap of visibility made possible by the particular historic moment of ‘68 – letting its reader peer into a world that is often perceived as “invisible” – too marginal and oppressed to be “seen” by the average passerby. For, as Samuel Steinberg asserts in his 2016 *Photopoetics at Tlatelolco: Afterimages of Mexico, 1968*, the massacre marks a moment of violence that has come to stand in for, and that often obscures, a whole history of struggle for justice. Steinberg seeks to make visible an event that is “...constantly unburied and covered over in archival dust, as it is submitted to perverse lamentations and melancholy silences, as it is explained, imaged, retrieved, and reterritorialized” (6).

Like the still image of Soledad’s face at the opening of the novel, the still image of Tlatelolco needs to be interrogated through the act of storytelling, through the act of urban wandering and chronicling. And, who better to uncover the reality of a fuzzy and ever-changing past (and the way it continues to dialogue and affect the present) than the figure of the ghost? By willingly becoming invisible, giving in to her most secret desire, Soledad gains access to this marginal world, and paradoxically gains visibility by escaping the grasp of those powers that wish to silence her. She becomes an intermediary: between history and the present, between personal and collective memories. The reader follows the protagonist through the past, through the labyrinths of her interior space, and through the exterior maze of Mexico City.

Soledad speaks to those who inhabit the world of the present, and to those who have long since ceased to exist actively in the space of the city. Her ghostly state allows her to see history differently – as flexible, uncertain, and constantly manipulated by those who have the power to make certain facets visible, and others disappear.

El “boom femenino”

Before offering close-readings of this literary work, I first situate Clavel (born 1961, Mexico City) and her novel, *Los deseos y su sombra* (*Desire and Its Shadow*), within the literary sphere of Mexico City at the time of publication, and within a set of generational concerns faced by Clavel and her female contemporaries. Very little has been written on Clavel’s work – a gap that Jane Elizabeth Lavery has partially addressed with her new, book-length examination of Clavel’s entire literary trajectory, *The Art of Ana Clavel: Ghosts, Urinals, Dolls, Shadows and Outlaw Desires* (2015). In the introduction, Lavery thoroughly outlines Clavel’s position within the literary circle of Mexico City, situating her as a second-generation member of the *boom femenino*. Not an exclusively Mexican phenomenon, the *boom femenino* began in 1970: “Clavel is a relatively unknown author who belongs to this wave which is characterized by the dramatic emergence of women’s voices in the cultural sphere in Mexico and is due, in part, to a globalized cultural environment that has seen rapid change in all areas of women’s lives” (1).⁸⁷ The “Boom” originally referred to a period of great literary productivity in Latin America post-1960s on the

⁸⁷ On the topic of the “boom femenino” see also the introduction to a collection of critical essays edited by Nuala Finnegan and Jane E. Lavery (2010): *The Boom Femenino in Mexico: Reading Contemporary Women’s Writing*.

part of male writers, including Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Carlos Fuentes; their works were translated for an international, globalized audience. The “post-boom” – which includes the “boom femenino” – became a kind of “counter-project,” carving out a space for women, gays, Jews, and other marginalized groups (Lavery 2). In her study, Lavery strives to give attention to a writer she considers to be an important member of this “post-boom femenino,” but who has not received due critical attention.⁸⁸

Women’s writing during the period of the “post-boom” was not given serious, scholarly attention, as it was often associated with the “best-seller” genre, also known as “*literatura lite*”; this “popular” and consumable literature was looked down upon by the literary elite in Mexico. (Exemplary novels include Isabel Allende’s 1982 *La casa de los espíritus / The House of the Spirits* or Laura Esquivel’s 1989 *Como agua para chocolate / Like Water for Chocolate*.) As the publishing industry, beginning in the 1980s, became increasingly motivated by global market consumption, writers

⁸⁸ Lavery also provides a broad overview of the key players and genres of this literary movement: “The principle literary genres associated with the *boom femenino* are the novel (Cristina Rivera-Garza, Ana García Bergua, Ana Clavel), and, to a lesser extent, poetry (María Baranda, Pura López Colomé), but the chronicle (*crónica*) (Elena Poniatowska, Guadalupe Loaeza, Cristina Pacheco), and theatrical productions (Sabina Berman, Carmen Boullosa) have also contributed significantly to the increased visibility of women writers. Alongside this has been a willingness to embrace new multi-media forms that incorporate new technologies of communication such as the work of Eve Gil and Ana Clavel” (2). In an earlier essay entitled, “The Fragmented Nation, Self and Body in *Los deseos y su sombra*,” Lavery writes that Clavel “remains on the fringes of the *boom femenino*”: “Clavel’s *Los deseos y su sombra* is a highly sophisticated piece of narrative fiction notable for its use of techniques such as plot fragmentation, shifting perspectives, and stream of consciousness, inviting the reader’s active participation in disentangling its complexities. Clavel’s interest in contemporary socio-historical gender roles and relations puts her work in direct line with contemporary *boom femenino* Mexican female writers such as Susana Pagano, Rosa Beltrán, Sara Sefchovich and Angeles Mastretta, among others. My exploration of *Los deseos* from two distinct but interrelated angles, the historical and the psychoanalytical, will aim to establish Clavel as a socially engaged writer whose text is concerned with questions of gender within a broad socio-political context” (314-15).

were asked to produce with an international audience in mind. Because of this tendency to automatically label women's writing as *literatura lite* rather than as *literatura difícil* (3, 5), Clavel is hesitant to place her own work into the post-boom category.⁸⁹ At the same time, however, scholars are now calling for attention to be paid to these women's writing – including works by “first” generation authors such as Esquivel or Rosa Nissán and “second” generation authors such as Clavel, Cristina Rivera-Garza or Ana García Bergua – whose works do not conform to the stereotype of the “best-seller” plot (5).

⁸⁹ In an interview with Emily Hind, Clavel recalls a conversation that she had with Rosa Beltrán: Un día platicaba con Rosa Beltrán sobre la importancia de encontrar temas que pudieran ser interesantes para un público más vasto, pero tratándolos con todo el rigor literario y con una preocupación estética intrínseca. Entonces estaba más o menos reciente el fenómeno de *Como agua para chocolate*. Mucha de la gente que criticaba la novela de Laura Esquivel mencionaba el aparato mercadotécnico que hizo posible su éxito, pero realmente la novela tiene un valor en sí misma. La propuesta que hace la autora a nivel temático y la manera en que la va desarrollando en general me parece muy hábil. A mí me gustó la novela. La disfruté bastante a pesar de que entre el medio literario es muy desdeñada. Creo que hay mucha envidia también detrás. El caso es que hablaba con mi amiga escritora sobre lo interesante que sería encontrar un tipo de literatura que conjuntara algo que pudiera ser accesible para un público más amplio, pero que a la vez tuviera un sustento literario, una propuesta estética y escritural refinada ... Existe la idea de que si es bueno tiene que ser para pocos. Pues bien, sí creo que la verdadera literatura siempre es selectiva. No es un arte multitudinario (41-2).

One day I was talking with Rosa Beltrán about the importance of finding themes of interest to a wider public, but treating them with full literary rigor and with an intrinsic aesthetic concern. So the phenomenon of *Like Water for Chocolate* was fairly recent. A lot of the people who criticize Laura Esquivel's novel mention the marketing schemes that made its success possible, but really the novel itself has value. The author's proposal at a thematic level and the way she develops it in general seems very skilled to me. I liked the novel. I really enjoyed it, even though it's disdained by the literary media. I think there's a lot of envy behind that, too. I was talking to my writer friend about how interesting it would be to find a kind of literature that combined something that would be accessible to a broader public, but at the same time had a literary weight, an aesthetic proposal, and a refined writing style. There's an idea that if it's good, it has to be for the few. I do think that true literature is always selective – it's not “mass art.” (my trans.)

Through an examination of Clavel's historical, experimental, and neo-avant garde novel *Los deseos y su sombra*, I show how the author subverts patriarchal and state sponsored versions of history by producing critical works that do not adhere to the conventions of officially sanctioned "tellings" of the past. Although Clavel's style is fantastical, it is very much in dialogue with reality; the dimension of disbelief – the suspension of the mimetic "real" – becomes a strategy for talking about history, memory, and trauma differently. Far from pandering to an international audience, Clavel's fantastical elements seek to present a highly sophisticated critique of a detailed and richly layered version of the Mexican past.

The "Neofantástico" and a Re-Working of the Urban Chronicle

Critics such as Lavery have used the term "fantastic" to describe the mix of fantasy and reality contained in Clavel's fictional depiction of Mexico City. Ana Rosa Domenella, studying the works of Clavel's contemporaries Ana García Bergua, Adriana González Mateos, and Cecilia Eudave, has made a case for calling this type of fiction "lo neofantástico." Building on Jaime Alazraki's work on Julio Cortázar (*En busca del unicornio*, 1983), Domenella argues that this genre of writing in the contemporary world, "...destaca que la transgresión de las leyes del mundo cotidiano conforma un nuevo orden que intenta revelar o comprender desde otros ángulos la realidad, con cuentos construidos sobre la ambigüedad y con leyes de causalidad inéditas, pero que resultan verosímiles dentro de la estructura narrativa..." (254).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ "...emphasizes that the transgression of the laws of the everyday world shapes a new order, which attempts to reveal or comprehend reality from different angles, through stories that are built on ambiguity and unknown laws of causality, but are plausible within their narrative structure." (my trans.)

Domenella argues that although “fantastic” literature had its peak in the 19th century, contemporary writers of the *neo-fantastic* genre are faced with capturing a radically different reality – one of a postmodern and globalized world (373). Finally, Domenella cites the work of Rosemary Jackson, who suggests that in the English context, women writers like Mary Shelley wrote fantastic literature to explore the themes of absence and loss, to create writing that “sigue ‘las huellas de lo no dicho y lo no visto de la cultura’: lo que ha sido silenciado, invisibilizado, encubierto y convertido en ‘ausente’” (375).⁹¹ Based on the definition of this genre, it becomes clear how Clavel’s story of the haunting traces of the past and the ghostly, female protagonist who uncovers them, adheres to a kind of fantastical writing. It is a novel that follows the footsteps of what is not typically seen or heard. By incorporating herself into a world of people who are silenced, invisibilized, and displaced in Mexico City, Soledad allows us as readers to see what has been hidden and repressed within urban space. However, I further define the fantastical element of Clavel’s writing by suggesting that what Clavel is attempting to do is to create a kind of novelized urban chronicle that embraces the neofantastical, carving out a space for women in what has been a traditionally male-dominated genre in the Mexican literary scene.

The neofantastical urban chronicle is, I argue, a genre that recovers, through a layering of real cityscapes with imagined alternatives and dreamlike imaginings, what

⁹¹ “...follows ‘the traces of the unsaid and unseen of culture’: what has been silenced, made invisible, covered up and converted into ‘absence.’” (my trans.)

has been forcibly hidden from the legible façade of the landscape. It seeks to reanimate the “image” of the city through acts of creative storytelling. As Clavel points out in an interview published in *La Jornada* (July 25, 2000) by César Güemes, her novelistic embrace of the fantastical idea of invisibility mirrors the concrete reality of a Mexican society that “convierte en invisibles a muchas personas” / “makes many people invisible”:

En cuanto el brinco hacia la fantasía, creo que es una de las maravillas de lo literario: se puede contar un hecho de la manera más realista o irse por el lado de la ficción. A mí se me ocurría que la invisibilidad se presenta en nuestras vidas cotidianas, metáforas aparte. **Esta sociedad convierte en invisibles a muchas personas.** Cuando se tiene un jefe que no te toma en cuenta, le invisibiliza, por ejemplo. Retomé esas realidades y las llevé al extremo (n/p, emphasis added).⁹²

Elaborating on this question of metaphorical and real invisibility in a 2003 interview with Emily Hind, Clavel notes that Soledad, even when visible, is treated like she is not even present; she has no power to make her own decisions: “Entonces, me dije: <<Bueno, ¿por qué no llevar la metáfora al extremo? ¿Qué pasaría si este mismo personaje se borrara, anulara su voluntad, se hiciera completamente invisible?>>” (42)⁹³

⁹² “As far as this turn towards fantasy, I think that it’s one of the miracles of the literary: you can tell a fact in the most realistic way or you can go on the side of fiction. It occurred to me that invisibility shows up in our daily lives, metaphors aside. This society **makes many people invisible**. When you have a boss that doesn’t pay any attention to you, for example, he makes you invisible. I picked up on these realities and pushed them to the extreme.” (n/p, emphasis added, my trans.)

⁹³ Below is the full quotation from her interview with Emily Hind (2003):

Un día me topé con un <<pretexto>> literario: supe de una mujer adulta a la que su familia no la consultaba en la toma de decisiones que le concernían, incluso en su misma presencia unos y otros miembros de la familia dialogaban sobre su destino como si ella no estuviera presente o fuera retrasada mental. Entonces, me dije: <<Bueno, ¿por qué no llevar la metáfora al extremo? ¿Qué pasaría si este mismo personaje se borrara, anulara su voluntad, se hiciera completamente invisible?>>

In her partially anti-mimetic portrayal of the streets of Mexico City, Clavel writes a testimonial – a dialogue with dead and disappeared bodies. In so doing, she suspends various moments of the past – “snapshots” or “photographs” of memories and events in Soledad’s life – in order to examine and narrativize these fleeting testimonial traces:

Por eso es que para saber qué camino seguirían sus huellas sin pasos, recurre al pasado y husmea entre sus recuerdos – verdaderas instantáneas fotográficas – antes de que, como ella misma, terminen por velarse. Lo prodigioso de estas instantáneas es que a pesar del polvo ... basta con que se acomoden en ese ojo especial de la memoria para que las imágenes fijas se sucedan una tras otra. Fotograma tras fotograma una escena se ambienta ahora (30).⁹⁴

Recordé *El hombre invisible* de Welles y después Miriam Grunstein me sugirió el título homónimo de Ralph Ellison, esa novela estupenda sobre un negro que, por cuestiones de racismo, también se vuelve invisible. Comencé a leer mucho sobre el tema. Me encontré también con los cuentos de hadas y la mitología. Luego el don de la invisibilidad derivó hasta la fotografía, una poética de las sombras y el sojuzgamiento al deseo de los otros, que fue donde encontré el motivo principal de la invisibilidad del personaje. Las lecturas y el proceso de escritura requirieron cinco años. Considero que a la postre el haber dado tiempo para que la novela creciera, para que incorporara elementos más sutiles, hizo posible que también se enriqueciera. Un proceso de alquimia y destilación internas para ofrecerle al lector algo de valor (42).

One day I stumbled upon a literary “pretext”: I learned of an adult woman whose family didn’t consult her when making decisions that concerned her – even in her presence, certain family members would discuss her destiny as if she were away or mentally disabled. So I said to myself: “Okay, why not take the metaphor to its extreme? What would happen if this same character were deleted, her will annulled, made invisible?” I remembered *The Invisible Man* by Welles and then Miriam Grunstein suggested the homonymous work by Ralph Ellison, that wonderful novel about a black man who due to racism, also becomes invisible. I started to read a lot about the subject. I also found fairytales and myths. Later, the gift of invisibility veered towards photography, a poetic of shadows and the subjugation of the desire of others, which is where I found the principle motive behind the character’s invisibility. The process of reading and writing took five years. In the end I think that giving the novel time to grow so that it could incorporate more subtle elements also made it possible for the novel to enrich itself. A process of internal alchemy and distillation to offer the reader something of value. (my trans.)

⁹⁴ “For this reason to know which path her stepless tracks would follow, she returns to the past and pokes among her memories – true photographic moments – before they, just like her, end up becoming veiled. The prodigious thing about those moments is that despite the dust and yellowness, it’s enough

Dubois describes the photograph as composed of “huellas luminosas,” and it is exactly these “luminous traces”⁹⁵ that mark the cityscape that Soledad brings to life as we follow her through the city, her path illuminated by the act of historical telling.

The urban chronicle is a liminal and hybrid genre, an ideal container for the kinds of liminal and hybrid stories the figure of Soledad weaves into the narrative whole of the novel – imagined histories, childhood fantasies, alternative futures, myths, fairytales, and expressions of desire. Clavel creates a world in which something exists *below* the surface of the “real” city – something that is somehow more real than the real – that is hauntingly real. This novel embodies the act of writing from the margins in a marginal genre – a split genre that depicts both concrete history, and an other, non-mimetic, extra-real reality, simultaneously. This parallel reality opens up an alternative space beyond what is typically perceived. Ignacio Corona and Beth E. Jorgensen define the genre of the urban chronicle in *The*

for them to settle in that special eye of memory for the fixed image to follow one after the other. Frame by frame a scene now creates its own atmosphere” (18).

⁹⁵ In his work, *El acto fotográfico*, Dubois defines this luminous trace: “Al comienzo de la problemática, el núcleo del dispositivo: la huella. Seguramente cae de su propio peso recordar que, en su nivel más elemental, la imagen fotográfica aparece *de entrada*, simple y únicamente como una *huella luminosa*, más precisamente *como el rastro, fijado sobre un soporte bidimensional sensibilizado por cristales de halogenuro de plata, de una variación de luz emitida o reflejada por fuentes situadas a distancia en un espacio de tres dimensiones*” (55) / “At the beginning of the problematic, the nucleus of the device: the trace. It surely follows that, at its most basic level, the photographic image appears from the start, simply and solely, as a luminous trace, or, more precisely like the trail – fixed upon a bidimensional support by silver halide, of a variety of light emitted or reflected by sources placed at a distance in three-dimensional space.” (my trans.)

Later in the novel, Soledad and her Hungarian photographer / lover will directly discuss the theories of Philippe Dubois, “Pensó que Péter tenía razón en definir a la fotografía como una sombra luminosa” (111) / “She thought Peter was right to define photography as a luminous shadow” (81). It is not light, but its interruption, that causes the photographic image to form.

Contemporary Mexican Chronicle: Theoretical Perspectives on the Liminal Genre (2002) as, "...a hybrid form of writing that crosses multiple discursive boundaries" (1) a genre that is, "...adaptable and elastic in form, an invitation to writers to mix an extratextual reality with artful fictional touches" (5), as well as "a social practice" (8). Vivian Mahieux, in *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America: The Shared Intimacy of Everyday Life* (2011), similarly outlines the conventions of the contemporary urban chronicle. Its importance:

...hinges on its inherent ability to capture urban life in all of its chaotic, fragmented, and often dysfunctional grandeur ... chroniclers have become the intermediaries through whom the gritty reality of city streets, like the modest accounts of isolated neighborhoods and ignored public happenings are recognized and resignified. They write about characters, cityscapes, and practices that have been left out of the official versions of national modernity ... more than ever, guides are needed to grasp the overwhelming experience that is the Latin American city, and chroniclers have stepped in as the ironic, irreverent, and indispensable commentators of everyday life (1-2).

By adding elements of the fantastical, the psychoanalytical, and the urban legend, Clavel creates a kind of chronicle that is capable of overturning historical conventions, of disrupting received versions of the past. This is a novelized urban chronicle that takes as the basis of its wandering an exploration of the hidden crevices and corners of both city streets and the body's internal contours.

The City – The Body's Double: A History of Layered Violence and the Scar of the Tlatelolco Massacre

Throughout this experimental novel, written in a style reminiscent of the avant-garde tradition, Clavel provides her readers with portraits of the cityscape from Soledad's perspective. As Sol casts her gaze out over the city from various vantage

points (sites she makes visible from the position of invisibility, from the roof of Bellas Artes, from Chapultepec Castle), the Tlatelolco tower seems to perpetually dominate and haunt her perception of the landscape. It is the prompt for her memory-work; it incites a process of delving into the past, an exploration of her foundational trauma. One such contemplation of the landscape comes at the opening of the novel, in a moment when Soledad is coming to terms with her invisibility. The act of seeing the panoramic view of the city precipitates an investigation into her personal past:

...Soledad se preguntaba si de verdad aquello que le había pasado era un don. Se sintió sola y perdida. Miró el cielo y luego el bosque que rodeaba el Castillo guareciéndolo en un sueño otoñal. Más allá, la torre triangular de Tlatelolco ... Pero para llegar hasta Tlatelolco debía detenerse en una parada previa: su amiga Rosa Bianco. Abordó el tren de la memoria porque algo como una extrañeza o melancolía le hizo pensar que tal vez en el pasado encontraría una respuesta (30).⁹⁶

It is almost as if Soledad and the city fuse, the city becoming an extension of her body. Donatella Mazzoleni describes this relationship between the corporeal and city as one that is predicated upon the body's ability to register a kind of "infralanguage" – a way of communicating that comes out of the collective, communal body, and one that is produced by the mass of bodies living in space (288); she claims that the city is nothing more than an extension of the body, a metaphor for the body, and "...A

⁹⁶ "...Soledad should have asked herself if in truth what had happened to her, becoming invisible, was a gift. She felt alone and lost. She looked at the sky and then the forest surrounding the castle, cloaking it in some autumnal dream. Farther away, the triangular tower of Tlatelolco and the train station reminded her again of her father, and then of Miguel Bianco, conqueror of epic poems and soldiers. But to get to Tlatelolco she would first have to make a stop at her friend Rosa Bianco's. She boarded the train of memory because something akin to strangeness or melancholy made her think she'd perhaps find an answer in the past" (18).

replica ... and a double” (289) ... “Architecture is simply another layer of skin” (291).

In her testimonial and anti-mimetic urban chronicle, Clavel returns to the memory of the '68 student massacre; her perspective is representative of that of the “generation after”, still attempting to come to terms with this historical moment of trauma that marked their youth. The act of testimony takes place through an interaction across the fluid borders of body and city. Soledad becomes an extension of the urban landscape, and is situated in space in manner that prompts storytelling. While she did not experience the student massacre directly, she, nevertheless, embodies a generational response to the legacy of silence left by the violence.

However, it is important to keep in mind that Clavel does not claim to be strictly writing a historical novel. In her own words, her work seeks to fictionalize, personalize, and make fantastical the still image of this moment of violence. The form of the work matches its content, as the novel considers the way in which we can think through the issue of the double – of the split personalities of Sol and Lucía, of the visible and the invisible, of the real and what lies beyond its realm:

A mí la verdad me da un poco de flojera la novela histórica. Me parece que es como hacerle trampas a la historia y a la ficción ... (43) ... Pero a mí no me atrae la historia de los grandes personajes sino de los pequeños, los marginales. Si toqué sucesos como el 68 en *Los deseos* fue porque formaba parte de una historia personal posible del personaje y porque justificaba a un nivel metafórico algunos de los supuestos de invisibilidad que percibía que se podía extender a una sociedad como la mexicana que hacía posible la invisibilidad de sus miembros. También me animé abordar el 68 porque la dualidad de la novela me permitía recrear una historia no oficial, lúdica, no de lo que pasó sino de lo que pudo haber sucedido si la sociedad mexicana

hubiera repudiado la matanza de estudiantes y se hubiera levantado en un grito de rebeldía y dignidad (Hind 44).⁹⁷

Rather than attempt to capture the grand history of this single event, (what Steinberg has criticized as something that has become frozen in time and space, a mere image of violence that has lost the complexity of the whole history of the struggle for social justice that came to an abrupt end in October of 1968), *Los deseos y su sombra* tells the story of invisibility and captures the marginal experiences of those whose reality is not incorporated into the folds of official history. By contrasting contradictory categories such as light and shadow, lies and truths, personal and collective history, visibility and invisibility, the novel refuses to paint a clear picture either of the past or the present reality.

Paz notes that the “texture” of the events surrounding the ’68 massacre is different – it is not a clear-cut history, and it cannot be captured through traditional forms of historical telling, or through the purely imaginary space of fiction: “These events really happened, but their reality does not have the same texture as everyday reality. Nor does it have the fantastic self-consistency of an imaginary reality such as we find in works of fiction” (viii). One means of capturing this layered and contradictory memory is through the hybrid-genre and generational writings of

⁹⁷ “To tell you the truth, I’m not that into historical novels. To me, it’s like setting traps for history and fiction. ... But I’m not drawn to histories of grand figures but rather to those of little people, marginal ones. If I take up events like ’68 in *Desire* it’s because it was a possible part of a character’s personal history and because it justified, on a metaphorical level, some of the assumptions of invisibility that I thought could be applied to a society like Mexican society, and made the invisibility of its members possible. I was also motivated to broach ’68 because the duality of the novel allowed me to recreate an unofficial history, playful, not about what happened, but about what could have happened if Mexican society had repudiated the killing of students and had let out a cry of rebellion and dignity.” (my trans.)

authors such as Clavel, narratives that mix of historical specificity and ghostly, neo-fantastical imaginings. By uniquely recombining generic conventions, Clavel insists upon remembering a tangible, traumatic event, while at the same time preserving the ambiguity of its significance and offering the possibility of multiple truths. In order to do so, she grounds her telling in stories about haunted places – sites in the urban landscape that refuse to forget these silenced pasts. One such site is the Plaza de las Tres Culturas (in which stands the tower of Tlatelolco), where the massacre itself took place.

In order to unravel the connection between haunting and place in Clavel's novel, I take a detour to explain the history of this landmark – the tower of Tlatelolco – whose fictionalized presence speaks not only to the 1968 student massacre, but also to a legacy of layered historical injustices that come to orbit the site. The space surrounding the tower is truly a palimpsest, and the various strata of its history are described by Rubén Gallo in a 2009 article entitled “Modernist Ruins: The Case Study of Tlatelolco.” In this piece, Gallo describes architect Mario Pani's 1966 project – one that involved the construction of a complex of modernist housing towers in the Tlatelolco district of Mexico City. But, as the workers set out to dig the initial foundations, they encountered the physical traces of a past that could not simply be erased by utopic architectural projects: stones that once formed the base of a pre-Colombian pyramid, destroyed in the 16th century by the Spanish. Gallo writes: “What had been repressed by the Spaniards, the Aztec city with its pyramidal structures, suddenly reemerged with a vengeance and threatened to derail Pani's

ambitious plan to modernize Mexico's urban fabric" ... "Housing blocks represented the triumph of order and rational principles over living spaces; the pyramid, in contrast, was an alarming reminder that the irrational forces associated with the Aztecs ... persisted in twentieth-century Mexico" (110). Next to the pyramid, the remains of a 16th century church and convent were discovered, and Pani was forced to embrace these ruins, coining the name: "La plaza de las tres culturas" / "The Plaza of the Three Cultures", a new space born from the overlapping mixture of Spanish and Aztec roots.

The dream of Pani's utopic space was forever shattered on October 2nd, 1968 – just ten days before the scheduled opening ceremony for the Mexico City Olympic Games. Student demonstrators, who joined their global contemporaries that year in world-wide social movements, were protesting against what they saw as the government's undemocratic policies. Then president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, a member of the PRI – a party that had held undisputed power since 1929 – was determined to avoid a repeat of the May student protests in Paris and any kind of disruption to the Olympic Games; he ordered that the army fire on the crowds gathered in the Plaza of the Three Cultures in a surprise attack. The plaza had no easy exit, and an estimated 300 students were killed and over 1,000 arrested. As Gallo describes, this history left deep scars on the urban fabric of Mexico City: "The Tlatelolco massacre became the most traumatic event in twentieth century Mexican history, one that shattered the vision of the PRI ... as a benevolent institution that had helped Mexico avert the destiny of other Latin American countries such as Argentina and Brazil, which were

ruled by totalitarian regimes” (112). He concludes by stating that Tlatelolco is a “[place] in which a country’s cultural memory has been inscribed. Tlatelolco registers the marks of the most traumatic events of twentieth-century Mexican history: the razing of entire neighborhoods in the name of a modernist *tabula rasa*; the 1968 student massacre and the transformation of the housing blocks into a reverse panopticon; and the 1985 earthquake and the collapse of both buildings and the nation’s dream of urbanist modernity” (115). It is no coincidence that 1985 – the year of the colossal earthquake that crumbled the Tlatelolco tower, devastated Mexico City, and exposed buried pasts as it shook buildings down – is also the year of Soledad’s disappearance from the cityscape; her physical erasure coincides with the historical trajectory of this plaza – her ghostly traces helping the reader to uncover a more nuanced picture of this difficult historical period as it plays out across the landscape of the nation’s capital city.⁹⁸

The very first memory that Soledad-as-ghost draws the reader into – from the height of the Chapultepec Castle (itself a landmark of national importance)⁹⁹ – is that

⁹⁸ Writes Steinberg on the space of the plaza:

That is to say, the student movement is the prophecy of the present return of a past that is always already present, but which has been made invisible. The movement foretells its own death, its own sacrifice, in order that its death *be* a sacrifice, in order that this sacrifice productively render visible the true history of Mexico, locked in the archive, here concealed beneath the stones of the plaza, there exposed in the museumlike display of an appropriated past. *There*, in that place, remains a layered topography of trauma, excavated only in the mid-twentieth century by the designs of the modernizing national-popular state in its drive to produce a built environment adequate to the future of a mestizo people (that is, the Unidad Habitacional Nonoalco-Tlatelolco). The planning state’s project unearths, makes visible, this very “intrahistorical” archive of trauma that it most sought to conceal or consign (34).

⁹⁹ Chapultepec Castle, whose construction began in 1785, has served as a military academy, as the imperial quarters for Emperor Maximilian I and his wife Carlota during the second Mexican Empire,

of the childhood death of her friend Rosa's brother, Miguel. Miguel goes missing after attending the student demonstrations, and his remains are never found. His body mirrors Soledad's in that it has been forcibly "disappeared" from the urban fabric, but – as in Soledad's case – there is no "proof" of its absence. It has simply vanished without a trace. Soledad remembers Miguel and Rosa's mother's frantic search:

...su madre, enloquecida de tantas cosas que le había tocado ver en hospitales y delegaciones, con la zozobra de que su hijo no estuviera – cruel paradoja – entre esos cruzados con pintura negra en el pecho que esperaban ser cremados en el Hospital Rubén Leñero. Eran pilas de cadáveres y doña Cande se había plantado toda la noche del 3 de octubre frente a las puertas del hospital, mirando cómo las chimeneas del crematorio exhalaban un humo negro constante, cargado de olores de rastro (58).¹⁰⁰

As Rosa describes, her mother is already living in a state of "limbo" – the uncertain fates and missing bodies of these students create a kind of purgatory on earth for those affected by the violence; time and space are disjointed (40). But, the children can only understand the massacre through play; they cannot hope to grasp the incomprehensible events that have befallen their families, and only process the facts partially, in fragments, through acts of the imagination.

In fact, it is through Rosa's denial of the power of play that Soledad learns to disappear under the force of a repressive history. Channeling her creative, youthful

as a presidential home, and most recently as the National Museum of History. The hill on which it was built is a site of Aztec importance.

¹⁰⁰ "...her mother, crazy from so many things she'd had to see in hospitals and municipal halls, with the anxiety that her son wasn't there – a cruel paradox – among those with a black cross painted on their chest waiting to be cremated at the Rubén Leñero Hospital. There were piles of cadavers and Doña Cande had planted herself the whole night of October 3 before the hospital doors, watching how the crematorium's chimneys exhaled a constant black smoke stinking of a slaughterhouse" (39).

energies, Soledad attempts to carve out a space for an alternative version of the facts

– one that is open to redemption:

Soledad tomó la mano de Rosa y se puso a jugar con sus dedos.

- Este chiquito se fue a la mar y pescó un resfriado – dijo tocándole el meñique –; este otro, se fue al mercado y compró el resfriado a un precio bajo; éste de acá, se puso necio en que lo quería y llamó a un soldado y ...
- Y a éste de acá – musitó Rosa con los ojos enrojecidos –, lo mataron de un bayonetazo.
- No, Rosa, eso es lo que nos dijo Luis, pero no, son invenciones tuyas, Miguel va a regresar. Oye, mientras tanto, ¿por qué no me dices ya de qué son los leones que están a la entrada del bosque de Chapultepec? Tú dijiste que cuando comenzaran las Olimpiadas me lo ibas a decir. ¿Son de mentiras, verdad?

Rosa Bianco miró a Soledad como si su amiga fuera transparente y pudiera penetrar más allá de su piel y de sus carnes, revisándole el corazón para verle las llagas, para saber qué tanto le dolía la muerte de Miguel y si podía confiar en ella. (59).¹⁰¹

Unable to comprehend the twists and turns of this history that has violently erased Miguel from its folds, and simultaneously denied her the right to imagine it differently, she relinquishes her ability to put trust in her country (the lions of Chapultepec – a symbol of national pride – are merely made of lies), and begins to

¹⁰¹ “‘This little one went fishing in the sea and caught a cold,’ she said, touching her pinkie. ‘This one went to the market and bought the cold at a good price; this one here began nagging that the other loved it and called a soldier and ...’

‘And this one here,’ mused Rosa with reddened eyes, ‘they killed with bayonets.’

‘No, Rosa, that’s what Luis said, but he made that up, Miguel is going to come back. Hey, and in the meantime why don’t you tell me already about those lions at the entrance of Chapultepec Forest. You told me when the Olympics started you were going to explain. They’re made out of lies, right?’

Rosa Bianco looked at Soledad as if her friend were transparent and she could penetrate deeper than her skin and her flesh, passing through the heart to see the wounds, to know how much Miguel’s death pained her and how much she could trust her” (40).

fade, to become transparent. She, too, loses her footing and it becomes difficult for Soledad to exist in the world of the living.

In order to cope with these troubling occurrences, Soledad turns to composing an anti-mimetic, experimental urban chronicle; Clavel uses this tactic to expand the reader's imagination so that she can say more about the injustices that have long been suppressed. Through creative-play, she and her friend are fancifully transformed into foreign journalists Rosa Falaci and Soledad Fryer, lending Sol the agency to defend and define a version of the nation in which she, too, has a place. This on-the-ground reporting picks up on the style of Elena Poniatowska's famous work on the '68 massacre, her much-celebrated urban chronicle and journalistic collage, *La noche de Tlatelolco: Testimonios de historia oral* (1971) (*Massacre in Mexico*). At a time when the government was attempting to silence the violent breakup of popular student movements, Poniatowska collected testimony from its diverse actors to preserve the myriad voices and fleeting physical evidence that marked this historical event. Clavel folds this genre into her hybrid novel, fictionalizing the act of collecting testimonial evidence in order to re-visit this potentially redemptive moment. Soledad's act of childhood play becomes the means by which this watershed event can be reevaluated, can be saved from the effects of the stagnation stemming from official reports.

In Soledad's redemptive version of history, the public at large, including children, rise up on October 2nd, 1968. The imagined rebellion turns this dark, historical memory into a euphoric juncture, in which popular forces free three

hundred political prisoners and new political parties appear, “Aparecieron nuevos partidos políticos y también nuevos periódicos. Los jóvenes llevaban poemas, noticias, artículos y escenas de la revolución a los diarios” (61).¹⁰² Rosa and Soledad act out and embody the events of October 2nd, reinterpreting how they are fossilized on the front pages of their imaginary newspapers. All of this is an attempt by Soledad to redress the senseless death of her friend’s brother (who was not politically involved in the student movement, and only attended the demonstrations to pick up girls). The game allows Sol and Rosa to literally dig under the architectural façade of the city, and to discover the network of corruption built into its gridlocked streets: “En las calles de Brasil y Belisario Domínguez, bajo el Palacio de la Inquisición y para continuar su memoria, se descubrieron los cuarteles secretos de la PGR. Eran galerías de varios pisos de profundidad, con muros de concreto de un metro ochenta de espesor, puertas que cerraban herméticamente, instrumentos de tortura, todo un sistema de sótanos que se extendía hasta el Palacio Nacional (60-1).¹⁰³ Miguel becomes the hero of the story, resisting until the very end. At last, Soledad reaches the conclusion of her mock journalistic account of events with a triumphant “BUT”, symbolically denying closure to this history through an invitation to engage in revision and rewriting: “La revolución fue vencida, ahogada en sangre y enterrada

¹⁰² “New political parties appeared, as well as new journals. Young people brought poems, articles and descriptions of the revolution to the daily papers” (41).

¹⁰³ “On Brasil and Belisario Domínguez Streets, they discovered the memory of the Palace of the Inquisition preserved beneath it in the secret quarters of the PGR. There were galleries various floors in depth, with walls several feet thick, doors that sealed hermetically, instruments of torture, an entire system of basements going all the way to the National Palace” (41).

entre ruinas y mentiras, pero... PERO..." (63).¹⁰⁴ This "but" – an opening towards the future – is abruptly silenced during a foundational exchange in which Rosa rejects the legitimacy of Soledad's voice and its transformative power, leading to her "erasure." This act of silencing causes one of the first incremental losses of Soledad's body; she begins the process of becoming literally invisible.

In an exchange between the two girls, Rosa demands that Soledad be silent; Soledad protests, insisting that they can compose a different ending, flipping through a book on Hungary's successful 1956 student uprising for inspiration. Rosa, ripping the tome to pieces, yells:

-No vuelvas a componer la historia. Tus cuentos no sirven para nada. Aquí la gente no hizo nada después del 2 de octubre, ni se levantó en armas, ni clamó por la verdad, ni mi hermano es ningún Combatiente de la Libertad ... Es más: aquí no hubo muertos ni heridos. No hubo cuerpos ni sangre ... Yo nunca he tenido un hermano llamado Miguel. Yo no estoy aquí y tampoco te conozco. **Es más: no te veo** (64, emphasis added).¹⁰⁵

With this declaration, Soledad is forced not only to come face-to-face with the concrete-reality of Miguel's death (albeit one that does not leave behind any trace, any tangible proof), but with the fact that bodies truly can disappear, and that histories can be left without a just ending.

¹⁰⁴ "The revolution was defeated, drowned in blood and buried amidst ruins and lies, but ... BUT ..." (43-4).

¹⁰⁵ "Don't compose the story again. Your stories are good for nothing. People have done nothing here since October 2, no armed uprising or clamor for the truth, and my brother isn't any Freedom Fighter ... Instead, there were no dead and no wounded here. There were no bloody bodies. And I never had a brother named Miguel. I'm not here and I don't know you. **Even more I don't see you.**" (44, emphasis added).

Soledad is scared by this negation of her agency; it begins a process that leaves her so terrified that her most ardent desire becomes to achieve invisibility – to literally not be seen: “Y bueno, yo siempre había querido desaparecer, que otra tomara por mí las riendas de la vida porque, sabe, a mí la vida me da miedo” (237).¹⁰⁶ But what is it exactly that frightens Soledad to the point of losing her body? This childhood incident is simply the building block in a long series of events that deny Soledad (and other, marginalized figures like her) a role in the voice of the city. In a Rulfian gesture, Clavel uses the avant-garde strategy of exploring beyond the realm of the real – beyond what is visible – to create an experimental space within the city where Soledad can finally find her voice, despite losing her body.

Before she becomes invisible, disappearing from sight, Soledad has a telling conversation with a co-worker, Maru. As they stand on a balcony overlooking the city, Maru asks her to re-tell the story of Miguel’s disappearance:

Soledad frunció el ceño y miró hacia Tlatelolco. Triangular, una punta de lanza, su torre se clavaba en la lejanía.

...

-Sí, desde que me lo dijiste, me quedé pensando qué hubiera pasado si aquí hubiéramos reaccionado como en Hungría en el 56. Decirle al pan, “pan,” y a los asesinos por su nombre. Tal vez nos hubieran aplastado, pero no del todo.

Luego miró a Soledad de soslayo y se aventuró a decir:

-...Tal vez se te hubiera quitado el miedo.

¹⁰⁶ “I’ve always wanted to disappear, for someone else to take the reins of my life because, you know, life scares me” (175).

-...Pero no del todo –bromeó Soledad... (170).¹⁰⁷

As Soledad will grow to learn, there *is* a power in naming. Although her body is erased from the cityscape, Soledad in spectral form learns to find her voice – a voice that can still reach the ears of some of the living. In her ghostly form, she finds she has the power to name a reality whose presence is constantly jeopardized – yet whose marginal existence dangerously challenges the dominant urban script. As Lavery points out in *The Art of Ana Clavel*, there is an intrinsic connection between city and body: the “remapping of her own body in the megalopolis feminizes the traditional male quest in the Mexican urban novel” (38). By remapping her personal memories onto the façade of the built environment (after all, the physical tower dominates her view of the landscape even as she digs deeper into the recesses of her memories of ’68), Soledad comes to shape her own, urban reality. Mexico City becomes more than a still-image, a fixed map depicting rigid, topographical contours. She learns to navigate its space differently.

As a ghost, Soledad discovers, and gives name to, a different face of Mexico City; her invisible body can encounter invisible stories. While these stories are not legible to the majority of city dwellers, the reader is now granted access to them. I argue that the novel records traumatic memory spatially, and that by exploring the

¹⁰⁷ “Soledad wrinkled her brow and looked toward Tlatelolco. Triangular, a spear tip, its tower hung there in the distance.

...
‘Yes, since you told me, I’ve been thinking about what would have happened here if we had reacted like they did in Hungary in ’56. To call bread “bread” and killers by their names. Maybe they would have squashed us, but not completely.’

After a while she looked at Soledad out of the corner of her eye and ventured to say, ‘Perhaps it would have helped you stop being scared’” (126).

trajectory of the spectral protagonist's pathways through Mexico City, a nuanced reading of history emerges; this practice of place-based historical telling becomes a powerful weapon against those who wish to erase the traces of injustice. As Ángel Rama outlines in his 1996 work, *The Lettered City*, control over the contours of urban space has long been important in Latin America; since the time of the conquest, the privilege of "reading" and "writing" the city was a practice guarded by the city's elites, the *letrados*. But, Soledad's liminal state allows her to narrate space differently. Her invisible body slips through the cracks; as a ghost she is uncontrollable, is able to reclaim those disconcerting remains, the rubble and ruins of crumbling buildings, the forgotten streets, the back alleys, and the overlooked everyday violence – pieces of an alternative history that can be stitched back together to create a distinct kind of spatial narrative.

As Rama observes, Latin American cities, dreamed and imagined in their utopic and orderly forms by the lettered elites, "...from the time of their foundation ... had to lead double lives: on the one hand, the material life inescapably subject to the flux of construction and destruction, the contrary impulse of restoration and renovation, and the circumstantial intervention of human agency; on the other hand, a symbolic life, subject only to the rules governing the order of signs, which enjoy a stability impervious to the accidents of the physical world" (8). By finding her voice, Soledad begins to disrupt these dominant narratives that control the symbolic life of the city; she peels back surfaces to reveal the messy reality that exists

beneath the supposedly ordered streets, pointing to the space of tension in the city's double life.

This practice of walking the city brings to mind Michel de Certeau's differentiation between tactics and strategies (*The Practice of Everyday Life* [1984]); in the chapter "Walking in the City," he defines "strategies" as those methods adopted at the level of the institution, the government, or the corporation in order to present the city as a unified whole. Tactics, on the other hand, are those methods utilized by the everyday city dweller. Because tactics are individual and infinitely variable, they can never be fully controlled, and therefore constantly undermine the impossible institutional goal of totality and unity: "...one can try another path: one can analyze the microbe-like, singular and plural practices ... one can follow the swarming activity of these procedures that, far from being regulated or eliminated by panoptic administration, have reinforced themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy ..." (96). As Soledad traverses the streets of the city, her interactions mark the pathways of the very figures previously "disappeared" from view by the same patriarchal powers that transformed the protagonist into a literal ghost.

As the book plays with images of shadow and light – and the greys in between – it digs beneath the façade of the city to reveal the traces of violence left by its labyrinthine pasts. Despite Soledad's increasing invisibility, it is only through her eyes that she (and we) are able to see beyond the hegemonically scripted city to "read" a landscape multiply haunted by overlapping and interconnected historical traumas: the stories of the street children, of the blind, of the mentally ill, of the

ambulatory vendors, of forgotten revolutionary figures whose souls are trapped in the bronze statues meant to honor their legacy, and of an elaborate system of underground tunnels that reveal to Soledad the persistent traces of an Aztec city whose foundations refuse to be entirely erased from the modern one above. As Del Pilar Blanco suggests, one must, “look at ghosts as representations not of occluded pasts, or buried secrets, but as manifestations of an increasing awareness of *simultaneous landscapes and simultaneous others* living within unseen, diverse spaces...” (7). It is precisely this quality of simultaneity that Soledad’s trajectory highlights; only by existing in a state of limbo is she able to bear witness to, and touch, a world of parallel cities and stories whose very presence stubbornly contradicts the dominant narrative of cityspace.

In the two different scenes of remembering the student massacre that I presented previously, (that of coming-to-terms with Miguel’s death as a child, and that of revisiting that scene through an interaction with her co-worker in her adult life), Soledad’s working-through of her own agency is haunted by the ever-present marker of the Tlatelolco tower. The building stands as a chronotope and symbol of the entrance to that “other city” – one that lies beneath the crust of the contemporary urban landscape, one that contains those clandestine torture chambers and hidden tunnels that lead to a dark underbelly whose impenetrable corners house dirty state secrets. Ana García Bergua writes of Clavel’s novel in the *Jornada Semanal* (2001):

... la Ciudad de México da pie también para grandes fantasías, porque en ella se entrecruzan realidades muy diversas, temporales y espaciales. De hecho, en ella no es difícil que se cumpla la fantasía de desaparecer con sólo trasladarse dos colonias más allá (o quizá con

sólo cerrar los ojos mientras se viaja en el Metro), y algo debe haber de cierto en la idea de que bajo nuestras plantas perviven aún las ciudades que antaño fueron ésta: ciudades subterráneas de pirámides, de patios y acequias coloniales, o espaciosas ciudades-drenaje de los años cuarenta, habitadas todas por fantasmas y por sectas que las mantienen y las invocan. Uno se pregunta si esta ciudad no tendrá un verdadero centro, es decir, un corazón oculto de bien o del mal, que desata con igual alegría providencias y temblores (n/p).¹⁰⁸

Clavel's novel facilitates our reading of that *other* city on the underside of the modern one above – a hidden city that allows the reader to think about the organization of space, and our place in it, differently. However, while Miguel and Soledad's disappearances mirror one another, Soledad clings to a possibility of redemption. How does one resolve the indeterminacy of the space between life and death created by the glaring absence of the physical proof of a missing body? Both youths are made "invisible," are disappeared from the urban fabric by repressive patriarchal power structures. However, as I will demonstrate, Soledad finds a way to use her invisibility to almost paradoxically gain visibility. Like a *huella luminosa* (a luminous trace), the protagonist leverages her liminal position within the city to slip between the cracks in order to reclaim her voice and agency. Though increasingly invisible to the naked eye, Soledad's process of becoming transparent does not render her powerless; from the city's shadows, from its underbelly, Soledad finds her place.

