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ON THE USES AND ABUSES OF THE PAST: DIAMELA ELTIT'S AND CECILIA
VICUÑA'S ART AND LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

On the Uses and Abuses of the Past: Cecilia Vicuña's and Diamela Eltit's Art and Literature

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My dissertation explores the politics of mourning in post-dictatorship Chile from a feminist perspective. Consequently, it is concerned with the possibilities of remembrance after a political demise: what and how to remember, how to reckon with the dead and the disappeared bodies, is there an ethical approach to the past that will defy the post-dictatorial politics of oblivion? In order to answer these interrogations I analyze the work of two of the most influential Chilean feminist artists of the past five decades, Cecilia Vicuña and Diamela Eltit, rarely studied in tandem. My dissertation wishes to contribute to Latin American post-dictatorial and cultural studies by addressing a critical void in the work of memory, that is, a comparative feminist approach that includes other aesthetic practices such as painting, sculpture, and art installations. On the other hand, my project wishes to contest the critic's predominant melancholic approach to the work of mourning who conceive of literature as unable to transmit experience and thus as a failure. I argue that the critics in resourcing to Walter Benjamin's rhetoric of mourning have performed a reductive reading of his theory of allegory and hence have not offered a possibility of imagining the future otherwise. If allegory is the privileged figure in times of horror it is allegory which must be reconceived as a critical tool to address the past. I argue that both Eltit and Vicuña, through their different aesthetic media, re-signify allegory as an interpretative and creative modality to re-enact the work of mourning. In their search for

the disappeared body they unearth a deeper layer of disappearance, the female body, as the biopolitical support to Chilean national history.

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Introduction

It has been nearly four decades since the military coup d'état in Chile; however, legal and criminal questions regarding the disappeared bodies of Pinochet's regime are still unanswered, not only because the perpetrators remain unpunished, hence, the question of the viability of justice and the proper closure of national trauma are still in suspense, but also because the conditions of death and disappearance are not clear. The search for the disappeared body has turned towards forensic anthropology in order to assist with the identification of remains and the causes of death. Three of the most emblematic figures of the Chilean socialist movement, Víctor Jara, Pablo Neruda, and Salvador Allende, who all died in the first year of the dictatorship, have been exhumed and their bodies have been processed by forensic teams to unearth the real cause of their deaths.

On June 2009, the singer and theater director, Víctor Jara, who was killed in the Estadio Chile (now called Estadio Víctor Jara) a couple of days after the coup, was exhumed, and his body was transported to the Chilean Legal Medical Service (SML) in order to ascertain how and when he died. The Minister of Justice, Carlos Maldonado, explained regarding Jara's exhumation that "[n]uestro interés en esta causa, como en todas las de derechos humanos, es que se investigue hasta las últimas consecuencias y que los culpables, especialmente los que dieron las órdenes, enfrenten la justicia y sean castigados" (<http://internacional.elpais.com>). On May 23, 2001, the body of ex-president Salvador Allende was exhumed due to concerns regarding the veracity of his suicide. The Minister of the Interior to Rodrigo Piñera's mandate, Rodrigo Hinzpeter, declared that Allende's exhumation "es una decisión que ha sido adoptada por el Poder Judicial,

respaldada por la familia del ex Presidente Allende y que nuestro Gobierno recibe con un ánimo positivo porque los países tienen que avanzar dejando los menores espacios de incertidumbre posibles en su historia” (www.gov.cl). According to the judge Mario Carroza, who ordered the exhumation, the country needed to know what really happened. On December 29, 2012, Judge Carroza closed the investigation ratifying Allende’s cause of death as suicide. Since Neruda’s death, his driver and personal assistant, Manuel Araya, has claimed that the poet did not die of advanced prostate cancer as it is believed but that he received a lethal injection in the stomach. Judge Carroza has agreed to exhume the body though the date has not been confirmed. For Minister Maldonado, the quest for knowledge involves unveiling the name of the culprits and determining their punishment. Knowing here is equated with the possibility of justice and with justice itself. Knowledge, on the other hand, according to the view of the current mandate in Hinzpeter’s words signifies historical certainty and hence the possibility for the development and the movement forward of the country.

Besides these national efforts, there are, furthermore, collective movements and institutions which aim to find and identify the remains of the *detenidos desaparecidos* as well as give an account of *presos politicos*’s torture such as *Memoriaviva*, *Proyecto desaparecidos*, *Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos*, *Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos*, and *Comité de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo* (CODEPU). The motto of CODEPU, “Por la Memoria, la Verdad y la Justicia,” makes explicit the goal of disinterring the past and the role and value attributed to memory as a collective and individual effort to find truth in hopes that such truth will bring justice. Memory thus understood is an exercise in knowledge. The history of the post-

dictatorship, however, proved that knowledge and justice are not correlative; hence, many of the perpetrators, as well as those before them, were never prosecuted for their crimes. The clearest example of this is Pinochet himself who was indicted by the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón Real in 1998 and charged for his crimes committed against human rights. Six days later, Pinochet was detained in London only to be allowed to come back to Chile where he was indicted again in 2000. He died in 2008 without being tried and convicted for his crimes. The paradigmatic recourse to the principle of universal jurisdiction, which allowed Spanish judges to indict Pinochet, proves the global effect political violence has as well as the global effort to remember and to bring justice to Chile despite the local amnesty law approved in 1978 by the military junta.

The value of truth as knowledge is exemplified by truth commissions as an after-the-fact national effort to reckon with the state of terror such as “La Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación (Informe Rettig)” in 1990 and “La Comisión Asesora para la Calificación de Detenidos Desaparecidos, Ejecutados Políticos y Víctimas de Prisión Política y Tortura (Comisión Valech)” in 2011. The mission of the former was “contribuir al esclarecimiento global de la verdad sobre las más graves violaciones a los derechos humanos cometidas entre el 11 de septiembre de 1973 y el 11 de marzo de 1990, ya fuera en el país o en el extranjero, si estas últimas tuvieron relación con el Estado de Chile o con la vida política nacional”

(http://www.ddhh.gov.cl/ddhh_rettig.html). Truth commissions, however, as Latin American historian Greg Grandin explains, “are contradictory bodies.” The contradiction inheres in the fact that they “raise hope of justice...yet they operate within the impoverished political possibilities which exist throughout much of the post-Cold War

world” (“The Instruction of Great Catastrophe,” 46). The first Chilean truth commission produced the now infamous *Informe Rettig* which revealed only a portion of the crimes against humanity committed from 1973 to 1990. Although Patricio Aylwin, the first president in the process of transition towards democracy, asked for forgiveness in the name of the entire country after reading the *Informe* and although the *Informe Rettig* proposed a series of compensatory measurements to the families afflicted by the dictatorial violence such as “La Corporación Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación,” the perpetrators of such violence were protected by the amnesty law.

Truth commissions are mere mediations between the atrocities of the past and the possibilities of a democratic future. In this regard, the commissions serve to “cultivate a notion of liberal citizenship that viewed the state not as a potential executor of social justice but as an arbiter of legal disputes and protector of individual rights” (47). The transition of which the commissions are part is one of value: from the social democratic principles to market values. Memory is, hence, used here in exemplary ways to move beyond social principles to economic ones. As Chilean law professor José Zalaquett explains regarding the work of truth commissions in Chile, “truth in itself is both reparation and prevention” (qtd. in Grandin 47). Remembering is hence equated with truth not only as possibility but also as knowledge. On the one hand, the remembrance of the past will allow the healing of historical wounds while, on the other, it illustrates for the future a cautionary lesson not to commit the same mistakes again. The problem between this equation becomes immediately manifest. Truth commissions were in charge of studying not only qualitative and quantitative information regarding the past violence but assessing a whole historical period and its implications with violence:

[t]heir final reports distill a violent past into a manageable, lucid story, one that portrays terror as an inversion of a democratic society, a nightmarish alternative of what lies ahead if it does not abide by constitutional rules...[Latin American jurists] argued that a dramatic affirmation of liberal values was needed in order to prevent recurrences of state violence or institutional breakdown and they often turned to the past to define these values. (48)

States of terror hence are devoid of historicity and denied their reactive birth to social democratic programs as well as their involvement in establishing neoliberal agendas.

Truth commissions are, in this regard, national tools to direct the political future according to a politics of forgetfulness of the unforgettable thus forging a renewed sense of nationalism. The past represented by Pinochet's violent regime and the coup itself were redeemed as tragic yet necessary in preventing the dissolution of the national bond. Truth commissions operate a sanctioned truce between memory and oblivion while producing a fictive sense of national cohesion and hope of justice.

I call this fabulation of the past, that is, its use as parable in the construction of the future, *the abuses of the past*. Conversely, I pose *the uses of the past* as the active and creative employment of memory for the purposes of life, that is, its active unearthing in order to heal historical wounds. I am appropriating here Nietzsche's terminology from his *Untimely Meditations* regarding how history pertains to the living—in other words, its value in healing historical wounds and, conversely, how it can be harmful to life.