¹⁰⁸ "Mexico City allows, too, for great fantasies, because within her, very diverse realities, temporal and spatial, are crossed. In fact, in her it's not difficult to fulfill the desire to disappear simply by moving two neighborhoods away (or perhaps only by closing your eyes while you travel by Metro), and there must be some truth in the idea that beneath our feet there still survive those cities of yesteryear like this one used to be: subterranean cities of pyramids, of patios and colonial irrigation ditches, or spacious drainage cities of the forties, all inhabited by ghosts and sects that maintain and invoke them. One wonders if this city might even have a true center, that is, a hidden heart of good or evil, one that unleashes with equal happiness blessings and earthquakes." (my trans.)

The Dead Archive: Entering Photography's Blind Fields (the Archive and the Repertoire)

“Thus the air is the luminous shadow which accompanies the body; and if the photograph fails to show this air, then the body moves without a shadow, and once this shadow is severed, as in the myth of the Woman without a Shadow, there remains no more than a sterile body. It is by this tenuous umbilical cord that the photographer gives life; if he cannot, either by lack of talent or bad luck, supply the transparent soul its bright shadow, the subject dies forever” (Barthes 110).

“... ¿Y ahora qué resta? ¿Desvanecerse como una fotografía demasiado expuesta, como los deseos fallidos o traicionados, o como la vida que postergamos creyendo que siempre estará esperando a nuestro antojo?” (Clavel 110) / “...And now what's left? To vanish like an overexposed photo, like those desires failed or betrayed, like the life we leave behind, still with the belief it will always be there awaiting our longing?” (80)

Although at the end of the novel Soledad's body is in some ways highly visible – it exists as a pure image on wanted posters plastered prominently along one of the major thoroughways of the city (20 de Noviembre Street) – her essence is reduced to this single frame. But, as Barthes suggests in the quotation above, photography has the capacity to push beyond this moment “frozen in time.” If we understand the photograph to be a literal still image of the past brought into the space of the present, we can see how it might capture the subject's “bright shadow.” The act of photography preserves something of the subject's agency, helping us to recreate the essence of the individual person, preventing the snapshot from becoming nothing more than a static picture. The caption scribbled below the photographic “proof” of Sol's existence, “her image couldn't contain her,” suggests that she has exploded through the frame of this image – has broken the boundaries of her (female) body that so often limited her power and agency. In this section of the chapter, I consider the role of photography in the process of making the subject simultaneously visible and

invisible (a theme that is prominent in the novel itself). Clavel was directly inspired by Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980) and by Philippe Dubois' *El acto fotográfico* (1983) (whose concept of the photograph as a "huella luminosa" / "luminous trace" is abundantly present throughout her work.) Both French theorists are in conversation with one another, as they examine the stakes behind the act of photography.

To borrow Barthes' language, Soledad's lingering image could be described as that "rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead" (9). Photography is an act that captures, "[t]he body in its passage to immobility" (13). However, perhaps the most relevant part of Barthes' thinking on photography in relation to Clavel's novel is where he suggests that to be photographed is to witness the moment in which a subject becomes an object, in which one "...experience[s] a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter" (14). In other words, the camera transforms the into a "dead" object. However, Barthes suggests that some images have the power to move the spectator or observer beyond the photographic frame if they contain an element that he calls the *punctum*: that "which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me) (26-7). This *punctum*, claims Barthes, is what "expands" the photograph – pulling its viewer out of the immediate context, and allowing him or her to imagine the life *beyond* the photographic field, "a kind of subtle *beyond* – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see" (53). And, the *punctum* is often revealed only when one reflects back upon the picture (not when one looks at or observes the image

directly) (53). The photograph *proves* to its viewer that its subject (and object) existed.

Through the novel, we are permitted to access the blind field corresponding to Soledad's final image; the work takes us beyond the static photographic capture of the missing body, and into an exploration of those forces and processes that led to her gradual disappearance. Much like the still picture of the student massacre (which, as I mentioned earlier, Steinberg compels us to think and write against), it is only through re-narrativizing the frozen image that the reader is able to reactivate the field of forces that compose her life. Soledad "touches us" – through the "umbilical cord" that "links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze..." (80-1): "Every photograph is a certificate of presence" (87) attesting to "...a reality one can no longer touch" (Barthes 87).

In the novel, directly before disappearing, Soledad becomes romantically involved with a Hungarian photographer, Peter Nagy, who is also her professor in art school. Like all of her relationships with male figures of authority, Soledad loses herself, led by desire to give up her agency. Peter – a philanderer and abuser of his power over Soledad – nonetheless uncovers a secret ability within her; she has a talent for photography. While he captures her body in still frames, obscuring the contours of her figure in play with light and shadow through the manipulation of his camera lens, she, too, finds power in capturing her own snapshots, in equally mastering the penumbra. Together, they learn how to become "fotógrafo[s] de sombras" – "shadow photographers" (70). The practice of taking photographs

becomes a kind of testimonial act for Soledad, and parallels that of recording stories through writing.

Through photography, Soledad learns how to capture moments of lived memory, which she stashes – unprocessed and raw – in the storehouses of the internal labyrinth of the Chinese vase; the snapshots can be accessed, contemplated and re-examined later: “...su dualidad de luz y sombras le hablaba oscuramente de un tejido interno, la textura de un instante vivo detenido en un palpitar de muerte ... algo que ya había percibido en el interior del vientre del jarrón” (85).¹⁰⁹ For, as Peter tells her (following Dubois’ definition), photography is nothing more than a “sombra luminosa” (111) – a luminous shadow. This luminous shadow is memory incarnate – a frozen image that can be revisited, and if captured correctly, can entice the viewer into its “blind field.” Its meaning can be written and re-written, over and over again, adding more texture to each memory.¹¹⁰ As Clavel describes, “Escrita con luz y sombras, el origen de la fotografía es la memoria: perpetuar la imagen amada, invocar la anulación del tiempo y el olvido” (130).¹¹¹

The power of photography lies in the possibility of capturing the essence and spirit of an object; it is a chemical process that freezes the soul in a snapshot. And,

¹⁰⁹ “...its duality of light and shadow spoke to her obscurely of an internal tapestry, the texture of a lived moment detained in the heartbeat of death ... something she had already seen in the belly of the vase” (61).

¹¹⁰ To borrow James Young’s phrase (*The Texture of Memory*).

¹¹¹ “Notes on designing a shadow”: “Written with light and shadows, the origin of photography is memory: to perpetuate the beloved image, to invoke the cessation of time and forgetfulness” (95).

within the novel, while the photograph serves as evidence of the existence of a body, it paradoxically makes Soledad disappear, become a ghost, transforms her into nothing but a shadow of her former self: “Pero es a partir de la sumisión del objeto como se logra la subversión perfecta: la cristalización de la conciencia y la voluntad de convertirse en imagen y no cuerpo real, de ser sombra, aura, nube, huella, sueño” (Clavel 131).¹¹² As Soledad begins to comprehend, and as I will discuss later in the chapter, there is a power in enticing the viewer of these freeze frames to move beyond the artificial boundaries and limitations of static, photographic time, reanimating them with a sense of historical urgency. Clavel’s readers come to understand that only after losing the physical contours of her body can Soledad learn to voice her desires, to control how she is understood by the world, and to exert her own sense of agency; invisible, Soledad is solely in control of how her “image” is produced.

But, before gaining this ultimate mastery over the image of her body, Soledad first must come to understand not only the power of photography, but also the importance of the archive. When Peter abandons her, returning to Hungary after tiring of their sexual escapades, Sol transforms into a kind of sleepwalker. With no interest in life (and with hints that she has perhaps contracted hepatitis from a coerced affair with Peter’s ill friend – this is only suggested by the presence of white gloves worn by Soledad to cover “sores” or “burns” that she claims are a result of the chemicals used in developing film in the darkroom), Sol decides to disappear. She tells her

¹¹² “But beginning with the submission of the object, the perfect subversion is achieved: the crystallization of the conscience and the will to convert itself into an imaginary and not a real body, to be shadow, aura, cloud, trace, dream...” (96).

mother and brother that she is in Hungary on an art fellowship, and waits for her health to slowly deteriorate. Finally, helped by strangers and by luck, she acquires a position in the Bellas Artes museum, and is assigned the strange task of rummaging through the “Archivos Muertos” or “Dead Archives” located in the maze of sub-basements and labyrinthine tunnels that house hundreds of years of unexamined evidence.

It is through the experience of working in these “dead archives” that Soledad is able to understand the potential that lies in naming, in reviving the frozen, still image, in taking back the power of the gaze. It is through this exterior exploration of the labyrinth – a kind of projection of the interior maze that exists in the heart of the Chinese vase – that she is able to spatialize the archive of her own frozen memories. She animates through a performance of body and space (Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*) what has become a kind of dormant bank of memory-images: “Lo nombraron el Archivo Muerto de Bellas Artes ... El Archivo mismo era un mundo aparte, una especie de gruta donde estalactitas de documentos y cajas simulaban un equilibrio de columnas irregulares que sostuvieron techo y suelo por igual. Había sinuosos corredores, pasadizos que surgían repentinamente y se cancelaban por esa intempestiva voluntad de papel” (138).¹¹³

¹¹³ “The archives at the Palace of Fine Arts were called the Morgue ... The archives were a world apart, a kind of grotto where stalactites of documents and boxes seemed to create a balance of irregular columns that held up both the floor and ceiling. There were sinuous corridors, passages that suddenly emerged and then dead-ended by the impetuous will of paper” (101).

But, once again, Soledad's ability to belong and to control her own image is foiled by the patriarchal figure of her powerful boss, Martín Rueda. While he explains that her task at the museum is to locate a 1905 photograph of an excavation that led to the discovery of a mysterious fountain, and requests that she photograph the underground, labyrinth-like passageways that exist under the museum, the job is a kind of wild-goose chase. As one of her co-workers points out, it is strange that she is hired in the first place, as they already have a "living archive" ("archivo viviente") in the form of a man who has worked at Bellas Artes for over fifty years and who, they believe, must surely know about the secret fountain (160). In reality, Soledad has been hired to serve as a kind of informer. Never able to resist the pull of a powerful male authority figure, she is covertly tasked to serve as a scab, feeding Rueda (even without her truly comprehending the nature of her assignment) information about a planned worker's strike. Only a day after Soledad is hired, Rueda has already reduced her body – her image – to something transparent and translucent. He has "ghosted" her: "Pero al subir al coche el licenciado desfundó una grabadora pequeña que se hallaba en el asiento trasero y murmuró en ella una especie de bitácora de todo lo que había conversado con Soledad. Sin ningún pudor, describió a la chica como si ella no estuviera presente. 'Opaca, pero translúcida, adivino en ella una servidora ideal,' dijo y Soledad creyó que hablaba de otra persona" (150-1).¹¹⁴ In this moment, Soledad is not even cognizant of the fragility of her increasingly spectral presence.

¹¹⁴ "But getting into the car he picked up a little tape recorder from the back seat and murmured into it a kind of detailed summary of everything he had discussed with Soledad. With no self-consciousness he described the girl as if she weren't even there. 'Opaque, but translucent, I foresee in her an ideal servant,' he said and Soledad thought he was talking about somebody else" (110-11).

Soledad continues to fulfill her most secret desire – to disappear, to have someone else take control of her life. She becomes a pawn in an increasingly complex labor dispute.¹¹⁵ And yet, Sol exists in a world apart. She is almost invisible at work, hiding in the winding and twisting labyrinth of anonymity that outwardly mimics the sensation of fleeing, retreating, into the imaginary world of the Chinese vase. She becomes known only as “la Sombra” (the shadow) (154). While the solidarity among the striking co-workers gives Sol the opportunity to finally “belong” and to join in a movement bigger than herself – to at last stand up to the power structures that have frightened her throughout her life, have reduced her to a shadow, have pushed her into living an interior life within the “dead archives” of her own traumatic memories – she instead uses her invisibility in an act of self-sabotage. She begins to use her ability to disappear at will, refusing to give testimony regarding other moments of abuse of power, such as when her boss, Rueda, physically assaults one of her co-workers, or when the union uprising is threatened by security forces.

¹¹⁵ As Maru, her co-worker, points out: “Son tiempos difíciles para el sindicalismo democrático. Ya le partieron la madre al movimiento magisterial, a la delegación del Politécnico. Sigue Bellas Artes. No sabemos cómo pero lo van a intentar. Pero tampoco estamos tullidos. Somos mil ojos y mil manos. Les seguimos los pasos a las autoridades y, en especial, a Rodolfo Mata. Ese hijo de la chingada fue el que rompió el movimiento del metro. Por eso lo ‘premiaron’ trayéndolo acá. Y parece que fue idea de tu jefe. Al principio creímos que te habían mandado de espía pero Leonardo te vio y dijo que sólo una hija de la chingada que pudiera fingir endiabladamente podría aparentar ser tan ... inocente” (161) / “These are difficult times for democratic unions. They’ve already knocked the shit out of the teachers’ movement and the delegation from the Polytechnic School. Now they’re going after Fine Arts. We don’t know how, but they’re going to try. But we’re not crippled either. We have a thousand eyes and a thousand hands. We follow the steps of the authorities, especially Rodolfo Mata. That son of a bitch was the one who broke the subway workers’ movement. That’s why they ‘rewarded’ him by bringing him here. And it seems like that was your boss Rueda’s idea. At first we thought they’d sent you here to spy on us, but then Leonardo saw you and said that only a real bitch would be able to fake it so damn well and appear so ... innocent” (119).

One of her colleagues, confronting her directly, compares her sin to that of those souls in limbo in Dante's *Inferno*: "...el peor de los pecados lo cometen los indecisos" (189); she will ultimately be punished for the sin of indecision. While in the end, she does not actively sabotage the strike, she also does not intervene on behalf of the workers. Soledad cannot find the courage to break free of the hypnotic pull of the authority figure. Finally, watching the aftermath of the successful strike, and realizing that she has no place in celebrating its victory, she decides that it is time to retreat; she can no longer tolerate her image being molded by the will of others. As Lucía urges her to flee into the interior folds of the vase, Soledad, in this moment, willingly embraces invisibility.

But, through the act of fulfilling her most secret desire – to become invisible – Soledad ends up paradoxically gaining control over her (absent) body. Barthes describes the act of photography as an act of violence: "I feel that the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice" (10-11); however, by erasing or revealing only at will the contours of her body, Soledad becomes the only person with the capability of framing it. She takes the power of the gaze away from others. To return once more to that final, haunting image of the lingering evidence of the now missing body on the wanted poster, the ghostly Soledad comes to embody the complex landscape that remains behind the testimonial photograph. The photograph exists in a state of limbo – a kind of "dead archive" of frozen memory that disappears and makes invisible the field of forces that went into this sliver of history – *unless* it can be re-animated by enticing its viewer into its "blind field."

After her retreat from the successful worker's strike, Soledad begins to exist in that state of purgatory, condemned to ghostly wanderings by her sin of indecision. However, through this process, she learns to control her own image – she discovers her voice. Dubois outlines the contradictory forces inherent in photography when he describes what the act entails: “Robarlo para poder guardarlo, y para mostrarlo para siempre ... Y así, en cierto modo – y éste es el problema paradójico – *salvarlo de la desaparición haciéndolo desaparecer*” (149).¹¹⁶ This last statement perfectly captures the essence of Soledad's final photographic trace: she has been saved from disappearing by being made to disappear. Protected from the patriarchal forces that try to control her image by willing herself to be invisible, Soledad finds her voice through exploring the spectral underside of a marginalized Mexico City where a whole host of invisibilized bodies finally “see” her. And, while Soledad is not a heroic figure throughout much of the novel, through the process of disappearing, she begins to gain agency – finding a way to help other peripheral characters she meets along the paths of her urban wanderings.

Invisibility as Agency: The Question of Embodied Memory

We meet the Soledad who has emerged from the vase in the aftermath of the strike at the start of the novel. As she climbs out of the vessel, her invisible body absorbs the vast skyline of Mexico City; rather than being overwhelmed by its seemingly infinite contours, she is instead finally fulfilled:

¹¹⁶ “To steal it in order to save it, to display it forever. To pull it into the uninterrupted ... And so, in a way – and this is the paradoxical problem – to save it from disappearance by making it disappear.” (my trans.)

Por eso cuando salió del jarrón y descubrió que nadie podía verla, sin una pizca de sombra que se escapara de sus talones, creyó que habitaba una de las historias que desde niña le gustaba contarse ... Soledad miró a su alrededor; aletargada, la avenida Reforma bostezaba durante el intervalo de un semáforo. A su izquierda la columna dorada del Ángel, como una espiga que tocara el cielo; a su derecha, en lo alto de un cerro, el Castillo de Chapultepec. Frente a ella, los hoteles de lujo y los edificios más modernos de la zona. Pero por más inaccesibles que fueron unos y otros mientras durara aquel sueño, sólo bastaría con franquear los sitios prohibidos, hacer a un lado los cordones, las vallas, las puertas clausuradas o simplemente estirar la mano y tomar lo que deseara. La invadió una sensación de plenitud ... (14).¹¹⁷

She exits the vase like a character in a children's story, equipped with the possibility of magically reimagining her place in the world.

Now, rather than simply being able to redeem such traumatic events as the Tlatelolco massacre in the space of her memory, Soledad is able to use the power of fantasy to proactively alter the contours of the *living* world. As she wanders through the city, empowered by the reality of her invisibility, she re-writes and revives the "frozen images" of monumental moments of history. Soledad echoes and mirrors Steinberg's call to enter certain historical moment's static representations, reanimating the network of forces that exist behind the freeze frame. From statues that have been transformed into "invisible symbols" embedded in the texture of living

¹¹⁷ "And so when she emerged from the vase and discovered that no one could see her, not even a sliver of a shadow escaping her, she thought she was living through one of those stories that since she was a little girl she'd liked to tell herself ... Soledad looked around; Reforma lethargically paused during a stoplight. To her left the Angel's golden column, like a stalk touching the sky; to her right, atop a hill, Chapultepec Castle. Before her, luxury hotels and the most modern buildings in the area. But however inaccessible those places were, while the dream lasted it was enough to wander through forbidden zones, to move aside the cordons, the barricades, the cloistered doors or simply extend her hand and take whatever she wanted. A feeling of plenitude enveloped her..." (6).

memory, to street children, to the blind and the “crazy,” Soledad is – through the powers of her living fairytale – able to tell their marginal histories through this marginal genre. Rather than relying on official History to stagnantly represent the bodies and memories she encounters in the folds of the city’s breathing fabric, she discovers that she has the ability to reanimate these hidden or forgotten recesses of the city, making them relevant to the people who inhabit them. Through the figure of Soledad, Clavel plays with the contrast between living versus static history. She embraces the possibility of an embodied memory that can perform the blind field of the “photographic” still shots of archival memory.

Clavel calls upon her readers to investigate the function of voice in this section of the novel; there is a transformational power in the ability to narrate stories of city space. And to tell this spectral story, Clavel turns to the genre of myth, in which the fantastical is possible:

Cuéntanos, Eco, de aquella doncella de deshilvanado entendimiento y frágil voluntad que, después de destruir las murallas de su cuerpo, anduvo peregrinado las noches de claro en claro y los días de turbio en turbio ... Tú, ninfa que te extiendes repetidora por las calles despobladas de voces y en las construcciones a medias, los subterráneos ciegos donde arrullan su sueño los niños perdidos, cuéntanos aunque no sea más que una parte de tales cosas. (Pero los ecos no retumbaron. La ciudad permaneció silenciosa, sorda al latir obstinado de la doncella, a su sangre transparente y a sus deseos esmirriados. Tendré entonces que prestarle mi voz a la doncella sin cuerpo, sólo sombra ella) (195-6).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ “Sing, Eco, of that damsel of unraveling understanding and fragile will, who after destroying the ramparts of her body wandered in pilgrimage at night ... You, nymph who goes out endlessly through the streets unpopulated by voices into the half-built structures, the blind subterranean worlds where lost children are lulled in their sleep, tell us even just a part of such things. (But the echoes don’t drone on. The city remains silent, deaf to the obstinate throb of the damsel, to her transparent blood and her exhausted desires. Thus must I lend my voice to the shadowless damsel, who is only shadow)” (145).

Soledad, through Clavel-as-narrator's act of storytelling, becomes the spectral guide through which the city is experienced anew. While the reader has grown accustomed to observing the urban landscape through the lens of Soledad's fearful gaze, as a ghostly presence, she is able to take in a panoramic view of space and time. She is capable of entering this "subterranean world" of "lost children" and "half-built structures." And by following her luminous traces, other invisible people and their stories are brought to the surface. The ever-present tower of Tlatelolco retains its prominent place in the skyline. However, Soledad moves beyond this still frame to reveal the long-lasting inheritance and effects of this single moment of traumatic memory, whose symbol, once animated, unravels a whole network of related injustices.

In a particularly poignant scene of self-realization, Soledad comes to fully comprehend her agency-in-death. She describes her suicidal wish to disappear, and the effects it has had on her present state of invisibility, in Duboisian terms; she understands her "disappearance" (and subsequent invisibilized re-appearance) by comparing the process to a photographic act:

¿Qué la detenía? Si de verdad nadie podía verla, entonces tampoco sabrían nada de su muerte. Y si algo tenía de obscuro el suicidio más decoroso era encontrar el cuerpo como huella lastimosa, como vestigio sangriento, como una fotografía de nota roja. Dependiendo de la muerte elegida, el grado de horror podía aumentar o disminuir pero a final de cuentas sucedería como con esas fotos que muestran los estragos de la guerra, del hambre, de la injusticia: al poco tiempo la gente se acostumbra y las olvida. Las vuelve invisibles. Como todo aquello que de verdad nos toca o nos hiera. Soledad reflexionó que, bien visto, aquel deseo de desaparecer sin dejar huellas había sido un buen deseo: sin manchas ni rastros aun en el caso de que terminara

arrojándose al vacío. Saberlo la reconfortó: no se sentía dueña de su vida pero por fin sería dueña de su muerte (69).¹¹⁹

While still unsure if she is truly alive or dead, the act of disappearing without a trace, without so much as a stain on the urban fabric, allows her the flexibility to invent her own existence in the space of the city. No longer beholden to the way she looks – to what people assume to be true about her – Soledad embraces the freedom that comes from being completely untethered.

This confusion between life and death is reflected in another frozen image: the statue of Leandro Valle. The statue, overlooking the Avenida de la Reforma, is an additional “snapshot”, frozen in time and space, out-of-step with the realities of contemporary daily life as cars zip past. Over the course of her urban wandering, Soledad-as-ghostly-spirit is called up to his pedestal to avoid the quickly moving traffic, only to encounter a man of flesh and blood, trapped atop the motionless stage. In Leandro Valle, Soledad finds another “alma en pena” – a lost soul caught in the indeterminate space between life and death. Telling Soledad of his history – and long ago erased from the living flow of the city – he narrates the plot of the famous battle he fought with his friend Miguel Miramón in a conflict where each found himself on

¹¹⁹ “What was holding her back? If it were really true that nobody could see her, then they wouldn’t know anything about her death either. And if there was something obscene about the most decorous of suicides, it was coming across the body like some painful trace, a bloody vestige, a tabloid photo. Depending on the mode of death chosen, the degree of horror could grow or diminish but in the end it was just like one of those photos that show the ruins of war, hunger, injustice: in a short time people get used to it and then forget. It becomes invisible, like everything that truly touches or wounds us. Soledad reflected that, seen clearly, the desire to disappear without leaving a trace had been a good desire: without stains or traces even if you ended up being dragged through the emptiness. Knowing that comforted her: she didn’t feel like she was the master of her life, but in the end she could be the master of her death” (49).

the opposite side of Ferdinand Maximilian's¹²⁰ army. He is haunted by the question of whether or not his friend died honorably or as a traitor, and clings to the historical uncertainty, unable to let go of the half-life he still leads. Valle has no voice; he is pure image: "La cantaleta de siempre ... Cuando quiero hablar, no me escuchan, y cuando me escuchan, no me entienden o no saben. Aciago destino de morir y despertar estatua ..." (201).¹²¹

These statues have become symbols of a now-empty or meaningless history book; no one remembers how to read the images of these heroes on the face of the city:

Y vuelta a caminar de árbol en árbol, de estatua en estatua. La rigidez de una figura en bronce que, en lo alto de un pedestal, detenía el tiempo y negaba el movimiento de la avenida, la hizo recordar que entraba al boulevard de los héroes, paladines de los movimientos de Independencia y Reforma de su país, que se levantaban a lo largo de la calzada como una lección de historia tridimensional que ya pocos –o nadie– leía. Vidas esforzadas, sacrificios, honor por la Patria ... Pero sucedía que los automóviles y transeúntes pasaban frente a las estatuas como si no existieran. La columna del Ángel, el Castillo, la estatua de Colón estaban situados en lugares estratégicos que obligaban a la vista a reparar en ellos. Pero estas efigies laterales, erigidas en los camellones al borde del arroyo, mirando el correr de los coches y los tiempos, de espaldas al viandante que para verlas debía cruzar al otro lado de la avenida o situarse en pleno arroyo y torear el tráfico ...

¹²⁰ Known as Maximilian I of Mexico (1832-67), this figure was the only ruler of the Second Mexican Empire. He was appointed by Napoleon III, who sought to legitimize French rule in the Americas, and who invaded Mexico in 1861 in a conflict known as the War of the French Intervention. In 1864, Maximilian took for himself the title of "emperor," backed by the French army and a group of Mexican conservatives opposed to then President Benito Juárez's rule (a liberal and of indigenous descent). The United States supported President Juárez's armies, and eventually, the empire collapsed. The war ended in Maximilian's 1867 execution.

¹²¹ "The same old noise ... When I want to speak, they don't listen to me, and when they listen to me, they don't understand or don't know what I'm talking about. Such a sinister destiny to die and wake up a statue" (150).

Estas estatuas condenadas a pasar inadvertidas. Soledad sintió compasión: a fin de cuentas eran tan invisibles como ella (198).¹²²

Both invisible in their own way, Valle aids Soledad in finding her voice. Introducing himself as “José María Leandro Francisco de Paula Valle Martínez, general brigadier del ejército de la Reforma, *Conde del Nopalito* para servir a usted y a la patria liberada” (204) / “José María Leandro Francisco Paula Valle Martínez, brigadier general of the Reform Army. *Conde del Nopalito*, at your orders and those of the free fatherland” (152), she is forced, in turn, to name herself, to give voice to her body. For the first time, Soledad creates herself in her own image, replying, “Bueno, supongo que ahora mi nombre completo es Lucía Soledad García Maldonado ... Marquesa de las sombras y otras huestes crepusculares” (204) / “Well, I suppose that now my complete name is Lucía Soledad García Maldonado ... Marques of shadows and crepuscular armies” (152).

It is through this exchange that Soledad begins to explore the nature of her condition; how did she will herself into a state of invisibility and what kind of power comes from this transformation? As Valle explains to Soledad, only the crazy, the

¹²² “And she went back to walking from tree to tree, statue to statue. The stiffness of a bronze figure that, from atop a pedestal, stopped time and prevented movement on the avenue reminded her she was entering a boulevard of heroes, champions of the movements of Independence and Reform in her country, elevated along the length of the roadway like a three-dimensional history lesson that few people – or no one – can read any longer. Driven lives, sacrifices, honor for the Fatherland ... But in the end the cars and pedestrians passed before the statues as if they didn’t exist. The column of the Angel, the Castle, the statue of Columbus were situated in strategic locations that forced the view to stop upon them. But these effigies to the side, erected on the planters at the edge of the traffic, looking at the passing of cars and time, with their back to the wanderer who to see them had to cross the other side of the avenue or step right into the middle of traffic and play bullfighter with the vehicles ... These statues were condemned to pass unnoticed. Soledad felt pity: in the end they were just as invisible as she was” (147).

blind, and children can sense his presence. He questions whether she is a lost soul in purgatory; in response, Soledad tells him of how she wished to lose her body. As she discusses and describes her affliction, he suggests that he might be able to pinpoint what ails her: “pérdida de la sombra” (205) – loss of shadow:

En mi descargo le diré de una enfermedad que ... tiene sus síntomas. La nombran “pérdida de la sombra” ... es cuando el alma, que también la llaman sombra, recibe un susto muy grande. Entonces se aleja del cuerpo como quien sale de su casa a medianoche por un incendio y empavorecido corre y cuando quiere regresar ya no encuentra los caminos ... ¿Tuvo usted algún susto muy grande previo a la mencionada pérdida? (205)¹²³

But, as Soledad’s reply indicates, she cannot locate a particular moment in her life where she was frightened. Rather, she responds, she has always been scared. In an attempt to understand the subtleties of her condition, Valle asks if she could have died without even realizing it, by assault or mishap (206-7): “Oiga, ¿no estará usted ya desaparecida? Quiero decir, muerta...” (206).¹²⁴ Soledad is firm in her answer. It is not death that has caused her to disappear, but rather, the fulfillment of a strong desire (207). She leaves Valle’s statue, observing that he is the only one that still stubbornly grasps an unbroken stone saber – a figure strong in his resolve to cling to his frozen image until he gains the answer to the question of whether or not his dear friend

¹²³ “In my defense I will tell you of an illness ... that has your symptoms. They call it ‘loss of shadow’ ... From what I’ve heard it’s when the soul, which they also call shadow, has a great fright. Then it departs from the body like a person who leaves a house on fire at midnight and runs about in a daze and when he wants to go back home can no longer find the way ... Did you have a big scare before the loss you mentioned?” (153)

¹²⁴ Again, this harkens back to Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo*, where often Comala’s ghosts do not even realize that they have died: “Listen, haven’t you disappeared yet? I mean, died...” (154).

Miguel was killed from behind. But the exchange prompts an inward reflection on the boundary between life and death, the nature of her fear, and the question of the underlying traumas that have come to mark her body, and caused her strong wish to disappear.

Soledad begins to experiment with the boundaries and limits of her (disappearing) body – an attempt to re-negotiate her place in the world. Shutting her eyes, she focuses on her internal, corporeal rhythms – systems whose active functions seem to indicate a body very much “alive”:

Al principio los ruidos del exterior insistían en penetrarla, pero poco a poco pudo ir escuchando los sonidos silenciosos de su propio cuerpo: el corazón persistente como los deseos, las vísceras derramarse en cascadas repentinas, el aire en el laberinto del oído. Hacia dentro, en ese recorrido al interior de sí misma, ahora que los límites de su cuerpo parecían haberse desdibujado, Soledad se descubrió obstinadamente viva. De nada había valido dejar que la vida se derramara como una herida, quedarse inmóvil, acallar los deseos, no hacer ruido, proponerle a Lucía que cambiaran de lugar. Cada latido rebelde, cada respiración testaruda, le hablaban ahora de una fuerza secreta similar a la de las semillas: ese germen, esa plantícula ínfima, de tallo y hojas aún inexistentes, se negaba a desaparecer. Tal vez fuera que escuchara ese despertar de células que acompaña a una germinación, o tal vez que no había comido y el sol le sorbía los sesos y las fuerzas ... Sintió hambre (212).¹²⁵

¹²⁵ “...She shut her eyes. At first the exterior sounds kept coming through, but little by little she could hear the silent sounds of her own body: her heart as persistent as desire, her guts spilling out in sudden cascades, the air in the labyrinth of her hearing within, in that distance traveled inside herself, now that the boundaries of her body seemed to have been erased, Soledad discovered herself obstinately alive. It would have been worthless to let life spill out like a wound, to remain motionless, to shut off all desire, to make no noise, to ask Lucía to change places with her. Each rebellious throb, each stubborn breath, spoke to her now of a secret force like that of seeds: that germ, that paltry little plant made of still inexistent stalk and leaves, refused to disappear. Perhaps it was hearing that awakening of cells that accompanies germination, or perhaps it was because she hadn’t eaten and the sun was sapping her brains and strength ... She felt hungry” (158).

Although the boundaries of her body are no longer visible, she feels hunger, desire; in the absence of her body, she counter-intuitively becomes sharply aware of its needs and of its strength. That last desire – hunger – propels Soledad back into the world of the living. Rather than continue to wish, as she has all of her life, to retreat into the shadows and corners of her internal labyrinth, Soledad finds the strength in her invisibility to leap into the currents and flows of city streets.

Entering this maze of unexplored and uncharted territory (an urban landscape whose dominating triangular tower of Tlatelolco no longer scares her), she pushes herself to encounter other lost souls in equally forgotten back streets:

...la cabeza se le llenaba con el recuerdo de otras calles de nombres sugestivos que no había conocido pero que formaban parte del mapa de leyendas de su ciudad y que su padre le contara algunas noches: callejón de Salsipuedes, de los Espantos, del Monstruo, de la Buena Muerte ... Pero al igual que la del Niño Perdido, estas calles ya no existían más: por obra y gracia de una toponimia oficialasca que por la zona de Catedral agradeció a las repúblicas del orbe el reconocimiento del gobierno revolucionario, la ciudad olvidaba sus nombres y su pasado (214).¹²⁶

She wanders through these neglected thoroughfares, named for legends, stories, and urban myths whose active memory has been stripped from living memory. In her exploration of the city, Soledad meets with many spectral figures who, like her, exist in the space between the living and the dead, in a state of purgatory, made invisible

¹²⁶ "...her head filled with the memory of other streets with suggestive names she hadn't recognized but formed part of her city's map of legends which her father occasionally told her about at night: Get Out If You Can Alley, Street of the Scares, Monster Street, Good Death Street ... But just like the Lost Child, those streets no longer existed: by the work and grace of a bureaucratic toponomy that throughout the cathedral's neighborhood thanked the republics of the world and in recognition of the revolutionary government, the city was forgetting its names and past" (159).

by their marginal life circumstances; they are individuals overlooked, ghosted, by the average passerby.

One such character is Matías Torres, the now-blind, former librarian of San Agustín, Santo Domingo who makes his money writing letters for the illiterate and disadvantaged (the uneducated, the provincial); Matías helps Soledad to re-negotiate her place in the city. As a result of his blindness, he has discovered a new-found flexibility and freedom to create the world anew. Walking through a landscape of shadows and darkness means that his reality is constructed only by language; he suddenly has the power to erect his own city: ...“le daba la oportunidad de inventarse un mundo para él solo, un mundo donde la sola pronunciación de una palabra bastaba para crear su significado ... Y así Matías Torres que, puesto a viajar en un país increado e informe, volvía a inventarlo todo a su imagen y deseo” (221).¹²⁷ The blind man becomes, in a way, Soledad’s guide through a city that now unfolds before her; no longer intimidated by its geographical vastness, Soledad simply learns how to *name*. Serving as a parallel to the conversation she had long ago with her colleague, Maru, who suggested that the memory of the student massacre was much more frightening because it had never been named as such, Matías’ lessons help Soledad to overcome fear. In Matías’ words: “...no saber dónde empieza el mal, si en las palabras o en las cosas, pero que cuando las palabras se corrompen y los significados

¹²⁷ “...but it also gave him the opportunity of inventing alone a world for himself, a world where just the pronunciation of a word was enough to create its meaning ... And so Matías Torres, ready to travel to a country uncreated and unformed, once again completely reinvented his image and desire” (164).

se vuelven inciertos, el sentido de nuestros actos y de nuestras obras también se tambalea. Yo pienso ... las cosas se sustentan en sus nombres y viceversa” (222).¹²⁸

Continuing their conversation, Matías explains that sometimes things, through symbolism, myth, and fairytale, become more concrete and more real than “reality” itself. He points to the story of the emperor’s clothes – invisible, missing, garments whose absence makes their presence all the more glaring – as an example of this kind of play with the power of language; the clothes exist only through the act of naming. He turns, finally, to the underlying trauma that haunts this work: “Bueno, cuando no prestamos atención a las palabras, último reducto para asirnos a la realidad, cuando los muertos de San Juan o los del 68 se cuentan en la versión oficial con las manos, entonces estamos perdidos, como si filtros y filtros se interpusieron entre nosotros y la realidad nombrada. Escondidos, cada vez más separados de nosotros mismos” (223-4).¹²⁹ Soledad learns from Matías that when the official version of History is full of filtered lies, she must invent her own language to rescue a reality from layers of fantasy.

And so, Matías counters the “official” version of ‘68 by telling Soledad a tale of place-based history; by understanding the stories behind each street name, Matías

¹²⁸ “...not knowing where evil begins, in words or in things, that when words are corrupted and meanings become uncertain, the meaning of our acts and works also stumbles. I believe that as well: things are sustained by their names and vice-versa” (165).

¹²⁹ “...Well, when we don’t pay attention to words, the last redoubt where we may seize reality, when the dead of San Juan or those from ’68 can be counted on two hands in the official version, then we’re lost, as if filter upon filter were placed between us and the named reality. Divided, more and more separated from ourselves” (166).

re-locates this overlooked history, etched into the street signs themselves. He selects Avenue Thiers, a road that branches out from the Avenida Reforma where the statue of Valle sits – named for the general who put down the Paris Commune in 1871 by murdering many men, women, and children “a sangre fría, en escenas innumbrables de crueldad y sufrimiento. Mucha gente que transita por esa calle, a pie o al volante, los que tienen sus casas lujosas a uno y otro lado de la avenida, tal vez no lo saben, pero Thiers, el general por quien le pusieron nombre a esa calle pavimentada de la colonia Anzures, se enorgullecía de haber “pavimentado” de cadáveres de miserables las calles de París. ¿No es una ironía demasiado cruel?” (247)¹³⁰ But, Soledad learns how to redeem some of these marginal memories. The names of the streets prompt a critical examination of the act of storytelling, as each pathway is linked intimately to a history, myth, or popular tale that can push its listener towards a restoration of these troubled stories – if they engage in a practice of embodied, place-based performance. The streets’ stories help Soledad to understand how to position herself on the plane of the city; narrative threads become a kind of navigational system that guides her through the once-overwhelming labyrinth.

With her new understanding of the power of language – and an invisible body made present only through her voice – Soledad assembles a network of marginal

¹³⁰ “...and the city that calls one of its avenues ‘Thiers,’ which comes out onto Reforma, in homage to that general who in 1871 put down the Paris Commune by commanding the army to kill in cold blood more than twenty thousand men, women and children in scenes of unnamable suffering and cruelty. Many of the people passing down that street, whether walking or hurrying, those who have their luxurious houses on one side of the street or another, perhaps they don’t know but Thiers, the general for whom that paved street in the Anzures neighborhood is named, was proud to have ‘paved’ the streets of Paris with the cadavers of *les misérables*. Isn’t that a cruel irony?” (183)

figures that help her to locate her place in the city: José Estrella, a man who performs as a street Angel, a frozen, living statue; a band of lost children, caught up in a life of drug trafficking; members of the Nocturnal Adoration who pray for the safety of the city, that it will continue to exist through the night; Señor Polo, the bellman who coordinates the hourly peeling of the bells at the Cathedral. And, while the vast majority of those who dwell in the city cannot sense her presence, these marginal figures recognize Soledad. The Angel even catches a glimpse of her every now and again – even though she has purportedly lost her body. These individuals sense her presence, can hear her voice, and, in this way, Soledad also has control over her own image:

Poco a poco iba descubriendo que no era tan difícil hablar y ser escuchada: los ciegos como Matías, las mujeres religiosas, los indigentes que atraídos por un imán a la zona del Centro deambulaban por sus calles, entraban a sus iglesias, dormían en sus portales y plazas públicas. Sólo bastaba dirigirse al interlocutor adecuado: ese tipo de gabán sucio y desfondado, con un listón rojo y blanco alrededor del cuello que farfullaba oraciones ininteligibles en un reclinatorio de la iglesia, se volvió a verla como si la reconociera (235).¹³¹

In her new state, Soledad no longer “fights” with Lucía. The Chinese vase and its maze-like labyrinth disappears, and she and her other half are joined (177). She has finally found herself:

Ahora que la distancia entre los deseos y los actos se acortaba, Soledad podía abandonarse a la presencia del instante y gozar con esa plenitud

¹³¹ “Little by little she discovered it wasn’t so difficult to speak and be heard by the blind like Matías, religious women, the indigents who attracted by some preacher downtown wandered through the streets, entered churches and slept under the portals in public plazas. All she had to do was find the right person to converse with: that guy in a dirty torn trench coat and a red and white scarf around his neck, jabbering unintelligible prayers on a kneeler in the church, turned to look at her like he knew her” (174).

de la infancia que llena o remienda todos los huecos y todos los vacíos. Como nadie podía verla, descubría también esa inocencia primera, ese estado de gracia previo al juicio que es toda mirada. Y así, despreocupadamente, protegida de esa tiranía que antes la sojuzgaba, se atrevía por fin a saborear la vida como un helado de vainilla en un mediodía radiante.

Y no era tampoco que le sucedieran grandes cosas: sin tener ya que dar cuentas de lo que hacía o deshacía, de lo que era o había dejado de ser, bastándole la voz y el tacto (porque podía hacerse oír y tocar o ser tocada), Soledad se sentía por fin entera: estiraba la mano para alcanzar un pan, brincaba charcos o se bañaba en la fuente de la Corregidora, y sus manos y sus pies y su cuerpo todo eran uno con ella, sin culpas y sin temores. Nunca como entonces durmió como dicen que duermen los niños y los locos, como si estuviera bendecida (240).¹³²

As Matías has taught her, her city can only be called “Soledad,” and his can only be called “Matías” (186); each individual, through his or her luminous steps and traces, builds his or her own urban reality.

It is in this last section of the novel that the story becomes most like a non-mimetic urban chronicle, the reporter a spectral figure able to represent realities hidden from plain sight. With Jorge the street performing angel, she witnesses the brutality of police enforcement as they crack down on ambulatory food vendors. But

¹³² “Now that the distance between desire and action had lessened, Soledad could abandon herself to the present moment and enjoy that plenitude of childhood which fills or mends every hollow and every emptiness. As nobody could see her, she also discovered that first innocence, that state of grace preceding the judgment coming from every gaze. And so, unconcerned, protected from the tyranny that had subjugated her before, she finally dared to savor life like ice cream on a sunny afternoon.

Nor was it that great things happened to her: no longer having to take into account what she did or undid, what she was or had stopped being, still with her voice and touch (for she could touch or make herself be heard or touched), Soledad finally felt complete: she stretched out her hand for a piece of bread, she jumped over puddles or bathed in the Corregidora fountain, and her hands and feet and entire body were all one with her, and she felt neither guilt nor fear. Never like then had she slept as they say do children and crazy people, as if she were blessed” (178).

this time, Soledad has the power to stand up to authority. Her invisibility gives her strength, and she torments and teases the policemen – frightening them with her intangible presence: “En otra situación no se habría atrevido; habría pesado en ella la preocupación de tocar con la mirada al otro y que él, así reconocido descargara en ella ese mal que surgía y entraba por los ojos. En cambio, suponer que el hombre no podía verla, la hacía sentir invulnerable...” (262).¹³³ She becomes the street vendors’ invisible protector – a kind of patron spirit – recognizing the truth of their struggles and concretely able to watch over them in her death-like state. She fulfils in this instance the desire she could not execute through imaginary journalism in the aftermath of the Tlatelolco massacre, when in her childhood innocence she attempted to redeem the legacy of Miguel. The two instances are presented as parallel events, as the image of the washing away of the street vendors’ blood echoes the action of the government forces erasing the traces of bloodstains from the Plaza de los Tres Culturas in ’68: “Fue entonces cuando descubrió las aceras mojadas y una corriente de agua que se deslizaba hacia una alcantarilla, como si una lluvia intempestiva, los bomberos o los hombres de limpieza hubieran lavado las calles. Sintió que el corazón se le encogía sólo de pensar que la sangre pudiera desaparecer bajo un chorro de agua, borrarse con tal facilidad, hacerse transparente” (303).¹³⁴ With Soledad’s new-

¹³³ “In any other situation she wouldn’t have dared: It would have weighted upon her the worry of touching him with her gaze and he, thus recognized, would have shot her with that surging evil which passed through his eyes. Instead, to suppose the man couldn’t see her made her feel invulnerable...” (194).

¹³⁴ “Soledad took the blind man’s arm and walked with him across the avenue. It was then she discovered the wet sidewalks and a current of water that flowed toward a sewer grate, as if an unseasonable rain, firemen, or street cleaners had cleaned the way. She felt her heart clench just to

found ability to name, however, these absences become luminous traces, revived under the power of storytelling, documenting, and chronicling. In some small way, she is able to stand up to the foundational trauma of '68 that kept her scared for so long, by demanding a more just present. And, this sense of power – of not needing to meet the gaze of anyone else, of simply knowing and understanding what is “right” and “true” for herself – allows her to finally break free.