Similarly, I am concerned with the ways in which memory as another register which reckons with the past is appropriated by different agents, in particular, by feminist artists in post-dictatorship Chile, so as to actively engage in the process of healing national traumas while opposing the abuses of history. I understand memory here as *interpretation* of the images of the past; in this regard, memory can be, as history, either abusive or useful. Insofar as interpretation, memory can be ethical or unethical, that is, it

is either faithful to its mission of healing the trauma and responsible in its creation of social values and evaluations or it is unethical and unfaithful in following presentist political agendas. Since memory consists of an interpretative modality, I conceive of the past as latent and sensitive to re-interpretation and of memory's subject as a creator of memory images, interpretations, and values. I call the effort of answering the call of the past in search for its creative, positive, and ethical uses *the will to remember*. The subject who wishes to reinterpret the past is hence looking to heal the collective. In this regard, the one who wishes to ethically remember, the subject of the will to remember, does not dwell in melancholia but seeks to find alternative ways to mourn the past. This is represented allegorically in this project by the figure of the disappeared body.

Contrary to Idelber Avelar, for whom mourning signifies an impossible yet imperative task of restitution, that is, as a failed act, I pose a *creative mourning* by which the mourner, conscious of the limits of her own psychic economy, does not seek to retribute or to restore the past but to healthily coexist with the lost object by re-elaborating its image. For Avelar, following Freud, mourning implies an "active forgetting." The mourning I am seeking to develop here takes the figure of the disappeared or lost object and transforms it not into memory or remembrance but into that which is unforgettable. In other words, the unforgettable never ceases to be at work within us yet it is working within us not in a melancholic way but in the form of a constant exigency, a will to remember, a conscious, active search for the unforgettable. The aim of such memory will not be to retrieve the forgotten in order to commemorate it or make it into remembrance; remembering is retrieving the forgotten to make it live, endlessly, as unforgettable. That is, the unforgettable remains "in us," as Derrida

suggests (*Mémoires: for Paul de Man*, 32).¹ This will exclude the cannibalization of the other (the lost object) via incorporation, as Nietzsche would have it, an action which Derrida fears and deems an unethical cannibalism, or as introjection, as Abraham and Torok propose, which involves the replacement of a physical crypt with a psychic one.² The unforgettable is freed from remembrance and hence is able to be remembered and reinterpreted anew according to the pressure of time. The past and the forgotten remain open and, thus, possible for us.

This project wishes to ask two simple and interrelated questions: how to ethically remember the past and what can feminist art and literature tell us about this process. In other words, this project explores the link between the status of memory and feminist art and literature in a Chilean post-dictatorial context. In order to do so, I analyze the works of Cecilia Vicuña and Diamela Eltit, two of the most important feminist Chilean artists of the past half century, who are rarely studied in tandem. By drawing on theories of

¹ It is important here to clarify that Derrida does not call this process of mourning “unforgettable.” This is a term I take from Giorgio Agamben. However both, in referring to memory, curiously use the same locus to describe the place of mournful memory: “in us.” For Derrida, this “in us” is constituted *a posteriori*, that is, it is constituted “out of the possibility of mourning” (34). This already suggests that the memory of which I speak constitutes the subject of remembrance as such only after the loss; hence, the will to remember is an answer to the gift of death. This implies that accepting the object as lost is a pre-requisite to accept the gift of death which, in turn, implies that whether mourning is considered paradoxical (“the possibility of the impossible”), as Derrida does, the gift as gift cannot take place within the realm of melancholy. Accepting the gift of death, lastly, will imply accepting the gift of memory, the will to remember.

² For Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo*, the question is “[h]ow much truth does a spirit endure, how much truth does it dare?” (3). Daring and enduring are, for Nietzsche, synonyms of incorporation: “To what extent can truth endure incorporation? That is the question; that is the experiment” (*Gay Science* 110). Derrida uses the word interiorization following Freud’s account of normal mourning. For the former, this process implies “ideally *and* quasi-literally devouring them (34). But this should not deter us from thinking the possibility of mourning and finding ways with which to ethically work through the past. The last chapter of this project deals precisely with the figure of the impossible possible, the ghost, not as an aporia but as a viable way to remember. Lastly, Abraham and Torok in *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word* revisit Freud’s famous wolf man case and pose a difference between introjection and incorporation as two ways to interiorize the lost object. Introjection resounds with the Nietzschean concept of incorporation which advances, assimilates, takes over, and includes, making the self larger whereas incorporation preserves the other not as other but as a particular “topography” intact (xvi-xxiii). Incorporation thus resists introjections; hence the former signifies the impossibility of mourning.