The ending scenes of the novel are triumphant. Soledad for the first time acknowledges her own sexual desire, and has an equal and consensual relationship with Jorge the Angel to whom she proclaims and affirms, “Te deseo” (“I desire you”) (283). In complete control – after all, Soledad is by-and-large invisible to Jorge except in small glimpses – she, for the first time, takes the reigns of her own love life. Emboldened by this action, she decides to help another individual break free of his body and static image – the statue of Valle. On a last visit, Valle asks about the street that bears his name. Soledad describes it in blunt terms, telling him of the children addicted to drugs, the gang violence that haunts its corridors, and the general misery that now falls under the domain of the once proud war hero. With that, Valle decides it is time to let go of his life of purgatory, of existing as a still frame in the space between life and death (285). And so, on All Saints’ Day, Soledad arranges for Jorge the Angel to meet Valle, in a duel of living statues (285). At last, Valle’s spirit leaves the frozen image of his body, and, dropping his stone-sword, he is set free.

think that blood could disappear beneath a stream of water, be erased so easily, become transparent” (224).

But Soledad has no body from which to free herself – she has just begun to truly live. Awakening on All Saints’ Day, Soledad encounters various shades at the Cathedral who ask her to tell their loved ones that they are forgiven; she watches the souls, liberated from all sin, swinging on the ropes of the ringing church bells (299). Joining the band of lost children, Jorge, and Matías on an excursion to Chapultepec Castle, she encounters, on this day of limbo where spirits return from the dead, a man with an old-fashioned camera. It is here that a twin image appears, countering the one belonging to the wanted-poster presented in the closing paragraphs of the novel: the camera captures the ghostly trace of the girl who is stubbornly alive, but invisible to all: “Luego siguió el proceso de costumbre: la placa, unos minutos de espera, el balde de agua. Cuando la imagen se aclaró por fin los niños aparecieron más delgados que de costumbre, Jorge – que se había movido en el último momento – se veía desenfocado y Matías tenía los ojos en blanco. La única figura favorecida – el fotógrafo frunció el ceño – resultó ser una muchacha que de seguro pasaba por ahí y que la cámara había captado en la última fracción de segundo” (304).¹³⁵ It is through the act of seeing her own image reproduced in the photograph that Soledad is able to recognize her new place in the metropolis.

In this closing scene, the interior maze of the vase is exteriorized onto the face of the city. The city *becomes* her body – the fluid boundaries between the urban

¹³⁵ “There followed the normal procedure: the plate, a few moments of waiting, the bucket of water. When the photo was finally developed the children looked skinnier than usual ... The only figure that turned out well – the photographer frowned – was some girl who must have just been walking by that the camera by chance captured at the last fraction of a second” (225).

space and the contours of Soledad's physical figure allow for a spatialized reading of memory, a literal mixing of public and private remembrances: "...Soledad la contempló como si por fin la poseyera. Bueno, no era una posesión completa sino más bien que se sentía parte de la ciudad y que la amaba como a un cuerpo propio..." (305).¹³⁶ Soledad is one with the city.

Conclusion: Overlapping Memory Spaces, Tlatelolco, & the Monument to the 43 "Disappeared"

In the summer of 2013, I took a trip to Mexico City. Eager to retrace the fictionalized steps of Soledad, we bought tickets for Turibus – a red, double-decker bus that takes tourists around on set trajectories throughout the city. I was excited to see the Tlatelolco neighborhood listed as one of the stops, and equally disappointed to find that the route was inexplicably out of service. Following the complex directions provided by our hostel, we took a subway from the city center, only to arrive at a maze-like station, confronted with an incomprehensible map. Suddenly, a shadow fell across us and an older man asked us where we were headed. When we told him we wanted to see the Plaza de Las Tres Culturas, he nodded and said he would show us the way. As we followed him out of the subway station, he asked us if we were aware that there was a student massacre there in '68. We said yes, we had read Elena Poniatowska's famous 1971 historical chronicle. He said he could not really read, but he had been there, and left us at the corner, indicating the site of the plaza before

¹³⁶ "...Soledad looked at it in contemplation as if it were finally her own. Well, it wasn't complete possession; rather, she felt part of the city and loved it now like a body itself..." (226).

turning to walk away. Without this man's help, we would have never been able to locate the square – a square whose invisible presence on the subway map conjures forth an important and difficult history.

In the center of the plaza is a monument that marks the absence of the bodies belonging to those who were killed during the massacre. But the legacy of disappearance continues to haunt the public sphere. On October 1st, just a day before the anniversary of the student massacre, *Al Jazeera* published an article entitled “Dozens of students missing in Mexico after police fire on protest”; up to fifty-seven students gathered in Iguala, Guerrero to oppose increasing university fees and controversial education reforms disappeared after being taken away by police, and just fourteen have been found. On October 5th, the *BBC* reported the discovery of a mass grave on the edge of Iguala, but questioned whether these bodies belong to the disappeared students, or to other individuals made silent by violence. With the PRI back in power for the first time since 2000 under President Enrique Peña Nieto, these student disappearances bring echoes of a past not yet entirely congealed; the students – trainee teachers – had planned to join a national protest for education reform, and to participate in the annual October 2nd rally held in Mexico City to remember those who lost their lives in the 1968 massacre.

In 1975, just seven years later, Paz composed an introduction to Poniatowska's famous historical chronicle; his question remains unanswered: “The students were seeking a public dialogue with those in power, and these powers responded with the sort of violence that silences every last voice raised in protest.

Why? What were the reasons behind this massacre? Mexicans have been asking themselves this question since October 1968. Only when it is answered will the country recover its confidence in its leaders and in its institutions” (viii). Writing in the year 2000, looking back to 1985, Clavel captures this textured history – a history that spans distinct periods and layers of structural injustices in order to attempt to sketch the beginnings of an answer to Paz’s haunting – and impossible – question. Her novelistic threads weave a web whose crossing points can ultimately be marked only by the presence of a ghost.

At the conclusion of Gordon’s 1997 *Ghostly Matters*, she reminds us that the work of haunting has as much to do with the present as with the past: “The ghost registers *and* it incites, and that is why we have to talk to it graciously, why we have to learn how it speaks, why we have to grasp the fullness of its life world, its desires ... Because ultimately haunting is about how to transform a shadow of a life into an undiminished life whose shadows touch softly in the spirit of a peaceful reconciliation. In this necessarily collective undertaking, the end, which is not an ending at all, belongs to everyone” (207-8). Listening to the ghost of Soledad in her story of place-based haunting points to a larger collective undertaking – one that not only compels us to keep the memory of the Tlatelolco student massacre alive, but also pushes the reader to consider a network of interlocking injustices that continue to leave their spectral presence on today’s Mexico City.

As the *Milenio* reported on April 26th, 2015, another monument has been added to Mexico City’s urban fabric. At the intersection of the Avenida Reforma,

Bucareli, and Juárez, the parents of the disappeared students from the Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa have installed what they are referring to as an “anti monumento” – a call to mark and remember another set of bodies disappeared from the space of Mexico. The article records the voice of Melitón Ortega, the father of one of the disappeared students, who implicates all levels of the Mexican government in the disappearance of his son and the other 42 students. He calls upon the dwellers of Mexico City to protect this monument and space of memory, and, anticipating the attempt to eliminate this reminder of unpleasant events from the urban center, denounces those who would remove it: “A los ciudadanos del Distrito Federal, los invité a ‘contribuir con su presencia para que no sean quitados, porque esto significa que continuamos la lucha y el día que aparezcan veremos que hacemos con éste monumento’” (n/p).¹³⁷ While the monument mourns the loss of these missing bodies, their very invisibility has now left a tangible mark on the cityscape as their absence is clearly indicated by the large “43.” Their disappearance has opened a space for questioning, critique, and a demand for visibility in the space of the nation’s capital.

Likewise, for Clavel, there is some redemption in the state of invisibility and absence. As Lavery suggests, Soledad’s disappearance at the end of the novel is in some ways not just a commentary on the forces of patriarchy – a power so strong that it can literally erase those bodies that do not conform to the urban script – but also a means of empowerment. Soledad *chooses* invisibility, and this election opens up a

¹³⁷ “He invited the citizens of the Federal District to, ‘contribute their presence so as not to be removed, because it signifies that we continue to fight and the day they appear, we’ll see what we do with this monument.’” (my trans.)

space where Soledad is untouchable: “The trope of invisibility reflects non-representation of women and women writers such as Clavel, while paradoxically also signaling hope for women’s sexual, intellectual, and literary emancipation beyond male-dominated society. Clavel appears to be torn between a desire to remove all physical traces of femaleness through Soledad’s invisibility and an attempt to inscribe the physical aspects of the corporeal” (47). Perhaps by giving voice to absence, by marking these moments of erasure through acts of narration and curation (the monument for the 43 that changes the way we read the script of the city; Clavel’s novel that recuperates the lost voices in the urban fabric, creating a counter-map that refuses to silence the ghosts and the marginalized inhabitants Mexico City’s “underbelly”), acts of invisibility, ghostliness, and disappearance can be reclaimed as spaces that insist upon social change and dialogue: “...en su calidad de invisible, veía otras ciudades invisibles de la propia Ciudad de México ... como ella perdía su cuerpo, la ciudad cobró un poco esa función de cuerpo propio. Era una especie de enamoramiento, de enlace del personaje y de la ciudad” (43).¹³⁸ Ultimately, Soledad’s ghostly body parallels this ghostly history:

These events have not yet concluded. The ghost is here and is not here, because the event whose aftermath it haunts has not yet taken place: there has been no failure, and thus the time is not out of joint in the way we have imagined. It must return as the nonghost of its immaterial and unyielding demand – the demand for justice. This call for justice concerns not the restitution of failure but the only return of the political for which the ghost can claim responsibility: a defeat or the

¹³⁸ From Clavel’s interview with Emily Hind: “Invisible as she was, she saw other invisible cities within Mexico itself ... as she lost her body, the city, in part, took on the body’s function. It was a kind of falling-in-love, of connection between self and city.” (my trans.)

momentary retreat of a line that resists still, as the an-archaeological trace of 1968 (Steinberg 193).

After all, who better to narrate a ghostly history that refuses closure, that erupts through the orderly surface of the city to seek justice, than the ghost herself?

Chapter 3

City of (Post) Memory: Memory Mapping in Nona Fernández's 2002 *Mapocho*

Chile: Responses to the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990)

“Y después, el tránsito a la democracia ... sobre todo los primeros años en un tiempo de silencio absoluto ... donde no había voluntad de hablar ... Entonces, claro, te quedas con esa inquietud súper grande, y de pronto te das cuenta de que nadie te va a hacer el relato, que tienes que investigarlo, tienes que darte cuenta, que tienes que buscarlo, hasta esto de los cuarenta años en los que se instaura la posibilidad oficial de: señores y señores vamos a recordar y aquí tenemos la información” (Sepúlveda 253).¹³⁹

“The *Guacha* Generation”: Contextualizing the Work of Nona Fernández

In a 2015 interview with *La izquierda diario*, Nona Fernández – Chilean author, actress, and scriptwriter – outlines the ways in which her writing engages with memory and historical trauma in post-dictatorship Chile. In her response, she situates her work generationally, specifically identifying herself as belonging to “the generation of post-memory” (Marianne Hirsch), whose own “life stories” are “displaced” or “evacuated” by the powerful traumatic memories that they inherit (5).¹⁴⁰ Born in 1971, Fernández was only two years old at the time of the coup, and in her late teens when the country returned to democracy by plebiscite in 1988; she

¹³⁹ Interview with Nona Fernández (2014): “And afterwards, the transition to democracy ... especially the first years in a period of absolute silence ... where there was no will to speak, no exercise of speech ... So, of course, you feel this humongous anxiety, and suddenly you realize that nobody’s going to write the story for you – you have to go investigating, you have to pay attention, all the way to the present through forty years of establishing the official possibility of, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, we are going to remember and we have the information here.’” (my trans.)

¹⁴⁰ In the context of Holocaust memory, Hirsch defines the experience of belonging to the post-memory generation as having a “...connection to the past ... [that] is mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension” (5).

refers to those who grew up under dictatorship in Chile as the *guacha* or “orphan” generation – raised by parents who were largely absent, preoccupied by fear, shock, or loss, unable to narrate their experiences or serve as interlocutors. Some parents were killed or disappeared by the regime. Fernández explains: “Siento que crecimos un poco perdidos en el espacio, desconcertados, sin comprender del todo lo que pasaba a nuestro alrededor, con preguntas atragantadas y enigmas sin resolver” (n/p).¹⁴¹ She observes that clarity was not achieved with the overthrow of Pinochet and the return to democracy in 1990: “Muchas preguntas se quedaron sin respuestas y el puzzle seguía ahí, lleno de acertijos” (n/p).¹⁴² Fernández describes this sensation of dislocation, both in time and space, as the legacy left to her orphaned generation; she argues that the way to work through this disjointed relationship to national belonging is through the creation of fiction.

Growing up under the shadow of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) – a dictator who took power after a U.S. backed coup d’état overthrew President Salvador Allende’s socialist Unidad Popular government – Fernández claims for her generation a shared experience of feeling “orphaned,” as radical policy change quickly transformed the Chilean social and economic fabric. These changes were brought about by the violent repression, death, and disappearance of those who opposed the regime. The ideas of the so-called “Chicago Boys” – economists trained under Milton

¹⁴¹ “I feel like we grew up a little lost in space, disconcerted, with no full understanding of what was happening around us, with questions stuck in our throats, and with enigmas with no resolution.” (my trans.)

¹⁴² “Many questions went unanswered, and the puzzle remained, full of riddles.” (my trans.)

Friedman and Arnold Harberger at the University of Chicago – were used to impose sweeping reforms in the economic sphere, including free market policies, neoliberalism, privatization, repression of labor unions, and a push towards globalized trade. The effects were also felt in the private, social sphere. Fernández came of age under this restructuring of Chilean society, and began to write in its aftermath.

The way in which writing remediates the orphaned generation’s experience of loss is exemplified by Fernández’s novel, *Mapocho* (2002): “Creo que a mi generación le toca hacer el trabajo de ficcionalizar, de apropiarse de los hechos, de pasarlos por nosotros, sacarlos de la oficialidad y el museo e instalarlos en ese inconsciente colectivo donde los pedacitos se vuelven un todo más complejo y poderoso” (n/p).¹⁴³ Born Patricia Paola Fernández Silanes (1971, Santiago), Nona Fernández is best known as an actress, author, and scriptwriter for both television and theater.¹⁴⁴ However, in this chapter, I explore the memory-puzzle within a

¹⁴³ “I think it falls on my generation to undertake the work of fictionalizing, to take control of the facts, to make them ours to take them from the officials and the museums, and to install them in that unconscious collective where the pieces will return themselves to a more complex and powerful whole.” (my trans.)

¹⁴⁴ Fernández notes in an email interview with Demian Paredes published in *La izquierda diario* (February 28th, 2015) that: “Mi única formación es la del escenario, de ahí vengo, es lo que estudié ... El escenario instaló en mi la idea de que cualquier creación debe ser una experiencia viva que nos sacuda, que nos ponga en crisis tanto a los creadores a los espectadores. El teatro debe encarnarse, debe pasar por el cuerpo y por el nervio de todos los que intervienen en ese inquietante y misterioso rito” (n/p) / “My only training is stage acting – that’s where I came from, it’s what I studied ... Stage acting gave the idea that any creation should be a live experience that wakes us up and injects doubt into both the creators and the spectators. Theater should become flesh, it should pass through the body and nerves of everyone involved in its unsettling and mysterious ritual.” (my trans.) It is interesting to note the importance that she places on writing and the theater arts in the process of working through difficult memories.

fictionalized Santiago, as Fernández undertakes the difficult task of charting the kind of memory-landscape that she describes in this interview. Within the pages of fiction, she captures a sense of disassociation from space and time, and the feeling of alienation and loss. Fernández's *Mapocho* undertakes an always-partial grappling with the unrecognizable façade of the radically altered cityscape of Santiago in the aftermath of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship. It stages the encounter between the ghostly presence of a child returned from exile, and the equally ghostly city.

When the protagonist, la Rucia – the daughter of a professor and neighborhood storyteller turned keeper of “official history” under Pinochet's dictatorship – returns to confront her long-absent father in the liminal space between life and death, she is faced with a city whose façade she can no longer recognize. Yet, despite its radical physical transformation, the city is still capable of narrating its own history of change, of preserving a seemingly lost past. When La Rucia reencounters Santiago, she has little memory of her time there. She has spent most of her life in a mysterious exile with her mother and brother on a remote and unnamed Mediterranean island, believing falsely that her father is dead. This period comes to an end after a tragic car accident caused by her twin brother and lover, el Indio. She and her brother emerge half-specter, but their silent mother does not survive, thus permanently muting the secrets of the traumatic past. In their ghostly states (and only gradually aware of their own deaths), both brother and sister return to the space of Santiago to uncover their lost history from beyond the grave. They are the second

generation searching for the answers that will uncover the legacy and stories of a neighborhood now buried under layers of silence.

As la Rucia walks the unfamiliar streets of the city, she clutches the ashes of her mother, hoping to locate her childhood home and at last find a resting place and gravesite for her remains. At the same time, she searches for answers about her allegedly dead father, a professor of history and neighborhood storyteller. La Rucia's footsteps through the space of the city not only awaken sleeping memories, kept safe by the physical contours of buildings, but also re-connect her to her father, Fausto, who – she later learns, contrary to what her mother told her, is alive. He chose to save his family by aiding the regime in the covering up of messy government secrets by writing imaginary histories for official state-sponsored books. His betrayal of his neighborhood's grounded history has turned him into an isolated figure; the majority of the barrio's inhabitants exist only as ghosts after perishing in an intentionally set fire (victims of the military regime), and Fausto remains behind as the only living body capable of providing testimony for their suffering. But, he cannot serve as witness while simultaneously meeting the government's demands for censorship and a careful crafting of history. He becomes entangled in a never-ending a project to provide tomes of "Official History" for public consumption. It is the body of la Rucia – an orphan who has lost both her parents and her nation – that negotiates these contradictory historical projects; her body unites place-based storytelling, her father's fictional "official" stories, sites of exile and return, and spaces of the living and the dead. By walking the city, she is able to conjure forth memories of missing bodies. La

Rucia awakens the dead people connected to dead spaces, creating a kind of alternative geographical trajectory through the city that can be followed and understood by the readers of her ghost-story.

This chapter considers the novel's blurry boundaries between memory and history, and attempts to capture a form of historical narration capable of recording the realities of the "post" dictatorship period. It is the contours of the urban environment themselves (bridges, modern office towers, the Mapocho River, official and unofficial cemeteries...) that tell the story of trauma. And, as the work fluctuates among modes of collective telling ("dicen"), official history, and fairy tale ("érase una vez")¹⁴⁵, it takes the first steps towards integrating Santiago's history into a larger narrative of structural trauma and injustice. How does the space of the imaginary push through the modernized shell of the city, dig up the memories buried beneath, and expose its ghostly foundations? And how does the *guacha* generation experience these landscapes of memory?

¹⁴⁵ As Andrea Jęftanovic points out, the characters in the novel carry on a kind of "contaminated dialogue" with the city. In other words, voices, discourses, counter-discourses, memory, and countermemories become scrambled in the space of the urban. Each group fights to have his or her story recognized: "Españoles e indígenas, autoridades e individuos, padres e hijos, luchan por imponer su relato. Toda historia evidencia su revés de las versiones oficiales y sus flagrantes omisiones. En la novela las versiones oficiales son contrastadas por un 'Dicen' que refuerzan lo popular, lo de oídas, aquello que se susurra de generación en generación para que no se olvide pero que también, en otro orden de cosas recuerda al 'dicen' farandulero, mediático, el del chismorreó" (75). / "Spaniards and natives, authorities and individuals, parents and children, fight to impose their story. All stories betray their refutations of official versions and their flagrant omissions. In the novel, official versions are contrasted by a "They say" that reinforces what's popular, what's been heard, what one generation whispers to the next so that it's not forgotten, but in another manner of speaking reminds us of the rumor-mongering, gossip, 'They say' or hearsay." (my trans.)

The first section of this chapter considers Fernández's role in a generational response to writing about the dictatorship period, both as a woman and as an individual who was a child during Pinochet's regime; here, I outline previous scholarship on the novel as well as on Fernández's literary corpus as a whole. I then present a brief overview of efforts to memorialize this difficult history in the post-dictatorship period, using Villa Grimaldi – a former clandestine detention and torture center turned memorial park – as a case study for the kind of site-based memory work that the novel advocates. While Villa Grimaldi is not one of the sites signaled by the novel as a potential “touchstone”¹⁴⁶ for community and collective memory, it serves as a parallel for the kinds of landmarks capable of “housing” recollections of this difficult past. The chapter concludes with an analysis of how this act of memory-mapping – of the creation of a cartographical record of places touched by traumatic memory, and of the restorative act of consciously acknowledging and inhabiting these spaces – unfolds in the novel itself. How does the second generation, the generation of post-memory, interact with a landscape of (suppressed) places of memory? How can the novel foster the kinds of dialogue needed to prompt collective memory-making?

Nona Fernández and “la nueva narrativa chilena” / “New Chilean Narrative”

Writes Guillermo García-Corales, “Nona Fernández (1971) ... ha sido considerada por prestigiosos políticos y escritores (como es el caso de Juan Armando Epple, Patricia Espinosa, Antonio Skármeta y Pía Barros) entre las figuras de mayor

¹⁴⁶ To borrow Robert Bevan's term.

relevancia dentro del nuevo grupo generacional que se perfila en el horizonte de la literatura chilena del siglo veintiuno” (215).¹⁴⁷ Fernández belongs to a generation of writers called, most broadly, “La Nueva Narrativa” (“The New Narrative”) – many of whom participated in the literary workshops of those authors belonging to the previous generation such as Antonio Skármeta, Pía Barros, Carlos Franz, and Pablo Azócar (García-Corales 221); nevertheless, this generation is not one that is particularly united.¹⁴⁸

Critical pieces such the one written by editor and author Jaime Collyer, “Narrativa que resurge de las cenizas” (“Narrative that Emerges from the Ashes”), and Macarena Areco’s *Cartografía de la novela reciente (Cartography of the Recent Novel)* (2015) chart this literary trend in greater detail:

Agotada esa retórica de la deformación, y la dictadura en sí, entra en escena, a principios de los 90, y en coincidencia con la transición a la democracia, la Nueva Narrativa, acompañada de un debate tan pertinaz como irresuelto ... el fenómeno fue la expresión palpable de una generación de recambio que irrumpió de manera tardía en la escena editorial, se diría que con diecisiete años de retraso, y con la carga de interdicciones que la dictadura impuso a todo el país (Collyer 107).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ “Nona Fernández has been considered by prestigious politicians and writers (as is the case with Juan Armando Epple, Patricia Espinosa, Antonio Skármeta, and Pía Barros) to be among the most relevant figures of the new generational group emerging on the 21st century Chilean literary horizon.” (my trans.)

¹⁴⁸ As Resha S. Cardone points out, there are several terms by which members of this generation are labeled by literary critics, including: “The Generation of 1990”; “The Group of Very Young Writers”; “The McOndo Generation”; “The Emerging Generation”; “The Generation of 1987”; “The Group of Cultural Industry”; and “Generation X” (Cardone 14). However, as she rightly notes, the classification of the McOndo group is often criticized due to, “the scarcity of women writers in one anthology and their complete absence in another [which] is alarming given the importance of female authors of the dictatorship Generation of the 1980s. The editors address this lack in both introductions, attributing it to a deficiency in talent, submissions, and numbers of young women writers at the time” (14). The contribution of women writers to the post-dictatorship generation’s corpus is an understudied area – one I hope to partially address in this chapter.

In fact, in an interview with Fernández, García-Corales highlights the fact that unlike previous “generations” of writers, the post-dictatorship generation is not united under a clear-cut ideology, but rather by “...una rabia muy abstracta, no concretizada en ideas fijas o personas porque no desarrollamos una escritura política” (219) / “... a very abstract rage, not materialized as fixed ideas or people because we never developed political writing.” (my trans.)¹⁵⁰

As Sergio Rojas points out, what unites this particular generation of writers does not follow the typical trend. Fernández herself notes, for example, that none of them are trying to write “la potencial gran novela de la dictadura” or “la llamada novela total” (221) / “... the potential great novel of the dictatorship ... the so-called complete novel...” (my trans.)¹⁵¹ Rather, the members of this “generation” are

¹⁴⁹ “The distorting rhetoric, and the dictatorship itself, come onstage exhausted in the early 90s, coinciding with the transition to democracy, the New Narrative, accompanied by a debate both persistent and unresolved ... the phenomenon was the palpable expression of a substitute generation that barged into the editorial scene late – one could say seventeen years late – and with the charge of interdictions that the dictatorship imposed on the entire country.” (my trans.)

¹⁵⁰ Notes Fernández: “Una vez, conversando con el escritor Carlos Franz, integrante de la generación inmediatamente anterior a la nuestra, me decía que la de nosotros era una generación de rabiosos y que él no entendía tanta rabia porque no llevaba a ninguna parte. Franz no solamente se refería a la gente joven dedicada a la literatura en cuanto al género o novela, sino también hablaba de los cineastas, los dramaturgos y otros creadores o artistas” (García-Corales 219) / “One time I was talking to the writer Carlos Franz, who is part of the generation immediately before ours, and he told me that our generation was full of angry people and he couldn’t understand all that rage because it didn’t lead anywhere. Franz was referring not only to young people in literature, regarding genre or the novel, but also to filmmakers, playwrights, and other creators or artists.” (my trans.)

¹⁵¹ The full quotation from Fernández reads: “Y lo anterior, en cuanto a la forma de ejercer el oficio, es también consistente con la idea de la nueva generación que está lejos de pretender escribir algo así como la llamada novela total o, más específicamente, la potencial gran novela de la dictadura. Yo también creo que no se ha escrito la gran novela que hable de la dictadura e interprete a mucha gente, porque queda mucho que decir al respeto y estamos muy encima” (García-Corales 221) / “And the former, as far as how to perform the role, is also consistent with the idea of a new generation far from claiming to write anything like a so-called complete novel or, more specifically, the potential great novel of the dictatorship. I also think the great novel that talks about the dictatorship and explains it for

brought together by their shared commitment to exploring the period of their youth, and pulling from this blur of daily memories those fragments of the past that help them to construct an active memory of the dictatorship:

En el presente siglo, ha surgido en Chile un conjunto de escritores que, sin corresponder técnicamente al concepto de “generación”, comparten en sus narrativas importantes elementos tanto en estilo como en contenido. Pertenecientes al contexto de la transición política en el país, los personajes rememoran su propio pasado en relatos e imágenes de infancia y juventud, buscando un remedo de historia. En lugar de grandes acontecimientos, encuentran el tiempo de una densa cotidianeidad nunca interrumpida. Esta literatura nos permite reflexionar la emergencia de las memorias de lo cotidiano en el Chile de hoy, cuando la matriz narrativa de la gran historia parece agotada en el imaginario social y un pasado múltiple e insubordinado retorna como la cifra del presente (Rojas 231).¹⁵²

Other critics, such as Mary Lusky Friedman, have pointed out that this group was originally reluctant to enter into conversations about the dictatorship in their early writings – the topic instead shrouded in silence – but that more recently, “...Chileans have begun to reappraise the aftereffects of dictatorship in explicitly political terms. No group more vividly reveals this trajectory from private to public of the Pinochet years than do Chileans born during the 1970s” (613). In her study, she includes authors Álvaro Bisama, Alejandra Costamagna, Nona Fernández, Rafael Gumucio,

people hasn't been written, because there's so much left to say on the subject and we're too close to it.” (my trans.)

¹⁵² “In the present century, a group of writers has emerged in Chile who, without technically conforming to the concept of ‘generation’, share in their narratives important elements of both style and content. As they pertain to the context of political transition in the country, the characters recall their own pasts through stories and images of childhood and youth, in search of some semblance of history. In place of grand occurrences, they find a period of dense and never interrupted everydayness. This literature allows us to reflect on the emergence of everyday memories in today’s Chile, when the narrative mold of History appears to be worn out in the social imagination and a multiple and insubordinate past returns as a code to the present.” (my trans.)

Andrea Jeftanovic, Andrea Maturana, Lina Meruane, Nicolás Poblete, and Alejandro Zambra. She notes that these individuals grew up in Chile, and did not witness the disappearance or torture of their parents: “These younger writers experienced the dictatorship as children and collectively speak as second-generation survivors of Chile’s national trauma” (Friedman 613).

As Resha S. Cardone explains, when Fernández first began writing “around the start of the new millennium” Chile’s democratic transition was supposedly a success; according to her analysis of Fernández’s corpus, the author is both part of a generational response, and also reflects a gendered response to trauma – the themes of her writing sharing a similar focus to those of her female contemporaries:

Yet, even as the transition came to an end in the late 1990s, Chilean narratives, particularly by young women writers like Fernández, continued to express concern with preserving collective memory and with seeking justice for the human rights violations that occurred during the regime (1973-1990) ... [and] tend to represent the traumatic aftereffects of dictatorial rule on those who grew up during the regime, while exploring the negative consequences of the regime’s neoliberal agenda on the people. These writers’ early works spotlight post-totalitarian experiences, exhibiting a confused nation in transition tormented by the dictatorial past and struggling to understand Chile’s present and future (1).¹⁵³

¹⁵³ In her article, Cardone outlines how she sees the work of women-writers of the post-dictatorship generation functioning differently from other sub-groups of contemporary fiction-writers (many of which are male-dominated):

Most literary critics have underestimated the trenchant stance towards post-dictatorial Chilean politics and culture that women of the Generation of 1990 have espoused. Perhaps this is because the contemporaneous McOndo group, founded a few years prior to the emergence of these women writers, captured the attention of literary scholars from Chile and abroad. In two anthologies, *Cuentos con walkman* (“Short Stories with Walkman”) (1993) and *McOndo* (“McOndo”) (1996), Chilean writers Alberto Fuguet (b. 1964) and Sergio Gómez (b. 1962) established the identity of the McOndo group, a pan-Hispanic literary movement comprised almost exclusively of men in their thirties. In the introductions to these collections, Fuguet and Gómez argue that the image of provincial Latin America that magical realism popularized internationally in the 1960s and 1970s misrepresents the globalized,

Other critics have noted that their works tend to focus on “blighted intimate relationships” or the “aftereffects of repression” instead of on blatant references to the dictatorship’s violence (Friedman 612); Andrea Jeftanovic, one of the writers considered to be a part of Fernández’s generation, states that: “...she and her generational peers do unfailingly inscribe a response to dictatorship but that it is repressed *within* the personal sphere” (Friedman 613). Between 2000-2011, Friedman notes a shift in Chilean novels written by those born during the 1970s, whereby the theme of political engagement is much more explicit (614). (*Mapocho*, published in 2002, meets these criteria.) In an article entitled, “Desarraigo y nostalgia: El motivo de la vuelta a casa en tres novelas chilenas recientes” / “Uprooting and Nostalgia: Reasons to Return Home in Three Recent Chilean Novels” by Bieke Willem (2013), Fernández’s writing is grouped with the fiction of two Chilean novelists – Diego Zúñiga and Alejandro Zambra, each of whom published their works after 2000 – and

postmodern milieu in which the young Hispanic writers anthologized in the collections were actually living in the 1990s. They proposed that the dramatic changes generated by neoliberalism, technology, and the region’s entrance into the global village required a renovation of theme and style to match the influences of MTV, music, movies, and the Internet on the lives of young writers. The McOndo group created a literary aesthetic characterized by expendability, utilitarianism, and political apathy that corresponded with Chile’s politics of forgetting as well as with its identity as the testing ground of the neoliberal experiment. Literary critic Javier Campos has rightly argued that the McOndo aesthetic fails to appreciate the heterogeneity of Chilean life and art during the transition. Indeed, the women writers of the Generation of 1990, who are strikingly absent from these anthologies, question the Pinochet regime’s violent installation of neoliberalism while showing how it created widespread inequality and had a damaging emotional effect on the dictatorship’s survivors. In contrast with the McOndo’s group’s uncritical stance toward neoliberalism, the early narratives of these women writers tend to explore the historical, emotional, and environmental wreckage concealed beneath Chile’s tenuous façade of economic and emotional wellbeing (2).

argues that these pieces break from previous fictional responses dedicated to memories of the Chilean dictatorship in that they are not anti-nostalgic, but rather embrace what Svetlana Boym might call a restorative nostalgia; returning home becomes a part of this second generation's examination of memory-spaces.¹⁵⁴

As Rojas puts it: “En sentido estricto, no estamos ante la literatura de una generación, sino ante la *literatura de los hijos de una generación*, y entonces se escribe desde esa condición, la de ‘hijos’, a los que les fue arrebatada la posibilidad de la novela” (240) / “Strictly speaking, we’re not looking at the literature of a generation, but at the literature of the children of a generation, and so it is written from that point of view, that of ‘children’, those who had the possibility of the novel snatched away from them.” (my trans.) He notes that because they were so young during the years of the actual dictatorship, writing becomes the means through which

¹⁵⁴ In more detail: “Es precisamente también la ausencia de muertos la que permite mirar nostálgicamente hacia el pasado y hacia la infancia. Su nostalgia atípica no consiste sin embargo en una vuelta improductiva y paralizadora al pasado, sino en recordar e imaginar activamente este pasado. La postura nostálgica implica además una mirada muy crítica al presente posdictatorial. No en el sentido de que ‘antes, todo era mejor’ (lo que sería la nostalgia restaurativa, según Boym), ni con la intención de escribir un panfleto político o un informe sociológico en formato novela. Antes bien, cabe sostener que en las novelas posdictatoriales nostálgicas se registran de una manera poética las consecuencias a veces nefastas de la sociedad de consumo en la vida cotidiana, la amnesia y la indiferencia que parecen caracterizar al Chile de hoy. Asimismo, se evocan en ellas los pequeños actos de resistencia contra este régimen, que implican más de una vez un deseo de volver a casa” (Willem 156) / “It is also precisely the absence of the dead that allows us to look nostalgically towards the past and towards childhood. Nevertheless, their atypical nostalgia does not consist of some unproductive and paralyzing turn towards the past, but in actively remembering and imagining this past. Nostalgic posturing furthermore implies a very critical look at the postdictatorial present. Not in the sense of ‘everything was better before’ (which would be restorative nostalgia, according to Boym), nor with the intention of writing a political pamphlet or sociological briefing in the form of a novel. It is enough, rather, to claim that nostalgic, postdictatorial novels register in a poetic way the sometimes disastrous consequences of a consumption-based society on daily life, the amnesia and the indifference that seem to characterize modern Chile. Likewise, the small acts of resistance against the regime are evoked, implying on more than one occasion the desire to return home.” (my trans.)

they can remember, as the memories of important political events often blur into the background of their daily memories. As children, they did not have fully-formed recollections of the past; the process of writing fiction allows them to navigate the maze of memories, to transform themselves into the protagonists of their own histories (Rojas 246, 250). *Mapocho* as a novel explores this very process: An orphaned child returned from exile must sort through her scrambled, childhood memories in order to create a history of dictatorship that is a collective, place-based amalgam of stories.

Fernández's literary corpus¹⁵⁵ remains relatively unknown outside of Chile, despite the fact that her work has captured significant attention within Chilean literary circles. *Mapocho* itself has not received much critical attention – either inside or outside of Chile. Writes Cristián Opazo: "...*Mapocho* ha pasado bastante inadvertida para la crítica y el público (solo ha sido reseñada por Sonia Montecino en la revista *Rocinante* [mayo 2002] y su primera y única edición ha sido relegada a las bodegas de las principales librerías de Santiago). No obstante, he querido llamar la atención sobre esta obra, pues, considero que, desde su epígrafe (una cita a 'La amortajada,' de María Luisa Bombal) tiene la osadía de aventurarse en un diálogo (que, a veces, es también remedo) de aquellos textos que han sido institucionalizados por la ley, santificados por la iglesia y tolerados por la tradición" (29).¹⁵⁶ In September of 2011,

¹⁵⁵ In 2000, Fernández published her first short story collection, *El cielo*, followed by the novels *Mapocho* (2002), *Av. 10 de Julio Huamachuco* (2007), and *Fuenzalida* (2012); her latest work, a novella entitled *Space Invaders*, was released in 2013.

¹⁵⁶ "*Mapocho* has gone largely unnoticed by critics and the public (it has only been reviewed by Sonia Montecino in the magazine *Rocinante* [May 2002] and its first and only edition has been relegated to

El país featured Fernández as one of a list of the twenty-five Latin American “literary secrets” in an article entitled, “El secreto se ha desvelado. La Feria del Libro de Guadalajara (México) acaba de anunciar cuáles son los 25 narradores latinoamericanos poco conocidos más allá de sus países pero con un gran potencial” (n/p) / “The secret is revealed. The Book Fair of Guadalajara (Mexico) has just announced the 25 Latin American novelists who are little-known outside of their countries but have great potential.” (my trans.).¹⁵⁷

In a 2014 article entitled “Nona Fernández: juegos de niños, rasgos de época” / “Nona Fernández: Children’s Games, Signs of the Time”, Demian Paredes of *La izquierda diario* emphasizes the importance of this author in the Chilean literary scene and Fernández’s relationship with one of Chile’s most well-known literary figures, Roberto Bolaño:

storage in Santiago’s main bookstores). Nevertheless, I’ve hoped to call attention to this book because, as I see it, from the very epigraph (a quote from ‘La amortijada’ by María Luisa Bombal) it is bold enough to venture into a dialogue (which, at times, is also a parody) with the texts that have been institutionalized by law, sanctified by the church, and tolerated by tradition.” (my trans.)

¹⁵⁷ “Los autores de América Latina que, según la FIL, garantizan el revelo de los grandes escritores latinoamericanos del siglo XX y de los que ya siguen sus pasos en el XXI, reflejan la diversidad y el multiculturalismo en sus apellidos: desde Casas y Muñoz, hasta Umpi y Wynter, pasando por Juárez, Tarazona, Monge, Varas ... Seis mujeres y 19 hombres, de entre los 27 y 55 años de edad, comprometidos básicamente con la literatura y la exploración de nuevas formas de contar. Abordan la condición humana y su entorno a través de mundos íntimos protagonizados por gente común y corriente. Ese sería un retrato panorámico de un grupo de escritores conectado con los derroteros de la literatura internacional contemporánea” (n/p) / “The Latin American authors that, according to the FIL, guarantee the unveiling of the great Latin American writers of the 20th century as well as the ones who are already following in their footsteps in the 21st, reflect the diversity and multiculturalism of their surnames: from Casas and Muñoz, to Umpi and Wynter, all the way through Juárez, Tarazona, Monge, Varas ... Six women and 19 men, between 27 and 55 years of age, basically dedicated to literature and the exploration of new forms of narration. They take on the human condition and its surroundings through intimate worlds protagonized by common and everyday people. That would be a panoramic portrait of a group of writers connected to the currents of contemporary international literature.” (my trans.)

Tras años de exilio, el escritor Roberto Bolaño (1953-2003) regresó a su país, Chile. Y luego de esa experiencia dejó un escrito llamado “Fragmentos de un regreso al país natal” (1999). Publicado en una revista, y luego en el libro-compilación *Entre Paréntesis* (Barcelona, Anagrama, 2004), allí afirmó: “hay una generación de escritores que promete comérselo todo. A la cabeza, claramente se destacan dos. Éstas son Lina Meruane y Alejandra Costamagna seguidas por Nona Fernández y por otras cinco o seis jóvenes armadas con todos los implementos de la buena literatura.” Y no se equivocaba: entre aquellas “jóvenes escritoras chilenas que escriben como demonios” (Bolaño *dixit*), Nona Fernández Silanes les ha dedicado mucha prosa a unos “demonios” (en este caso sin metáfora) muy bien reales; a los del bando contrario, a los de la dictadura (n/p).¹⁵⁸

And, as many of her interviewers highlight, “Nona” has always pushed the envelope, has always had a certain kind of fighting spirit – a desire to question official histories, and to promote through her stories a critical engagement with difficult realities.

An article entitled “Nona Fernández, la escritora multifacética” / “Nona Fernández, a Multifaceted Writer” (published on Elmercurio.com by Natalia Nuñez in May 2012) describes that when Fernández was a small child – growing up in a “vieja, larga, crujiente y fantasmagórica casa de adobe” (n/p) / “a large, old, creaky, and phantasmagorical adobe house” in the neighborhood of Avenida Matta – she hardly spoke. However: “Lo único que sabía decir era el monosílabo, tajante, ‘no’” (n/p) / “The only thing she could say was the unequivocal, monosyllabic, ‘no’” (my trans.)

¹⁵⁸ “After many years of exile, writer Roberto Bolaño (1953-2003) returned to his country, Chile. And after that experience he produced a writing called, “Fragments of a Return to a Country of Birth” (1999). Published in a magazine, and then in the compilation *In Parenthesis* (Barcelona, Anagrama, 2004), he there affirmed: ‘There’s a generation of writers that promises to eat up everything. Off the top of my head, two of them stick out clearly. They are Lina Meruane and Alejandra Costamanga, followed by Nona Fernández and five or six other young women equipped with all of the tools of good literature.’ And he wasn’t mistaken: among those ‘young Chilean writers that write like demons’ (Bolaño *dixit*), Nona Fernández Silanes has dedicated much prose to some very real ‘demons’ (in this case without metaphor): to the people from the other camp, to the dictatorship.” (my trans.)

For this reason, she was given the nickname “Nonito,” which later turned into “Nona.” As Nuñez points out, this name has served her well: “...a la Nona le gusta llevar la contraria, ser amiga del desasosiego, de las movilizaciones, de la irreverencia. Le gusta poner sobre el tapete temas incómodos, intenta iluminar con su pluma y acercar con ella asuntos que se creían olvidados...” (n/p).¹⁵⁹ She took an activist stance during the dictatorship, participating in assemblies and protests, was a member of student groups, and found herself engaged in public demonstrations: “Vivió esos tiempos de dictadura, de esa dictadura de barrios céntricos, esa que abre los ojos. Con distintas mixturas y con la labor de tener que hacer ‘todo’ colectivamente” (Sánchez n/p).¹⁶⁰ It is with this experience that Fernández writes. She paints a vivid picture of the changes she witnessed during the period of dictatorship, as she urges her reader to actively engage in the space of the city, to say “no” to official historical narratives, and to fight for a more inclusive and varied picture of the memory pieces that make up the puzzle of trauma and its fragmented aftermath.

The Post-Dictatorship Generation, Acts of Memory

As works such as Nelly Richard’s *Cultural Residues: Chile in Transition* (1998, translation 2008) make clear, the transitional period between dictatorship and

¹⁵⁹ “Nona likes to be contrary, to be a friend to unrest, to movements, to irreverence. She likes to put uncomfortable topics on the table, she tries to illuminate with her pen and broach topics that were believed to be forgotten.” (my trans.)

¹⁶⁰ Alejandra Sánchez, *La Pollera*, September 29th, 2008: “She lived through those times of dictatorship, the dictatorship of central neighborhoods, that opens your eyes. With distinctive mixtures and with the labor of having to do ‘everything’ collectively.” (my trans.)

democracy elided a direct address of the legacy of authoritarianism.¹⁶¹ In the introduction to Richard's work, Jean Franco describes a kind of "consensus effect" that took place post-dictatorship:

What happened to the remnants of the militant and the democratic left in the postdictatorship? Returning from exile or emerging from clandestinity, they found themselves in a different world. Older systems of meaning were eroded and old loyalties and principles had become irrelevant (viii) ... Those whose relatives were among the disappeared would find their efforts to discover their fate frustrated while demands for accountability were lost in the babble of the marketplace (ix).

How does Fernández – who grew up under the dictatorship – engage with her peers and the generations that follow? How does she provoke an interaction with these pasts that have long been ignored, covered up, or made silent?

Ana Ros dedicates an important theoretical work to the study of the "post-dictatorship" or, in Fernández' words, the "guacha" generation in Chile. In her piece, *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay: Collective*

¹⁶¹ In Richard's words:

The consensual mode of a "democracy of agreements" formulated by the Chilean government of the Transition (1989) marked a passage from politics as antagonism (the dramatization of conflict governed by a mechanism of confrontation under dictatorship) to a politics of transaction (the formula of a pact and its techniques of negotiation). The "democracy of agreements" made consensus its normative guarantee, its oppositional key, its de-ideologizing ideology, its institutional rite, and its discursive trophy.

What overflows did the consensus try to limit, in attempting to force a unanimity of voices and conduct related to the formal and technical rationalization of agreement? An overflowing of names (the dangerous revolt of words that disseminate their heterodox meanings in order to name what is hidden – repressed outside the official networks of designation); an overflowing of bodies and experiences (the discordant ways in which social subjectivities break the ranks of identity normalized by the political script or the publicity spot with its zigzagging imaginary lines of escape); an overflowing of memories (the tumultuous reinterpretations of the past that maintain the memory of history open to an incessant struggle of readings and meanings) (15).

Memory and Cultural Production (2012),¹⁶² Ros – who was born in Uruguay in 1976 and who considers herself to be a part of this generational experience – tries to define exactly what marks this group, what factors are the most influential in carving out a space for dialogue, and what ways are most appropriate for reflecting upon this complex and difficult historical moment. Defining the “post-dictatorship generation” as one that grew up under authoritarian regimes, Ros notes that in Chile – where the dictatorship lasted seventeen years – children never experienced anything but military rule (4). Ros outlines the diversity of possible relationships to politics and dictatorship, but emphasizes the fact that regardless of family involvement, everyone was affected by the regime: the children of “bystanders” who “grew up in an environment of fear, distrust, and isolation”; the children of activist parents who spent the dictatorship in exile, in prison, or underground; and children who were orphaned or raised by parents connected to the military, unaware of their true biological families (4). She highlights the tangle of stories that orbited in the public sphere in the aftermath of dictatorship, and the confusing process by which this generation, coming of age in the “post” dictatorship, sorted through the many, and often conflicting, versions of historical memory available to them:

For these children’s parents, the dictatorship is related to traumatic memories they were unable to evoke or painful experiences they prefer not to revisit. Additionally, in the public sphere, representatives of the armed forces, the government, and the human rights associations defended conflicting narratives about the meaning of the dictatorial repression. In lieu of a historicized perspective and an analysis of different actors’ involvement, the post-dictatorship generation had to

¹⁶² See also Susana Kaiser’s *Postmemories of Terror: A New Generation Copes with the Legacy of the “Dirty War”* (2005) – although Kaiser’s work focuses specifically on post-dictatorship Argentina.

make do with the precept of remembering the military crimes in order to “never again” live through this kind of horror. This caused a state of confusion: How were such atrocities between the groups and individuals around them possible? How was one to prevent crimes committed by armed forces supposed to protect the collectivity? How was one to conceive of positive change after so many were tortured and murdered for wanting a better world? The present appeared enigmatic, and the future became a minefield. As a consequence, many members of the post-dictatorship generation became indifferent and were unable to relate their anger and frustration about the present to a conflictive past that also held the key to social change (Ros 4).

It is precisely in this environment of conflicting historical narrations – of competing versions of the past, of knotted memories – that Fernández’s work is situated.

Through fiction, she addresses the particular legacy left to her contemporaries in the period of post-dictatorship, and animates the fragmented puzzle-pieces inherited from her parent’s too-often silent generation.

Mapocho engages with memory practices through physical sites and urban space. In order to better situate the novel’s interaction with both concrete sites of memory, and the ghostly remains and traces of places lost to the post-dictatorship generation, I provide a brief exploration of Chilean commemorative practices. Many memorial sites are re-visited via the pages of Fernández’s fiction, and inscribed with new meanings. Therefore, it is useful to provide my reader with some contextualization before delving into the work itself. Ultimately, I argue that *Mapocho* serves as a kind of counter-memory map, a novelized practice of cartographic charting – one that digs beneath the façade of the modernized city in part to recover some of these buried sites. Acknowledging the presence of these neglected

memorial places proves essential to cultivating a practice of active memory in the present.

As Michael Lazzara notes in his 2006 *Prismas de la memoria: narración y trauma en la transición chilena*, one of the lasting effects of the dictatorship was the transformation of cityscape – felt particularly in the country’s capital city of Santiago. In Lazzara’s words, “Durante la dictadura, Santiago se transformó en una gigantesca escena de crimen”... and after the dictatorship the so-called “democracy of agreements” allowed for the complete erasure of the visible signs of this violence that played out across the urban topography: “...hoy es difícil mapear los vestigios de la violencia política en el actual espacio urbano modernizado y neoliberal de la capital chilena” (201).¹⁶³ I follow Lazzara’s argument that physical commemorative sites are fundamentally necessary for the passing on or transference of memory to subsequent generations. However, these urban spaces must be narrated or represented in ways that make the sites understandable – intelligible to those who have not had firsthand experience with these places of traumatic history. I assert that Fernández’s novel steps in as a kind of urban guide or map; while there may be important sites of memory preserved within the landscape of post-dictatorship Chile, without some form of storytelling there is no means of passing on this knowledge. Her novel, which was written as these struggles for memorialization began to take center stage, recovers these lost traces and acknowledges that no violence can ever be truly erased

¹⁶³ “During the dictatorship, Santiago became a giant crime scene today it’s difficult to map the traces of political violence on the current modernized and neoliberal urban space of the Chilean capital.” (my trans.)

from the landscape. Fernández recovers the ghostly remains of these sites of memory, urging her readers to be attentive to the lost urban geography of state sponsored violence. The reorganizing forces of Pinochet's policies of privatization and neo-liberalism forever changed pre-dictatorship Santiago.

Villa Grimaldi: The Process of Memorialization and Fernández's Novel

While the site of Villa Grimaldi – a country estate turned torture and detention center by Chilean secret police, DINA (Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional), between 1974 and 1978, and transformed in the post-dictatorship landscape into a “Peace Park” – is never explicitly mentioned in Fernández's novel, the effort to memorialize the space serves as an interesting case study. The place is very much a part of the city's imaginary – an integral feature of the post-dictatorship landscape of Santiago. Examining the process by which the site was explicitly marked as one of collective memory in the urban fabric provides an interesting “real world” parallel for those neglected places of remembering signaled by the novel itself (forgotten neighborhoods, crumbled bridges, the debris of lost communities in the la Chimba district of Santiago...)

Teresa Meade describes the history of this site in her article “Holding the Junta Accountable: Chile's ‘Sitios de Memoria’ and the History of Torture, Disappearance, and Death” (2001). To paraphrase, in the 19th century, the space was owned by José Arrieta, an Uruguayan aristocrat, and later passed into the hands of Emilio Vasallo, who used the building as a weekend house (and where he ironically entertained such leftist guests as Pablo Neruda and Gabriel García Márquez). In the

1970s, the villa was acquired by the military, and given to DINA in 1974. It was later occupied by the CNI (National Intelligence Council) and was sold in 1987 to General Hugo Salas Wenzel who planned on developing the land into a complex of luxury condominiums (127). The changes inflicted upon this physical landscape speak to the project of economic transformation and neoliberal reforms championed by the military dictatorship – a project that persisted in its aftermath. As the result of a public campaign during the democratic transition (1990), the site was returned to the government – but only after all of the original buildings were torn down in anticipation of the real-estate development project. How do you create a place of memory – one capable of narrating traumatic pasts to new generations of Chileans – on a site constituted solely of fragments and traces of buildings that no longer exist?

As Meade suggests, the transition’s “center-left democracy” sought to reconcile the economy of the free market with social programs – what she describes as an “uneasy balance between ... the goals of Allende’s democratic socialism” and “Pinochet’s brutal neoliberalism” (124). While the government began in the 1990s to establish certain historical markers in recognition of those who were tortured and disappeared during the dictatorship, Meade critiques these memorial efforts because they did not coincide (as in the case of South Africa post-apartheid, for example) with legal trials of war criminals: “The memory sites thus exist as monuments to the contradictions of Chilean society and to the fragility of its democracy” (125).

More importantly, both Meade and Diana Taylor reflect upon their personal experiences visiting Villa Grimaldi – curated by camp survivor and volunteer tour

guide, Pedro Matta. The space of the memory park itself is sparse; it consists of tiled pathways that connect various placards, describing what once was located at the site. A replica of the camp in miniature helps the visitor to envision what it was like for the prisoner. The only tangible object in the landscape is a fountain, representing hope in the post-dictatorship era. Therefore, it is Matta's story that brings the empty, fragmented, and ruinous place to life, as his personal testimony and passage through space re-animate the histories and trauma inscribed across its surface.

Taylor paints a picture of what it is like for the visitor to walk through these now empty spaces: "Parece un lugar en ruinas o en obra, hay algunos viejos escombros e indicios de nuevas construcciones, un espacio de transición entre el pasado y el futuro" (n/p) / "It looks like a place in ruins or under construction, with old rubble and signs of new projects, a space transitioning between the past and the future." (my trans.) As she passes through the park, she asks herself about the future of the site, wondering what will happen when there are no longer survivors of torture who can narrate this history directly. She notes that Matta has decided to self-publish a guide to Villa Grimaldi – one that faithfully records the exact narration he provides to tourists (Taylor asserts that Matta recites an almost identical account of his story on each of his guided visits, repeating his testimony over and over again). This document: "...se trata de un mapa doble: en una capa aparece el campo de tortura, mientras que en la otra capa semitransparente de papel cebolla se delinea el Parque de la Paz ... Una línea de puntos rojos traza el recorrido exactamente como Matta lo

realiza ... El trauma vive en el cuerpo, no en el archivo” (n/p).¹⁶⁴ This last line begs an important question; if memory lives in the body (not in the archive) then what happens when this memory reaches the second generation (and beyond)? What happens when we can only animate the almost dead space of the park via recorded memory, and not through Matta’s direct resurrection and mediation of these now literally ruinous pasts?

This particular memorial site presents an important question and concern for future generations of Chileans: What takes place when the generation who experienced this trauma directly and corporeally is no longer physically present, no longer able to reanimate these seemingly empty spaces? Reflects Meade:

While the memory sites are open to the public, without an informed guide it is questionable that the average international tourist, or even Chilean resident, could learn much history from visiting them. As such, the current democratic government has fulfilled an obligation to commemorate the memory of the victims of the military regime, but has not stepped into the volatile territory of drawing lessons from the brutality and human rights violations that regime carried out ... Ironically, most of the well-known monuments to the disappeared and to the Allende government are in a cemetery, a place that marks dead memories (126).¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ “...it deals with a double map: the torture camp appears in one layer, while the Peace Park is outlined in another layer of semitransparent tracing paper ... a line of red dots traces the path exactly as Matta takes it ... Trauma lives in the body, not in the archive.” (my trans.)

¹⁶⁵ Meade continues: “The scarcity of resources devoted to establishing a public record of what happened in the torture centers, and to finding and accounting for those who disappeared, serves the purpose of those in Chile who would just as soon the profundity of the antihuman behavior of the Pinochet era remained an abstraction. For the right-wing Alianza Popular, relegating the ugly picture of torture and brutality to an obscure past allows them to ignore any responsibility for the death, disappearance, and torture they supported. On the other hand, from the vantage point of the moderate ... left Concertación, acknowledging the abuse, while refusing to press for reparations or to hold the military responsible for human rights violations, allows them to govern without confrontation” (135-36).

In closing, Meade turns to the present day use of the park – a space in which she sees local youth gathering, but where she notes very little transmission of difficult pasts. It reminds her of playing on top of the Indian burial mounds in the rural Midwest of her childhood: “They were a curious novelty from another era, and since we never read about Native Americans in any depth in our school books, we presumed they were of no importance” (132). Clearly, it is not enough to merely establish these sites; they must be actively made relevant in the public sphere through continual processes of narration and storytelling. These places – no longer animated by natural social practices – must be mediated.

In her 2009 work, *Where Memory Dwells*, Macarena Gómez-Barris also looks at the places where the memory of historical violence lingers in the Chilean landscape – a landscape she characterizes as transformed by the forces of dictatorship and the will to forget. In her analysis, she includes the site of Villa Grimaldi: “Only later did I realize that open space signified erasure. If there is nothing for the mind to grasp, and there is no evidence of history – or is there? What are the traces of history that one follows for evidence of social reality?” (50) ... “Perhaps such excesses cannot be monumentalized in places themselves, but rather in the passage through places” (72). It is precisely this question of “passage through places” that I take up in the remainder of this chapter. Can the novel serve as a means of virtually passing through place? Can it help its reader to look at seemingly static space or long neglected corners of the city in a new light?

As Taylor suggests, there are political implications associated with the act of charting new memory-paths: “Su recorrido, al igual que la marcha de las Madres, es ejemplo de lo que se vuelve espectáculo – una sociedad en la que los sistemas judiciales difícilmente pueden llevar a los criminales ante la justicia ... los sistemas económicos rapaces que desaparecen poblaciones enteras. Sin embargo, el recorrido, al igual que la marcha, también hace visible los senderos de la memoria que conservan otra topografía del lugar y la práctica, no del terror sino de la resistencia, de la voluntad no sólo de vivir sino de mantener vivo el recuerdo” (n/p).¹⁶⁶ This is also the role of the novel – as it challenges those “official” narratives that attach themselves to the built environment. Fiction allows the reader to enter into imaginary and imagined relationships with space without the danger of “fixing” any one of these accounts as the final truth.

Fiction might avoid the pitfalls of what Richard directly addresses as the “monumentalizing” of collective memory in the public sphere via more traditional forms of memorialization: “Tribunals, commissions, and monuments to human rights regularly quote memory (they mention her) but leave aside from their diligent wording all the wounded substance of remembrance: the psychic density, the magnitude of experience, the emotional wake, the scarring of something unforgettable that resists being submissively molded into perfunctory forms of judicial procedure or

¹⁶⁶ “His path, just like the marching of the Mothers, is an example of something turning into spectacle – a society in which judicial systems can hardly bring criminals to justice ... rapacious economic systems that disappear entire populations. Nevertheless, the path, like the march, also makes visible the trails of memory that preserve another topography of place and practice, not of terror, but resistance, of the will not only to live but also to keep memory alive.” (my trans.)

inscription on an institutional plaque” (17). In this respect, perhaps the unfinished quality of the memory site of Villa Grimaldi prompts a more open form of memory work in that no one version of the past has been fixed to the space. Rather, understanding place depends upon acts of narration. As Gómez-Barris points out in her work, the empty nature of the park allows it to act like a kind of theater. She writes that the former camp becomes a stage for the performance of “microhistories” – and that these personal stories – that like Matta’s memories are so dependent upon their connection to physical space – become integral to the quest for intergenerational transmissions of difficult pasts (41). It is here that I weave in the question of storytelling, and argue that fiction itself might provide a platform for more of these “microhistories”, allowing myriad stories to circulate around these types of memory nodes without fixing any one official version of the past to memorial space. As Taylor questions, “... ¿cuál es el objetivo de la visita? ¿Qué experiencia podemos tener al estar físicamente en un campo de muerte una vez que los indicadores han desaparecido? ¿Acaso el espacio en sí transmite los hechos?” (n/p).¹⁶⁷ This last question is a curious one – how can a space itself transmit difficult histories? Is space meaningful without narration?

As I return to my analysis of the novel itself, I note that the fragmented remains of the reality of violence during dictatorship – splinters of the past that stubbornly refuse to be erased from the present-day cityscape – echo the form of the

¹⁶⁷ “...what’s the purpose of the visit? What experience can we have being physically in a death camp once the outward signs have disappeared? Does the space itself transmit the facts?” (my trans.)

puzzle pieces evoked by Fernández in her statement about the incomplete memories left to the post-dictatorship generation by their parents. In the interview that I presented in the opening of the chapter, Fernández asserts that narration (and importantly in this context, specifically “*fictionalization*”) is the first step towards placing these jigsaw pieces into meaningful constellations. While Villa Grimaldi is never explicitly mentioned in the novel, other sites of memory officially recognized by the transitional government are: the General Cemetery of Santiago with its memorial wall, and Patio 29 which houses the unmarked graves of many of the disappeared. The physical ruins that remain buried in the modern city demand narration – and in doing so – prompt a new kind of engagement with urban space: “Una vez que las ruinas han sido desenterradas, deben ser activadas, entretrejidas en un contexto narrativo. Como el arqueólogo que desentierra fragmentos de un pasado hecho trizas, quien recuerda debe decidir *qué hacer* con los fragmentos de la memoria; debe decidir *cómo usarlos y qué forma darles*” (Lazzara 207).¹⁶⁸

Memory-Mapping: *Mapocho* as Counter-Map

“Se muestra una ciudad que huye de sí misma, incómoda, a la vez que una ciudad de visiones encontradas donde se privilegia lo provisional, un imbucho de capas de mentiras que cubre todos nuestros rincones” (Andrea Jęftanovic on the novel).

“We see a city that runs away from itself, uncomfortable, and at the same time a city of found visions where the provisional is privileged, layer upon layer of lies that covers all of our corners.” (my trans.)

¹⁶⁸ “Once the ruins have been unburied, they need to be activated, woven into a narrative context. Like the archeologist who unburies fragments of a shattered past, whoever remembers must decide *what to do* with the memory fragments; he must decide *how to use them* and *what shape to give them*.” (my trans.)

At the very start of the novel, Fernández alludes to the idea of a liminal space between life and death. For Fernández, this space of indeterminacy holds possibility; as the quotation from Jeftanovic suggests, *Mapocho* privileges the provisional, the moments and states in which the cityscape, coated in layers of historical lies, can be read in different ways – ones that open up towards new ways of imagining the future. The first page includes a quotation from one of Latin American literature’s most well-known stories of ghostly haunting – Chilean author María Luisa Bombal’s *La amortajada* (*The Shrouded Woman*) (1938). Fernández pulls herself into this literary lineage: “Había sufrido la muerte de los vivos. Ahora anhelaba la inmersión total, la segunda muerte: la muerte de los muertos” / “She had suffered the death of the living. Now she longed for total immersion, a second death: the death of the dead.” (my trans.) *Mapocho* draws upon this special state of existence – on the idea of haunting and the implication that it brings memories of the unsettled past into the living world of the present – to create a ghostly picture of post-dictatorship Santiago.

Fernández depicts a city whose contours glisten with neon lights and modern façades, but whose streets are unsettled by the haunting presence of overlapping ghosts – each corresponding to distinct moments of troubled national history. This novel has an extremely complex plot – its characters’ movements through the city weave together an exploration of the evolution of the La Chimba neighborhood (which translates from the Quechua to mean “de la otra banda” / “from the other group”, “del otro lado” / “from the other side”) – a traditionally indigenous and working class sector of Santiago, historically situated at a distance from the urban

center, on the opposite side of the Mapocho River that runs through the city. The work traces the details of this zone's incorporation into the cityspace at large via the personification of the Calicanto bridge – now lost and buried under the river's water – a project that initially integrated the neighborhood into the growing urban landscape. It touches upon the figure of Bernardo O'Higgins, founding father and architect of the Cementerio General that is located in this neighborhood, and highlights the history of myriad structural injustices faced by its inhabitants from the time of the Conquest to the military dictatorship. In order to recognize the buried pasts, a special practice of walking, and thereby of reading the cityspace, must be invoked by this member of the second generation.

As I explore this notion of haunting, I turn to two different works that outline some of the functions of ghosts in stories of place: Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997) and María del Pilar Blanco's *Ghost-Watching American Modernity* (2012). Through the story of *Mapocho*, I chart a case study for the fundamental ways in which the presence of a ghost can render seemingly familiar, predictable, or hegemonically scripted cityspace suddenly unfamiliar, and easily digestible histories complex, messy, and indeterminate. As Gordon notes, "...the ghost is not just the sign ... that a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (8). The novel is full of cases in which the ghost guides the reader into a confrontation with place – making clear the connection between lived experience, lived memory, and

lost social subjects who have been erased due to the violence of dictatorship. As Gordon elaborates, the ghost is someone who pulls us into a kind of affective encounter – one in which we might not otherwise willingly participate: “Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition” (8). La Rucia’s ghostly state allows the reader to see through her eyes lost cityspaces intimately connected to lost modes of living in La Chimba. Her unique way of seeing engages us in this practice of “transformative recognition” of the contours of Santiago. Suddenly, vestiges of violent pasts become visible – and these are not limited to the most immediate memories of dictatorship. A kind of archaeological coring takes place in which multiple layers of trauma’s traces reveal themselves as tangible parts of a lived landscape. In fact, these neglected histories and the rubble they have left behind literally form the foundations for the shiny new buildings that mark the contemporary skyline.

Building on Gordon’s work, Del Pilar Blanco calls for a practice of “ghost-watching” – an activity she describes as a special way of perceiving space within literary or cinematic texts (1). She notes that this act necessarily evokes the obligation to “mobilize” “other temporalities into the present, and an electrification of the specters that move across these spaces in order to yield a critical history and literature” (6). This is precisely what the movement of la Rucia produces. As her body traverses the surface of the city, a counter-history emerges as she encounters

other ghostly figures in the context of their place-based specificity. Del Pilar Blanco instructs us to think of ghosts as “commentaries on how subjects conceive present and evolving spaces and localities” – a practice she defines as a “present-progressive conception of haunting” (6): “Ghost-watching is a particular way of reading perceptions of space within a given text” (1). In other words, a reader of a haunted text must be particularly attentive to the tangle of past, present, and possible openings into alternative futures that a given landscape marked by the presence of a ghost makes visible.

I question: What kind of cartography does the text of *Mapocho* map across the landscape of Santiago, as a ghost of the second generation – one without intimate, lived knowledge of the cityspace itself – comes into contact with the ghostly traces of lives intricately bound to place-based experience? How does she come to experience the reality of a country she was born in, but no longer remembers? How can the direct witness pass on a complex and nuanced history of trauma to the second generation (and beyond) when the encounter with the past has already rendered them spectral – incapable of serving as living testimony? As I investigate la Rucia’s pathways through her birth city, I focus on this idea of memory transmission, and on the connection between lived spaces of remembrance and the physical environment. How can place-based narration facilitate the intergenerational passing of difficult pasts?

In an opening scene, after receiving a mysterious call from her brother to join him in their natal home, la Rucia sits overlooking the Mapocho River for the first time since she was exiled. She studies a map of the city’s layout on the back of a

telephone book, and compares it to the skyline before her, trying to reconcile her fuzzy childhood memories with a landscape that has been radically transformed during her time in exile:

Santiago cambió el rostro. Como una serpiente desprendiéndose del cuerpo usado, la ciudad se ha sacudido plazas, casonas viejas, boticas y almacenes del barrio, cines de matiné, canchas de fútbol, quioscos, calles adoquinadas. Santiago removió sus costras y ahora ellas se van por los aires, vuelvan en la memoria de la Rucia que, sentada en una cocinería frente al Mapocho, con el espinazo de un congrio mosqueado en su plato, trata de identificar en el mapa de la guía telefónica que le ha prestado algo que le suene familiar, algo que le parezca conocido (19).¹⁶⁹

A fly – feet oily from landing in her meal – perches on the telephone book in front of her, and proceeds to leave chaotic and confused tracks across the map of urban space; la Rucia realizes the extent to which the city has changed, and the near impossibility of the quest for the kind of homecoming she desires. How can she locate the family home in the midst of such an altered landscape? Where can she find the footprints of her elusive father, the memories of her grandmother, the ghost of her brother, within this radically transfigured labyrinth of streets? She decides the only possible path is to follow the river itself – a geographical feature that weaves its way through the entirety of the city, a journey that will allow for a panoramic view of both time and space: “Pero el Mapocho es grande, cruza la ciudad completa. Tendría que recorrerlo

¹⁶⁹ “Santiago changed its face. Like a snake wriggling out of its used body, the city has shed plazas, old mansions, drugstores and neighborhood shops, matinee cinemas, soccer fields, kiosks, cobblestone streets. Santiago picked its scabs and now they’re gone with the wind – they return to the memory of la Rucia who, seated in a restaurant facing the Mapocho, with eel bones on her plate, tries to identify on the map on the back of a phonebook someone had lent her something recognizable, something familiar.” (my trans.)

entero, desde la cordillera hacia abajo, para poder encontrar algo que la ubicara y la llevara a su barrio de infancia, y con todos los cambios que han hecho, con tanto aviso de neón, tanta vitrina de color maquillándolo todo, se hace muy difícil” (20).¹⁷⁰

La Rucia will have to learn to read the city differently in order to decipher the unfamiliar environment. The book becomes a cartographical project – a process of map-making that takes into account communal forms of identity making.¹⁷¹

Overwhelmed by the maze-like footprints of the fly, La Rucia solicits help. As she asks about her old family home – memories that are narrated in her head as fairytales, “érase una vez...” / “once upon a time...” La Rucia tries to describe its location in the only way she knows how: through intimate stories about place. She sketches for the woman the steps upon which her father used to tell never-ending stories and perform magic tricks for the local children, where the neighborhood used to gather to watch friendly soccer games on Saturdays. Her memories of the *barrio*

¹⁷⁰ “But the Mapocho is big, it crosses the whole city. She would have to follow the whole thing down from the mountain range before she could find something to orient her and guide her to her childhood neighborhood, and with all of the changes that they’ve made, with so many neon signs, so many colorful storefront makeovers, it is difficult.” (my trans.)

¹⁷¹ This is a conception of geography that is based on the premise that space is inherently linked to social practice: “En la lectura de la novela pareciera que se está ‘dibujando’ un mapa pero no en el sentido del trazado de una hoja sino de recrear un mapa con las distintas percepciones o visiones de la ciudad para finalmente esbozar un proceso de construcción de identidad. En una urbe son muchos los espacios ‘condensadores de temporalidad’ en los que mito e historia se entrecruzan, y en donde se superponen no sólo las representaciones de lo visible sino las de la memoria individual y colectiva, referentes connotativos no siempre vividos, sino también ‘aprendidos’ o simplemente ‘leídos,’ o bien confesados, conversados, relatos heredados” (Jeftanovic 83) / “In reading the novel it would seem that a map is being drawn but not in the sense of tracing on a page, but of recreating a map with distinctive perceptions or visions of the city so as to sketch a process of constructing identity. In the metropolis, there are many spaces of ‘temporal condensation’ in which myth and history are interwoven, and in which representations of the visible and also individual and collective memories are superimposed, connotative referents that are not only lived, but also ‘learned’ or well-confessed, spoken about, inherited stories.” (my trans.)

involve a living space, and depend upon locating specific place-based practices. However, the restaurant owner denies her this possibility, rejecting the idea that this is a valid means of navigating cartography. The woman warns her that not many homes like these exist anymore – old mansions that have been torn down to make way for modern office towers – and that buildings in Santiago are well-ordered, have been organized by systems of numbering. It should not be difficult to find, she suggests, if la Rucia can determine the exact address: “Yo no sé qué idea tendrá usted de nosotros, pero aquí es muy raro que alguien pregunte por una casa. Aquí las casas tienen número y están dispuestas en calles con nombre y apellido, si no somos nada aborígenes, estamos bien organizados, desde la Conquista hasta el día de hoy que nuestras casas tienen ubicación exacta para que la gente y las cartas lleguen sin problemas” (22).¹⁷² By insisting upon a particular way of ordering space, the restaurant owner denies the power of la Rucia’s memories; they have become obsolete recollections, ones that no longer serve in the well-ordered city.

However, la Rucia’s childhood home does not belong to this era of numbering and organization, but to a past way of ordering her neighborhood. These are memories of now dead spatial practices attaching themselves to sites in decay or ruin, to places destroyed or erased in the urban landscape. The location of this childhood space in ruins escapes a totalizing system, and la Rucia must find alternative ways of

¹⁷² “I don’t know what idea you have about us, but here it’s very strange for someone to ask about a house. Here the houses have an address and are located on streets with first and last names, since we’re not aboriginal at all, we’re well organized, from the Conquest until today our houses have an exact location so that people and letters arrive without problems.” (my trans.)

locating its position within the city (22). She turns to oral history and storytelling, to memories of the ghosts that haunt and disrupt the order of the modern city, to find her place; she must exist in the margins, and utilize these equally marginal stories to unravel her complicated role within a city whose script has no clear cut place for her.

As *Mapocho* progresses, the reader learns more about how la Rucia and her brother came to be written out of the story of national belonging. Chronological time is jumbled in the novel, and scenes cut in and out of memories pertaining to their childhood in exile. Through these snippets of the past, it is revealed that the children are haunted by their mother's pain and sadness that follow her to the unnamed and remote Mediterranean island on which they have settled. The mother weeps every night, nursing incurable wounds on her legs wrapped in permanent bandages – bandages that are described as a kind of second skin, as a “cuero postizo” (25). When the children question their mother, she replies that she remembers things that cannot be erased, but that “...son cosas con las que ustedes no tienen por qué cargar” (27) / “...they're things you have no reason to take on.” (my trans.) She explains that they need not be afraid of her screams – that she does not really return to these “lugares lejanos y terribles” / “terrible, faraway places,” but rather the task is undertaken by another part of herself – “otra” (27) / “someone else.” When la Rucia and her brother question where she travels in her dreams, they are faced with a pregnant silence. She tells the children that their father died in a neighborhood fire, and they ritually bury his photograph (39). However, despite the mother's best efforts to create a clean

break between the past and the present, half-formed memories haunt the children and consume them.

While they live in isolation, the children question the constant stream of money that keeps them alive. The brother, a painter, develops a fixation with bellybuttons – especially his twin sister’s. The two of them become embroiled in an incestuous relationship. Their forbidden liaison revolves around the recovery of violent and equally forbidden histories (their names evoke images of the Conquest – the blonde and the Indian). The couple obsesses over origins. Their mother’s refusal to speak eclipses their own lives, and el Indio becomes consumed with finding out answers, with understanding where he came from: What has happened to his father? What is the underlying cause of his mother’s perpetual suffering? Where does the mysterious money come from?

To echo some of the ideas presented in Marianne Hirsch’s *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, the children exemplify what she defines as the state of belonging to a generation of “post”-memory:

To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue in the present (5).

Fernández uses a different term to describe this phenomenon – one that refers to the figure of the orphan or *guacho*. These children are “orphaned” because even though their parents are alive, they have been entirely consumed by traumatic memories.

They essentially live as ghosts even before their physical deaths. This state of existence leaves la Rucia and el Indio virtually parentless, as they are forced to negotiate and sift through these glimpses and traces of the traumatic past alone – without mediation from the previous generation:

Guacho es el que no tiene padres. El que es echado al mundo a la buena de Dios. Ése que no es deseado ni querido, al que prefieren olvidar en algún rincón. El que no tiene casa, el que vaga de un lugar a otro, ése que no sabe donde echar raíces porque nunca las tuvo. Guacho es el que tiene que inventarse el mundo solo. Se crea su pasado, sus referentes, sus modelos. Idea las respuestas y las preguntas, establece sus límites, sus formas de actuar, de vivir, porque no hay parámetros que le sirvan de guía. Nadie ayuda al guacho, nadie le da una manito. El guacho hace de madre cariñosa y de padre consejero, es un engendro triple metido en un solo cuerpo. Él mismo se acaricia y se lame las heridas, se aconseja y a veces hasta se reprende. El guacho lleva una carga pesada. Tiene que vivir su vida y además hacer el trabajo del par de pelotudos que lo echaron al mundo y después se hicieron los huevones (167).¹⁷³

When el Indio literally ghosts the entire family in the deadly car crash, he makes it physically, as well as mentally, impossible for the twins to have a life separate from their parents and beyond one another. As la Rucia and el Indio walk through Santiago, they have no possible way forward, but rather must live as “ánimas en pena” (lost souls), paying for the sins of their parents. It is only by actively listening

¹⁷³ “A *guacho* is someone without parents. Someone left alone to his fate in the world. Someone who is not wanted or loved, who others would prefer to forget in some corner. Someone who doesn’t have a house, someone who wanders from one place to another, someone who doesn’t know where to put down roots because he’s never had them. *Guacho* is someone who has to invent the world for himself. He creates his past, his referents, his models. He thinks up his answers and his questions, sets his limits and his behavior, his way of life, because there are no parameters to serve him as a guide. No one helps the *guacho*, no one lends him a helping hand. The *guacho* plays the role of the loving mother and the wise father, he’s a triune fetus stuffed into a single body. He cradles himself and licks his own wounds, gives himself advice and sometimes even scolds himself. The *guacho* carries a heavy load. He has to live his life and also do the job of the pair of jerks who cast him out into the world, and then ducked out.” (my trans.)

to the traces of the past that have eclipsed their own future that some sort of opening is carved from the overwhelming layers of traumatic history that coat the city's surface.

La Rucia's subsequent routes begin to chart for the reader a kind of guide to a practice of walking through space that will uncover a counter-history of Santiago. She situates herself spatially by locating "el poto de la Virgen." This unusual landmark refers to the twenty-two-meter statue of the Virgin Mary that sits atop the Cerro San Cristóbal – a hill that was also used for orientation during the founding of the city by the Spanish. The statue – which is lit up at sundown – is a landmark visible day and night from the city of Santiago below. And, the hill itself ties into the history of the La Chimba neighborhood as stones from its quarry were used to build the bridge that initially incorporated the once rural zone into the urban fabric of greater Santiago. However, la Chimba – in its marginalized position across the river from the city's center – can only see the backside of the figure, and its residents pray to the virgin's "poto." Remembering the words of her grandmother, la Rucia at last finds her natal home: "Cada vez que te pierdas ... recuerda que vivimos mirando el poto de la Virgen. La doña no tiene ojos para nosotros, sólo mira a los que están del otro lado del río, así es que mientras el resto de la ciudad le reza a su cara piadosa, nosotros nos conformamos con su traste..." (28).¹⁷⁴ The relevant information for la Rucia's orientation in the city comes from her stored knowledge of stories – oral traditions

¹⁷⁴ "Whenever you get lost ... remember that we live with a view of the Virgin's ass. The Lady doesn't have eyes for us, she only looks at the people on the other side of the river, and so while the rest of the city prays to her pious face, we make do with her backside." (my trans.)

passed down through inter-generational transmission. Official maps are of no use to her, because in reality she searches for traces of the past that do not fit a well-ordered version of the city's cartography. Instead she must: "Enfocar la visión del presente y ajustarla nítida a la del pasado" (29) / "Focus her view of the present, and adjust it clearly towards the past." (my trans.)

Much like Del Pilar Blanco's vision of the ghost's role in re-envisioning or re-imagining geographical landscapes, la Rucia forces the reader to see the palimpsest like layers of occluded pasts that still leave their mark on the present. However, when she at last arrives in La Chimba, all traces of the neighborhood she remembers have been erased. The familiar buildings have been replaced by a modern glass office tower whose shiny façade reflects billboards and flashy neon publicity (28). While she finds her childhood home within the tangle of new construction, it is split in two.

Her body parallels the space of the house – the scar that runs down her face echoes the form of the two halves of her former home (30). The neighborhood is described in anthropomorphic terms – it lives and breathes as if it were human, as if it could one day be resuscitated:

El Barrio está muerto. La noche cae y se cierran las vitrinas, se apagan las luces de neón, los letreros colorinches. La función ha terminado y la gente se entierra en algún sitio para no salir. Dejan las calles vacías, se sacan escondidos los lentes de contacto, las pelucas, las pestañas postizas, las fajas compradas en la última promoción de la televisión por cable. Se lavan el maquillaje de la cara, sus rostros quedan limpios, ojerosos, pálidos como los de un ánima. El Barrio está muerto. No se respira el aire de fiesta que la Rucia recuerda. Ese olor a pichanga dominguera, a rifa, a kermesse de fin de semana. Ya no se toma el mate en la puerta de las casas, no se juega a la pelota en la calle, no se hacen historias ni magia en los escalones rojos cada tarde.

Ahora todo es silencio y brumas. Neblina densa que deja ver una que otra figura negra cruzando la noche (59).¹⁷⁵

As the quotation above suggests, spaces die just like the people who inhabit them. However, it is only with her broken body that la Rucia is able to revive equally destroyed neighborhoods. Within this state of dreaming – this state of ghostliness – la Rucia is able to resuscitate not only dead bodies, but also dead spaces – neglected sites in the cityscape that hold the key to still-living memory. I suggest that the novel seeks to map these spaces – to mark points now made familiar to la Rucia – to call forth the memories of the disappeared bodies that once kept this neighborhood alive. Through modes of popular storytelling, fantasy, and historical revision, la Rucia is able to re-appropriate La Chimba’s lost landmarks for collective mourning and remembrance.

In her quest to reanimate spatial history, la Rucia’s father and ex-professor, Fausto, becomes a key figure in the place-based narration of the past; he plays the mediating role between history, literature, storytelling, and the creation of fact and fiction. Very much alive, the reader discovers that Fausto’s wife disowned him when he agreed to work for the government in an attempt to create a fictional, censored version of history – an official state-sponsored History. In doing so, Fausto

¹⁷⁵ “The Neighborhood is dead. Night falls, and the shop windows close, the neon lights turn off, the loud signs. The function is over and the people burrow down somewhere and don’t come out. They leave the streets empty, in hiding, they remove contact lenses, wigs, fake eyelashes, skirts purchased from the latest cable television promotion. They wash off their makeup, their faces left clean, baggy-eyed, pale as a ghost. The Neighborhood is dead. You don’t breathe the festive air that Rucia remembers. That smell of Sunday scrimmages, of raffles, of weekend festivals. They don’t drink mate in the doorways anymore, or play ball in the street, or make up stories or do magic on the red steps each afternoon. Now everything is silence and mist. Dense fog through which the occasional figure can be seen crossing the night.” (my trans.)

necessarily betrayed his roots and his connection to a living community, as he eliminates the traces of this past from his sterile historical telling. He lives in the very office tower that now dominates la Rucia's childhood neighborhood – whose remains have been all but erased from the urban script. His windows overlook the changed contours of the city streets.

After receiving the news that his children have died in a horrible car crash in exile, Fausto's purpose for existing (sending money to support their life in the Mediterranean) is eliminated, and he must live with the consequences of his actions; he realizes the true power of his fiction, of his storytelling:

La Historia de Chile completa, desde los orígenes hasta el día de ayer, contada por su puño y letra. Ediciones de bolsillo, ediciones ilustradas, ediciones completas para las universidades, otras resumidas para los colegiales. Reproducciones de su relato, de su versión personal de los hechos. Palabras salidas de su cabeza, mezcladas y aliñadas con cuidado, horneadas a punto para luego constituirse en verdades ciegas.

Él escribe y la Historia del país aparece irrevocable en las páginas de sus libros. Los niños la aprenden en el colegio, los adultos la leen en las bibliotecas, los ancianos la reciben de regalo en lugar del cheque de aguinaldo para fin de año. Poco a poco su Historia se va legitimando, va ganando terreno, va anulando a las otras, a esas que han sido sacadas de los anaqueles, de las listas escolares, de las librerías, hasta de las tiendas de libros usados. Su versión es la correcta. Lo que él ha escrito existe y lo que no, bien merece ser olvidado. Ése fue el trabajo que le dieron por hacer (41-2).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ “The complete History of Chile, from its origins until yesterday, told in his own words. Pocket editions, illustrated editions, complete editions for universities, others abridged for school kids. Reproductions of the story, of his personal version of the facts. Words from his own head, mixed and carefully seasoned, perfectly roasted to a fine, blind truth.

He writes, and the History of the country appears irrevocably in the pages of his books. Children learn it in school, adults read it in libraries, the elderly receive it as a gift instead of a Christmas bonus at the end of the year. Little by little, his History legitimizes itself, it gains ground, it erases others, the ones that have been taken from the shelves, from reading lists, from bookstores, even from used ones. His version is the correct one. What he has written exists, and what he hasn't, deserves to be forgotten. That was the job that they gave him to do.” (my trans.)

Tasked with starting from the beginning of the nation (1541: Spanish conquistador Pedro de Valdivia first arrived in the Mapocho Valley) he re-imagines, invents, and censors his thoughts to create a perfect History. But Fausto's own life histories get inadvertently tangled into this official version.

Entire chapters have been left out of the bound historical tomes and exist only in the scattered papers of his drafts. In a chorus of "dicen que," a popular, less sanctioned version of the past is told – an alternative story that would never be allowed in the official history books. For example, these histories tell the story of a Pedro de Valdivia who has a homosexual love affair with the leader of the Mapocho Indians, Lautaro / Toqui, during the time of the conquest. The imaginative retelling ends with a ghost story, as the ultimately beheaded Lautaro haunts the streets of Santiago as a headless horseman: "Dicen que desde entonces, Lautaro se pasea por las calles de Santiago. Corre como loco, de un lugar a otro, de la Plaza al Mapocho, del Mapocho al cerro, del cerro a la Plaza otra vez. Espolea su caballo, cabalga y cabalga sin detenerse jamás. Dicen que no tiene descanso. Dicen que mientras no encuentre su cabeza, nunca lo tendrá. Dicen. Eso dicen" (58).¹⁷⁷ The figure of the betrayed indigenous leader can only be communicated through a popular voice, his largely unacknowledged history lingers behind as a ghost story told and retold.

¹⁷⁷ "They say that ever since, Lautaro roams the streets of Santiago. He runs like a madman, from one place to another, from the Plaza to the Mapocho, from the Mapocho to the hill, from the hill to the Plaza again. He spurs his horse, rides and rides and never stops. They say he doesn't rest. They say that as long as he can't find his head, he never will. They say. That's what they say." (my trans.)

The popular stories of counter-histories are woven in and out of the narrative of la Rucia's urban wanderings. In another tale, the protagonist is Luis Manuel de Zañartu e Iriarte (portrayed simply as "the Devil"). The entire history of the La Chimba neighborhood is re-imaged ("dicen que"), and is retold through the rumors and urban legends that surround this historical figure, known as the "corregidor de Santiago" ("mayor"). Infamous for his cruelty, and for his alleged incestuous relationship with his two daughters, he exploited prisoners, drunks, and other social outcasts in his attempt to "redeem" society's misfits through hard labor as he oversaw the construction (1771-1782) of the Cal y Canto bridge – a structure that ultimately connected the la Chimba neighborhood to the urban center of Santiago on the opposite bank of the river. The story tells a popular version of how this marginalized and formerly agricultural zone of Santiago came to be exploited and incorporated into the cityscape at large: "Dicen que muchos no soportaron tan noble expiación y se fueron débiles por el río. Cuerpos azulosos partieron engrillados por el Mapocho y se perdieron en sus aguas. Indios muertos. Negros. Mestizos" (84) ... "Dicen que los muertos todavía gimen. Dicen que nunca dejarán de hacerlo. Flotarán en el río y aullarán tan fuerte como pueden. Dicen que por culpa de los muertos el Diablo jamás entrará al Cielo. Dicen. Eso Dicen" (86).¹⁷⁸ Even the ghosts of buildings come to behave like the ghosts of humans. In one scene, the Cal y Canto bridge is personified

¹⁷⁸ "They say a lot of people couldn't tolerate such noble atonement and went weakly down the river. Chained, blue bodies left by the Mapocho and were lost in its waters. Dead Indians. Blacks. Mestizos. ... They say that the dead still moan. They say that they will never stop. They'll float in the river and howl as loud as they can. They say that it's because of the dead that the Devil will never get into Heaven. They say. That's what they say." (my trans.)

in the uncensored version of Fausto's "real" and unpublished history. Ashamed of its origins, born only by the sacrifice of many men's lives, Fausto presents the image of a bridge, "atormentado por los ecos de su propio pasado" (119) / "tormented by the echoes of his own past." (my trans.)

In another vignette, the Estación Mapocho's (The Mapocho Train Station) darker past is revealed. A man walks by and watches students sketching the space, realizing that for this younger generation, the place holds no sinister connotations, no collective memory of trauma. Instead, much like their drawings, the station is an empty shell. Their art is merely a representation of the façade of a building, whose dark history is shrouded in layers of silence:

¿Qué son esos dibujos? ... ¿La Estación? ¿Una idea de la Estación? Qué fácil trazar un par de líneas y luego presentarlas con el título de "Estación Mapocho." Mentiras. Eso son esos bosquejos. Simulacros embustes. El tipo se pregunta si alguno de esos estudiantes tiene idea de lo que está delineando. ¿Algún padre o abuelo les habrá contado sobre la Estación? ¿Sabrán que desde aquí salían trenes hace años? ¿Tendrán la más remota idea de cuánta gente partió para no volver desde ese edificio? ¿Alguno imaginará cuando la cerraron, por qué, en qué extraño momento una estación de trenes se convierte en un centro cultural?

Un retrato medianamente bueno habla por sí solo. Cuenta sobre el cuerpo y el alma, sobre el pasado, el presente, sobre la posibilidad de un futuro. Desnuda los miedos, los horrores, las pesadillas y hasta los días felices. Un buen retrato evidencia, desarma, deja descubierto y al mirarlo no queda otra que guardar silencio y entenderlo todo (126-7).¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ "What are those drawings? ... The Station? An idea of the Station? How easy it is to draw a pair of lines and present them with the title "Mapocho Station." That's all those sketches are. Deceitful simulacra. The man wonders if any of those students has any idea what they are drawing. Did a parent or grandparent tell them about the Station? Do they know that trains left from here years ago? Do they have the slightest idea how many departed from this building never to return? Could anyone imagine when they closed it, why, in what strange moment a train station was turned into a cultural center? Any half good portrait speaks for itself. It speaks of the body and the soul, of the past, the present, of the

The book then goes on to narrate the story of all of the people who were taken into exile, or to their deaths, on the train that once passed through this abandoned station turned cultural center. It begins with Colonel Ibáñez's obsession with "cleaning" Chile – a scene in which the nation is personified as a big house much like la Rucia's childhood home. (The figure is based on two-time president [and later dictator] Carlos Ibáñez del Campo [1927-31 and 1952-8], who was backed by Nazi and rightwing powers, and known as "the broom" for his insistence on "sweeping" the national home clean). The story of the politically motivated disappearances that took place under his regime begin to re-animate the space as a counter history unfolds.

His historical legacy is turned upside down, however, when upon entering a house of cross-dressers with the pretense of sweeping it clean, Ibáñez instead becomes fascinated by their lifestyle and becomes one of them. When he is caught and humiliated by his men, el Corregidor bans the cross-dressers to the "más afuera" / "the beyond"; boarding the train at the Mapocho Station, the crossdressers never reach any kind of destination, and instead their bodies are thrown into the waters below: "De los maracos nunca más se supo. El tema se olvidó, se borró de las memorias de los archivos a punta de escoba, y la vida en la casa siguió su curso ... Pero dicen que las locas parten a diario desde la Estación Mapocho" (166).¹⁸⁰ As all

possibility of a future. It lays bare fears, horrors, nightmares, and even happy days. A good portrait bears witness, deconstructs, uncovers and when you look at it, all you can do is keep quiet and understand it all." (my trans.)