temporality and phenomenology, I challenge predominant critical approaches which view post-dictatorial literature as melancholic and as allegories of narrative, historical, or experiential failure. I advance three claims regarding the status of memory: first, I argue that any affirmative act of memory should be oriented towards the future and not the past. Second, I claim that the object of loss, whether a person or a sense of community, should be redefined according to a concept of the past as dormant, open, and receptive and to an active, affirmative remembrance, thus, re-signifying the melancholic figures of ruin, residue, and remnant. Third, I argue that the task of mourning in a post-dictatorial context should embrace the paradox of “mourning mourning” through a different ethical engagement with the lost object that does not have restitution or recuperation as its aim.

Idelbel Avelar’s important work *The Untimely Present* asks how we can remember within the forgetful neoliberal present in which memory seems to be precluded and negated due to growing commodification. He explains that “the past is to be forgotten because the market demands that the new replace the old without leaving a remainder. The task of the oppositional intellectual would be to point out the residue left by every substitution, thereby showing that the past is never simply erased by the latest novelty” (2). But the task of the oppositional intellectual cannot be just to expose a system which forgets every reminder and to demand restitution. The expository task, in this regard, does not differ much from the mere exemplarity of the truth commissions. The remainder (remnant, ruin, residue) cannot, by definition, be restituted. It should not be for the restitutive gaze is the same as the melancholic one: it wishes to restore, return, to make or give something equivalent to the remainder thus preventing the task of mourning by emphasizing its restorative impossibility. The melancholic remainder

paralyzes and reifies memory. The consequence of this is that both the collective and the individual cannot ethically respond to the vocation of the ruin for they are faced with the weight of impossibility. The remainder as melancholic needs to be re-elaborated in order to access a truce, however precarious, between the impossibility of mourning and the possibility of “mourning mourning.”

The remainder, insofar as remainder, still belongs to the world of cultural images and both art and literature make the case in answering its call. Certainly, the ruin returns not as such but as an allegory of a time which is the ruin’s cause. The work of art or literature cannot transcend its own belatedness in its representation of the ruin’s or fragment’s locus within historico-political discourses. As Avelar rightfully suggests, post-dictatorial literature “remind[s] the present that it is the product of a past catastrophe” (3). Similarly, I believe post-dictatorial art and literature point towards catastrophe, but the work of Vicuña and Eltit suggestively unearth a deeper catastrophe which they trace back to the origins of the Chilean nation: the sacrificial place of women in history which they represent as a historical continuity amidst the socio-political changes the Chilean nation has undergone since its formation. In other words, they uncover entrenched psychosocial patterns of historical violence which have determined women’s position in national discourses.

Avelar treats allegory as a privileged figure by which post-dictatorial literature engages and mourns the past while trying to overcome the trauma. Similarly, I show that Vicuña and Eltit recur to the figure of allegory. However, contrary to Avelar’s Benjaminean reading of it, I propose a different rapport between allegory and mourning by focusing on Paul de Man’s understanding of allegory. Benjamin’s definition of

allegory is well known so it suffices here to quote it briefly: “in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather in a death’s head” (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 166). There is an intimate relationship between allegory and death and hence with time. However, I find this relationship to be problematic for the purposes of mourning. If, in allegory, the observer only sees death—not only the other’s but hers as well for she is reminded of her own transitoriness—the figure of the remnant cannot be but melancholic because the remnant, as ruin and remainder, is elevated to an emblem of loss. As Avelar explains, “[the mournful self’s] mute and melancholy stare upon an object detaches it from all connections, turns it into an emblem of what has been lost, an allegorically charged monad” (4). However the mute and melancholy stare is preventing the ruin to enter into new connections with the world; hence, the knowledge, interpretation, evaluation, and generation of new values are prevented by the detached object. Consequently, allegory, as charged monad, becomes reified too. Herein lies the connection that, for Benjamin, the mournful self has with the collector but we can see how the figure of the new can be feared and rejected. The mourning I am suggesting in this project and of which Eltit’s and Vicuña’s work are examples, reconceives both ruin and allegory in an attempt to de-petrify history and to set the charged meanings of the allegorical ruin free to operate in time for, as Paul de Man has shown, it is time that is the proper locus of allegory.³