¹⁸⁰ "Of these children, nothing more was heard. The subject was forgotten, erased from archival memory at gunpoint, and life at home moved on ... But they say that the Madwomen depart daily from Mapocho Station." (my trans.)

traces of this site-based history have been eliminated with the erasure of the functionality of this touchstone for memory, marking the building becomes of vital importance. How do you make evident the significance a structure that has been destroyed except by leaving behind a ghostly haunting – one that under the appropriate gaze can be revitalized and nurtured?

For la Rucia, the train itself is now nothing but a specter. She observes the ghost train travel in its circular journey, never arriving at its destination. She, too, remembers fleeing by rail with her mother and brother on their way to exile. Looking out the window, she recalls the frightening site of encountering the bodies of victims, of disappeared peoples: “De pronto, en la ribera del río, un grupo de cuerpos aparecieron derrumbados unos sobre otros. Todos hombres. Todos con las manos atadas en la espalda. Estaban casi desnudos. Llevaban los pantalones abajo, a la altura de los tobillos, y el torso descubierto y ensangrentado. Las aguas del río los mojaban y limpiaban de a poco” (152-3).¹⁸¹

These figures, animated by stories – the headless horseman, the ghost of the bridge, the train station and the specters of those taken to the “Más Afuera” (“The Beyond”) in its cars – join other “ánimas en pena” (“lost souls”) that still mark historical injustice on the streets of the city. La Rucia ultimately encounters these individuals – whose lives spanned historical space from the time of the conquest to

¹⁸¹ “Suddenly, on the riverbank, a grouping of bodies appeared, piled up on top of one another. All men. All with their hands tied behind their backs. They were almost naked. Their pants were down around their ankles, their torso uncovered and bloody. The river’s water washed over them and slowly cleaned them.” (my trans.)

the present-day betrayal of her childhood neighborhood. The ghosts wait for someone to bear witness to them – to tell their stories, and to mark their absence.

At night, Fausto is on display in his office tower. The neighborhood – no longer a place where people live and create vibrant street life, but rather a place to which individuals commute to work – is abandoned by the evening. In the darkness, led by the headless warrior, the ghosts surround Fausto’s office tower, clamoring for inclusion in his official history book. He has betrayed the locally grounded past of his community: “¿Dónde está su cabeza, Fausto? ¿Dónde metieron la cabeza del Toqui? ... Piden las palabras que él no se atrevió a escribir. Reclaman un lugar en esos escritos firmados con su puño y letra, en ese conjunto de palabras impresas. Quieren ser parte de esos diez tomos que lucen impecables en su estante de caoba” (69).¹⁸²

Soon after arriving at her childhood home, these neighborhood ghosts begin to reveal themselves to la Rucia. A couple – trapped in a kind of purgatory – beg her to pray for their souls. Their skin is burned, and the woman searches for her missing baby, the wounds of a botched C-section visible on her ghostly, yet somehow still fleshy, body (61). A mysterious soccer team follows her movement through the streets, dressed in outdated uniforms and kicking a deflated ball back and forth with no goal post in sight. These figures, at first, mean nothing to la Rucia. She has no concept of the history of the site in which she could contextualize their hauntings.

¹⁸² “Where is his head, Fausto? Where did they put Toqui’s head? They ask for the words that he doesn’t dare to write. They clamor for a place in his writings – penned by his own hand – in that collection of printed words. They want to be part of those ten volumes that sit impeccably on his mahogany shelf.” (my trans.)

But, as the novel suggests, dreams can awaken dead people and dead places; on the threshold between life and death, la Rucia exists in a dream-like state where she can travel in both time and space at will. This ability to revisit the stories of the past and pull them into the present creates for the reader a ghost story – one that can draw these marginalized tales into the contemporary sphere. The book acts as a kind of transparency that overlays the twists and turns of the modern city and hints at what was lost, buried, and covered up in the process of its formation:

Los sueños y los recuerdos están conectados. La memoria nutre a la cabeza en el momento de dormir, la alimenta con imágenes conocidas y el resultado es una mezcla rara de cosas ya vistas. Los muertos resucitan en los sueños. Vuelven a la vida y aparecen con el rostro del que nunca murió, del que siempre estuvo. Los lugares también salen de su tumba. Sitios sepultados por el olvido emergen nítidos, llenos de olor y ruido ... la Rucia desentierra recuerdos en su cabeza. Viaja kilómetros en el tiempo, atraviesa océanos y desembarca en las costas mediterráneas donde creció (87).¹⁸³

La Rucia's quest to re-awaken dead places begins with the site of the modern office tower. She watches the ghosts gather around its base – calling for Fausto to jump to his death. Ultimately heeding the ghosts' desires – and in an effort to put their souls to rest – he jumps, only to be saved by el Indio. There is no escape from this place of purgatory. Instead, the tower has become a site that has “disappeared” the living fabric of the neighborhood, erasing places where people used to live, re-

¹⁸³ “Dreams and memories are connected. Memory nourishes the mind at the moment of sleep, feeds it familiar images, and the result is a strange mix of things that have already been seen. The dead are resuscitated in dreams. They come back to life and appear with the faces of people who never died, who were always here. Places also emerge from their graves. Places buried in forgotten realms emerge sharp, full of smell and sound ... La Rucia unburies memories in her mind. She travels kilometers in time, crosses oceans and disembarks on the Mediterranean Coasts where she grew up.” (my trans.)

organizing the space around neo-liberal ventures. But, inside the tower is a single apartment – Fausto’s. At night, while the entire neighborhood sleeps, la Rucia can see him illuminated. Writes Fernández:

La torre de vidrio emerge en el centro del Barrio como un monolito enorme de esos que marcan los lugares en los que han ocurrido accidentes carreteros. Esos que dicen *a la memoria de*, los que tienen fecha y nombre, pero que no alcanzan a ser animitas por lo feo y desaliñado de su construcción. Nadie les enciende velas, nadie les pone una flor, sólo son mirados al pasar en el auto por algún conductor sensible que comenta: Ojo, aquí murió alguien (97).¹⁸⁴

But, the question remains: Who exactly does this secret monolith remember? To uncover this mystery, La Rucia must learn to read the transformed urban space and the traces of her former life that remain hidden in the corners of the neoliberal city.

In the morning, La Rucia returns to the site of the tower and realizes how the fabric of the lived space has changed. Gone are the ghosts of the burn victims and the headless horseman. Instead, she is faced with a neighborhood full of business people in suits, seemingly carrying on with their regular work day:

Avanzan rápidos alrededor de la torre, caminan con sus maletines oscuros, con sus trajes de oficinista, con sus tacones altos y sus uñas de esmalte rojo ... Ellos salen y entran del lugar cargados de papeles y carpetas. Algunos se ríen, otros conversan o van serios hablando por un teléfono celular ... El Barrio no está enfermo, ni herido. Todos hacen su vida de manera normal. La Rucia empieza a dudar que de verdad haya pasado algo en ese sitio ... Quizás se durmió en el techo y todo no fue más que un sueño. Nadie luce herido, nadie mira hacia arriba rememorando al hombre de la azotea, nadie sabe o quiere saber

¹⁸⁴ “The glass tower rises from the center of the Neighborhood like one of those enormous monoliths that marks places where highway accidents have taken place. The ones that say *in memory of*, that have names and dates, but are too ugly and poorly constructed to be roadside shrines. No one lights candles, no one lays flowers, they’re only viewed when an attentive driver passes by and says, ‘Look, someone died here.’” (my trans.)

lo que pasó anoche en ese mismo sitio aunque exista una torre enorme a modo de monolito recordatorio (97).¹⁸⁵

It seems as if this new, sterile neighborhood has been built upon a tabula rasa – on virgin land, unencumbered by its haunted past. But, as la Rucia wanders the neighborhood, place-based memories of specific people and practices begin to return to her mind. The tower continues to haunt la Rucia: she cannot escape its call to remember: “La Rucia siente la sombra de la torre de vidrio a sus espaldas mientras camina por las calles. No puede librarse de ella. El monolito enorme, el recordatorio: ojo, aquí murió alguien” (103) / “La Rucia feels the glass tower’s shadow on her back as she walks the streets. She can’t escape it. The enormous monolith, the reminder: look out, someone died here.” (my trans.) It is my argument that the remainder of la Rucia’s paths through the city become a kind of unofficial guide to sites of historical memory that lack a coherent script – that remain hidden in the urban space. They are sites that, much like Villa Grimaldi, might be visited by the public, but whose historical significance is not truly understood or comprehended by the public at large.

This space of the office tower serves both as a marker, and a memorial for the dead – a reminder that these are bodies that have no official site of commemoration.

Robert Bevan in his work, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (2006)

¹⁸⁵ “They surround the tower quickly, walking with their dark briefcases, with their white-collar suits, with their high heels and red fingernails ... They exit and enter the building with armfuls of paper and folders. Some laugh, others talk or look serious talking on cell phones ... The Neighborhood is neither sick, nor hurt. Everyone goes about his or her life in a normal way. La Rucia begins to doubt the veracity of whether or not something really happened in that place ... Maybe she fell asleep on the roof and it was all just a dream. No one looks hurt, no one looks up recalling the man with the whip, nobody knows or wants to know what happened last night in that very place even though there’s an enormous tower, standing like a monolith to the dead.” (my trans.)

defines monumental space: “in its broadest sense ... looking at both ‘intentional’ and ‘unintentional’ monuments – those that are directly commemorative and the many more buildings that, by virtue of their history and the identification their builders and users have with them, have had meaning thrust upon them” (14). La Rucia’s journey through the La Chimba neighborhood becomes a kind of quest to illuminate these potential memorial sites, drawing them into a network, resuscitating a place-based practice that might finally create spaces hospitable for the ghosts that haunt them – and thus perhaps lay them to rest. The unofficial monolith of the office tower marks bodies disappeared under the dictatorship and serves as a silent reminder of the lineage of anonymous bodies lost to past injustices – bodies that lack marked graves.

This juxtaposition between official and unofficial gravesites becomes clear when la Rucia encounters her father in the space of the Cementerio General as he is burying her and her brother’s remains. At this point unaware of her own death, and unaware that this stranger is her father, she connects with this man and empathizes with his process of mourning. The scene serves as a space of commentary, highlighting the importance of sites that signal the presence of the dead; as the novel describes, a marked grave is a kind of human right. This scene presumably evokes the presence of the Patio 29 – a special section of the cemetery where unidentified bodies had traditionally been buried, but that was also used as an anonymous grave for those killed by the military regime. Interestingly, it was not until 2006 – four years after the publication of *Mapocho*, that the site was named a national monument.

Entering the space of the cemetery, the narrator comments on the strange proximity of the great mausoleums, marked by the names of well-known families, and the small plots where bones of various individuals lay jumbled together: “Aunque tu cuerpo no mida más de un metro, aunque no hayas vivido más que un suspiro, no importa si fuiste un ángel o un demonio, no importa si lo hiciste bien o como las huevas, todos tienen derecho a una tumba, por rasca que sea, todos gozan de su lápida de identificación en el patio de los callados” (103).¹⁸⁶ The passage emphasizes that a resting place is a kind of human right – everyone has the “derecho a una tumba” (103), the “right to a grave.” This theme of a marked tomb – where the ghostly traces of a lost life can be properly identified – becomes an important thread in the novel as Fernández uses the text as a means of searching for appropriate spaces of memory in the folds of Santiago’s urban landscape. It is within the site of the cemetery that Fausto finally realizes that his children have been condemned to wander the earth in a state of purgatory – that the symbolic burying of their remains in the graveyard is not yet enough: “La muerte es mentira. Desde la M hasta la E” (115) / “Death is a lie. From the D to the H.” (my trans.) The neighborhood can only be laid to rest as a living, social network; each body’s salvation depends upon the other restless bodies that once inhabited and composed the lost communal space.

And yet, this space is just one of many signaled by the novel as a potential place of remembering and healing (the office tower, the ruins of the neighborhood,

¹⁸⁶ “Even if your body is under a meter tall, even if you haven’t lived longer than a breath, it doesn’t matter if you were an angel or a demon, it doesn’t matter if you did well or screwed everything up, everyone has the right to a grave, no matter how shoddy, everyone should enjoy a headstone in the patio of the silent.” (my trans.)

the ghostly trace of the Cal y Canto bridge, the Estación Mapocho). Fernández paints a network of interconnected sites that resist the re-narrativizing strategies of the dictatorship and that push towards a grounded telling of history – one that considers the memories that lay dormant, waiting to be revived, behind the façade and beneath the foundations of the modernized city. If Fausto’s job was to rewrite history to serve a particular political project, perhaps la Rucia’s pathway through the city, in the unique position of a second-generation exile, and in the liminal space between life and death, re-opens historical possibilities through an individual bodily reading of urban space. Both the modern office tower, and the site of the cemetery, come to take on multiple meanings under la Rucia’s reviving gaze.

But la Rucia alone cannot change the dominant narrative of cityspace – one that leaves no place for these haunting traces. Although as a ghostly figure she is able to serve as a kind of interlocutor between the spectral and the corporeal, new stories must be created to help lay the ghosts to rest. Only through a history that is “hospitable” (to use Gordon’s term) to the ghosts and markers of these traumatic pasts can these spaces of haunting serve their function. This process is modeled for the reader through the figure of Fausto, who comes to realize that the only way to save his children is by undoing the powerful words of his history book that have condemned an entire network of neighborhood relationships. In one scene, the ghostly la Rucia searches her father’s library, scanning the shelf for something historical to read so that she can understand more about her home country. However, all she can find are the ten volumes of Fausto’s neatly bound history tomes: “Me

gustaría leer algo histórico. No sé mucho de mi país” (170) / “I would like to read something historical. I don’t know much about my country.” (my trans.)

Rather than allow her to read the false stories published in his history books, Fausto begins to tell the truth – a kind of generational passing that inevitably fails because it is too late for his daughter. The story cannot be proliferated through La Rucia alone because she is already dead. Fausto narrates a tale of how he wrote the history that betrayed the neighborhood in order to support his family in exile, explains to la Rucia the dark day when the whole neighborhood was taken prisoner on the football field and burned to death by the military men. He illuminates a story of space, a kind of ghostly cartography that explains the absent social networks that once crisscrossed a now sterile office complex:

Sobre el fantasma chamuscado de la cancha, rápidamente construyeron una torre alta y moderna, hecha de vidrios oscuros. Al padre le ofrecieron un departamento en el último piso y él lo aceptó porque vivir solo en la casa era muy triste. Allí se llevó su máquina y sus apuntes, y continuó su trabajo con la única meta de terminar pronto. La primera edición de sus libros llegó con un buen estímulo monetario, pero no fue más que el comienzo de más trabajo. Tenía que preparar la segunda edición con nuevas correcciones y con nuevos capítulos (175).¹⁸⁷

Again, the reader notes the connection between dead buildings and dead people – the soccer field is quickly covered up with the symbol of capitalism: the high-rise office

¹⁸⁷ “Over the scorched ghost of the playing field, they quickly built a tall, modern tower of dark glass. They offered an apartment on the top floor to the father, and he accepted because living alone in the house was very sad. He had the typewriter and his notes brought there, and he continued his work with the single goal of finishing quickly. The first edition of his books brought good economic stimulus, but it was only the beginning of more work. He had to prepare a second edition with new corrections and new chapters.” (my trans.)

tower. What was once a communal, lived space is reduced to a place used only during the day for business. Ironically, the office tower, shaped like a monolith, becomes the site from which Fausto furthers the erasure of this neighborhood through the composition of his false and official History.

Ultimately, Fausto cannot finish this story, or give it a happy ending. He does not know how to lay these centuries of injustice to rest. This failure as a narrator prompts la Rucia to reject Fausto as her father. Eventually, Fausto, unforgiven by both of his children, jumps to his death screaming “fin” (“the end”) in an attempt to end his harmful lies. But rather than peace, he is met with a waking death, forced to wander the earth with his tongue hanging from his mouth, unable to use his words to shape his reality (215): “Pero la historia no acaba así de fácil” (218) / “But history does not end so easily.” (my trans.) One man alone cannot fix the harmful effects of these powerful historical erasures, now disseminated to the public at large. His words have taken on a life of their own, and Fausto can no longer control his carefully crafted lies.

The past, suggests Fernández, is like garbage that coats the street. It is very difficult to sweep clean, to get rid of completely, to erase all traces from the map of the city. History, like garbage, refuse, and remains, is buried in place; it is site specific. And, by coring through the earth, revealing layers of history and spatial practice that have been swept aside – “cleansed” from the social fabric – one can imagine a different past and thus envision alternative future possibilities. In his work, Bevan emphasizes the very important connection between architecture, and the

“continuity of successive experience, setting down layers of meaning” which creates, “a psycho-geography, an ‘awareness’ of the past ... that is dynamic, handed down to people rather than recorded on the very stones, that is specific to a particular historic and political context” (16). This connection between lived space and identity is, Bevan suggests, what makes the destruction of architecture such a powerful weapon and tool for social reorganization: “If the touchstones of identity are no longer there to be touched, memories fragment and dislocate – their hostile destruction is an amnesia forced upon the group as a group and on its individual constituent members. Out of sight can become, literally, out of mind both for those whose patrimony has been destroyed and for the destroyers” (16).

Fernández emphasizes this problem, describing the buried layers of trash and rubble; the neighborhood is now “clean,” “shiny,” and modern in the remodeled landscape:

...Se les entierra bajo capas gruesas de relleno como se hace con los muertos. Se les inmoviliza y se les controla porque la basura es rebelde y se cuela hacia fuera en forma de gas tóxico. Los vestigios de la mugre son tan peligrosos como ella. Pueden aparecer en cualquier momento, irrumpir cuando ya se les creía olvidados. Por eso se les reduce y cuando ya están bien controlados, se diseña un buen paisaje para instalar encima. Algo que ayude a borrar su imagen cochina. Un centro comercial, una torre de espejos, un parque, una plaza de juegos para los niños del sector. Columpios, balancines, áreas verdes para pelotear un rato. La basura queda olvidada bajo los juegos de color. Enterrada por las voces infantiles.

Los niños se columpian encima de los platos rotos que quebraron sus padres. Los niños juegan sobre mierda ajena, pero no lo saben (218).¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ “They’re buried under thick layers of backfill, like they do with the dead. They’re immobilized and controlled because trash is rebellious and it slips out as toxic gas. The grimy vestiges are just as dangerous. They can appear at any moment, erupt when they are thought to be forgotten. And so they’re reduced and when they are under control, a nice alleyway is designed to go on top. Anything to

Due to this attempted erasure of lived history, rebellious city sites *themselves* become the only true space of reading the connection between past and present. In order to learn how to re-read the city in this light, one must notice the debris, the ruins, and the markers of trauma that have escaped the totalizing forces of the re-workings of the dictatorship and its neoliberal policies. But: how to revive these memories – make them dynamic again? Place-based stories must somehow be reactivated, but who is capable of telling them? I suggest that for Fernández, this cannot be an individual effort; her novel is one way of drawing social attention to these lost ways of life, bringing these marginalized and half-forgotten stories into the public realm.

Towards the end of the novel, Fernández explains that the neighborhood is no longer dead, contrary to what she suggested at the beginning of the story:

El Barrio vive. Se esconde tras el grueso alquitrán con el que han tapizado sus viejos adoquines. Sus muros de adobe respiran hechos polvo, su aliento añejo perfuma las calles cuando la polución recula después de un día de lluvia. El Barrio vive. Se le intuye más allá de las vitrinas y los anuncios de neón. Está sepultado por construcciones, por publicidades de televisión por cable y telefonía móvil. Sobre él las máquinas se pasean, el tránsito se atasca a las siete de la tarde, los andamios se elevan, la gente circula. El Barrio yace bajo el paso acelerado de todos. Pero a veces, cuando la tierra se sacude en un temblor pasajero, el Barrio suspira y deja ver con claridad pedazos de su carne (189).¹⁸⁹

help erase its nasty image. A shopping mall, a mirrored tower, a park, a playground for local kids. Jungle gyms, seesaws, green spaces to kick a ball around in. The trash remains forgotten below the colorful games. Buried by children's voices.

The kids play on top of shattered dishes their parents broke. The kids play on top of others' shit, but they don't know it." (my trans.)

¹⁸⁹ "The Neighborhood lives. It hides behind the thick tar they've smeared over its old cobblestones. Its adobe walls wheeze dustily, its aged breath perfumes the streets when the pollution recedes at the end of a rainy day. The Neighborhood lives. You feel it behind the shop windows and neon signs. It's buried by construction, by cable television ads and mobile phones. Machines drive on it, traffic jams at

This portrait is juxtaposed with the original personification of the neighborhood as dead space. What Fernández seems to imply here is that, beneath its neoliberal surface, networks of social memory wait to be noticed and revived. What follows this suggestion is a kind of recovery project. The remainder of the novel is dedicated to the individual – yet always connected and communal – stories of the neighborhood’s residents. The refrain “dicen que” echoes throughout – a chorus of repeating lines that insists on the telling, retelling, and passing on of these lost stories. The stories speak of resistance and community: an older couple shelters political prisoners in their store (190); a woman endures rape and imprisonment to be with her family; a mother and child die at the hands of the guards after a botched C-section in a soccer stadium turned prison (194); the neighborhood soccer league sings their hymn in defiance of their captors, and plays one final, rebellious game (196, 228). It is in dreams of the past, suggests the novel – in the liminal space between life and death – that new possibilities for future and present understandings of history can be imagined. Through these oral testimonies – folk histories that compete and contradict – the ghosts of the community become the authors of their own, tangled afterlives.

 Their ghosts remain behind, refusing to let this geographical node that registers so much trauma blend into the everyday functioning of the neoliberal city. Even in death, the neighborhood soccer team insists upon playing their final game – a

seven p.m., scaffolding is raised, people circulate. The Neighborhood lies beneath everyone’s accelerated pace. But sometimes, when the earth shakes itself off in a passing tremor, the Neighborhood breaths and clearly shows pieces of its flesh.” (my trans.)

game that began in defiance of the guards in an attempt to raise the prisoner's spirits, but which ultimately led to the stadium being set on fire and the players' bodies being taken away in trucks and dumped into the Mapocho River:

Pero ahora seguimos jugando. Seguimos chuteando nuestra pelota escondida, porque no nos queda otra. Tenemos que darle hacia delante, patear y patear, fintear al oponente, atacar, dar buenos pases, hacer tiempo hasta que salga el gol que tenemos atragantado. Lo llevamos en la punta de estas zapatillas rotas, lo hemos macerado durante años. Será una jugada tremenda que los va a dejar a todos impresionados, sin posibilidad de respiro. Una chilanita preciosa. Un gol que va a resonar desde la cordillera de los Andes hasta el fondo del océano Pacífico. Goooool, se va escuchar. Y nadie se libraré de ese rugido. Nadie (232).¹⁹⁰

But what gives these players the possibility of moving forward? What kinds of conditions make it possible? As the novel suggests, cityscripts must be made to account for and give voice to these ghosts – to open up a space for them in the history of the city. This is necessarily a communal project.

When la Rucia returns in a final scene to her natal home after her last visit with Fausto, she hears an echo of a prayer to the backside of the Virgin. It is her grandmother's ghostly imprint on the house itself. Her voice is raised, defiant and irreverent. Exhausted by the neglect she receives even in death, the grandmother

¹⁹⁰ “But now we continue playing. We continue kicking our hidden ball, because we don't have another one. We have to kick it forward, kicking and kicking, faking out the opponent, attacking, making good passes, passing the time until we score the goal that we've been holding our breath for. We carry it on the tip of these broken cleats, we marinated it for years. It will be a tremendous play that will leave everyone impressed, totally breathless. A precious 'chilenita.' A goal that will resound from the peaks of the Andes to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. 'Goooooallllll' is what you'll hear. And no one will escape that roar. No one.” (my trans.)

pleads for a way forward for the abundance of lost souls (including her own) that wander the neighborhood without hope for lasting peace:

Dios te salve María. Llena eres de gracia. El señor es contigo. Bendita eres entre todas las mujeres y bendito es el pote blanco de loza que nos brindas desde la altura del cerro. No importa que nos hagas el quite. No importa que nunca te hayas dado el trabajo de mirarnos, de pagarnos una ojeada loca una vez al año más que fuera. Igual tu culo nos protege. No sé de qué. No sé si son posibles más calamidades, pero de algo peor que se nos podría venir encima nos cuida tu pote blanco. Por eso, está siempre allí, sobre nuestras cabezas, arriba de nuestros techos, por sobre nuestros llantos y nuestros rezos.

Te agradecemos la deferencia de tu trasero, pero no te hagas la huevona, reina y madre, hazte un huequito en tu agenda y échale una miradita a este lado del río. Estamos locos. Tenemos el territorio copado de almas en pena y nadie hace nada por pavimentarles el camino al otro lado. Finados de todas las edades, jóvenes y viejos. No damos abasto, Marita linda. Los vivos y los muertos se nos están mezclando y tú sabes que eso no es bueno. Caminan por las mismas calles, rezan en las mismas iglesias, algunos hasta conversan entre ellos sin respetar los límites divinos. Ya nadie entiende nada aquí abajo, es una verdadera casa de putas. Por favor, Maruchita querida, yo sé que estoy pecando de majadera, que he pasado muchos años sobre este techo con la misma cantinela, pero es que si te dieras vuelta por un solo minuto entenderías a lo que me refiero. No te voy a hinchar más las huevas. Hasta aquí nomás llega el rezo de tu humilde servidora. Pero no sabes el favor que nos harías si nos otorgaras algo más que la visión de tu inmaculado pote. Santa Martita, madre de Dios, ruega por nosotros pecadores, ahora, la hora de nuestra muerte. Amén (211).¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ “God save you Maria. You are full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the porcelain white ass that you offer up from the top of the hill. It doesn’t matter that you turn away from us. It doesn’t matter that you’ve never bothered to look at us, to even give us one measly glance a year. Still, your ass protects us. I don’t know what from. I don’t know whether more disasters are even possible, but your white ass protects us from something worse that could come down upon us. And so, it’s always there, above our heads, above our roofs, above our cries and our prayers.

We thank you for the deference of your behind, but don’t let it go to your head, queen and mother, make a little room in your agenda and throw a glance to this side of the river. We’re crazy. Our land is full of lost souls and no one does anything to pave the way to the other side. Dead of all ages, young and old. We can’t take it, Marita sweetie. The living and the dead are mixing and you know that’s not good. They walk the same streets, pray in the same churches, some even talk amongst themselves without respect for divine boundaries. No one understands anything down here anymore. It’s a real shit

In order to bring peace to La Chimba, there needs to be an amplification of these prayers and stories that circulate throughout the neighborhood. The ghosts continuously clamor for la Rucia to pray for them, to help them to lay their burdens to rest. As the grandmother points out, it is not right that the living and the dead should mix in this way – a situation in which the dead (who do not even know they are dead) pray for the souls of equally ghostly figures, and in which the majority of the community is ignorant of its own spectral presence.

When la Rucia at last enters her home, her brother, el Indio, has painted a mural across its walls, representing all of the stories that her father's history books have neglected. La Rucia's own journey through Santiago is depicted on the mural – her journey through the charred rubble of the neighborhood, her encounter with the ghosts that mark these lost spaces, the accident that split her in half, body mirroring the split city of Santiago with the never-closing wound of the Mapocho River running through its center (213). At last, la Rucia's grandmother appears to sing her to sleep – she has served her role as witness, and the counter-history on the mural crumbles into pieces. Like a broken puzzle, the rubble must be pieced together not by any one

show. Please, dear Maruchita, I know I'm sinning left and right, that I've spent years on this roof with the same old story, but if you'd just turn around for one minute, you would understand what I'm talking about. I'm not going to bust your balls anymore. Your humble servant's prayer goes no further. But you don't know the favor you'd be doing us if you'd grant us just a little more than the sight of your immaculate ass. Saint Martita, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, at the hour of our death." (my trans.)

individual, but by a whole network of people searching for answers. La Rucia alone cannot bear testimony to a lost community, or atone for her parent's sins (224-5).

Through the space of her fiction, Fernández imagines possible openings toward the future. The book speculates that the home's ruins will one day be encountered by vagabonds, who will seek shelter in the abandoned structure in the forgotten corner of the now refurbished neighborhood. El Indio, in the space of his imagination, pictures their confusion as they attempt to put the fragments of his once cohesive counter-history into a meaningful assemblage:

Yo sé hacia donde van. Avanzan rumbo a nuestra casa de infancia que ahora yace hecha mierda en el suelo. Ruinas por las que se pasean los perros. Un basural donde los vagabundos registran entre los escombros algo que pueda serles útil. Algún plato quebrado de la abuela, alguna olla machucada, una escoba, una cañería en buen uso. A veces dan con un rostro pintado sobre un trazo de yeso, una mueca de óleo que es contemplada con extrañeza. La toman con desconcierto y la observan un buen rato. La dan vueltas, la tratan de unir a otros trozos pintados para darle algún sentido, para buscar una totalidad, pero es difícil entender de qué se trata. Un pedazo de Valdivia delineado a pincel, un retazo de algún mulato engrillado, de cierto milico con peluca plateada. ¿De quién es ese rostro? ¿Qué le pasó? ¿Por qué se queja? No hay respuesta y entonces la pintura es devuelta al basural. Todo un registro de ojos, bocas, cabezas sueltas, desparramado sin orden ni lógica en el suelo.

En eso se ha convertido nuestra casa.

Un rompecabezas desarmado, piezas sueltas que ni los vagabundos quieren recoger (237).¹⁹²

¹⁹² "I know where they are headed. They advance in the direction of our childhood home, which has now gone to shit. Ruins for dogs to wander through. A garbage dump where tramps find things that might be useful to them in the rubble. One of Grandma's broken plates, a dented pot, a broom, some well-used piping. Sometimes they come across a face painted on a piece of plaster, an oil-painted face that is contemplated with surprise. They pick it up uneasily and observe it for a while. They turn it over, they try to unite it with other painted bits to give it some kind of meaning, to search for a totality, but it's difficult to understand what it's about. A piece of Valdivia outlined in paint, a fragment of some shackled mulatto, of a certain soldier with a silver wig. Whose face is this? What happened to

But then, he forecloses this possibility, imagining instead that the pieces will once again be taken away, buried as trash – another layer of secrets added to the ruinous foundation of the office tower. But is there a way out of this circular haunting? Is there a way to escape from purgatory? Who will become the audience for these difficult and complex histories. Who will be the interlocutor capable of putting the fragments back into some kind of narrative whole? For, despite el Indio’s relegation of these ruins to forgotten and buried trash heaps, the fact is that their traces stay behind, waiting to be re-discovered and re-covered by future generations.

El Indio describes the barrio as permanently doomed to exist in a state of purgatory, as a “carrusel dando vueltas sobre sí mismo” or as a “punto cero ... en el eje del carrusel” (24) / “carousel spinning around itself” or as a “zero point ... on the axis of the carousel.” (my trans.) But, the ending is not entirely unhopeful. There is a kind of opening-up from the trauma – a possibility for a new kind of future. As an (almost) ghost, la Rucia is at once implicated in the highly personal trauma of her own family for which she serves as a marker, and is able to commune with death, to resurrect dead places and dead people. She exists in a state of dreaming. As Jeftanovic notes in her article about the novel: “En los textos la ciudad es un vehículo actante de múltiples hablas, que se hacen reconocibles en su intrincada red de espacios

him? What’s he whining about? There aren’t answers and so the painting is put back in the dump. A whole record of eyes, mouths, loose heads, scattered without order or logic on the ground.

That is what our house has become.

A disassembled puzzle, loose pieces that not even the tramps wanted to gather.” (my trans.)

y significados según discorra por algunos de sus espacios semánticamente cargados. Es, entonces, contra calles y esquinas, contra plazas, contra edificios y bares que el individuo se delimita, a la vez que coteja su discurso con el contradiscurso de los espacios, de la historia” (73).¹⁹³ By illuminating these dark corners of the city, by re-activating the lost connections between space and lived social networks, the book models the process of re-piecing the fragmented shards of a once daily reality shoved to the margins and into oblivion by the neoliberal transformation of the city. As Opazo’s 2004 article puts it, the novel is a “lectura *a contrapelo* de la geografía urbana...” (31) / a “reading against the grain of urban geography...” (my trans.)

For Gordon, the ghost is an inherently social creature; the ghost is always tied to a complex web of social relationships: “Haunting is a shared structure of feeling, a shared possession, a specific type of sociality ... Haunting is the sociality of living with ghosts” (201). And, she argues, in order to lay the ghost to rest, one must learn to live in its shadow peacefully; it is necessarily a collective undertaking (207-8). While la Rucia’s body makes these lost footprints visible in the urban landscape, it will be up to the readers of the novel to acknowledge and to make the city hospitable for the ghosts. This process is echoed in the text. The ghosts need to be prayed for, to be acknowledged, to be physically commemorated in marked graves, to have their

¹⁹³ “In texts, the city is an active vehicle for multiple voices, which become recognizable in their intricate web of spaces and meanings as they flow through some of their semantically loaded spaces. It is, then, against streets and corners, against plazas, against buildings and bars that the individual delimits himself, at the same time as he compares his own discourse with the counter-discourse of space, of history.” (my trans.)

lost lives and equally lost space registered on the surface of the city. They yearn for touchstones of memory.

In a 2007 article entitled “The ‘Uchronic’ City: Writing (after) the Catastrophe,” Voionmaa points out that in the postmodern sphere, Santiago has lost both its “place-ness” and its “time-ness”; he views the novel *Mapocho* as existing in this “uchronic” space and time due to the catastrophic forces of traumatic experience:

Catastrophe is understood here as history itself, as the result of dictatorships and neoliberal democracies in the Southern Cone of Latin America. In one sense, to talk about “after catastrophe” is an oxymoron, because it is an ongoing event, therefore without an “after.” But at the same time it has continuously already happened. In other words, it is precisely the oxymoronic disappearance of time, history, and memory that allows us to maintain the possibility of the “after” of something that has not yet ended. These writings are dealing precisely with that possible impossibility (110-11).

In his exploration of this novel, Voionmaa questions how literature has come to capture these “patterns of erasures” prompted by the dictatorship and the subsequent neoliberal policies imposed by this regime (111). He reads the Santiago of *Mapocho* as stuck in the space and time of “no-where-ness,” and points towards Fernández’s examination of the neoliberal strategies of spatial organization enforced by Pinochet’s dictatorship. However, I read this book as registering a certain openness towards the future – a way of slowly exiting from the forever-revolving carousel.

Avelar describes in his 1999 work, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning*: “If the dictatorships have resignified every corner of the city, if the catastrophe is blocked from public memory by the absence of monuments to the dead, postdictatorial literature depicts the urban

space as an allegorical ruin. It is through these ruins that postcatastrophe literature reactivates the hope of providing an entrance into a traumatic experience that has seemingly been condemned to silence and oblivion” (10). The only kind of protagonist who is capable of reading these traces (in constant threat of disappearing) is a ghost – a person who exists in a state of liminality and therefore can inhabit spaces that have also been rendered equally ghostly in the new order of the city. These stories depend upon place-based resurrections (much like the necessity for an active tour guide to reanimate the ruinous space of Villa Grimaldi). And yet, I suggest that this novel does something slightly different with space than the earlier works considered in Avelar’s analysis; for, rather than depict a cityscape composed of merely rubble and ruin, I argue that the novel also gestures towards the presence of almost “hidden” monuments – towards unintentional memorials to the dead that go unrecognized, that need to be made *visible* through storytelling in order to serve as sites of collective remembrance. Avelar has suggested that “...the labor of mourning has much to do with the erection of an *exterior* tomb where the brutal literalization of the internal tomb can be metaphorized” (9). Perhaps *Mapocho* is not so much about the *construction* of an exterior tomb, but rather about the recognition of the potential for re-signifying spaces *already* marked by trauma. How do we locate externalizations of memory in the space of Fernández’s Santiago?

Conclusion: “Writing is a loving act. It’s a way of being in the world.”

Richard emphasizes the dangers of suppressed memory, especially its subversive potential: “...it is the laboriousness of that unsatisfied memory that never

admits defeat, that perturbs the official burial of that memory seen simply as a fixed deposit of inactive meanings” (17).¹⁹⁴ Equally important is the space on which memory can leave legible marks: “...memory needs surfaces of inscription to record itself so that the lived relationship between mark, texture, and event can liberate new capabilities of meaning” (Richard 6). It is my argument that *Mapocho* is a way of providing a surface for inscription, one that can be superimposed over the space of the forgetful city to provide different ways of understanding the geography of Santiago. Fernández’s narration provides an alternative to topographical record of memories by exhuming a lost landscape, by reanimating the social networks that once traversed the city. Additionally, I extend the exploration of the way in which urban space is portrayed in the novel to include the question of the second generation, and of memory transfer. How does the urban environment itself help to create a legible or read-able space of memory – one that resists state-sponsored erasure and that preserves stories that can then be “passed on” to those bodies not physically or directly affected by the traumatic events themselves? As Gómez-Barris points out, those who were detained, tortured, and disappeared under Pinochet’s dictatorship were often *already* disenfranchised in other ways: working class, indigenous, female,

¹⁹⁴ We see again the importance of the figure of the ruin in this process: “El problema es todavía más grave, si consideramos que, a menudo, son precisamente los lugares físicos los que actúan como punto de partida para la elaboración de la memoria; las ruinas materiales, de hecho, sirven con frecuencia como detonante para la construcción narrativa. Dicho en pocas palabras, las ruinas son significativas: indican la eterna calidad presente de la catástrofe y nos invitan a considerar tanto nuestra relación con el pasado como la importancia del pasado para el futuro” (Lazzara 203-4) / “The problem is even graver, if we consider that, often times, it is precisely physical places that act as points of departure for the making of memory; material ruins, in fact, often serve as catalysts for narrative construction. More simply put, ruins are meaningful: they indicate the quality of eternal present-ness of the catastrophe and they invite us to consider not only our relationship with the past, but also the importance of the past for the future.” (my trans.)

queer (17): "...In its effort to rebrand the nation as a global capitalist player, the state again reproduced exclusion, whereby dead, damaged, and disappeared bodies became the debris of capitalist restructuring" (17). This novel captures all of these complex pieces of "debris" and these lost social subjects, creating a picture, through haunting, of a city of subjects who still struggle to be heard and remembered.

Though writing about the Argentine context, Silvia R. Tandeciarz asserts in her 2007 article, "Citizens of Memory: Refiguring the Past in Postdictatorship Argentina" that the built environment is integral to the formation of the new citizen. For Tandeciarz, forgotten spaces, once re-noticed and made visible in the present, bring to the surface buried histories that will:

...lead to a transformation in the performance of citizenship that the city either facilitates or blocks. Because each historical subject is also the product of the paths he or she has chosen, changes in the landscape can help shape new forms of civic engagements. How individuals inhabit this geography, which routes they choose, and what they encounter along the way can have profound consequences for the construction for their subjectivities and the articulation of civil society (152).

Despite the modernized façade of the city, la Rucia's pathways uncover the suppressed histories and penetrate beneath the surface of the cityscape, making visible the living memories of the neighborhood in the space of the present: "El Barrio vive. Se le intuye más allá de las vitrinas y los anuncios de neón. Está sepultado por construcciones, por publicidades ... a veces, cuando la tierra se sacude en un temblor pasajero, el Barrio suspira y deja ver con claridad pedazos de su carne" (189) / "The Neighborhood is alive. It is felt beyond the shop windows and the neon signs. It is buried by construction, by advertisements ... sometimes, when the earth

shudders in a passing tremor, the Neighborhood breathes and clearly shows pieces of its flesh.” (my trans.)

At the heart of this novel is the idea of connection between memory and space – especially as it concerns the passing of these traumatic pasts from one generation to the next. However, *Mapocho* also highlights the very real limitations that these sites have in transmitting history in and of themselves. Fernández’s fiction becomes a means of mediating this gap – an unofficial guidebook to these unexplored corners of the city, these buried traces of the past. Jeftanovic calls the novel a kind of anti-tour: “En el recorrido que hacen los hermanos por la ciudad, en una suerte de tour anti-turístico, se nos muestran aquellas historias que no se cuentan a los extranjeros, las que ‘ensuciarían’ la imagen de Santiago como metrópoli globalizada” (77) / “Along the route that the siblings take through city, in a kind of anti-touristic tour, the stories that aren’t told to strangers are revealed to us, those that “sully” the image of Santiago as a globalized metropolis.” (my trans.) La Rucia’s urban wanderings demonstrate new ways of engaging with urban space – new ways of participating as a “citizen of memory.” Just as the rubble of Villa Grimaldi cannot be understood without someone, or something, to guide the visitor through a site marked mostly by absence, so, too, does the city as a whole require mediation. It is through fiction, argues Fernández, that we can recover this possibility of remembering and narrating the city differently.

Returning to Paredes’ February 2015 interview with Fernández, I note her adamant belief in the power of fiction, and in its potential to allow the reader to both

process the past and to transform the way she thinks about the future: “Creo firmemente que la lectura de un buen libro te hace una mejor persona, te eleva un poco, te ilumina ... La escritura, lo mismo que una función de teatro, detiene el tiempo en un ejercicio reflexivo y generoso que dura el número de páginas que tiene cada libro o la cantidad de minutos que dura la función. Escribir es un acto cariñoso. Es una manera de estar en el mundo” (n/p).¹⁹⁵ These last lines make a firm assertion: “Writing is a loving act. It’s a way of being in the world” – it is through writing that we shape the world around us.

¹⁹⁵ “I firmly believe that reading a good book makes you a better person, raises you up a little, illuminates you ... Writing, just like a theatrical production, stops time in a generous and reflexive exercise that lasts however many pages are in the book or however many minutes are in the production. Writing is a loving act. It’s a way of being in the world.” (my trans.)

Chapter 4

The Eye that Cries: Macro and Micro Narratives of Memory in Peru Post Shining Path in the Works of Karina Pacheco Medrano

Peru: Responses to the violence of the Shining Path (1980-1992 – Decline after the capture of leader Abimael Guzmán)

Writing in the Footprints of the Shining Path Era: Contextualizing the Work of Karina Pacheco Medrano

Karina Pacheco Medrano (1969, Cusco) has emerged as one of the most important figures within the contemporary Peruvian literary scene; she considers herself an integral part of a generation of writers whose works are marked by the legacy of the Shining Path era. In a 2010 interview with Gabriel Ruiz Ortega published online in *Proyecto Patrimonio*, she explains that the theme of political violence, which saturates her fictional landscapes, was not one she deliberately sought out, but rather a fact of daily life that in part defines an entire generation of Peruvians:

La violencia política marcó profundamente la adolescencia y la entrada a la juventud de la gente de mi generación. Encontrarte a diario con noticias sobre coches bomba, paros armados, matanzas perpetradas con una crueldad espeluznante, o el hallazgo de fosas comunes con los restos de ancianos, mujeres y niños, continuamente nos hacía preguntarnos de dónde, cómo, por qué surgía tanto horror. Aunque una no viviera en el corazón de la violencia ni en las esferas de mayor peligro, esos años nos obligaron a desprendernos de toda visión ingenua de los ideales y observar como mucha gente que apreciabas tomaba partido de manera radical; sea para apoyar la violencia terrorista, o en el otro extremo, para justificar las barbaridades que el Estado cometió en medio de la lucha contrasubversivo (n/p).¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ “Political violence profoundly marked adolescence and the beginning of youth for the people of my generation. Daily confronting news about car bombs, armed strikes, killings perpetrated with terrifying cruelty, or the discovery of common graves with the remains of the elderly, women, and children, we had to continually ask ourselves from where, how, why so much horror. Even for those not living in

A fraternal conflict between government forces and a Maoist group that began in 1980, began its decline in 1992 with the capture of leader Abimael Guzmán, and whose effects were actively felt until the end of Alberto Fujimori’s presidency in 2000, this twenty year period of violence resulted in the disappearance or death of approximately 70,000 individuals.¹⁹⁷ Pacheco Medrano explains to the interviewer that while her intention may be to touch upon other subjects, particularly issues such as the deeply embedded structures of racism that exist in Peru, the theme of political violence inevitably emerges in her writing; she views this difficult historical period as inherently linked to a long history of structural injustice from colonialism to the “cruel modernity” of the 20th century. An anthropologist by training (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) – and one who has worked extensively with issues of human rights both nationally and internationally – Pacheco Medrano traces the intersections between the public and the private, the macro and the micro, uncovering a layered history of violence that continues to mark the landscape of Peru, contextualizing these

the midst of violence or in proximity to the greatest dangers, those years made us let go of any naïve ideals and take note of how many people you loved took sides in a radical way; whether to support terrorist violence or, on the other extreme, to justify the atrocities that the State committed in the midst of a counter-subversive fight.” (my trans.)

¹⁹⁷ As Cynthia E. Milton describes in her 2012 article, “Public Spaces for the Discussion of Peru’s Recent Past”:

The CVR’s report was staggering: 69,280 people dead or disappeared, over 43,000 orphans, and some 600,000 internal refugees in the preceding twenty years of violence, ignited by *Sendero Luminoso* ... and made worse by the armed forces’ brutal, indiscriminate, response. Three out of every four victims were *campesino*, Quechua speakers from the Peruvian highlands. The regions hardest hit were isolated towns in the Peruvian highlands – in the departments of Ayacucho, Huancavelica, Apurímac, Junín, and San Marín – representing 85 percent of the victims (185).

themes in networks of both local and global scale. In her work, she registers the footprints left behind by the Shining Path era, while emphasizing the overlapping traces and memories that traverses the surface of the national sphere.