For Avelar, the metaphorical operation proper to the market cannot take place in mourning for “[w]hat cannot be replaced, what lingers on as residue of memory, is

³ See *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (187-228).

precisely the allegorically charged ruin” (5). It is this irreplaceability of the ruin that leads Avelar to beautifully pose a *memory value*, as opposed to an exchange value, understood as “the insistence of memory, of the survival of the past as a ruin in the present” (5). This paradoxical memory value for Avelar resists exchange and hence remains unable to efficaciously mourn the lost object. I want to pose a corollary to Avelar’s formulation and suggest a memory value which is not trapped in the dialectic subject-object but considers it only as a step to overcome. I take my cue here from Paul de Man for whom the relationship between the allegorical sign (in this case, the ruin, fragment, or lost object) and its meaning is of secondary importance for the meaning constituted by allegory can only consist in a repetition of a previous sign to which it relates only by virtue of time since it is posterior to it. This relation signifies that there is no coincidence between allegory and its signification. They do not coincide because the essence of the previous sign is to be pure anteriority. Hence, by virtue of this anteriority and its temporal relation, allegory signals a distance with respect to its own origin thus renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide with its origin. For de Man, this is the reason why allegory’s language is established in the void of this temporal difference.⁴ The renunciation of nostalgia prevents the self from any illusory identification with the non-self, which implies that the collector and the nostalgic gaze are resignified into the cognition of the self as being different (non identical) from the non-self. The relationship between subject and object is hence understood as a temporal relationship and the language-self, the allegorical subject, becomes an assertion of this relationship. The

⁴ Although this is not the place to undertake this discussion in full, I want to point out that, contrary to de Man’s assertions, there is no need to conceive of the origin of allegory’s language as a void in between the first sign and its iteration; the lack of coincidence and identity may very well just signify difference and not emptiness.

memory value I propose in this project is what I called above a creative mourning which does not wish to remember or to forget but to turn the forgotten into the unforgettable. Allegory, in this regard, becomes a strategy to defy what Avelar calls the “defeat of literature” and the “crisis of the transmissibility of experience.” I think the past represented in the figure of the residue signifies that mourning manifests allegorically but where Avelar sees the ruin as *facies hippocratica*, I see the ruin as allegories of the yet to come, that is, as possibilities. Hence, where he sees post-dictatorial literature “[t]rapped between the imperative of memory and a general inability to imagine an alternative future,” I see the allegoresis of the ruins and fragments, insofar as possibility, as the ethical commitment both Eltit and Vicuña have to envision the future, not to determine it but to suggest its openness to reinterpretation (10). Thus, the figure of allegory too is resignified from melancholic to joyful, from the past as petrified to the past as latent and open to the future. If history is the visibility of the events, allegory is the mediation, insofar as charged monad or polysemy, between the world of history and the time that runs underneath history, the invisibility of the events. The time of allegory cannot but affirm the world of decay of which it gives an account and of which it is a consequence; hence, it is not melancholic but joyful and hopeful of the ever-changing, always renewable world of meaning. Allegory will, in other words, metaphorize the participation of the invisible into the visible. The allegorical ruin or remnant overflows with meaning and thus cascades into the world where it takes up partial residence. That is, the remnant is only the possibility of allegoresis, which, according to Gordon Tesky, reveals the contingency of ideological orders. From “the other side of signification,” allegory invites interpretation of the orders which it reveals in its concealment. In this

regard, I define allegory, as Zhang Longxi does, as the interpretation of what lies underneath.⁵ Allegory is then the privileged mode of disinterring the past and of exhuming the disappeared body.

In this project, I argue that both Vicuña and Eltit are allegorists who dramatize a chain of interrelated meanings: the relationship between memory and history, the relationship between expression and meaning, and lastly, the relationship between language and the transmission of experience. Allegory hence represents the creative answer to the difficulty of transmitting experience after a state of terror but not a representation of its impossibility. As allegorists, Vicuña and Eltit read the remnant of the past allegorically and create new allegories upon them. The process of allegorical interpretation is hence endless and always defined by the cultural circumstances in which the allegorical monad, insofar as ruin, is located and re-interpreted.