In this chapter, I examine how Pacheco Medrano's works of fiction interact with other modes of memorialization – both within the literary sphere and beyond – including the effort to commemorate the period through physical interventions in the urban landscape. I first consider her writing within in the broader context of a generational response to this moment of trauma in the post-Shining Path era – looking particularly at her role as a woman author, and at her dualistic approach as both writer and anthropologist. This concise examination of the contemporary literary history of Peru will help to illuminate the increased attention that is recently being paid to women writing about this important historical period. Within this context, I further examine the idea of a “multidirectional” memory, using the figure of the ruin, an embodiment of multi-temporality, and the figure of the chronotope, a representation of linked time and space. These figures embody the kind of memorial work that is possible within the realm of fiction, as they envelop memories of the past, while simultaneously inviting future-oriented thinking. I link this examination of the chronotopic ruin with an analysis of Pacheco Medrano's new publishing venture – Ceques Editores – whose name evokes both the ancient Incan past, and charts a path for the future of Cusco as a literary publishing hub.¹⁹⁸ I continue with a reading of

¹⁹⁸ The word *ceques* is the Quechua term for the set of pathways that began at the center node of Cusco, and ritually connected the capital center to the rest of the empire. Thus, the name of her publishing house recalls this ancient form of social organization, while simultaneously forging new ties between Cusco and the world at large through the process of sharing stories.

Alma alga (Seaweed Soul) – a short story collection that delves into the relationship between the mythic and the historical – that I pair with a sketch of a physical memorial in Lima, *El ojo que llora (The Eye that Cries)* – a space that speaks to the power of narration and ruination. I then consider the novel *La sangre, el polvo, la nieve (Blood, Dust, Snow)* – a work that literally traces the political process of ruination – and finally end with a presentation of few short stories from her latest collection, *El sendero de los rayos (The Path of Lightning)*, which return us to the question of the space between mythic and historical tellings, of the importance of uncovering a landscape of buried secrets and difficult histories in Peru.

Although primarily trained as an anthropologist, whose specialities include inequality, race, and development, Pacheco Medrano felt compelled to record certain experiences through fiction. A prolific writer, she has published several novels and short story collections since 2006: *La voluntad del molle (The Will of the Molle Tree)* (novel; 2006); *No olvides nuestros nombres (Don't Forget Our Names)* (novel; 2008: Premio Regional de Novela del Instituto Nacional de Cultura de Cusco); *La sangre, el polvo, la nieve (Blood, Dust, Snow)* (novel; 2010); *Alma alga (Seaweed Soul)* (short story collection; 2010); *Cabezas y orquídeas (Heads and Orchids)* (novel; 2012: Premio Nacional de Novela Federico Villarreal 2010); *El sendero de los rayos (The Path of Lightning)* (short story collection; 2013: Premio Luces 2013 – “mejor libro de cuentos” / “best short story collection”); and *El bosque de tu nombre (The Forest of*

Your Name) (novel; 2013).¹⁹⁹ In an interview with Rosana López Cubas for the online magazine *Lima en escena*, “Karina Pacheco Medrano: ‘La memoria histórica, individual y colectiva me atrae fuertemente’” / “Karina Pacheco Medrano: ‘I am strongly attracted to historical, individual, and collective memory’” (July 2013), she describes what she sees as the primary task of fiction in the act of recording the serious effects of legacies of historical violence and trauma:

En un país donde se quiere pasar rápida página sobre esos hechos y sobre las víctimas, a veces la literatura ha logrado tocar fibras y convocar más atención del público que algunos excelentes libros de ciencias sociales. Tal vez porque la narrativa aborda estos temas de

¹⁹⁹ In a 2010 interview with Gabriel Ruiz Ortega for *Proyecto Patrimonio*, Pacheco Medrano provides an overview of her equally extensive, non-literary projects:

Cuando vivía en España trabajé varios años en una organización dedicada a las relaciones entre Europa y América Latina en la cual realizamos bastante trabajo de investigación y publicaciones. De aquel periodo destacaría dos libros que coedité: *Nuevos horizontes andinos: encuentros y desencuentros entre Europa y América Latina*, publicado en 2004. Entre los documentos de trabajo, por todo lo que aprendí, así como por el interés personal que me motivaba, resaltaría “La protección de los defensores de derechos humanos en América Latina. Perspectivas europeas,” publicado en 2003. De vuelta en el Perú, retomé más mi trabajo antropológico. Como resultado, en 2006 gané el Premio Regional de Ensayo del INC del Cusco con *La diversidad oprimida: centralismo cultural y reivindicaciones excluyentes*, publicado a fines de ese año; y en 2007 el INC me publicó el libro *Incas, indios y fiestas: representaciones y reivindicaciones en la identidad cusqueña*, que me suponía la actualización de la tesis doctoral que había sustentado en la Universidad Complutense el año 2000. Este libro me ha dado muchas satisfacciones (n/p).

When I lived in Spain I worked for several years for an organization dedicated to relations between Europe and Latin America, where we did quite a bit of research and publication. Two books that I co-edited stand out from that time: *New Andean Horizons: Encounters and Dis-encounters between Europe and Latin America*, published in 2004. Out of all the documents, in spite of everything I learned, and also the personal interest motivating me, the one to stand out would be “Protection of the Defenders of Human Rights in Latin America. European Perspectives,” published in 2003. Back in Peru, I took up my anthropological work again. As a result, in 2006 I won the INC de Cusco Regional Essay Prize with *Oppressed Diversity: Cultural Centralism and Selective Restitution*, published at the end of that year; and in 2007 the INC published my book *Incas, Indians, and Festivals: Representations and Restitutions in Cusqueño Identity*, which meant updating the doctoral thesis I defended at the Universidad Complutense in 2000. This book has given me a lot of satisfaction. (my trans.)

una manera más personalizada e íntima, permite que los lectores sientan mayor empatía con esas lecturas; mientras las ciencias sociales bordan una figura más completa y generalmente más compleja, pero este tipo de relato, además con un lenguaje más frío y académico, pocas veces cautiva al gran público (n/p).²⁰⁰

In this chapter, I situate the literary work of Pacheco Medrano within the physical memorial landscape of Peru, as I begin to untangle the very different kind of memory work made possible through fictional space. While she actively participates in the realm of social sciences, I note that this attention to the power of literature to captivate a different type of audience – specifically, a public one – is a very important component of Pacheco Medrano’s choice to engage in the art of storytelling. In a 2016 interview with Carlos Villacorta González for *Aurora Boreal*, she explains: “El método antropológico también apunta la necesidad de atender a los pequeños detalles, a los silencios, a lo no dicho, y eso, en literatura, es también muy importante ... A ello se añade que las novelas y cuentos tienen una capacidad de diálogo sumamente rico con una variedad y cantidad mayor de lectores, mientras los textos académicos, con excepciones, restringen su diálogo a un público especializado” (n/p).²⁰¹

Reminiscent of the figure of Peruvian anthropologist, poet, and author José María Arguedas (1911-69), Pacheco Medrano follows in his footsteps, practicing an

²⁰⁰ “In a country where facts and victims are quickly glossed over, literature has sometimes been able to touch nerves and draw more public attention than some excellent social science books. Maybe because narratives approach these topics in a more personalized and intimate way, they allow the reader to feel greater empathy through that type of reading; although social sciences paint a more complete and generally more complex picture, this kind of story, especially in a colder and more academic language, very seldom captivates the general public.” (my trans.)

²⁰¹ “The anthropological method also points to the necessity of attending to small details, to silences, to what is not said, and that, in literature, is also very important ... Added to that is that novels and stories have an immensely rich capacity for dialogue with a greater variety and quantity of readers, whereas academic texts, with exceptions, restrict their dialogue to a specialized audience.” (my trans.)

anthropologically infused literary investigation that delves deep into Peru's mestizo identity and the intersections of Spanish and Quechua culture. This acknowledgement of Cusco's tangled roots and layered history becomes a way of remembering a violence perpetrated against the indigenous population from the time of the Conquest through the period defined by Franco as "cruel modernity" – a violence that culminates in *Fujimorismo* and the Shining Path movement. Her fiction sheds light on the Incan ruins that literally and figuratively hold up the walls of Cusco to this day, as Pacheco Medrano imagines a redemptive, future-oriented space for these memories.²⁰²

Women Writing in the Aftermath of the Shining Path

In order to understand the important contribution that Pacheco Medrano makes to the practice of tracing the violence of the Shining Path, as well as to contemporary Peruvian literature as a broader category, it is first necessary to situate her writing within a history of literary production. I particularly emphasize Pacheco Medrano's position as one of the few female authors who touches upon the theme of political violence in her work, and further highlight that she does so from within the

²⁰² This focus on the roots and origins of Cusco's foundational walls echoes a scene in Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos / Deep Rivers* (1958). In his novel, Arguedas uses the tactic of mapping ruins as a way of critiquing colonial legacies, and in order to carve out a space for the re-making of national identities. The work offers an opportunity to make visible the hidden ruins of the past in the geography of 20th century Cusco. The protagonist, Ernesto, existing as a kind of disembodied specter, is torn between two cosmovisions – European and Amerindian. Reflecting on the image of Cusco from above, Ernesto notes that the ruins of the Incan civilization are what, for him, will redeem this silenced history. These ruins have a certain latent force; the legacy of colonial conquest and the uneven reach of "progress" remains etched on the very stones – speaking for those without access to the written language of "official history." It is my argument that Pacheco Medrano's work draws from this particular literary legacy, and continues to build upon the foundations created by Arguedas' fiction in order to consider Cusco's relationship to its troubled past in the 21st century.

space of Andean Cusco (rather than from the capital of Lima), reclaiming the city as a node of literary and knowledge production. Both of these factors influence the topographical memory-map that she produces through her fiction.

In 2000, Mark R. Cox published an anthology entitled *El cuento peruano en los años de violencia* (*The Peruvian Short Story in the Years of Violence*) in which he begins to outline the literary trends he traces in Peru post-Shining Path. In the introduction to the collection, “El Perú: Su narrativa y la violencia política desde 1980” / “Peru: Its Narrative and Political Violence Since 1980”, he charts a kind of timeline that describes the way in which literary space reacted to the changing and haunted landscape of a Peru forever altered by this era of political turmoil:

Aunque la existencia de Sendero Luminoso se conoció en 1980 y del Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru en 1984, un análisis desde la perspectiva de la narrativa ficticia tarda unos años. A partir de 1986 comienzan a aparecer las primeras obras publicadas sobre la violencia política en el Perú. Sin embargo, desde entonces más de sesenta escritores han publicado más de cien cuentos y treinta novelas sobre el tema. La presente antología es un esfuerzo por mostrar parte del material publicado hasta la fecha sobre la violencia política. Muchos de estos escritores forman también parte de un “boom” en la narrativa andina que comienza en la década del ochenta. Este “boom” fue ayudado en gran medida por la demanda de un público lector, la labor de casas editoriales, concursos literarios que les confieren consagración a escritores galardonados, y escritores jóvenes que se enfocan en la región andina (9-10).²⁰³

²⁰³ “Although Sendero Luminoso’s existence was known in 1980, and the Revolutionary Movement of Tupac Amaru in 1984, an analysis from the perspective of narrative fiction takes years. Beginning in 1986 the first published works begin to appear about political violence in Peru. Nevertheless, since then more than sixty writers have published more than one hundred stories and thirty novels on the subject. The present anthology is an effort to show part of the material published so far on political violence. Most of these writers also form part of a ‘boom’ in Andean narrative that begins in the eighties. This ‘boom’ was largely supported by public reader demand, work in publishing houses, literary competitions that place great weight upon prize-winning writers, and young writers who focus on the Andean region.” (my trans.)

He attributes this boom in the production of Andean-based literature to the emergence of a public interested in the theme of political violence – a group mostly composed of urban-based readers who desired to understand this traumatic period of history, one whose palpable effects took place far from the city center.

It is Cox's claim that these authors mark a literary shift, and that the violence stemming from the conflict with the Shining Path shaped a whole generation of writers. He defines this group as originating primarily from the provinces and born after World War II, between 1944 and 1961: "La presente antología es un primer paso para dar cuenta de la admirable cantidad y calidad de ficción narrativa que sobre la época de la violencia política se ha publicado hasta el año 2000. Una época clave para una generación. Quizá será lo que une a una generación en su interpretación de su historia contemporánea, como la guerra de 1898 en España, la Revolución Mexicana y la Revolución Cubana han dejado sus huellas en las culturas de sus respectivos países" (13).²⁰⁴ However, I note that in this preliminary study conducted by Cox, out of the fifteen authors whose short stories are featured in the anthology, only one is written by a woman – Pilar Dughi's (1956-2006) "El cazador" / "The Hunter." It is within this complex literary topography that I situate the work of Pacheco Medrano; I push for an understanding of the difference between the earlier literary works produced by those authors included in Cox's 2000 anthology, and those of Pacheco

²⁰⁴ "The present anthology is a first step towards recognizing the admirable quantity and quality of narrative fiction that has been published about the period of political violence since 2000. A key period for a generation. It might be what unites a generation in its interpretation of modern history, like the war of 1898 in Spain, the Mexican Revolution, and the Cuban Revolution have left their marks on the cultures of their respective countries." (my trans.)

Medrano, born almost a full decade after the majority of this first and second wave of writers. I further argue that both her writing, and her involvement in editorial production, blur the once deceptively strict divisions between cosmopolitan and local, Andean and *criollo* – and that she deliberately engages with these seemingly set categories, staging juxtapositions that change and complicate the way in which the reader envisions the space of Peru.²⁰⁵ I question: How does the work of Karina Pacheco Medrano – a female writer from Cusco born in 1969 – fit within, or push the boundaries of, Cox’s map of authors? Does the work of later authors (who lived the period of political violence as youths and adolescents) touch upon different themes or address distinct concerns as they continue to chart the effects of this troubled history in the national sphere? And, how does the work of *women* writing about the period of violence add new perspectives to the expanding corpus?²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Cox does include Pacheco Medrano’s first novel *La voluntad del molle* (2006) in his annotated bibliography and corpus, included at the end of his 2008 article.

²⁰⁶ In a later article (2008), Cox addresses the issue of female authors and attempts to quantify their literary production based on the corpus of novels and short stories he has collected in an annotated bibliography attached to the end of the piece:

Las diecinueve mujeres que han publicado algo sobre el tema de la violencia política componen el 11.3% de los escritores y han producido veinticinco cuentos (8.2%) y cuatro novelas (5.9%). En 1989 Pilar Dughi publica un cuento y Aída Pachas es finalista en el concurso “El cuento de las mil palabras.” Varias de las siguientes publicaciones aparecen gracias al apoyo del Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán, cuyo primer concurso de cuento “Magda Portal” se da en 1990. Carmen Luz Gorriti gana el primer premio y Ena Victoria Ayala es finalista, mientras que Rosa María Bedoya y Carmen Guizado son finalistas en el segundo concurso. Además de las que han publicado por su propia cuenta, casi un tercio pertenece o ha pertenecido al grupo literario Anillo de Moebius, y alrededor de un tercio está afiliada al Centro Flora Tristán (230).

The nineteen women who have published on the theme of political violence make up 11.3% of writers and have produced twenty-five stories (8.2%) and four novels (5.9%). In 1989, Pilar Dughi publishes a story and Aída Pachas is a finalist in the competition “The Story of a Thousand Words.” Several of the following publications appear thanks to the support of the Flora Tristan Peruvian Women’s Center, whose

In 2015, Cocodrilo published a collection of short stories composed exclusively by women (Pacheco Medrano included): *Al fin de la batalla: Después del conflicto, la violencia y el terror / At the End of the Battle: After Conflict, Violence and Terror* (2015).²⁰⁷ The anthology specifically takes up the question of what it means to be a woman writing about this moment of historical violence in Peru. Editor Ana María Carrasco – a lawyer for the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP) and an expert in questions of gender, human rights, indigenous rights, and public politics – describes the work as an attempt to come to terms with the epoch of violence thirty-five years later: “El criterio para la selección fue buscar autoras cuyas obras hayan tenido algún impacto en mí como lectora. El pedido: un cuento sobre el postconflicto. Cada escritora tuvo la potestad de escribir desde el punto de vista que quisiera, sin ninguna restricción, no hubo el más mínimo intento de balancear los perpetradores, los tipos de crímenes o las víctimas. Y así fue armando poco a poco este libro de siete cuentos con siete escritoras a las que admiro” (10).²⁰⁸ However, it is in the prologue – composed by María Eugenia Ulfe – a professor of social sciences at

first story competition “Magda Portal” takes place in 1990. Carmen Luz Gorriti wins the first prize and Ena Victoria Ayala is a finalist, while Rosa Maria Bedoya and Carmen Guizado are finalists in the second competition. In addition to those who have gotten published on their own, almost a third belong or have belonged to the literary group Moebius Strip, and about a third are affiliated with the Flora Tristan Center. (my trans.)

²⁰⁷ The authors represented in this collection include: Christiane Félipe Vidal, Ysa Navarro, Karina Pacheco Medrano, Claudia Salazar Jiménez, Jennifer Thorndike, Nataly Villena, and Julia Wong.

²⁰⁸ “The criterion for selection was to find authors whose works had had some impact on me as a reader. The request: a story about post-conflict. Every writer had the authority to write from whatever point of view she wanted, without restrictions, without the slightest attempt to balance perpetrators, the types of crimes or the victims. And so little by little, this seven story book with seven authors I admire came together.” (my trans.)

PUCP – where the reader begins to unravel the importance of concentrating on women-authored short-stories:

Con una gran mayoría de varones difuntos, fueron las mujeres quienes asumieron un papel protagónico como defensores de los derechos humanos, emergiendo así como sujetos ciudadanos. Pero también fueron las víctimas silenciosas con marcas inscritas en sus propios cuerpos ... Ellas forman parte del universo de otros ciudadanos que nos deja el conflicto armado interno: afectados, desplazados, torturados, desaparecidos ... son estos otros ciudadanos quienes dan materialidad y visibilidad a esos números ... (12-3).²⁰⁹

Already center-stage in the struggle to uncover human rights abuses, this anthology gives women a platform from which to narrate their own version of the past in which they played such a central role. This increased attention to women's experiences in the fraternal conflict opens up a space for a renewed attention to Pacheco Medrano's earlier pieces – each of which highlights the importance of a female-centric understanding of Peru's memory-scape.

Narrating from the Ruin: Multidirectional Memory

In this chapter, I argue that the writings of Pacheco Medrano represent a memory that is layered – that is, that her stories paint a topography in which multiple, overlapping histories are inscribed on the surface of a single landscape. They further compel the reader to dig beneath the surface and to uncover the strata of memories buried beneath the façade of present-day Peru. I am interested in the way in which the

²⁰⁹ “With the vast majority of the men dead, it was women who took on the protagonist's role of defender of human rights, thus emerging as citizen-subjects. But they were also the silent victims with marks inscribed on their own bodies ... They form part of the universe of other citizens left behind by the internal armed conflict: affected, displaced, tortured, disappeared ... it is these other citizens who give materiality and visibility to these numbers.” (my trans.)

footprints and traces of this violence are revealed as Pacheco Medrano describes a complex landscape of entangled histories and stories of historical injustice. She outlines the manner in which particular moments of violence come to mark an era – a mark whose biting legacy is “inherited” by subsequent generations of Peruvians. María del Pilar Blanco, building on the work of Avery Gordon, writes in her 2012 *Ghost-Watching American Modernity* that ghosts must be thought of as, “representations not of occluded pasts, or buried secrets, but as manifestations of an increasing awareness of *simultaneous landscapes and simultaneous others* living within unseen, diverse spaces in the progressively complicated political and cultural networks of hemispheric modernization” (7, emphasis added). I echo this call, and propose that one read Pacheco Medrano’s Peruvian landscapes as encompassing this very simultaneity, as encircling sites that are multiply haunted.²¹⁰

One way in which this simultaneity is captured – that is, the competing presence of different histories, times periods, and spaces – is through the figure of the ruin. The site of Cusco that Pacheco Medrano engages with in her writing – with its

²¹⁰ I was very much influenced in my utilization of haunting by Del Pilar Blanco’s description of haunting as an act that, far from being rooted in the past, expresses a kind of anxiety in the face of the rapidly changing present. These clashes take place when complex pasts and presents meet. As she describes in the introduction to her work:

Haunting can take many forms: Alongside apparitions of supernatural shapes or beings that would otherwise be imperceptible, it can also mean the disquieting experience of sensing a collision of temporalities or spaces – an experience that is nevertheless riddled with doubt and uncertainty. Thus, to look for ghosts as a reader of literature and film is to study different perceptions of haunted landscapes as distinct from one another – and to vigilantly account, as a reader, for the spatiotemporal coordinates that merge to produce a site of haunting. To search for them within different texts that recount different experiences of modernity in the Americas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is to register (however slowly or doubtfully) an emerging sense of a diverse and changing experience of American landscapes, as well as to account for the constantly shifting set of perceptions of local, national, and transnational space that a given text may reveal (1).

ever-present Incan ruins as well as the traces and fragments of many histories of trauma spanning from the Conquest to the colonial period to the present-day aftermath of the Shining Path era – represents this kind of multi-temporal space. Michael J. Lazzara and Vicky Unruh present a multidisciplinary perspective on how the figure of the ruin functions in their work *Telling Ruins in Latin America* (2009): the ruin acts “as a merger of past, present, and future, and as a material embodiment of change” (1). Its meaning depends on “what a human group does with [it]” (1). Quoting Francine Masiello, they argue that ruins can be conceived of as sites of “ethical possibility,” as “frontiers of action,” and as objects that promote “collective thinking” (5). Further building upon this definition, Ana Laura Stoler in *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (2013) draws our attention to the fact that ruins are not just debris or rubble, but are the result of an active *process* of ruination. Ruins are not simply found, but rather they are *made* through political processes: “‘ruination’ [is] an active, ongoing process ... and *ruin* ... a violent verb that unites apparently disparate moments, places and objects”; “At issue are the political lives of imperial debris and the uneven pace with which people can extricate themselves from the structures and signs by which remains take hold” (8).²¹¹

²¹¹ In Cecilia Enjuto Rangel’s *Cities in Ruins* (2010), she carefully traces the etymology of the word “ruin”: “The Latin verb *ruo*, ‘to rush or fall,’ initially meant that ruin was a movement, the process of collapse. Through time, the word *ruin* came to signify the result of the destructive motion, the remains of a historical past. The etymology of the word is relevant to the development of the poetic topos, since these texts often exploit the multiple meanings of ruin. The poems I analyze often propose a rereading of the past, to condemn it, idealize it, or learn from it” (5).

Adding to this definition, Gastón Gordillo notes that: "...in the past two decades, scholars have moved ... toward analyzing ruins as sociohistorical configurations. This perspective has examined ruins as intrinsic components of any landscape and as sites constituted by wider social relations and fields of power" (142). Ruins are not symbols of nostalgic longing, but rather mark: "modern, contemporary, industrial forms of decay and destruction, the physical and social detritus created the world over by capitalist, state, and imperialist projects and conflicts" (142). The presence of this "imperial debris" challenges the very ideas of a progressive view of modernity; ruins are not "...univocal reified objects but dynamic social-spatial process" (Gordillo 142). Therefore, tracing the figure of the ruin in the post-trauma cityscape, a practice represented in the corpus of Pacheco Medrano's literary work, becomes a way of producing a particular kind of historical map of the city of Cusco, of Peru as a nation, and of the forces that shape these spaces. By insisting upon marking, highlighting, uncovering, and interrogating sites of ruins, her writing invites a critique and an examination of Peru's entry into contemporary systems of globalization and capitalism. What social price was paid to achieve these so-called economic advances under Fujimori? How long has this historical violence played out across the cityspace? How can we connect colonial cruelty to acts of cruelty in the 20th and 21st centuries?

Ruins become stumbling blocks or "obstacles" in the landscape – lingering sites of possibility that make re-imaginings of the urban possible. Subaltern voices can speak through this figure, noting the failed processes of modernization and

globalization. Pacheco Medrano's work builds on this figure of the ruin, used by such *avant garde* poets as Jorge Luis Borges in "Las ruinas circulares" / "Circular Ruins" (1941), Pablo Neruda in *Canto General / General Song* (1950; composed between 1938-50), José María Arguedas in *Los ríos profundos / Deep Rivers* (1958), to challenge linear notions of time and progress. The ruin becomes a way of merging highly public histories with deeply personal memories – of charting a particular process of ruination that attempts to erase certain people and certain ways of life – from the violence of colonial conquest, to the aftermath of the Shining Path.²¹² Narrating the ruin through fiction allows one to release the "... compressed histories" contained within the figure – a "spatial-historical compression" that is the result of "destruction, dislocation, and rupture, a perspective that views space ... as the product of historically situated relations and conflicts" (Gordillo 142). By weaving together fictional accounts that center on the figure of the ruin itself, Pacheco Medrano forges a new relationship between time and space.

To elaborate on the history of the space-time relationship in the Latin American city, I turn to the work of Silvia Spitta and Boris Muñoz. As Spitta describes in the preface to *Más allá de la ciudad letrada / Beyond the Lettered City* (2003), the initial conquest of Latin America was primarily one of space, one that

²¹² In fact, Pacheco Medrano's newest novel – tentatively slated for publication in 2017 – will deal explicitly with the theme of archaeological ruins: "Es una novela que viaja por la selva del norte y del sur, indagando en restos arqueológicos y el fin de la inocencia, así como en las historias irresueltas que heredamos de nuestros antepasados" (n/p, interview with auroraboreal.net) / "It is a novel that travels through northern and southern jungles, exploring archaeological remains and the end of innocence, like the unresolved stories we inherit from our ancestors." (my trans.)

strategically separated the geographical contours of the land from their corresponding histories. Walter Mignolo describes the perpetuation of the divide between time and space in his article, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference” (2002), in which he states that since the “emergence” of the modern / colonial world, “time has functioned as a principle of order that increasingly subordinates places, relegating them to the categories of ‘before’ or ‘below’ from the perspective of the ‘holders’ ... of time.” (67). However, as Mignolo highlights, the powerful nature of this system does not imply the complete *erasure* of other conceptions of the space-time relationship (75). To illustrate the lingering interactions of overlapping cosmologies, I draw from theorist Nestor García Canclini and Serge Gruzinski, each of whose work focuses on the layered nature of the configuration of time-space that marks the Latin American city. As Canclini points out in *Culturas híbridas / Hybrid Cultures* (1989), Latin America in the age of “modernity” exists in a kind of state of “multi-temporality”; it is necessary to recognize the “*heterogeneidad multitemporal de cada nación*” / “the multitemporal heterogeneity of each nation” (15). Likewise, Gruzinski, in *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization* (2002), points to the disorder that ensued after the conquest of the “New World” – one that left in its wake a clashing landscape composed of both “crumbing remains” and “newly erected buildings” – a legacy of “scrambled time[s]” and “strange zones” (39).

As these theorists suggest, the process of conquest by way of urbanization resulted in a kind of layered or palimpsest-like city, in which important administrative

buildings were built directly over the remains of the razed precolombian urban centers: "... Este proceso urbanístico, claramente entendido como instrumento de control, creó un palimpsesto entre el orden antiguo y el que se imponía de manera que, paradójicamente y muy a pesar suyo, las nuevas ciudades operaban como índices del orden suplantado. Según Carlos Monsiváis un 'hacerse entre ruinas' caracteriza antológicamente a las ciudades latinoamericanas" (Muñoz and Spitta 8).²¹³ This process of supplanting is highly visible in Cusco, where the city's foundations – its bedrock – is literally constructed from the ancient Incan walls.

Because ruins "house" memories of the past in the present, taking on both temporal and spatial dimensions, I propose utilizing Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope (linked time-space, where "time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movement of time, plot and history [84-5]) to read this figure in Pacheco Medrano's literature. I interpret ruins as a kind of chronotope – as pieces of a physical geography re-invested with a particular temporal or historical dimension based on the forces that orbit a place in the present: "We will give the name *chronotope* (literally 'time space') to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature ... In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (84-5);

²¹³ "This urbanistic process, clearly understood as an instrument of control, created a palimpsest between an old order and the one that was imposing itself in such a way that paradoxically and very much in spite of itself, new cities operated like markers of the supplanted order. According to Carlos Monsiváis, a 'becoming among ruins' anthologically characterizes Latin American cities." (my trans.)

we might think also of Walter Benjamin's figure of the monad²¹⁴ – a “something” that can house bits of the past suddenly made re-relevant in the present. Utilizing these two constructions of linked space and time, I present a topographical approach to the kind of historical memory presented by Pacheco Medrano's fiction. Her writing remaps the contours of the cityscape through an alternative geographical model that considers both spatial and temporal dimensions, as well as the political *processes* that cause sites to be “ruined” in the first place. By analyzing literary cityspaces that place the ruin at the forefront, I argue that these texts present a call for an “urban archaeology” – an uncovering of the various forces and strata that come together to compose the geography of the present.

Through her depictions of landscapes brimming with the potential of half-forgotten ruins, Pacheco Medrano envisions a kind of memory that is constantly shifting, that traverses time and space, that is multidirectional. As Michael Rothberg questions in his 2009 work *Multidirectional Memory*: “What happens when different histories confront each other in the public sphere? Does the remembrance of one history erase others from view?” (2). Negating an understanding of memory as a

²¹⁴ “XVII: Materialistic historiography ... is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only when he encounters it in a monad. In this structure, he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance to fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history – blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method the lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time canceled in the lifework, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history. The nourishing fruit of the historically understood contains time as a precious but tasteless seed” (Benjamin 261-2).

“zero-sum game” whereby one dominant version of the past eclipses all other remembrances from the collective sphere, he instead invites his readers to imagine memory differently; he considers “memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” (3).²¹⁵ I argue that it is precisely this version of memory that Pacheco Medrano captures within her fiction, as her narratives move from the space of the very intimate (the private, the family secret), to the global; she explores the way in which an individual remembrance interacts within a web of local, national, and international nodes as the act of remembering is one that cuts across historical and geographical boundaries.

In order to demonstrate the image of multidirectional memory that is encompassed by Pacheco Medrano’s works, I look first at her most recent undertakings – the founding of a publishing house called “Ceques Editores,” and the publication of an anthology of Latin American short stories in 2014. Doing so allows me to untangle both her relationship to the field of contemporary Latin American literary production, as well as the significance of her attempt to reposition the city of Cusco as a site of memory *production*. From the city built on Incan ruins comes a

²¹⁵ In this dissertation, I draw from and build upon the work of Rothberg:

Multidirectional Memory considers a series of interventions through which social actors bring multiple traumatic pasts into a heterogeneous and changing post-World War II present. Concerned simultaneously with individual and collective memory, this book focuses on both agents and sites of memory, and especially on their interaction within specific historical and political contexts of struggle and contestation. Making memory the focus of this work allows me to synthesize concerns about history, representation, biography, memorialization, and politics that motivates many scholars working in cultural studies. Not strictly separable from either history or representation, memory nonetheless captures simultaneously the individual, embodied, and lived side *and* the collective, social, and constructed side of our relations to the past (4).

vision for reimagining Cusco's position in the contemporary world order; storytelling becomes an act of redemption. I further consider how her own literary works – short story collections *Alma alga / Seaweed Soul* (2010) and *El sendero de los rayos / The Path of Lightning* (2013), and novel *La sangre, el polvo, la nieve / Blood, Dust, Snow* (2010) – can be read in conjunction with this editorial project in order to paint a larger picture of a landscape of multidirectional memory – one that interrogates the past and the present, the local and the global – compelling the reader to situate and contextualize the legacy of the Shining Path within a web of historical memories and past violence. Drawing on the image of the ruin – both in the sense of the archaeological fragment that can serve as a touchstone for memory, as the catalyst for practices of collective memory-making, and in the sense of exploring the processes of political ruination – Pacheco Medrano compels us to think about the long history of a Peruvian memoryscape haunted by legacies of trauma.

Ceques Editores

In addition to her work as a writer and anthropologist, Pacheco Medrano opened her own independent press in June of 2013 along with Adriana Peralta Villavicencio and José Antonio de Pascual Luca de Tena (which will publish in the areas of art, history, literature, the environment, and social sciences).²¹⁶ On

²¹⁶ According to their promotional Facebook page, “Quiénes somos” / “About Us” (www.facebook.com/CequesEditores): Karina Pacheco Medrano (Cusco): “Directora de Ceques Editores. Escritora y doctora en Antropología por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, es especialista en temas de racismo, discriminación y derechos humanos. Hasta la fecha ha publicado once libros de literatura, antropología, y relaciones internacionales, Ganadora del Premio Nacional Federico Villarreal de Novela 2010 con la obra *Cabeza y Orquídeas*, ha colaborado en revistas como *Crónicas Urbanas*, *Buensalvaje* y *Papeles y Cuestiones Internacionales* / “Director of Ceques Editores. Writer and doctor of Anthropology from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, specialist

September 13, 2014, *LaRepublica.pe* published a short article entitled “Ceques del Cusco,” a piece that highlights the curious fact that although there is a general trend towards an overall decline in the printing, reading, and consumption of books, small editorials continue to pop up all over Peru:

Desdeñado a quienes auguran la muerte cercana del libro, en el Perú siguen surgiendo nuevas editoriales. Es un fenómeno cuya explicación más fácil recurre el crecimiento económico de los últimos años y elude la relación inversamente proporcional que hoy se da aquí entre el crecimiento de la población y de sus ingresos y la reducción del tiraje de los libros, que rara vez sobrepasa ahora el millar de ejemplares. Importa anotar que el florecimiento de pequeñas empresas editoras no se limita a la capital; ocurre también en provincias. Estas líneas

in the themes of racism, discrimination, and human rights. To date she has published eleven books of literature, anthropology, and international relations, Winner of the National Federico Villarreal Novel Prize in 2010 with the work *Cabezas y Orquídeas*, she has collaborated with magazines such as *Crónicas Urbanas*, *Buensalvaje*, and *Papeles y Cuestiones Internacionales*.” (my trans.)

Adriana Peralta Villavicencio (Cusco): “Jefa de Comunicaciones de Ceques Editores. Fotoperiodista por la Universidad Gama Filho de Río de Janeiro, es comunicadora social con amplia experiencia en la publicación de ensayos fotográficos de corte cultural. Ha sido editora en las revistas *Parlante* y *Warmi* del Centro de Educación y Comunicación Guamán Poma de Ayala y ha trabajado como reportera gráfica del diario *La República*” / “Chief of Communications at Ceques Editores. Photojournalist for the Universidad Gama Filho de Río de Janeiro, she is a social communicator with ample experience in the publication of photographic essays on cultural themes. She has been editor of the magazines *Parlante* and *Warmi* at the Guaman Poma de Ayala Education and Communication Center and worked as a graphic reporter for the daily newspaper *La República*.” (my trans.)

José Antonio de Pascual Luca de Tena (Palma de Mallorca): “Editor General de Ceques Editores. Historiador por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, es también escritor y gestor cultural. Ha trabajado con diferentes instituciones culturales como Casa de América de Madrid, Caja de Madrid y Fundación Santillana en tareas de escritura y curaduría. Ha colaborado activamente en diversos libros de arte latinoamericano como *Ustedes-Nosotros: Jóvenes Artistas Latinoamericanos* y *Lenguajes desde Centro América*” / “General Editor of Ceques Editores. Historiographer at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, he is also a writer and cultural director. He has worked at cultural institutions such as the Casa de America de Madrid, Caja de Madrid, and Fundación Santillana on writing and curation. He has collaborated actively on various books of Latin American art such as *Ustedes-Nosotros: Young Latin American Artists* and *Languages of Central America*.” (my trans.)

For a history of the editorial’s publications thus far, see an article entitled “Ceques del Cusco,” printed on *LaRepublica.pe* on September 13, 2014.

quieren celebrar el nacimiento, en Cusco, de un nuevo sello: Ceques Editores S.R.L. (n/p).²¹⁷

If, as the article so clearly outlines, this increase in new publishing houses goes against the observable decline of the book and of the publishing industry, what is it that this independent press offers that allows it to find its niche in the literary world of Cusco and beyond?²¹⁸ What does it mean to reclaim the ruins and fragments of a lost Incan Empire, and to rebuild from the rubble a new literary tradition?

One of the biggest projects undertaken by this new press is the publication of an anthology entitled, *Cusco, Espejo de Cosmografías: Antología de relato iberoamericano / Cusco, Cosmographic Mirror: Anthology of Ibero-American Stories*. In her written presentation of the work (included in the volume), Pacheco Medrano explains the importance of the initiative by describing an annual ritual

²¹⁷ “Spurned by those who predicted the coming death of the book, new editorials continue to emerge in Peru. It is a phenomenon whose most facile explanation is the economic growth of recent years and which eludes the inversely proportional relationship that today exists between the growth of populations and their income and the reduction in book printing, which now rarely surpasses the thousand-copy mark. It is worth noting that the flourishing of small editorial businesses is not confined to the capital; it is happening in the provinces, as well. These lines are intended to celebrate the birth, in Cusco, of a new press: Ceques Editores S.R.L.” (my trans.)

²¹⁸ There is increasing attention being paid to the emergence of independent publishing houses across Latin America. See also “La Nueva Ruta de los Libros: Editoriales Latinas e Independientes” published in *El desconcierto* in November of 2013. Although the article focuses on the literary scene within Chile, it extends this conversation to Latin America as a whole: “El fenómeno de las editoriales independientes o culturales, que viene en ascenso hace algún tiempo a nivel mundial, ha prendido con fuerza en nuestro país, potenciado por la visibilidad en prensa y la capacidad de dinamizar la escena literaria y el debate crítico dentro del circuito del libro ... cabe preguntarse si discursivamente y prácticamente estos proyectos editoriales constituyen en efecto un fenómeno contracultural o de cierta proyección política, como algunos plantean...” (n/p) / “The phenomenon of independent or cultural editorials, which arose globally some time ago, has taken a strong hold in our country, strengthened by visibility in the press and the ability to breathe life into the literary scene and spark critical debate about books ... one must ask whether discursively and practically these editorial projects constitute, in effect, a countercultural phenomenon or a certain political projection, as some claim...” (my trans.)

undertaken by four communities in the Quehue district of Cusco; each year, they gather collectively in June to weave a bridge that allows them to:

...atravesar el río Apurímac y enlazarse con el resto del mundo. Haciendo equilibrio sobre el abismo, van trenzando piso, vallas y barandas con fibras vegetales secas ... La literatura también supone un ejercicio de equilibrio sobre el abismo, el trenzado de lazos y el ajuste de nudo, tensión y precisión, así como la disposición para meter las manos hasta el fondo de las hebras húmedas y secas, aunque terminen sangrando. La escritura, a veces, también logra formar puentes que nos permiten atravesar distancias insondables y reunirnos con personas conocidas y sobre todo con lectores que jamás hubiéramos conocido. Y así como los comuneros de Quehue persisten en tejer ese puente colgante cada año, en lugar de resumir el trabajo abordando la construcción de uno de concreto, también los narradores persisten en la confección de historias que mantengan vivo el mito de llegar a alguna parte, aunque pocas veces sepamos cuál será el final del camino (11).²¹⁹

The stories selected for this anthology are imagined from the space of the local, but also grow to encompass and envelop that of the global, stories that “bridge” this delicate space of the “between”: “...historias que logran sostenerse como puentes y que les han configurado caminos que les permiten avistar y ser avistados por públicos que traspasan las fronteras de sus países de origen ... Alquimia donde la flexibilidad es sinónimo de solidez ... En todas ellas hallamos la labor del orfebre que conoce bien su tradición y que disfruta reinventándola y reinventándose; husmeando en

²¹⁹ “...brave the River Apurimac and link themselves to the rest of the world. Balancing over the abyss, they braid ground, fence, and rail from dry vegetable fibers ... Literature, too, entails an exercise of balance over the abyss, the braiding of bonds and adjustment of knots, tension and precision, and a willingness to sink one’s hands into a bundle of wet and dry threads, even if they end up bloodied. Writing, at times, also builds bridges that allow us to cross unfathomable distances and reunite with acquaintances and, above all, with readers we would never have known. And just as the comuneros from Quehue persist in weaving their hanging bridge year after year, rather than concluding the job by constructing a concrete one, narrators, too, persist in their preparation of stories that might be able to keep alive the myth that we are going somewhere, though rarely do we learn what is at the end of the road.” (my trans.)

nuevos caminos, fugando de lo ya conocido, y a veces, también, tratando de hallar las migajas de pan que procuren el retorno a la casa que se ha dejado en algún lugar del bosque” (11-12).²²⁰ Pacheco Medrano claims that what unites the stories collected in this volume is that each author explores the concept of “*nomadismo*” – a kind of movement that cannot help but mark a generation who has witnessed the changes that accompany a world constantly and rapidly morphing in response to a globalized network of forces intimately connected to both the local and the global; these are authors who were born after 1960, who witnessed the “...manera [en que] las sociedades han procesado tantos ascensos y caídas; tantas muertes y resurrecciones; tanto boom literario, baby boom y bum-bum-bum de dictaduras y violencias de toda laya; tantas reconfiguraciones geopolíticas y demográficas; tantas utopías y sueños rotos; tantos avances tecnológicos y pérdidas de la inocencia; tanta música...” (14-5).²²¹ And, although she does not include her own work within this anthology, I argue

²²⁰ “...stories that hold themselves up like bridges, and which have established roads that allow them to see and be seen by publics across the boundaries of their countries of origin ... Alchemy where flexibility is synonymous with solidity ... in all of them we find the labor of the goldsmith who knows well his tradition and who enjoys reinventing it and reinventing himself; sniffing about on new roads, fleeing the known, and at times, also, trying to find the breadcrumbs that will lead back to the home that was left somewhere in the forest.” (my trans.)

²²¹ “...way in which societies have processed so many peaks and valleys; so many deaths and resurrections; so much literary boom, baby boom, and boom-boom-boom of dictatorships and violences of all sorts; so many geopolitical and demographic reconfigurations; so many utopias and broken dreams; so many technological advances and losses of innocence; so much music...” (my trans.)

A second anthology – which was translated into English and published in 2012 by Open Letter – also notes this need to mark a certain kind of generational shift in literary production: *The Future is Not Ours: New Latin American Fiction* edited by Diego Trelles Paz. He writes in the introductory note, originally composed in 2008:

So I am talking about the way that writers face *the act of writing* – what Agustín calls a “generational spirit” – within a group of Latin American writers born just after the Paris May of 1968 and the student massacre in Tlatelolco; educated under

that Pacheco Medrano's narratives also attempt to cast these same delicate threads, weaving a renewed connection between the space of Cusco and the world at large.

In a particularly telling passage included in this introductory essay, Pacheco Medrano reclaims the space of Cusco as a site of global importance – a node in a network capable of producing significant works, capable of being seen both as a site of knowledge production and of shaping the world beyond its national borders. This project de-centers the space of Lima, and promotes a kind of inclusionary politics that pushes for a certain “re-thinking” of the national space as well as the question of national belonging:

El Cusco como un tejido, antiguo, lleno de tensiones. Y sin embargo, una raíz. Un ombligo. También un puente trenzado con las voces diversas que convergen en este centro del mundo. A fines de los años 80 e incluso de los 90, en medio de las grandes crisis que azotaban el Perú, los adolescentes cusqueños podíamos ver a miles de jóvenes latinoamericanos arribar a nuestra ciudad superando riesgos, buscando una raíz del mundo, su raíz americana; su mirada nos renovaba y nos recordaba que los lugares míticos permanecen vivos, creativos, audaces, cada vez que procuran encuentros. Siete décadas antes, en medio del auge del indigenismo, nuestros abuelos habían experimentado lo mismo con la llegada de pintores, músicos, intelectuales y publicaciones procedentes de todo el continente, en

the framework of military dictatorships in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay; who as teenagers and young adults witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall, the massacre in Tiananmen Square, the Srebrenica Massacre, the fall of perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, and armed subversion and military repression in South America; who witnessed the rise of the internet and Kurt Cobain's suicide, the prolonged, methodical murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, the height of electronic music, the attacks on the World Trade Center, terrorist attacks in Spain and the U.K., the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Guantanamo prison, the Darfur genocide, the election of the first black president of the United States, the revolutions and popular uprisings of the Arab Spring, the occupation of many cities' parks and streets by citizens angry at the current state of affairs, and, among many armed conflicts, the Soviet and U.S. invasions of Afghanistan, as well as the U.S. invasion of Iraq with an international coalition of countries (xii-xiii).

especial del Cono Sur, superando fronteras, compartiendo vanguardias, miradas y el sueño de mundos mejores desde este centro milenario, y así también ellos recordaban la maravillosa obsesión de los incas por reflejar en la geografía del Cusco el mapa de las constelaciones ... A veces en el Cusco nos ensimismamos e imaginamos nuestra ciudad y nuestras identidades como si fueran una piedra. Gracias a los telescopios, a los quipus y a las crónicas podemos recordar. Gracias también a las piedras que forman las calles y murallas del Cusco antiguo: piedras ciclópeas y multiformas que han sabido acoplarse a la perfección mostrándonos cómo la flexibilidad puede ser sinónimo de solidez (16-7).²²²

These multiform stones – evoking the singing stones ever-present in Arguedas’ *Deep Rivers* – are the kind of ruins described by theorists such as Gordillo and Stoler. They are sites of ethical possibility – at once firm and flexible, simultaneously future oriented and reflective of hundreds of years of the past. It is from these ancient foundations – and through the preservation of the stories that the indigenous-built walls of Cusco stubbornly guard – that new narratives emerge; they account for this long history of vanguard movements, indigenous movements, moments of violence, and utopian dreams. They signal this opportunity for an opening up towards alternative futures.

²²² “Cusco as a weaving, old, full of tensions. And even so, a root. A navel. And also a bridge woven from the diverse voices that converge in this center of the world. At the end of the 80s and even 90s, in the midst of the great crises that lashed Peru, we young Cusquenos could see thousands of Latin American young people flooding into our city against the odds, seeking a root in the world, their American root; their gaze revived us and reminded us that mythical places are still alive, creative, audacious, every time they are encountered. Seven decades earlier, at the height of indigenism, our grandparents had experienced the same with the arrival of painters, musicians, intellectuals, and publications from across the continent, especially from the Southern Cone, overcoming borders, sharing vanguards, gazes, and the dream of better worlds from this millenary center, and they also remembered the marvelous obsession of the Incas with reflecting a map of the constellations in the geography of Cusco ... Sometimes in Cusco we become lost within ourselves and we imagine our city and our identities as if they were a stone. Thanks to telescopes, quipus, and chronicles, we are able to remember. Thanks also to the stones that form the streets and walls of old Cusco: colossal and multiform stones that have learned to fit together perfectly, showing us how flexibility can be synonymous with solidity.” (my trans.)

Fernando Iwasaki continues to explore this grey zone – a place both rooted in the local and outwardly expansive – in his prologue to the anthology, aptly entitled: “Desde el centro de la periferia” (“From the Center of the Periphery”). As he notes, this work marks a historic turning point in that it is an important anthology published far from the major “capitals” of literary production and by a small, independent editorial: “El Cusco – que una vez fue el Centro del Mundo – se ha convertido en las afueras de una capital periférica de un país de los suburbios del Extremo Occidental latinoamericano, aunque la marginalidad no ha sido un obstáculo para Karina Pacheco Medrano ... Todo lo contrario. Si algo demuestra la presente antología es que la periferia puede convertirse en un escenario central” (19).²²³ Decentering literary production means that these marginal stories rooted in Andean and indigenous tradition, in those zones most heavily impacted by the Shining Path violence, and in *place* can finally be told to a general public.

As the webpage for the new publishing house describes, this multi-disciplinary space serves a specific kind of literary project – one that I argue is reflected, too, in Pacheco Medrano’s own work:

Ceques Editores nace en la ciudad del Cusco con la intención de convertirse en un referente editorial de contenidos de calidad, partiendo de aquellas líneas imaginarias que desde diferentes direcciones unían el Cusco con el Universo creativo ... Estos ejes conforman un espacio dinámico para un diálogo humanista y multidisciplinario. Con los ejes de Historia, Ciencias Sociales, y Medioambiente apuntamos a trabajar cuestiones clave para el análisis

²²³ “Cusco, which was once the Center of the World, has turned into the outskirts of the peripheral capital of a country in the suburbs of the Extreme West of Latin America, although this marginality has not been an obstacle for Karina Pacheco Medrano ... On the contrary. If the present anthology demonstrates anything, it is that the periphery can become center stage.” (my trans.)

de la realidad desde el pasado y el presente: cultura e identidades; movimientos sociales; historia andina, amazónica y urbana; políticas socioculturales y ecología serán temas principales. El eje de Literatura busca sacar a luz las narrativas clásicas y contemporáneas en un diálogo con autores del interior y el exterior, al considerar que una perspectiva descentralista es dar a conocer lo que se produce a nivel local, pero asimismo dar cabida a las narrativas que arriban desde fuera para renovar, descentralizar y retroalimentar. Con el eje de Arte, buscamos la promoción de los trabajos de artistas contemporáneos y difundir sus propuestas dentro y fuera de la región. (www.facebook.com/CequesEditores)²²⁴

It is interesting to consider Pacheco Medrano's utilization of the image of ceques – the ritual pathways that ran through the Incan empire, branching out from the central node of Cusco, connecting center to periphery, capital city to the world beyond. One might even visualize how these forking roads – or ceremonial lines – might have organized identities and storytelling, as each was associated with a specific *huaca*, a sacred site, often housing man-made shrines or even defined by physical characteristics of landscape (waterfalls or stone formations, for example). Pacheco Medrano and her editorial team have transformed these ancient thoroughfares and, I argue, have laid the foundations for an idea of what a modern-day ceque might mean. It is an imaginary pathway, constructed with language, that bridges through

²²⁴ “Ceques Editores is born in the city of Cusco with the intention of becoming an editorial guide with high-quality content, running along those imaginary lines that united Cusco with the creative Universe from different directions ... These axes create a dynamic space for a humanistic and multidisciplinary dialogue. With the axes of History, Social Science, and the Environment we make a point of working with key questions for the analysis of reality from both the past and present: culture and identities; social movements; Andean, Amazonian, and urban history; sociocultural and ecological politics will all be principal themes. The axis of Literature seeks to bring to light classic and contemporary narratives in dialogue with authors from both within and without, considering that a de-centralist perspective is introducing what is produced at a local level, but at the same time making room for narratives that come from the outside to reinvigorate, decentralize, and give feedback. With the axis of Art, we seek the promotion of works by contemporary artists and to spread their ideas both inside and outside the region.” (my trans.)

storytelling the local and the global, and that highlights the overlapping stories and memories that cling to the façade of the city of Cusco, connecting the site to wider networks beyond its borders. Re-imagining ceques entails visualizing the urban environment in a specific way. It is a means of linking a very local, rooted Peruvian identity to a certain form of global identity – perhaps without losing the importance of either aspect. It is a strategy of rebuilding from the ruins of empire – the remains left behind by a deliberate process of *ruination* – through the practice of narration. It is a practice of revival. I argue that it is this simultaneous concern with memories rooted in the local, and the way in which these same memories can in turn invite a certain kind of reaching out towards a global community, that also links the diverse fictional spaces found within Pacheco Medrano’s works.

***Alma alga* (2010) and *El ojo que llora*: Absent Bodies, Memorial Landscapes**

“Karina Pacheco pertenece a ese grupo de autores peruanos que han rastreado obsesivamente las distintas y complejas capas que envuelven a sociedades postcoloniales como la nuestra, con toda su carga de clasismo, racismo, sexismo, segregación y odios” (n/p).²²⁵

Pacheco Medrano’s short story collection, *Alma alga* (2010) is a slim volume composed of twelve pieces marked by their interest in myth and the fantastic, and containing a diversity of tales that narrate everything from love stories to crimes:

Alma alga es un libro de cuentos, pero también es un cofre donde el lector encuentra objetos únicos: piedras sagradas que hablan desde la prehistoria; un sombrero que guarda el recuerdo del padre; ciudades y

²²⁵ From “El racismo es un cuchillo que desgarrar a medio mundo, pero su práctica sigue normalizada” / “Racism is a knife that cuts us all, but its practice continues to be normalized”; lamula.pe; October 5th, 2016: “Karina Pacheco belongs to that group of Peruvian authors that have obsessively catalogued the distinct and complex layers that envelop postcolonial societies like ours, with all of their classicism, racism, sexism, segregation, and hate.” (my trans.)

desiertos de sol ausente; una mujer que descubre la naturaleza del aliento en las noticias de la televisión; un violín cuya música despierta utopías; y también un grito: *Agua, Volcán, Viento, Alma, Alga*, desde el fondo de un lago en el que sin querer ya nos hemos sumergido al momento de abrir este libro. Karina Pacheco Medrano nos ha preparado un lugar donde lo mítico y lo real se abrazan; donde la sensualidad, la nostalgia y la contemplación del otro son los ingredientes de un plato servido a través de las palabras (back cover).²²⁶

In her eyes, myth and history are very much interconnected concepts; in a 2016 interview with auroraboreal.net, she notes: “Ha sido en los cuentos donde he podido explorar o dar vuelta de tuerca a mitos o elementos míticos que me resultan inquietantes, o de una belleza fulgurante que no permite ser vista de manera directa. Los mitos tienen una potencia simbólica inmensa, puedes leerlos con diferentes lentes y hallarles diferentes significados” (n/p).²²⁷ In the space of fiction, she is able to play with those moments of difficult pasts that cannot quite be explained directly through a historical or anthropological analysis. By applying the lens of the mythic, Pacheco Medrano sheds new light on the ruins left behind by centuries of historical violence in Peru.

²²⁶ “*Seaweed Soul* is a book of stories, but it’s also treasure-chest where the reader encounters unique objects: sacred stones that speak from prehistory; a hat that holds the memory of a father; cities and deserts devoid of sunlight; a woman who discovers the nature of wind on the TV news; a violin whose music awakens utopias; and also a cry: *Water, Volcano, Wind, Soul, Seaweed*, from the bottom of a lake in which we unsuspectingly submerge ourselves the moment we open this book. Karina Pacheco Medrano has prepared for us a place where the mythic and the real embrace; where sensuality, nostalgia, and contemplation of the other are the ingredients of a dish served through words.” (my trans.)

²²⁷ “It’s in stories where I’ve been able to explore or take to another level myths or mythic elements that I find unsettling, or of such stunning beauty that they cannot be viewed directly. Myths have an immense symbolic power, you can read them through different lenses and find different meanings.” (my trans.)

In this portion of the chapter, I will examine three short stories, each of which is an attempt to register through fiction the staggering loss of life inflicted by the violence of Sendero Luminoso: “El aliento” / “Breath”; “Contra el adios” / “Against Goodbye”; and “Sin sol en Santiago” / “Without Sun in Santiago”. I interweave this analysis with a reflection on a Peruvian monument, *El ojo que llora* (*The Eye that Cries*), in order to emphasize the interrelated nature of the space of fiction and the physical contours of the Peruvian landscape. Attending to ruins and their ethical possibilities, Pacheco Medrano plots through her narratives a Peru brimming with absence in a “post” Shining Path era – a geography pitted with the deaths or disappearances of around 70,000 individuals. However, even as she contextualizes the violence of the Shining Path within the national context, she simultaneously moves the reader in and out of this space, and from the present to the past, connecting Peru to the globalized world and to a long history of structural injustice. By attending to the textured layers of these stories, the reader pieces together a more expansive worldview: what does it mean to live with the consequences of deep-rooted structural violence? As Pacheco Medrano describes, “...me atraen mucho aquellas tramas que a través de la historia de unos individuos ofrecen además mapas sobre sus sociedades y tiempos” (*Proyecto Patrimonio* n/p) / ...I am very attracted to plots that offer maps of societies and time periods through the stories of individuals” (my trans.); the violence that marks the era of the Shining Path is, within her fictional world, clearly part of a larger web of global scope and of historical duration. While her “historias encapsuladas” (“encapsulated stories”) (*Proyecto Patrimonio* n/p) can be read in

isolation, the narrative threads fit together to create a kind of fragmented totality – a rough map that digs beneath the surface of contemporary Peru to uncover strata of recent and half-forgotten pasts, and that extends to touch far-away corners of the globe.

“El aliento” / “Breath”

Pacheco Medrano plays with the contrast between the ephemeral qualities of an absent body – the disappeared person whose physical remains have not been laid to rest, the haunting void left behind – and the devastating tangibility of witnessing bloody, violent death. In many of her stories, the ghosts of disappeared and dispossessed bodies point towards traces of centuries of overlapping violence and buried secrets, of connections between the local and the global: the collection both opens and closes with strikingly opposite images of dead bodies – their juxtaposition clearly marked.

In the opening story of the collection, “El aliento” / “Breath”, the phantasmal quality of the city is disrupted by the stark reality of a bleeding, touchable body; a young woman, depressed and disillusioned on New Year’s Eve, is reminded of the fragility of life when she witnesses a suicide:

Había bebido más de la cuenta. Al salir del bar, las figuras nocturnas que continuaban celebrando el fin de año parecían fantasmas. Sus rostros lánguidos apenas mostraban ojos y labios definidos, mientras sus cuerpos transparentaban las calles y las luces de neón. Con la amarga lucidez del vino, me preguntaba si es que ahí dentro, no habría realmente nada, y me inquietaba pensar si yo sería también transparente en esa calle colmada de ruido y miradas enfebrecidas, festejando una noche que a mí me había resultado una estafa. Era triste percatarse de que los dilemas que me abrumaban no eran nada importante para nadie más que para mí en esa ciudad fantasmal. Ganas

de llorar, también vergüenza. Abrí los ojos al máximo, tratando de hallar alguna figura sólida. Y ocurrió de repente. Una mujer salió despavorida de un hotel. Miró a un lado, al otro, y quizás fui lo primero que encontró. Se derrumbó sobre mí. Sus cabellos se estrellaron contra mis ojos, mientras de su boca, delineada en carmesí salió el grito: <<¡Yo no quería morir!>>. Pero se murió entre mis brazos. La sangre que salía de su pecho empapó mi chaqueta; era tanta, que empecé a sentir cómo traspasaba mi blusa y se deslizaba entre mis senos; cómo se mezclaba con el vino tinto que yo había bebido, con las preguntas que me había hecho, con la sangre de mis venas (7-8).²²⁸

While the narrator is never able to uncover the meaning behind the death, the story behind the suicide, she experiences a part of herself mixing with the dead body in front of her; the blood literally stains her blouse as she feels it mingling with the red wine she had consumed earlier in the night. The reality of the young woman's mortality contrasts sharply with the earlier depiction of a city full of ghosts, of an urban space where wandering bodies no longer connect with one another, with the narrator's feeling of isolation. While the woman carries the secret behind her death to her grave, a body is left behind to mark her disappearance from the space of the city. Her legacy is passed through the stain left behind on the clothes of the narrator – a tangible and permanent trace. The presence of this corporeal death contrasts sharply

²²⁸ “She’d drunk beyond her limit. As she left the bar, the nocturnal figures still celebrating the year’s end looked like ghosts. Their eyes and lips were barely defined on their languid faces, and their bodies showed through the streets and neon lights. With the bitter lucidity of wine, I wondered if maybe, in there, there was actually nothing, and it made me anxious to think of myself transparent on those streets, saturated with sound and feverish glances, celebrating a night that to me would have been a scam. It was sad to realize that the dilemmas that had overwhelmed me were unimportant for everyone but me in that phantasmal city. I felt like crying, and ashamed. I opened my eyes as wide as I could, trying to find a solid figure. And then it happened. A woman emerged terrified from a hotel. She looked one way, then the other, and I must have been the first thing she found. She collapsed onto me. Her hair crashed into my eyes while from her mouth, lined with crimson, leapt a cry: “I didn’t mean to die!” But she died in my arms. The blood running from her chest soaked my jacket; there was so much of it that I began to feel it under my blouse, slipping in between my breasts; how it mixed with the red wine I had drunk, with the questions I had asked myself, with the blood in my veins.” (my trans.)

with Pacheco Medrano's insistence on marking invisibilized absences throughout the remainder of her short story collection – disappearances that occur as a consequence of Shining Path violence, or as a consequence of a shared Latin American experience of 20th century “cruel modernity.” And, it is the figure of the woman-seeker, so clearly defined by the editor (Ana María Vidal Carrasco) of the female-centric *Al fin de la batalla* anthology – who remains behind to collect and record the fleeting testimonial traces.

“Contra el adios” / “Against Goodbye”

The bloody trace that marks the act of witnessing death is noticeably absent from the final story of the collection, “Contra el adios” / “Against Goodbye.” For the first time, the theme of the legacy of the Shining Path era is touched upon directly by the author. In contrast to the very present body of the deceased woman represented in the first story “El aliento” / “Breath”, within this fictional space, only phantasmal and fragile traces remain of a different kind of *desaparecido* (disappeared person). Here, the narrator is haunted by a loss that cannot be laid to rest with the physical remains of her absent friend because the body itself is missing; his intangibility contrasts with the imagery of her rushing blood and beating heart: “Hoy no tengo el temple para buscar tu fantasma en la lluvia, en ese camuflaje de las almas que anhelan permanecer, trasgrediendo a las parcas como garúa, rocío o torrente. A pesar de tu ausencia sigo atosigada de vida. Me tomo el pulso y siento cómo bombean los

chorros de sangre por mis venas; nada los detiene, nada me detiene” (146).²²⁹ The narrator describes her friend, reflecting upon the fact that while they had grown up with movies whose plots had conditioned them to expect “concrete endings” – conclusions that made sense – the emergence of the Shining Path had disrupted these ideal imaginings: “Cuando dejamos de ser niños y nuestro país se sumergió en la violencia, tenías claro los peligros que corrías, te acechaban desde diferentes bandos. Coches bomba, balazos en la nuca, arrestos y desapariciones se habían llevado a algunos amigos y a muchos conocidos. Me comentaste incluso sobre la posibilidad de siempre portar una pastilla de cianuro que apagara tu vida antes de ser sometido al horror de una tortura” (147).²³⁰ While his body is noticeably missing, the narrator continues to search for evidence of his trace – the footprints the friend left behind. She questions, “¿Dónde quedan esas palabras, esos instantes íntimos?” (147) / “Where are those words, those intimate moments?” (my trans.) Although she accepts his absence, she searches for a way to come to terms with her loss, to locate in the emptiness he left behind a tangible space of mourning.

²²⁹ “I no longer have the mettle to go after your ghost in the rain, in the camouflage of souls that long to stay, infiltrating parkas like drizzle, dew, or torrent. In spite of your absence, I am bursting with life. I take my pulse and feel how the streams of blood pump through my veins; no one stops them, no one stops me.” (my trans.)

²³⁰ “When we ceased to be children and our country descended into violence, you knew the risks you ran, they came at you from every direction. Car bombs, shots to the back of the neck, arrests, and disappearances had carried away some friends and many acquaintances. You even mentioned the possibility of always carrying a cyanide pill to extinguish your life before being submitted to the horror of torture.” (my trans.)

As the story unfolds, the reader is invited into the private sphere of the narrator's home, where she comes face-to-face with the inherent fragility of her friend's remains:

En el cristal de la cocina la estampa de tu mano ha quedado grabada. En medio de una guitarreada, olvidamos la cazuela en la que estábamos preparando un té piteado y el vapor lo inundó todo. Te acercaste a la ventana para averiguar si las líneas de tu palma podrían leerse en esa mezcla de agua consternada, oscuridad afuera, luz eléctrica dentro. Solo quedó plasmada tu mano. Si el experimento hubiera dado resultado, ¿habríamos podido descifrar que en un año más estarías muerto? Me acabo dar cuenta de que hace mucho tiempo no limpio las ventanas. Cada vez que olvido el calentador al fuego y el vapor se adueña de la cocina, ¡En tantas ocasiones que ha podido ocurrir un incendio!, la huella de tu mano emerge. Hoy quisiera tocarla, traerte de nuevo. Pero tengo miedo: temo que no ocurra, que mis conjuros se confirmen inválidos; temo igualmente deformar cualquier atisbo de lo único tangible que dejaste en mi casa (147-8).²³¹

The last line of this description encapsulates the impermanent and transitory traces left behind by a living body whose death was neither witnessed by the narrator, nor marked within a space of collective mourning. She cannot even touch the imprint he left behind, for through touch, the outline of the hand will vanish, become deformed by the superimposition of her own fingers.

²³¹ “Your handprint has stayed on the kitchen window. In the middle of a guitar strum, we forgot the pot where we were preparing a hot toddy and the steam drowned out everything. You approached the window to find out whether the lines on your palm stood out from the mix of troubled water, outside darkness, inside electric light. Only the hand stuck. If the experiment had been successful, could we have known that you’d be dead in a year? I just realized that it’s been a while since I cleaned the windows. Every time I forget to turn off the burner and steam takes over the kitchen – There could have been a fire so many times! – the trace of your hand appears. Today I’d like to touch it, to bring you back. But I’m scared: I’m scared it won’t happen, that my spells will be confirmed to be powerless; and I’m scared of deforming the only tangible trace you left in my house.” (my trans.)

As she struggles to carve out a resting place for her friend, to come to terms with the “nature of absence” (149), she turns to writing: “Es tan grande la nostalgia. O es tan lenta la muerte y aún no terminas de partir. O es que tu muerte se ha llevado una parte de mí y es esta la que me transmite tu reflejo, la que me susurra <<estamos vivos>>. Acaricio las teclas y me parece tocarte las yemas. Es infinita la nostalgia” (148).²³² Ultimately, she abandons her project, and with one of Pablo Neruda’s poems set to music on the radio, <<Busquemos las antiguas cenizas del corazón quemado, aunque caigan uno por uno nuestros versos, hasta que resucite la flor deshabitada >>²³³ (149), she exits the private space of her house. Hearing the birds singing in the night, she repeats the assertion: “Estamos vivos” (149) / “We are alive.” The phrase ends both the story and the collection as a whole. What does it mean that the narrator exits her home, rejecting the space of literature as the ultimate resting place, and instead locating her friend in the energy of the birds, of the rainstorm, of the public sphere of the city?

El ojo que llora / The Eye that Cries

In order to contextualize this search for places of mourning – a journey that seems to unfold within the fictional space of Pacheco Medrano’s short story

²³² “The nostalgia is so great. Or death so slow, and you’re still not done leaving. Or maybe your death has carried away a piece of me, the one that transmits your reflection, the one that whispers ‘we’re alive.’ I touch the keys and it’s like touching your fingertips. The nostalgia is infinite.” (my trans.)

²³³ “Let’s find the old ashes of the burned heart, even if our verses fall one by one, until it resurrects the empty flower.” (my trans.) The figure of Neruda is one whose presence alludes to the fall of Chilean President Salvador Allende’s socialist government in the military coup of 1973, perhaps linking these two instances of geographically distinct, yet connected, moments of historical violence in Peru and Chile.

collection, it is first necessary to chart Peru's contemporary memorial landscape. In 2005, Dutch-born artist and long-term Peruvian resident Lika Mutal unveiled a monument she calls *El ojo que llora* (*The Eye that Cries*) – a sculpture she constructed and designed through private funds and had installed in the district of Jesús María Campo, in Lima's Parque de Marte.²³⁴ The memorial space, which in the artist's words commemorates the victims of the Shining Path violence, consists of a central stone, brought down to the city by Mutal from the pre-Colombian site, the Cerro de Lacco. She sculpted the rock to resemble the figure of the Pachamama, or earth mother, affixing to the front a smaller rock from which a trickle of water continuously falls, representing a crying eye. Around the central sculpture, more than 30,000 smaller stones join to form a circular labyrinth that radiates out from the Pachamama, and that winds around the monument; the visitor must pass through this maze in order to reach the fountain. Each stone that comprises the path is inscribed with the name of an individual affected by the violence of the fraternal conflict, as well as the date of their birth and death. Peruvians of diverse backgrounds came together to inscribe the stones, from religious figures to families who were suffering

²³⁴ In an interview with Roxana Chirinos, "Conversación con Lika Mutal" published on *Agenciaperu.com* in November of 2012, the process of constructing the site is addressed in more detail. The monument forms part of a larger vision of memorial practice, an "Alameda de la Memoria" / "Avenue of Memory": "La municipalidad de Jesús María, en actitud humanística, cedió una parte del Campo de Marte para conmemorar y respetar la memoria de nuestra historia. En sus jardines nacerá el proyecto La Alameda de la Memoria. Proyecto cuya finalidad es crear una cultura de conciencia para que la historia no se repita" (n/p) / "The municipality of Jesus Maria, in a humanistic gesture, ceded a part of the Campo de Marte to commemorate and respect the memory of our history. In its gardens, the project La Alameda de la Memoria will be born. A project whose final goal is to create a culture of conscience so that history will not repeat itself." (my trans.)

the loss of the disappearance or death of a loved one; Mutal herself inscribed the final stone – affixing to its surface the name of a three-year-old girl (Chirinos, Hite).

In an interview with Roxana Chirinos, published in November of 2012 on *Agenciaperu.com*, the artist describes in more detail the aesthetic choices behind the design of her sculpture; she emphasizes the maternal, feminine qualities of the memorial – which she places in direct opposition to what she views as the masculine forces of violence and aggression: “Es un laberinto dedicado a la madre tierra, a la luna, a lo femenino, a la maternidad, el don que da la vida versus la masculinidad que debería proteger la vida pero que en este caso la ha destruido” (n/p) / “It is a labyrinth dedicated to mother earth, to the moon, to femininity, to maternity, the gift that gives life versus the masculinity that should protect life but in this case has destroyed it.” (my trans.) The monument again embraces this image of the mother-figure left behind in the aftermath of the destruction, collecting fragments and remains in an effort to construct a testimonial space for justice.

In some ways, the memorial is solidly rooted in its Peruvian identity, as it is constructed from a pre-Columbian stone that carries on its surfaces the marks of a long history of violence stemming from the era of the Conquest. And yet, the monument – designed and donated by a Dutch-born artist – also looks outward. As Katherine Hite explains in her book *Politics and the Art of Commemoration: Memorials to Struggle in Latin America and Spain* (2012):

For Mutal ... the act of sculpting Pachamama brought back memories of the traumatic experience of coming face to face with violence and death as a young child in Holland during World War II. She remembered a boy being pushed by a German soldier into a truck and

taken away ... “I realized,” Mutal said, “That the *Eye that Cries* was in part my search for personal redemption of my human condition” (57).

In another statement by the artist, included in her interview with Chirinos, she again speaks to the broader scope of the project, stating that: “Mi obra no es política sino humanística y llama hacia un despertar de conciencia sobre el terror y la violencia que afligen el mundo entero, como medios de buscar un cambio que esconde en realidad un afán de poder. Un cambio hacia una paz de múltiples aspectos es urgente tanto en el país como en muchas partes del mundo” (n/p).²³⁵ Mutal sees this monumental space as simultaneously rooted in the local and in the global. With so many threads of signification – nodes of meaning that orbit the site – it is important to analyze how the monument functions in practice: How has *The Eye That Cries* been embraced, rejected, and utilized within the space of Lima, within the space of Peru, and within the international community?

El ojo que llora in Practice

Paulo Drinot, in a compelling article “For Whom the Eye Cries: Memory, Monumentality, and the Ontologies of Violence in Peru” (2009), addresses these very questions:

I would suggest that the monument does more interesting work than its sculptor herself recognizes since it invites both a collective memory and an individuated memory as part of, but not subsumed within, the collective. The pebbles inscribed with the names of the victims of the violence both help remember (in a cognitive sense) those who died but also help re-member (in an embodied sense) those whose bodies were

²³⁵ “My work is not political but humanistic, and calls for an awakening of conscience regarding the terror and violence that afflict the entire world, as methods of seeking a change that in reality hides a desire for power. A change towards peace in multiple ways is urgent, as much in this country as in many other parts of the world.” (my trans.)

dis-membered by the violence. The monument serves not simply to remember the past but more importantly to inscribe literally into the most basic stuff of Peruvian territoriality (its pebbles) the names of those who were erased from it by the violence. In fact, by virtue of the marginality of the vast majority of those who died to official Peruvian nationhood, the inscription of their names in the pebbles should be seen not as a recording of their death but as their coming into being as actually existing, if dead, Peruvians (17-8).

From pre-Incan ruins, re-purposed for a contemporary project, comes the construction of a site dedicated to multi-temporal contemplation. Drinot's assertion that the monument actually brings to these disappeared bodies a kind of visibility in the public sphere and a sense of belonging to the nation is one that is very compelling – particularly since as Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Report so clearly illustrated, the majority of those who perished in the conflict were rural Quechua speakers – individuals who have been historically disenfranchised from occupying a position of full citizenship, from participating as members of the nation. The sculpture at once invites us to examine the past history of the treatment of indigenous peoples, and to look forward to the possibility of a redemptive future.

In fact, the monument itself remained nearly invisible – an often overlooked and ignored feature of the city's urban landscape – until two controversial issues, fiercely debated in the national and international sphere – came to orbit the site. These processes of “working through” difficult national histories came to mark the space of the monument – and to provoke a physical interaction with the memorial itself. As Hite describes in her article, “‘The Eye that Cries’: The Politics of Representing Victims in Contemporary Peru” (2007), in 1992, the government of Alberto Fujimori (a politician known for his quasi-dictatorship which included an

economic overhaul and an introduction of free market policies, as well as complete control of state institutions) authorized a raid on the high security prison Miguel Castro Castro, where Shining Path “terrorists” were detained. The raid affected mostly women, and over the course of four days, forty-one prisoners were killed. As Hite emphasizes, although the attacks were a clear violation of the prisoners’ human rights, the public generally approved of the measure, as they firmly believed that these individuals were dangerous terrorists. In 2006, the case was taken to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, where the judges ruled in favor of the prisoners; in their report, they included a somewhat unprecedented recommendation: the names of these forty-one individuals must be included in the memorial space, *The Eye that Cries*.

The decision sparked public debate, and in many cases outrage, pushing the neglected memorial space to the forefront of national attention. For, as Hite (2012) reports:

Yet in an ironic twist, Peruvians would soon discover that among those whose names were inscribed in “The Eye that Cries” memorial sculpture, several, if not all, of the dead *Senderistas* were already represented there. The sculptor intended the memorial to commemorate *all* the victims of the violence, and she reproduced all the names from the list of tens of thousands of deaths and disappearances provided by the government truth commission (45).

The attacks continued. In 2007, Fujimori, who fled Peru for exile in Japan in 2000 in light of mounting accusations of human rights violations, returned to Chile to attempt to reintegrate himself into Peruvian politics. However, in an unpredicted move, Chilean forces detained the ex-president, sparking rage from pro-Fujimori factions

who painted the monument orange in protest.²³⁶ Paulo César Peña, a Peruvian poet reporting on *Lamula.pe* in September of 2014, describes an additional attack against the monument in a piece entitled “Otra vez atentan contra ‘El ojo que llora’:
 Memorial sobre la violencia política en Perú, declarado patrimonio cultural desde 2013, sufrió un nuevo acto de vandalismo durante el pasado fin de semana” (n/p) / “Again They Target ‘The Eye that Cries’: A Memorial to Political Violence in Peru, Declared a Cultural Patrimony Since 2013, Suffered a New Act of Vandalism Last Week.”²³⁷ The attacks led the city to restrict public access, enclosing the space with a fence. And, in 2013, on the 10th anniversary of the completion of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the monument was declared a site of

²³⁶ Hite (2012) describes in more detail the policies of ex-president Alberto Fujimori and the controversy that surrounds his figure and legacy: “Fujimori immediately instituted economic ‘shock therapy,’ a major contraction of state spending that triggered greater unemployment but succeeded in halting hyperinflation. In addition, he implemented dramatic internal security measures that formalized and ‘nationalized’ the Peruvian security forces’ right to detail and hold citizens virtually at will – practices that had already been in place since 1982 in the declared emergency zone of Ayacucho, where *Sendero* was born. In September 1992, four months after the Castro Castro raid, the military captured *Sendero* leader Abimael Guzmán and several top leaders. By the mid-1990s, Peruvian military and intelligence effectively ended the Shining Path’s attacks in Lima as well as the insurgency’s general strength in the country” (48) ... “In April 1992, one month before Castro Castro, Fujimori orchestrated an *auto-golpe*, an executive shutting down of the national congress. This move quashed congressional dissent in the face of Fujimori’s economic and security reforms. The *auto-golpe* would later be condemned as the first major sign of Fujimori’s ‘quasi-dictatorship,’ yet at the time a clear majority of the country supported the takeover. In 1995, Fujimori restored the congress and was overwhelmingly re-elected president” (48).

²³⁷ Peña writes in the article: “Desde su inauguración en 2005, el memorial ... ha sufrido más de un atentado ... Sus detractores – sectores conservadores, integrados por el fujimorismo y por simpatizantes de las fuerzas armadas – lo consideran un ‘monumento al terrorismo,’ pues en los cerca de 40 mil cantos rodados instalados en torno a una piedra de granito negro se inscriben los nombres de las víctimas del conflicto armado” (n/p) / “Since its inauguration in 2005, the memorial ... has suffered more than one attack ... its detractors – conservative factions, integrated by Fujimori-ism and sympathizers with the armed forces – consider it a ‘monument to terrorism’ as the names of the victims of armed conflict are inscribed on 40 thousand rocks ringing a black granite stone.” (my trans.)

cultural patrimony in an effort to garner the resources necessary to better protect the location.²³⁸

The memorial remains a fragile and vulnerable space. In 2007, famed author Mario Vargas Llosa wrote a piece for *El país* entitled, “El ojo que llora.” He encourages his readers to visit the monument, claiming that: “Es uno de los monumentos más bellos que luce la ciudad y, además, hay en él algo que perturba y conmueve. Pero, apresúrese. Porque no es imposible – el Perú es el país de todos los posibles – que una singular conjura de la ignorancia, la estupidez y el fanatismo político acabe con él” (n/p) / “It is one of the most beautiful monuments the city has, and there’s something in it that moves and upsets. But you’d better hurry. Because it’s not impossible – Peru is a country where anything is possible – that some singular conspiracy of ignorance, stupidity, and political fanaticism puts an end to it.” (my

²³⁸ *Lamula.pe* published an article in August of 2013 describing the process, entitled “Las lágrimas aún caen: Concurrida conmemoración por los 10 años del informe de la CVR.: “‘El ojo que llora’, monumento construido para recordar a las víctimas de la violencia desatada por el terrorismo en el país entre los años 1980 y 2000, fue declarado hoy patrimonio cultural, según informó Javier Torres, presidente de la asociación Caminos de la Memoria, encargada de salvaguardar la obra. En declaraciones a EFE, Torres aseguró que el Ministerio de Cultura aprobó la solicitud para reconocer al monumento como patrimonio cultural tras un proceso de evaluación. En el monumento ubicado en el Campo de Marte se conmemoró hoy el décimo aniversario de la entrega del informe final de la Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación (CVR), y con la medida del Ministerio de Cultura se garantiza la preservación de la obra que generó polémica y que sufrió daños de quienes se opusieron a dicho informe, según Torres” (n/p) / “The Tears are Still Falling: 10-year Commemoration of the CVR Report”: “‘The Eye that Cries’, a monument constructed to remember the victims of violence unleashed by terrorism in the country between 1980 and 2000, was declared a cultural patrimony today, according to Javier Torres, president of the association Caminos de la Memoria (Paths of Memory), charged with safeguarding the work. In declarations to the EFE, Torres confirmed that the Minister of Culture approved the request to recognize the monument as cultural patrimony through an evaluation process. At the monument, located in the Campo de Marte, the tenth anniversary of the final delivery of the report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) was commemorated, and with oversight from the Minister of Culture that guarantees the preservation of a work that generated controversy and was harmed by those who opposed said report, according to Torres.” (my trans.)

trans.) For, as Drinot claims, the monument functions not as a site of memory, but rather as a “para-site” of memory, “both because it fails to function fully as a shared site of memory or remembrance, but also because for many its real purpose is to infect and waken the collective body” (28). What is the potential for this monument, and how does Pacheco Medrano engage with this use of space within the folds of her fictional geographies? The memorial in part is an attempt to create a future-oriented memory built literally from fragments and rubble of the past – sculpted pebbles that together form a narrative whole. Pacheco Medrano’s fiction parallels this structure.

I assert that much like Pacheco Medrano’s stories, the monument itself represents multidirectionality, returning to Rothberg’s work. As Hite (2012) argues, the sculpture not only laments the violent traces left behind by the fraternal conflict with the Shining Path, but also “mourns centuries of colonialist violence ... [it] speaks to both historic imperial aggression and violence as well as to twentieth century ideological conflict” (19); and, it “seeks compassion for the descendants of those who are foundational to Peruvian identity yet who are structurally marginalized from power” (43). While it is true that controversy has encircled the space of the monument, so, too has an “embrace” (Hite [2012] 61). As Hite reports, smaller versions of the monument, “ojitos”, have popped up in several highland villages (61), and “What some had initially dismissed as too abstract a representation became a cherished memorial, fiercely protected by relatives of the Peruvian dead and disappeared, so many of whom have no body to bury, no graveside to go to grieve. The sculpture acts as a meeting place, where many of the relatives recount that they

feel their loved ones' presence" (7). I wish to return to this question of the monument as meeting place as I address and analyze one final story found in Pacheco Medrano's collection, *Alma alga*; I argue that within this fictional geography, the narrator models for her readers how the space of the monument might be used as a "meeting place" to work through difficult historical moments and social trauma.

"Sin sol en Santiago" / "Without Sun in Santiago"

While many of the stories in this collection are set firmly within the Peruvian national sphere, Pacheco Medrano moves the reader through the Andes to the space of Chile in her short story, "Sin sol en Santiago," where the traces of Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1990) are rendered more clearly visible through a practice of fictional mapping. It is interesting to think about the ways in which this story, when contextualized within the trajectory of the collection as a whole, offers a different way of thinking about the practice of marking absent bodies. What does it mean to think about the role of the monumental within Chile, and how can these questions be transferred to the Peruvian context?

The story begins with the image of a landscape scarred by disappearances; the opening scene depicts a finger reaching out of the dust of the desert, uncovered for the first time since its body disappeared in 1973: "Al cabo de treintaiséis años de arena y vientos un dedo meñique, seco, acaricia de nuevo la superficie del desierto. El cielo está espejado y el sol es tan intenso, que la uña que fuera arrancada una mañana de octubre de 1973 parece brillar, como si se mantuviera enraizada al pequeño dedo"

(86).²³⁹ The story continues to mark hidden sites of memory in the landscape: the reader is directed 600 miles to the south, where an abandoned country home, transformed into a torture center during the dictatorship, stands empty, ghostly: “sus dueños . . . no se han afanado por vender la propiedad que durante los años de la dictadura cedieron al escuadrón de paramilitares que dirigía su hijo mayor; y este no tuvo tiempo por desmontar por completo su taller de operaciones antes de marcharse. Aunque ningún vecino sabía con certeza qué ocurría en esa casa, en 1989 los padres de quien fuera un joven ardoroso le pidieron que la clausurase y que cuanto antes se vaya al extranjero. Oficialmente, él nunca ha regresado a Chile y está registrado como muerto en un accidente de tráfico acaecido en Sudáfrica en 1991” (88).²⁴⁰ Then, the reader’s attention is brought to a woman, cultivating lettuce in a valley between the cordillera and Santiago: “Ese huerto y la proximidad de sus nietos es la mayor ventaja que le ha traído abandonar Calama, la región norteña donde vivió cuatro décadas: la primera formando una familia y las otras tres buscando restos humanos” (88).²⁴¹ As she harvests her crop, she contemplates her wedding ring, engraved with the name of

²³⁹ “After thirty-six years of wind and sand a pinky, dry, once again caresses the surface of the desert. The sky is glossy and the sun so intense that the nail, torn away one morning in October of 1973, seems to sparkle as if it were still rooted to the little finger.” (my trans.)

²⁴⁰ “. . . its owners . . . have not put much effort into selling the property which, during the years of dictatorship, they ceded to the squadron of paramilitaries led by their oldest son; and he had no time to take down his workshop before he ran off. Although no neighbor knew for certain what went on in that house, in 1989 the parents of he who was once a passionate boy asked him to cut himself loose and go abroad as soon as possible. Officially, he never returned to Chile and is registered as having died in a traffic accident in South Africa in 1991.” (my trans.)

²⁴¹ “The orchard and the proximity to her grandchildren is the greatest advantage that she gained by leaving Calama, the northern region where she lived for four decades: the first forming a family and the other three in search of human remains.” (my trans.)

her missing husband, and wonders where the matching one lies; although she knows that it was most likely melted down, she holds out hope that her husband's hand still wears it, twenty-six years later (90-1).²⁴²

The story then “zooms out” yet again, this time marking in miles the journey (2,200 miles to the south) to Santiago, where Pacheco Medrano paints a collage of various bodies, coexisting within the borders of the nation's capital. Despite their proximity, their lives remain isolated; they exist within the insularity of the spaces inhabited by opposite sides of a politically polarized country: a grandfather, Manuel, who lives in a, “barrio que cuatro décadas atrás fuera un cinturón urbano de obreros sumidos en reivindicaciones políticas que, al cabo de los diecisiete años de dictadura y dos décadas de democracia cargada de impunidad, ha terminado convertido en territorio de mafias de narcotráfico y prostitución que conviven lado a lado con un creciente número de iglesias evangélicas” (87)²⁴³, and who each Sunday goes to visit the wall of names located in the General Cemetery of Santiago to place carnations in front of his son's and ex-neighbor's names; the family of a retired admiral whose 84th

²⁴² In fact, the mummified hand with the missing ring finger depicted at the very beginning of the story seems to represent the certain absence of that very ring: “En el desierto de Calama el viento se ha impuesto a la arena y, al mediodía, pone en evidencia que el dedo meñique que desde el amanecer ha estado brillando forma parte de una mano desvalijada de su dedo anular; una mano que ha sido momificada por la sequedad y la sal del territorio inhóspito donde sus mutiladores la dejaron olvidada” (95) / “In the Calama Desert the wind has imposed itself over the sand and, at midday, shows evidence that the pinky finger that has been shimmering since sunrise forms part of a hand whose ring finger has been burgled; a hand that has been mummified by the drought and salt of an inhospitable territory, and whose mutilators left it forgotten.” (my trans.)

²⁴³ “...neighborhood that four decades earlier was an urban belt of workers submersed in political concessions that, after seventeen years of dictatorship and two decades of democracy with impunity, had become a territory for narco-trafficking gangs and prostitution, which lived side by side with a growing number of evangelical churches...” (my trans.)

birthday is disrupted by erupting protests (“una funa”) sparked by his involvement in “Dirty War” crimes, and specifically his grandson who comes to realize the extent of his family’s culpability; and finally a woman named Sol – driven insane by a mysterious history – whose ghostly figure haunts the space of the memorial.

As the story continues, however, the boundaries that have kept these constructed zones within the city artificially isolated collapse through the movement of the adolescent boy, who comes into national consciousness within the space of the monument to Chile’s disappeared bodies. As he pedals away from his home – where inside preparations for his grandfather’s party are in full swing, and where outside, the protestors clamor loudly for justice – he finds himself at the wall of names:

“Como en ocasiones anteriores, el adolescente ha llegado hasta el umbral de la explanada donde se levanta el memorial de los cinco mil que fueron perdidos. Nunca ha traspasado esa línea” (96).²⁴⁴ Finally, he is invited into the space of the memorial by the unstable Sol, who sees his bicycle and is reminded of the life story of one of the individuals represented on the wall – Sergio Tormen, a professional cyclist and militant who was detained on July 20, 1974. Although the story does not provide details of this man’s individual biography (it only mentions the name “Sergio Tormen”), it invites its reader to reanimate the life behind it – one name among the vast number inscribed on the memorial wall. It compels one to understand Sergio, and to uncover why this woman has gone crazy over his absence. Finally, engaged with

²⁴⁴ “As on previous occasions, the adolescent has arrived at the threshold of the esplanade, where a memorial is being raised to the five thousand who were lost. He has never crossed that line.” (my trans.)

the mystery of Sergio, the boy enters the memorial site, joined by the unknown woman: “Así es como ese día, aquel muchacho ingresa finalmente al país que le había sido ajeno” (97) / “And so on that day, the boy finally enters the land that had become foreign to him.” (my trans.) Returning home, he joins the protestors, listens to their accusations, and looks at his house – closed off and seemingly impermeable to the voices demanding justice outside its walls: “parece impoluta” / “it seemed pure” (99). However, within the shadow of the memorial, the adolescent’s understanding of how he belongs to the nation was altered.

The story seems to suggest that the way to work through this period of historical violence is by joining others in a public encounter with commemorative space. However, it is curious to think about the site of Chile within the narrative, and its connection to the ghostly traces of missing bodies found within the stories set in Peru – especially when one considers that the short story collection was published against the backdrop of the polemic surrounding the monument, *El ojo que llora*; it is productive to contextualize this work within the context of the national debate over the construction of physical places of memory. This book, so full of absence, negotiates the question of locating spaces of mourning; it plays with the contrast between missing and present bodies, marked and unmarked touchstones for memory.

La sangre, el polvo, la nieve / Blood, Dust, Snow

In her 2010 novel, *La sangre, el polvo, la nieve* (*Blood, Dust, Snow*), Pacheco Medrano peels back the layers of the past to reveal the cycles of violence that have led up to the period of the Shining Path conflict; just as the memorial, *El ojo que*

llora, was designed by sculptor Mutal to encircle moments of structural injustice, Pacheco Medrano composes her novel to encompass this multidirectional memoryscape. She explores the impact left by violence on the physical environment, demonstrating the palimpsest-like nature of the city of Cusco, and reveals its long-troubled foundations. Within the fictional city, history is literally inscribed on the faces of stone. Her novel creates a space in which the landscape acts as a kind of merger between highly public histories, and deeply personal memories, often tracing the process of “ruination” as it unfolds across the surfaces of buildings.

As the back cover of the novel describes, this book takes a long look at the twists and turns of 20th century violence:

El último día de agosto de 1945, un pastor descubre a cuatro jóvenes muertos en el antiguo adoratorio inca de Sacsayhuamán; su sangre ha teñido la nieve que cayera sobre la región después de doce años y su asesinato desata un torbellino de rumores que termina encubriendo la verdad. A partir de este misterioso caso y a través de la historia de una mujer nacida el año 1900, *La sangre, el polvo, la nieve* realiza un recorrido por la agitada vida cultural, social y política del Cusco en la primera mitad del siglo XX hasta la irrupción del terremoto en 1950, como metáfora del remecimiento de las historias ocultas de esta novela (back cover).²⁴⁵

The narrative traces in the third person three generations of the Loayzas in Cusco – an upper-class family who acquired their wealth through trading, a stigma that separated

²⁴⁵ “On the last day of August in 1945, a pastor discovers four young men in the old Incan shrine of Sacsayhuamán; their blood has tinged the snow that’s fallen over the region for the first time in twelve years and their assassination has unleashed a whirlwind of rumors that ultimately conceals the truth. With this mysterious case, and through the story of a woman born in 1900, *Blood, Dust, Snow* journeys through the tumultuous cultural, social, and political life in Cusco during the first half of the 20th century until the eruption of the earthquake of 1950, like a metaphor for the stirring up of the hidden histories in this novel.” (my trans.)

them from the established aristocracy (and haunted the patriarchal figures who constantly try to prove themselves worthy of acceptance into this unobtainable social sphere.) Focusing on the life of Giralda – born in 1900, a symbolic year that marks the many movements for social change that boil over in Peruvian society at the turn of the century – the work explores the world of leftist intellectuals, wrapped up in indigenous causes, artistic pursuits, and utopian dreaming. While Giralda, full of hope, enters this new realm, she is simultaneously pulled back into the old world order to which her family belongs; she confronts the passing on of dark secrets through the matriarchal line – stories that have been buried, swept under the rug, and that directly contradict her ideals. The work ends with the devastating earthquake of 1950, which literally leaves the city in a state of rubble and ruin (although the Incan walls survive the shaking, revealing the strength of these indigenous foundations.) The novel reanimates from the dust – *el polvo* – the long history of 20th century violence – a precursor to the tensions that erupt in the era of the Shining Path movement. Pacheco Medrano presents a historical critique of this key period for Cusco and Peruvian society at large through a feminine lens.

The focus on the intergenerational transmission of stories, secrets, and histories is central to the novel's structure. The question of a female-centric narration in the post-trauma era is one that is of great importance to Pacheco Medrano:

Además, cuando hay guerras y conflictos, la mayoría de muertos y desaparecidos son hombres, los sobrevivientes siguen trabajando o siguen yendo a la guerra, entonces la tarea de la búsqueda recae casi naturalmente en las mujeres. Además, al estar más atentas a estos ámbitos, suelen ser las que están más alertas de los secretos y problemas hondos que laten en ese interior. Y el sentido de la

curiosidad y la posibilidad de albergar y compartir secretos y confidencias a nosotras nos está más permitido (felizmente) ... las mujeres cumplimos bastante con el rol de “buscadoras” infatigables, de sanadoras de heridas, también hay muchas que cumplen con celo el de “encubridoras” de los secretos y vilezas de hombres y mujeres de su familia. Muchas veces son las madres, tías y otras mujeres de confianza las más estrictas para hacer cumplir con los mandatos de la sociedad (n/p).²⁴⁶

The novel illustrates women in both of these roles – that of the complicit secret-keeper, and that of the woman who refuses to stop searching among the ruins of past histories. The latter ceaselessly attempts to open up these locked secrets and difficult pasts in an effort to move towards brighter futures. And, Cusco becomes a model space in which to enter into this project of archeological digging – in which to discover how the invisible lines of the ceques might once again reach out from the central node of the city (forgotten pathways recovered through acts of narration) in order to imagine its relationship to modernity differently.

Pacheco Medrano’s novel seeks to dig beneath the “postcard” image of Cusco – the picture that only looks at its exotic qualities and at a certain kind of new-aged mysticism attached to its foundational Incan walls – to reveal the real tensions that exist within the city itself. These are other logics and histories, conflicts between

²⁴⁶ From the published interview (2016) “El racismo es un cuchillo” / “Racism is a Knife” (Gabriela Wiener – lamula.pe): “Additionally, when there is war or conflict, the majority of the dead and disappeared are men, the survivors continue working or going to war, and so the work of searching more naturally falls to women. And also, since they’re paying more attention to these things, they tend to be the ones who are more aware of the secrets and deep problems that are alive deep within. And the sense of curiosity and the possibility of housing and sharing secrets and confidential information with us is more permissible for us (luckily) ... women fulfil to a large degree the role of inexhaustible ‘seeker,’ of healers of wounds, and there are many who also enthusiastically play the role of ‘hidiers’ of secrets and vile acts of the men and women in their family. Often times it is the mothers, aunts, and other trusted women who most rigidly adhere to societal norms.” (my trans.)

modernity and tradition – issues such as oral memory, social climbing, machismo, racism, and family structures. When asked in a 2016 interview by Carlos Villacorta González (auroraboreal.net) about her “preoccupation” in the novel with depicting a Cusco belonging to the last century and not to the contemporary era, she references the many overlapping layers that exist simultaneously on the face of the city. This is a naturally occurring topography of multidirectional memory whose ruins constantly invite a back-and-forth dialogue between past and present, the forces of tradition and the reality of constant change; it is a “cartografía de micro-macro historias” / a “cartography of micro-macro histories” (n/p); she explains her struggle to narrate this past through fictional storytelling, resisting the urge to resort to the language of anthropology and the social sciences:

El Cusco es un espacio donde la historia está muy presente, tanto por la gran cantidad de monumentos incas, pre-incas y coloniales que alberga, porque ha sido escenario de continuos movimientos sociales, como porque en la cultura local (cusqueña y andina en general) la historia oral sigue siendo un elemento vivo. Pero más allá de ese Cusco tradicional y típico retratado en postales, está el otro Cusco en cambio social continuo, sumamente cosmopolita, que además tiene un lado poco sacro, más bien caótico, sucio y dionisiaco. Y la mayoría, dentro y fuera del Cusco, quiere quedarse con la visión de la postal. Entonces, desde la ficción hay por un lado un aliento para desentrañar momentos históricos que cuentan tremendas cosas de lo que fuimos, de lo que heredamos, pero también hay mucho por abordar sobre esos aspectos sórdidos, algunos descubiertos a través de historias orales íntimas; todos ellos mueven las micro y macrohistorias. Para mí, que vengo de una formación en antropología e historia, un reto persistente es cómo representar en ficción aquello sin rendirme al lenguaje más explicativo y riguroso de las Ciencias Sociales, cómo dar fuerza propia a la ficción con ese lenguaje literario que sin contar ni explicar los hechos concretos sugiere lo esencial, lo hermoso, lo sórdido (n/p)²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ From an interview with Carlos Villacorta González (October 2016) published on auroraboreal.net, “Entre mito y la historia, una nueva literatura asoma” / “Between Myth and History, a New Literature

The conjuring forth and drawing up the image of the ruin itself – an artifact literally pulled from the historical bedrock – is an act that pulls apart the tensions that exist within the physical contours of the cityscape. From these small, literally fragmented pieces of the past, Pacheco Medrano is able to connect webs of macro and micro histories; family secrets and major social changes are interwoven in the fabric of her fiction.

Pacheco Medrano narrates this process of ruination through the story of a slowly crumbling house in the heart of Cusco, which stands under the shadow of the older ruins of the Incan temple of Sacsayhuamán from 1900 to the destructive forces of the earthquake of 1950. It is the house *itself* to which she assigns the burden of memory – the task of passing down and “telling” stories that were ultimately un-narratable by the various family members who inhabit the space; memories and histories: “fueron incrustados entre el adobe y la cal de las paredes” / “were incrustated between the adobe and lime of the walls” (21). As Pacheco Medrano highlights the

Emerges”: “Cusco is a space where history is very present, as much because of the great quantity of Incan, pre-Incan, and Colonial monuments – because it’s been the scene of continuous social movements – as because in local culture (Cusco and Andean in general) oral history is still a living element. But beyond the “traditional Cusco” depicted on postcards, there is the other Cusco in constant social change, eminently cosmopolitan, which additionally has a side that is slightly sacred, but really chaotic, dirty, and Dionysian. And most people, both in and outside of Cusco, would like to stay with the postcard image. So, in fiction, there is on the one hand a tendency to unpack historical moments that tell us enormous things about what we were, about what we’ve inherited, but also there is a lot to take on about those sordid aspects, some discovered through intimate oral histories; they all move micro and macro histories. For me, since I’m from an anthropological and historical background, the persistent challenge is how to represent in fiction those things without giving into the more rigorous, descriptive language of the social sciences – how to let fiction speak for itself in a literary language that without telling or explaining the concrete facts suggests what’s essential, beautiful, sordid...” (my trans.)

shifting remnants of historical trauma and debris encountered by bodies moving through space, she plays with the contrast between presence and absence, uncovers networks of public structural injustices (from racial tension to dictatorship, and political persecution to global warming), and explores the relationship between private and public secrets.

While the narrator speaks from the year 2010, the novel opens with a scene from 1945: an image of the bodies of four murdered young men found at the site of the ancient temple of Sacsayhuamán, whose stones were mined by the Spanish in a foundational act of violence to form the base of the city of Cusco below. This detail clearly draws the reader's attention back to the moment of the Conquest, an event that forever marked and scarred the urban space: "En su vertiginoso afán, al inquisidor no le importaba si al hacer rodar megalitos, los indios que los aguardaban con sogas de retención quedaban aplastados o mutilados por ellos, observando que, al tiempo que se derrumbaba su templo, también se estaba derrumbando al hombre. Lamentos, lamentos, lamentos" (176).²⁴⁸ The narrator's mother, the central figure around which the rest of the novel pivots, responds only with silence when faced with their deaths. 1945 marks a year of tension – the news mingles with the image of the atomic bombs that have been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (12), and with an unusual snowfall that has both coated the city white, and made more visible the trails of blood that spill from the bodies of the four youths (12). While the narrator explains later in

²⁴⁸ "In his dizzying ambition, the inquisitor paid no mind when toppling megaliths to the Indians who were flattened or maimed while handling the support ropes, observing that the toppling of the temple was also the toppling of man. Grief, grief, grief." (my trans.)

the book that the publicly circulated stories that are exchanged as a way of reasoning through these untimely deaths – stories of revenge and homosexual love affairs – have been denied any kind of political dimension, as he grows older, he feels compelled to re-infuse this moment with all of its historical weight and significance; he decides to narrate the importance behind his mother’s silence. In the space of the post-Shining Path era, the narrator goes back to unbury lost secrets of the past – injustices that continue to haunt the present, that continue to shape and mold not only his own family’s history, but also the contemporary sphere of Peru.

In order to do so, the narrator returns to a past even further removed from the present; he retraces the life of his mother, Giralda – born on the threshold of the new century in the year 1900 into a family whose fortune was made through mercantilism, and therefore, who are never accepted into the aristocratic circles of the city (17). However, her cousin’s words to her on her fourteenth birthday reveal the hope that she is inhabiting the dawn of a new era – one that will be freed from the violence and antiquated customs of the past: “le recordó la importancia del año en que había nacido: le dijo que no olvidara jamás que pertenecía por entero al siglo XX, no al mundo de guerras, obscurantismo e injusticias que todos ellos querían dejar atrás” (41).²⁴⁹ However, the next century proves only to bring more violence – two world wars, cycles of dictatorship that plague the national space – forces that ultimately culminate in the conflict with the Shining Path in the beginning of the 1980’s.

²⁴⁹ “...reminded her of the importance of the year in which she was born: they told her never to forget that she belonged entirely to the twentieth century, not to the world of war, obscurantism, and injustice that they all wished to leave behind.” (my trans.)

For the narrator, the way to register these overlapping pasts, and the interaction between these distinct historical moments as they unfold in the public sphere, is through an attentiveness to space. Just as the foundations of the buildings of Cusco continue to speak to the violence of the twin forces of the Conquest and the Inquisition, the city's walls continue to register the passage of time, bearing witness to buried secrets:

Humildes o elegantes, comunes o extravagantes, hay algunas casas que pueden marcar en sus habitantes, como un hierro candente sobre la frente de un esclavo, su destino, sus opciones, sus percepciones del mundo. Tal vez esto dependa de las puertas que se dejan entreabiertas cuando es de noche, de la amplitud y transparencia de las ventanas, del grado de grosor de las cortinas, de las estancias que permanecen siempre cerradas, o acaso de las llaves que se descubren por azar y pasan a liberar risas, gemidos, alientos, lamentos que se habían mantenido suspendidos, pero vivos más allá de los años transcurridos desde que fueron incrustados entre el adobe y la cal de las paredes. Y si no es así, ¿de qué depende? (21).²⁵⁰

It is Giralda's family home – from which she is eventually expelled due to her marriage to a leader in the pro-indigenous movement – that keeps one of these secrets. It is a haunted space that leaves its marks on generations of Loayza women. The house – which remains empty and in partial ruination at the time of the narration (2010) – maintains the secret of its locked third patio until the narrator at last finds himself (retroactively) capable of describing the events in words.

²⁵⁰ “Humble or elegant, common or extravagant, there are some houses that can mark their inhabitants – like red-hot steel on a slave's forehead – their destiny, their choices, their perceptions of the world. Perhaps it depends on the doors that are left open at night, on the size and transparency of the windows, on the thickness of the curtains, on the rooms that are always closed, or maybe on the keys that are found unexpectedly and inspire smiles, moans, breaths, regrets that have been held but live beyond the years passed since they were encrusted between the adobe and the lime of the walls. And what does it depend on, if not that?” (my trans.)

Sara, Giralda's mother, does not want her daughter to inherit this legacy, and views her marriage to the pro-indigenous leader, Rafael, as an escape. She is thankful that her child will not have to remain in the shadow of the house whose ghostly and haunting qualities consumed and darkened the lives of both her and her mother-in-law, Alejandrina. It is a story she only alludes to – the very mention of the room makes her pale and frightened. But Giralda's marriage to Rafael is not simple, either. She spends many happy years involved in the vanguard art scene; the life of the city is renewed with the sudden interest in indigenous art, song, and archeology, attracting artists and poets from all over the world who come to inhabit the space of Cusco. However, this historical period is also clouded by cycles of dictatorship and waves of political repression that end in the death of her husband in a detention center. (Giralda later remarries, and the father of the narrator is the lawyer who helped political dissidents like Giralda during these difficult moments; she was arrested in 1936 for participating in a widow's march). In the midst of this difficult moment, Sara can no longer contain the secret that haunts her. She passes a partial story on to her daughter, although much like her mother-in-law before her, she is not quite capable of narrating the events in their entirety: "Si uno se pregunta por qué hay gente a la que nadie en su familia quiere recordar; por qué han existido habitaciones durante decenas de años clausuradas; o por qué esas preguntas nadie las quiere responder ... uno termina encontrando que la respuesta es algo innombrable porque cuando finalmente descubre qué es, a su vez no se halla capaz de tejar la combinación de palabras que pueda

expresar las magnitudes de dolor, vesania, miseria o terror que se esconden detrás” ...
“Un viejo establo que permaneció durante un siglo clausurado” (122).²⁵¹

The secret behind the locked door is revealed towards the end of the novel. The event, witnessed by Alejandrina in 1849, continues to be relevant: in the face of Sara’s experience of anti-indigenous waves of dictatorship in the 1920’s and 1930’s; during the narrator’s youth in light of the slaughter of the four leftist youths; and, although not touched upon directly by the novel, again right before the narrator speaks, in relation to the conflict with the Shining Path. In 1849, an indigenous leader came to the city of Cusco with a document signed by a priest, unveiling that the hacienda on which he worked was composed of illegally seized land that was set aside during colonial times to be used communally by the native people (124). However, when he and his family present the documents to the judge, the judge tips off the Loayza family, who decides to quiet the matter: “Entonces pasó algo inenarrable” (126) / “Then something un-narratable happened.” (my trans.) Hearing noises coming from the third patio, Alejandrina watches from the shadows as the mother is raped in front of her daughter, father, and grandfather, the grandfather is hung, and the indigenous leader’s eyes are blinded by a candle flame (128). She is made to “forget” the event by her husband, who threatens to take away her children if

²⁵¹ “If you ask yourself why there are people who no one in the family wants to remember; why rooms have remained closed for dozens of years; or why no one wants to answer these questions ... you find that the answer is unnamable, because when it is finally discovered, it is impossible to stitch together the combination of words that could express the magnitudes of pain, fury, misery, or terror that are hidden within ... an old stable that remained closed for a century.” (my trans.)

she continues to dwell in the past. But, this horror leaves an indelible mark on the house, and demands that its presence be known.

While Alejandrina tells Sara the story, she affirms that the place itself may not have so much power: “Alejandrina le dijo que los lugares en sí nunca eran de temer, sino las cosas que los hombres son capaces de infligir a otros en ellos; afirmó que allí se había cometido un crimen abominable del que jamás se podría hablar y le advirtió que era mejor tener las criaturas alejadas” (131).²⁵² However, the story itself is too powerful to contain under lock and key. In the earthquake of 1950, Giralda sees the locked patio destroyed, and has hope that the literally changing face of the city will liberate her family from the legacy of this ghostly tale.

But still, the house remains, albeit in its ruined form – a testament to past atrocities, and a haunting reminder of what is yet to be done. When Giralda is gifted the keys to her family’s home by her mother, Sara, after her father disowns her over her marriage to the leader in the pro-indigenous movement, Pacheco Medrano again alludes to the interconnected ghostly figures of those who the national memory has tried to erase from its borders:

Tenía veinticuatro años cuando su padre la expulsó de esa casa; sin embargo, un año más tarde, poco antes de suicidarse, su madre le había entregado el llavero que le permitiría acceder a ella de nuevo. “Pase lo que pase, yo quiero que conserves las llaves de nuestra casa, hija. Están todas, no falta ninguna,” le había asegurado Sara. También le dijo que una nunca sabía cuándo podrían hacer falta. Muchas de las familias judías expulsadas de España en el siglo XV habían conservado las llaves de sus casas aunque se sucedieran siglos y

²⁵² “Alejandrina told her that it wasn’t places that should be feared, but rather the things that men were capable of inflicting in them; she stated that an abominable crime that should never be spoken of had been committed there, and that it was better to keep the children at a distance.” (my trans.)

conocieran que su posibilidad de retorno a ellas solo cupiera en las quimeras. Una llave antigua alivia la nostalgia, parece susurrar la oportunidad de reabrir puertas lejanas. Giralda conservó aquel juego de llaves durante décadas (212).²⁵³

Giralda, like the figure of the Jewish converso escaping the forces of the Inquisition, has been cast from her home – deemed unfit – an alien – to Peru’s modern national future. Therefore, the hope of return becomes contingent upon the family’s abilities to atone for their sins of the past, to redeem some of the structural injustices that still haunt – and make uninhabitable – Giralda’s childhood home. The twin forces of the moment of foundational violence – the Inquisition and the Conquest – and their lingering effects and role in fomenting acts of 20th- and 21st- century violence live on in the ruins of the Loayza mansion. The keys for Giralda symbolize that hope of the possibility of return, and, much like the conversos forced to leave their homes behind, she waits in a state of limbo. The keys are a reminder – a kind of conjuring forth of the multiple ghosted bodies who the patriarchal system has attempted to erase from view.

Conclusion: *El sendero de los rayos*

In 2013, Pacheco Medrano published a second short story collection, entitled *El sendero de los rayos (The Path of Lightning)* – a title that seems to play with the

²⁵³ “She was twenty-four when her father kicked her out of the house; nevertheless, one year later, shortly before committing suicide, her mother had given her a set of keys so that she could come back in. She had reassured Sara: ‘Whatever happens, daughter, I want you to keep the keys to our house. They’re all there, not a single one missing.’ She also said that one never knew when they would be needed. Many Jewish families expelled from Spain in the 15th century had kept the keys to their houses, even though centuries had passed and they knew the possibility of return was nothing more than a fantasy. An old key alleviates nostalgia, and seems to whisper of an opportunity to reopen faraway doors. Giralda held onto that set of keys for decades.” (my trans.)

memory of Sendero Luminoso (The Shining Path). The book spans a wide range of topics – again, returning to the idea of a Peru whose contemporary surface is inscribed with layers of overlapping memories of violence that can best be captured in language that lies somewhere between history and myth:

Niños y tortugas que llevan el secreto del bosque en sus caparazones; una mujer habla con la muerte a través de las luces de la ciudad; una pareja intenta recuperar el tiempo perdido cerca del mar; un niño que ha sobrevivido al impacto de un rayo; dos mellizos cuyas vidas han sido trastocadas por la violencia política; una caverna esculpida que alguna vez acogió el huevo primigenio. Como esa caverna, los quince relatos que componen este libro guardan también el viento, ciudades impasibles, montañas, amores, memoria, olvido. Con este nuevo libro de Karina Pacheco Medrano, Ceques Editores acerca al lector una colección de relatos donde el estilo realista se combina con el mito y donde el mundo onírico se funde con las premuras de la vida moderna (back cover).²⁵⁴

The collection pulls from the mythic bedrock of Peru to draw imaginary lines that, much like the ritual ceques of the past, connect Cusco to sites across the globe.

An example of this connection between the threads that tie the local to the global is found in the story “Susana Susana,” which returns to the time of the Inquisition in Spain, and twins the violence inflicted on a young Jewish woman in the Old World with that violence inflicted on indigenous bodies within the space of the New World by sailors searching for gold. There are also stories that deal more

²⁵⁴ “Children and turtles who bear the secret of the forest on their backs; a woman who speaks with death through the city lights; a couple who tries to recover lost time near the sea; a boy who survived a lightning strike; two twins whose lives have been touched by political violence; a sculpted cave that once housed a primogenital egg. Like that cave, the fifteen stories that make up this book also hold the wind, impassible cities, mountains, loves, memory, forgetting. With this new book by Karina Pacheco Medrano, Ceques Editores brings to the reader a collection of stories in which realist style blends with myth and in which the dream-like world fuses with the rush of modern life.” (my trans.)

explicitly with the violence of the Shining Path and the way in which these legacies continue to haunt the present, such as “El sendero de los rayos” (“The Path of Lightning”). However, the quality of multidirectional memory is for me best encapsulated in a single story included in the collection, which I believe weaves together all of the narrative threads that I have explored within the literary landscape of Pacheco Medrano’s works – a piece aptly named “Ecos” (“Echoes”).

In this story, Pacheco Medrano includes a compelling line: “Toda la historia del tiempo parecía hablar en este instante” (37) / “The entire history of time seemed to speak in that moment” (my trans.); in the fictional space of narrative, a single moment in time expands to encompass an image of a history that returns, that continues to make its immediacy known as it “speaks” in the present. It is precisely this echoing of history – a kind of history that does not unfold linearly, but rather circles back on itself in order to envelop those moments of the past that continue to reverberate hauntingly in the space of the “now” – that Pacheco Medrano captures in the fictional sphere. As she plots the twists and turns of a complex and textured history across the surface of the Peruvian landscape, she depicts a national space that is simultaneously defined by its geographical specificity, as well as by its expansion outward as one node in a network of places that compose a globalizing world. “Ecos” can in many ways be classified as a type of ghost story; her narrative is marked by a haunting return of the past – a haunting whose telling paints a larger landscape of layered structural and historical injustices.

I build upon the work of Gordon to define the act of haunting as it unfolds across the narratives of Pacheco Medrano. Ghosts, as Gordon describes them in the introduction to the new edition of *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997; 2008), are beings that usually tell a difficult story of a troubled history – one that is inherently embedded in social processes, and whose outlines emerge through acts of collective narration:

...haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied (as in free labor or national security). Haunting is not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed, although it usually involves these experiences or is produced by them. What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely. I used the term *haunting* to describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done with comes into view. Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view. The ghost, as I understand it, is not the invisible or some ineffable excess. The whole essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, your attention. Haunting and the appearance of specters or ghosts is one way, I tried to suggest, we are notified that what's been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us (xvi).

Haunting, Gordon elaborates, produces a “something-to-be-done” – exposes the past in order to demand our action or attention in the present. This is a kind of historical attentiveness that “fork[s] the future and the past” (xii). It is precisely this “forking” of future and past that Pacheco Medrano captures in the line: “Toda la historia del

tiempo parecía hablar en este instante” (37) / “The entire history of time seemed to speak in that moment.” (my trans.) Her narrative demonstrates the entanglement of many threads of distinct historical moments, that, far from being over-and-done, continue to actively participate in the formation of the constantly shifting space of Peru: pre-Colombian mythology, the violence of the Conquest and its unsettled aftermath, the legacy of cycles of dictatorship and unrest, social inequality, and the troubled national sphere in the post-Shining Path, globalized era.

To untangle this complex and layered temporal map depicted by Pacheco Medrano’s narration, I turn once more to the contents of “Ecos.” In this story, a man – who is haunted by an act of violence committed by his ancestor in centuries past – returns to the very site of the trauma – to Wayra Pukara – the Fortaleza del Viento (“The Fortress of Wind”). Through his journey, the ripples of echoing histories clash in the space of the fort; however, these various dimensions come together in a single moment when he encounters the skeleton of an unidentifiable man. After reading the chronicle of the journey left behind by his long-dead ancestor Gonzalo Gómez – who crossed the ocean from Salamanca, Spain to Perú in order to make his fortune in 1537, and whose sacking of the precious idols from the Fortaleza del Viento ensured his wealth and status in Cusco – the protagonist feels a compulsion to return to the site of the violation; he finds himself obligated to understand the act that haunted generations of his family. As the protagonist describes, Gonzalo Gómez – who himself retraced the steps of his journey as an old man, only to end his life by jumping into the abyss below – and the protagonist’s grandfather, who mysteriously

fell off the very same path in 1945 never to be heard from again – are shadows who continuously haunt the family, reminding them of their dark inheritance; their wealth can only be attributed to one source – the violence committed against the idols of Wayra Pukara, whose curse pursues them to this day.

It is in the scene of encounter – the moment in which the protagonist comes into contact with the skeleton – that the overlapping echoes of histories join together, circling around this single node. Before the protagonist is able to reach the fort, he stumbles upon a crowd, huddled around the ossified remains of an unidentified victim – a victim who could belong to any number of moments of historical violence:

Un par de campesinos, rodeados por el juez de paz, un periodista local, un pastor, dos policías y una anciana llorosa, explicaban en qué circunstancias habían encontrado los restos óseos que se exponían ante nuestros ojos. Contratados por la oficina de promoción del turismo, la tarde anterior habían estado trabajando en la ampliación de aquel tramo del camino con ayuda de la haz y la pala que portaban a sus espaldas, cuando detrás de un arbusto descubrieron el esqueleto semienterrado que en aquel momento teníamos a la vista ... Al volver la vista a tierra, juez, periodista y policías retomaron la discusión sobre si pertenecerían a los años de la violencia política, mientras la anciana se aproximaba al esqueleto, tratando de reconocer en él señales del ser querido que había perdido. De pronto, el juez de paz sugirió la posibilidad de que esos restos del pueblo recordaban haber buscado sin fortuna varios decenios atrás.

En ese cráneo partido que no evidenciaba ningún tiro en la nuca yo vi a mi abuelo. La boca de su calavera estaba abierta ...

... En los años ochenta, la comarca de Wamani fue severamente azotada por la violencia política; aquellos restos podían ser de mi abuelo, como bien podrían pertenecer a otros abuelos, padres, o hijos cuyas cabezas terminaron fracturadas por la violencia y el olvido (36).²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ “A pair of villagers, flanked by a justice of the peace, a local journalist, a pastor, two police officers and a teary old woman, explained the circumstances under which they had found the osseous remains that laid before us. Hired by the office of tourism, they had been widening that particular stretch of the road the previous evening with the help of the packs and shovels that they carried on their backs, when behind a shrub they discovered the half-buried man our eyes were fixed on ... Looking back at the

This skeleton comes to embody the many historical reverberations that continue to inhabit this space – from the violence stemming from the immediate aftermath of the Conquest, to the haunting traces of this legacy generations later, to the more recent trauma of conflict in the era of the Shining Path. And, it is precisely this attention to the overlapping spheres of the macro and the micro, the unburying of layered structural injustices and scales of trauma – that I uncover in the work of Pacheco Medrano.

ground, the justice, the journalist, and the police resumed their discussion of whether [the bones] were from the years of political violence, while the old woman approached the skeleton, trying to recognize in it some trace of the loved one she had lost. Suddenly, the justice of the peace suggested the possibility that the remains could have been the ones the village had unsuccessfully looked for decades ago.

In that cracked cranium, which showed no evidence of a shot to the back of the neck, I saw my grandfather. The mouth of his skull was open ...

...During the eighties, the region of Wamani was severely afflicted by political violence; the remains could have been my grandfather, just as they could have been other grandfathers, or children, whose heads were fractured by violence and obscurity.” (my trans.)

Epilogue

In Patricio Guzmán's 2010 film, *Nostalgia de la Luz* (*Nostalgia for the Light*), the viewer is faced with clashing scales – scales of time and space that move from the intimacy of grounded, personal memory to the infinite mysteries of the cosmos. Chile's Atacama Desert is a territory where the past is more “accessible,” where history is perfectly preserved. Its historical record – a hidden script, unburied, made visible – can actually be “read,” as remains of both human and animal life are protected by the aridity and dust of the desert: “El aire, transparente, delgado, nos permite leer en este gran libro abierto, la memoria, hoja por hoja” / “The air, transparent, thin, lets us read in this great open book, memory, page by page.” (my trans.) The past, however, is not just beneath the earth, but also above it; this location provides one of the clearest views of the night sky – facilitating the observation of the stardust that allows one to piece together the very origins of the universe. The desert, in addition to serving as an international hub for astronomers, also served as a mass gravesite for many of those “disappeared” under Pinochet's military dictatorship. Ironically, by attempting to hide these bodies from social view, the dictatorship actually aided in their preservation; the dry climate safeguards clues that might help to unravel the mystery of these absences. The film compels us to think through historical scales – as the memories of these events seem to spill over or exceed “normal” ways of measuring our daily life – juxtaposing the fragment of a bone of a missing loved one with the boundlessness of traumatic experience and the expanse of the universe above. These two scales point to the difficulties of finding a place for

this trauma in the narrative of the nation's historical memory. And, the film opens a series of questions: How do we express, contain, measure, or compare traumatic events? How does trauma come to be "read" not only at the level of the body, but also topographically – a kind of geographical telling of this difficult history?

This film, much like the literary works I presented in each chapter of this dissertation, highlights the importance of the echoes and fragments of historical trauma that remain behind – objects that wait for an interlocutor, a narrator, to string the disjointed pieces back together. The process is reminiscent of the image presented by Italo Calvino's city of Ersilia – an imaginary geography in which nothing is visible but the knotted networks that now absent individuals have left behind. A spider web of markers and traces of relationships is all that remains, leaving the task of meaning-making to the traveler; he who stumbles upon the abandoned city must try to reassemble the puzzle of this community's lived cartography:

In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or gray or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.

From a mountainside ... Ersilia's refugees look at the labyrinth of taut strings and poles that rise in the plain. That is the city of Ersilia still, and they are nothing.

...

Thus, when traveling in the territory of Ersilia, you come upon the ruins of the abandoned cities, without the walls which do not last, without the bones of the dead which the wind rolls away: spiderwebs of intricate relationships seeking a form (76).

What is the responsibility of the visitor to sites that house the traces of these complex “spiderwebs of intricate relationships seeking a form?” Is fiction the space in which these fragile markers of previous means of ordering communities can be preserved – footprints that might be used productively to rethink the relationship between difficult histories and the imprint that they leave on the present? Acts of narration can reanimate these lost networks that structure past ways of inhabiting cityspace – and fictional passage through place can begin the process of imagining one’s relationship to the geographical contours of the city differently.

In Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he thinks critically about the way in which memories are intimately connected to the relationship between space and storytelling. Place-based memories cannot be contained in museums, in monuments, in memorials, but are awakened by footsteps, by the rituals of our daily routines that take place within the bounds of cityspaces; stories remind us of the importance and significance of sites we encounter in our daily movements:

... And in fact memory is a sort of anti-museum: it is not localizable. Fragments of it come out in legends. Objects and words also have hollow places in which a past sleeps, as in the everyday acts of walking, eating, going to bed, in which ancient revolutions slumber. A memory is only a Prince Charming who stays just long enough to awaken the Sleeping Beauties of our wordless stories. “*Here*, there used to be a bakery.” “*That’s* where old lady Dupuis used to live.” It is striking here that the places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences. What can be seen designates what is no longer there: “you *see*, here there used to be ...,” but it can no longer be seen. Demonstratives indicate the invisible identities of the visible: it is the very definition of a place, in fact, that it is composed by these series of displacements and effects among the fragmented strata that form it and that it plays on these moving layers (108).

In ever-evolving cityscapes, where trauma's traces have been buried, the authors I analyze in this dissertation reawaken this call to tell lost stories of forgotten urban corners. In fiction, these "moving layers," composed of displacement and the tension between forgetting and remembering, are preserved, examined, and revived. The act of storytelling breathes new life into urban landscapes – becomes an anti-museum in which the complexities of active remembrance can be adequately housed.

This dissertation dialogues with a so-called "third wave" of memory studies, carefully outlined in the 2016 work, *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies*. The book is organized around four key dynamics – the transcultural, the transgenerational, the transmedial, and the transdisciplinary nature of the field; memory is now a much more fluid, flexible, and mobile concept:

Memory, it is safe to say, is not what it used to be. Previously thought to be anchored in particular places, to be lodged in particular containers (monuments, texts, geographical locations), and to belong to the (national, familial, social) communities it helped to acquire a sense of historical continuity, memory has, in the last few years, increasingly been considered a fluid and flexible affair. In a globalized age, memories travel along and across the migratory paths of world citizens ... In the process, they redefine the relations between different generations, as geographical and medial transfers affect the uptake of memories by people who can no longer be said to simply inherit them. Meanwhile, the study of memory spans and complicates the boundaries between academic disciplines, generating a multifaceted and evolving field of research (1).

Memory in the 21st century "circulates, migrates, travels" (1). It is more "process" than "object" (1). The question now becomes: how do we record, capture, and understand these "memories on the move?" (2)

If trauma's immensity cannot be measured – if these experiences leave behind a kind of permanent or infinite void in the geographical texture of memory's landscape – certain narrative strategies can begin to outline its edges. As Dominick LaCapra suggests, narratives capture “nonlinear movements that allow trauma to register in language and its hesitations, indirections, pauses, and silences”; through this process, one is able to “work through posttraumatic symptoms in the present in a manner that opens possible futures” (208). In this dissertation, I consider the porous boundary between texts and monuments, between narratives and cityspace – complementary objects in the memoryscape; I examine how each form of cultural memorialization carves out a unique space in the memory field. By reflecting on both forms of remembrance, a particular understanding of trauma, working-through, and future living emerges. This dissertation explores the interplay between attempts at physical memorialization, and the spaces that literature signals as potential sites for the housing of traumatic memory. I untangle the different levels of memory that compose and define urban space – from latent memories in the un-built memorial landscape (absences), to official monuments to state trauma (a simultaneous absence and presence), to those reconstructed memory spaces within the literary texts themselves. These fictional accounts of the connection between urban space and memory reveal the complexity of the layers of meaning that attach themselves to place – and the potential to pass on these traveling memories from one generation to the next.

Central to my analysis of these works were the following key questions: How do these novels seek to move the burden of memory from the individualized, traumatized body to the collective sphere and to the contours of public space? How do these four female authors “think” the city differently, tracing or discovering in the folds of the cityscape that which has escaped the totalizing system – and what is the role of literature in this process? How can cityspace be “read” as a palimpsest-like narrative of historical trauma? How does the space of fiction help us to imagine the city otherwise? These works are very much in dialogue with the four, key dynamics that organize *Memory Unbound*: the transcultural, the transgenerational, the transmedial, and the transdisciplinary. With regards to the “transcultural”: I note that these authors consider not only national memories of trauma, but also how these memories interact and overlap with other moments of difficult history across space and time. The memorial wall of Santiago takes center stage in Pacheco Medrano’s short story collection *Alma alga* – a text otherwise deeply rooted in Peruvian struggles for active, collective memory formation. Mercado-as-narrator shows an affinity for and deep connection with Holocaust survivors and Spanish Civil War veterans. In terms of the “transgenerational”: La Rucia, as ghostly narrator in Fernández’s *Mapocho*, serves as a second-generation witness to historical trauma, attempting to piece together the fragments of a past that seem to constantly evade any type of narrative cohesion. Clavel’s equally ghostly protagonist, Soledad, helps the reader to understand the delicate process of the transfer of memories from the body of the direct witness to historical trauma, to the realm of the general public and

collective memory. For the category of the “transmedial”: this dissertation considers the practice of writing on and about monuments and memorials, and marks the absence of these forms of “official” remembrance. For example, Mercado’s imaginary crumbling of the memorial stones of the monument in Córdoba into pebbles fit for a slingshot, or her insistence upon the importance of “paper cemeteries” – of writing over the top of and engaging dynamically with newspaper death notices. One might also consider the role of the photograph as both absence and presence within the pages of Clavel’s novel, or of the many city streets and maps that are transformed, translated, and transposed onto the pages of fiction in order to imagine cityspace differently. This dissertation also engaged with the “transdisciplinary” aspect central to “third wave” memory studies: I have provided literary analysis alongside theories of urban studies, geography, and memory studies.

In her 2014 MLA Presidential Address, “Connective Histories in Vulnerable Times,” Hirsch suggests that scholars in the humanities should shift their attention from moments of “comparison” to moments of “connectivity” (334). She writes that the key to understanding our contemporary moment is to give attention to those “multiplying” moments of historical violence, trauma, and structural injustice, focused through the lens of memory and postmemory: “...what do these entangled responses *do* in the present? What do they demand of their viewers?” (341) Each of these author’s writings – Mercado, Clavel, Fernández, and Pacheco Medrano – is marked by this concern with examining the connectivity of difficult pasts. They present “entangled” responses to trauma in moments of shared historical vulnerability

from a position of post-memory. And in turn, by grouping these fictional pieces together, I emphasize the importance of taking a comparative approach to literary responses to 20th- and 21st- century trauma in Latin America.

These are moments of trauma that are still actively being worked through; Franco's previously analyzed work, *Cruel Modernity*, urges us to think of these Latin American instances of trauma together – as a unique cluster of interrelated events that mark the recent history of a continent. Underscoring the importance of this piece, the May 2016 volume of the *PMLA* featured in its “Theories and Methodologies” section a grouping of essays and reflections entitled, “Commentaries on Jean Franco’s *Cruel Modernity*”²⁵⁶ – focusing on the relevance and significance of this body of critical thought for thinking through the intersection of literature and understandings of state-sponsored violence. Writes María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo on Franco’s role as “forensic memory worker” and as the provider of a “thick description” of the crimes at hand:

Memory here is the continental but subaltern force of family and friends who are still noisily waiting to bury the broken remains of their disappeared sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, comrades in hope or children of utopic vision. Forensic subaltern memories document the phantasmagoric crimes committed against fragmented and maimed bodies, buried in mass graves or in the depths of lakes from Patagonia to the border between Mexico and the United States, interrupting the gleaming historical narratives that describe the slow but steady progress toward national development ... Franco is part of this force: she is a forensic memory worker, examining the crime

²⁵⁶ Essays in this cluster include Arturo Arias’ “From the Cold War to the Cruelty of Violence: Jean Franco’s Critical Trajectory from *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City* to *Cruel Modernity*”; Gabriela Nouzeilles’ “Theaters of Pain: Violence and Photography”; María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo’s “Cruel Coloniality; or, the Ruse of Sovereignty”; and an interview with Jean Franco conducted by Saldaña-Portillo, “Jean Franco, in Her Own Words: An Interview.”

scenes, the tortured, raped, mutilated bodies, describing in awful detail who did what to whom and with what instruments, and in what order ... Several rationales surface from Franco's analysis – economic, psychoanalytic, patriarchal, misogynist – but these are always necessarily insufficient, especially for Franco. She never fully answers the question she poses: Why were these crimes so cruel, so excessively enacted on the bodies of victims whose actions could never warrant such treatment? These crimes cannot be rendered rational, and perhaps, according to Franco, they should not be. What remains in the face of an impossibility to account for the cruelty is the description, the forcefully documented refusal to forget (722-3).

Later, in an interview included at the end of this cluster, Saldaña-Portillo emphasizes the fact that this period of “cruel modernity” might actually be thought of as one of “cruel colonialism” in that the project of state-sponsored violence of the 20th and 21st centuries was a means to the same end – that of the continued oppression and marginalization of women, the lower classes, and the indigenous (732). She asks questions: Why was it so important for Franco to combine an analysis of social science documents, such as truth-commission reports, with studies of literature, film, and art? Franco replies, “Any more scientific approach would have been totally inadequate. The social sciences are totally corrupt, and they don't liberate themselves at all from the corruption, especially in these countries. It's very difficult to include the social sciences in any innovative approaches to these things, and that's why I don't trust them” (734).

As this dissertation has illustrated, fiction can be thought of as one of the most effective containers for the kind of investigative memory-work suggested by the theoretical underpinnings of Franco's *Cruel Modernity*. Through the pages of fiction, the women authors I engage with are able to free themselves from the constraints of

carefully monitored versions of state-sponsored history. Their characters demonstrate the dangers of this kind of manipulation of the past – of being overtaken or corrupted by this process of documentation: Fausto’s tragic betrayal and concession to the creation of a specific version of history for the state-sponsored history books in Fernández’s novel, Soledad’s struggle to claim authorship of her own photographic evidence in Clavel’s work. Fiction allows space for imagined and future-oriented alternatives to working through trauma.

And, these memories of trauma – of the Tlatelolco student massacre, of the dictatorships of the Southern Cone, of the Shining Path – continue to circulate in the public sphere; their form as collective memory has yet to crystalize. Peru’s 2016 election awakened memories of Fujimorismo, as the ex-president’s daughter, Keiko Fujimori, was nearly elected president. Despite her father’s proven human rights abuses and his 25-year prison sentence following a 2005 conviction, Keiko narrowly lost the election. In an article that appeared on *Time.com* in June of 2016, “Peru Could Elect a Jailed Strongman’s Daughter as President,” Keiko is quoted as saying, “What politicians here in Peru still can’t believe is that after all the accusations that they have made up against my father, his approval ratings are still between 35 and 40 per cent. The more he’s attacked, the more popular he becomes. That’s what they fear: the return of Fujimori” (n/p). She ran on the platform of a “‘nuevo fujimorismo’ sin la mafia” / “a ‘new fujimorismo’ without the mafia,” attempting to sweep under the rug the unfortunate history of human rights violations (Jiménez n/p).

In another example of the current relevance of these memories, President Barack Obama visited the Memory Park in Buenos Aires in 2016, where he publicly apologized for the United States' slow response to human rights abuses under the military regime. This visit marked a moment of renewed interest in and attention to collective memory formation of the Dirty War. In an article that appeared in *La Nación* in March of 2016, Obama's ceremonial visit to the park on the 40th anniversary of the military takeover in 1976 is described: "Obama y Macri brindaron un breve discurso en el que coincidieron en el reclamo de 'Nunca más' ... Finalmente, los organismos de Derechos Humanos decidieron no asistir al acto con el jefe de la Casa Blanca, quien volvió a ensayar una suerte de autocrítica por el rol de Estados Unidos en los años 70 en la región" (n/p) / "Obama and Macri gave a brief talk in which they came together around the phrase, 'Never again' ... In the end, human rights organizations decided not to join the head of the White House, who again attempted a kind of self-criticism for the role of the U.S. during the '70s in the region." (my trans.) The act of Obama visiting the park with President Macri stirred up old tensions and debates: What was the role of the United States in these state-sponsored crimes? What does it mean to build a memorial park – and what happens when the president of the United States visits that communal space forty years later? Finally, the heavily covered disappearance of the forty-three students kidnapped from Iguala, Mexico – students traveling by bus to Mexico City to participate in the annual ceremonies meant to mark the anniversary of the Tlatelolco Massacre – speaks to the

continued importance of vigilance; disappearances still mark the Mexican landscape of the 21st century.

In an article published in *The Guardian* on Lauren Elkin's book, *Flaneuse: Women Walk the City* (2016), Elkin explains her decision to expand the role of the flaneuse to that of the reporter. Describing the life of Martha Gellhorn – a woman who covered the “micro” details of the Spanish Civil War, the texture of daily life under conditions of trauma – she writes: “Gellhorn directly contradicts the image we have of the flaneur – that of the solitary, dissociated urban observer. The flaneuse faced with war and suffering cannot simply stand by: ‘It is too hard to sit on the outside and watch what you can neither help nor change; it is far easier to close your eyes and your mind and jump into the general misery, where you have almost no choices left, but a lot of solitary company.’ In her dedication to exposing misery, Gellhorn turned flanerie into testimony” (n/p). It is the statement contained within this last line of the article – that of turning the act of flanerie into testimony – that I argue these novels by Latin American women of the 20th and 21st century capture within the pages of their fictional cityspaces. By metaphorically walking the city, their protagonists become witnesses, provide testimony, “reroute the paths they were expected to take, and disrupt the lives they were expected to live” (n/p). They mark the continued and ever-evolving importance of these moments of trauma for the present and the future of their respective national (and global) spheres.

In this dissertation, I have taken a comparative approach to each of these literary works – the fiction of four women authors who grapple with a distinct urban

environment produced by what Franco would call the violence inherent in “cruel modernity”: Mercado’s post-exilic Buenos Aires, Clavel’s post-Tlatelolco Mexico City, Fernández’s post-dictatorship Santiago, and Pacheco Medrano’s post-Shining Path Peru. Their works of fiction highlight the importance of literature as a space of memorialization and for recording testimony, and engage with the ties between memory, storytelling, and the built environment. These writers explore the question of histories and their circulation through lived urban space – histories that might be revived and maintained through the practice of dwelling in a “city of memory.” And by recognizing the presence of these overlapping histories, they help to produce a new kind of urban map – one that turns the act of walking the city into an act of recording testimony.

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