In Vicuña's work, the use of natural debris and waste are removed from the collector's vision and transformed into newness without ever falling into the commodification of which Avelar speaks for it does not wish to erase the past in order to consume empty newness. The ruin for Vicuña is no longer the *facies hippocratica* of history but the exigency of aesthetic reinvention and hope. Vicuña's debris and waste enter the realm of history again as newness and it is as allegories that they, once in contact with history, discharge their allegorical meanings and set into motion interpretation. Eltit, on the other hand, takes the figure of the disappeared female body as a remnant of national history not only to question women's absence but to engender aesthetic spaces for women's history and, like Nietzsche's critical historian, she cruelly cuts through the past so as to create a new one but only for women's sacrifice to be both

⁵ See Longxi's "Historicizing Postmodern Allegory" and Gordon Tesky's *Allegory & Violence*.

recognized and abolished. Accordingly, Eltit's emphasis on socially marginalized figures and Vicuña's sculptural use of waste and detritus are formal, thematic, and performative strategies that contest the abuses of the past and pose the fragment not as a melancholic sign that inhibits mourning but as a sign of possibility and reinvention. Since Eltit and Vicuña attempt to decolonize memory from the abuses of politics, they intervene directly within the discourses of history and temporality. As a consequence, they modify and defy the politics of history and visibility by redefining the relationship between temporality and difference. In an era characterized by discourses about the end of the subject, the end of history, and the end of the world, Eltit's and Vicuña's creative recourse to natural and cultural fragments illuminate the temporalities of mourning and dissolution.

In my first chapter, I interpret Cecilia Vicuña's experimental textile art as an act of memory-making. The obsolete Incan memory technology of the *quipu* is for her an allegory of disappearance and displacement within national history. Her allegoresis, that is, her reading of the obsolete technology, aims to question historical interpretation for she locates there, in the disappearance of women's and indigenous bodies, the primary violence upon which the whole history of Chile has been written. So historicizing and interpreting the dictatorial and the post-dictatorial era demands a weaving of the political present back to its genealogical origins. I pose her art as an answer to historical violence and state terror and as an attempt to reorganize the images of the past which support this originary violence for Vicuña sees in this re-weaving and re-interpretation of the past the possibility of future transformation by creating new genealogies for women and indigenous people; a new genealogy insofar as patrimony, will support the vision of a

different future. Vicuña operates a transvaluation of the figure of the obsolete into a critique of Chilean historical malady and into a new allegory of time. Thus, Vicuña's recourse to Amerindian textile art entails a re-evaluation of the concept of time and consequently of the notions of past, memory, and loss.

In chapter two, I turn to the most recently published novel by Diamela Eltit, *Impuesto a la carne*. Released in 2010, the novel responds to the national *bicentenario* by interrogating the democratic pretensions of the country's historical discourses, which, in fact, insist upon women's absence. The recuperation of women's disappeared bodies represents for Eltit a questioning of history's own lack of historicity and an interrogation of the imbrications between history, politics, and the past insofar as they are supporters and guarantors of any ethical future. The asphyxiating novel has only two anonymous characters, a mother and her daughter, who live in a hospital where their bodies are tortured and mutilated by nation and history. From the *penumbra* of history, they try to transmit their past while unveiling the Chilean nation as a system of violent inclusions and exclusions. Eltit poses the anonymous female bodies as allegories of women's biopolitical locus in the construction of the nation. Their historical exclusion represents for Eltit the innate structural possibility of all historical discourses to be deconstructed from within. Thus, the allegorical women represent a revolutionary intervention within history's temporality through the time of memory while creating new genealogies for women.

Chapter three analyzes Cecilia Vicuña's small sculptures, *los precarios*, made of cultural and natural detritus and her angelic painting *Manraja*. On the one hand, she raises and resurrects the fragility and precariousness of the disappeared bodies

represented by the sculptures as a response to the violence of totalitarianisms and imperialisms and their abuses of the past. On the other hand, she creates a corollary to Benjamin's angel of history with her female angel of memory who remembers the pile of debris by weaving it into presence. Waste represents for Vicuña an allegory of those who have been excluded from politics, and their reassemblage into sculptural and pictorial form is her attempt to, first, answer and oppose a Chilean politics of oblivion and, second, to allegorically create a time for the excluded ones. *Los precarios*, insofar as the outside of historical documentation, remain unexplored; thus, they resignify the figures of the ruin and the fragment into signposts of transformation and possibility as potential documents that stand *vis-à-vis* national discourses.

My last chapter studies Diamela Eltit's allegorical novel *Jamás el fuego nunca* (2008). The novel problematizes the political and ethical encounter between the world of the dead and the world of the living after a state of terror and poses the necessity of conceiving of a proper way to mourn the elusive figure of the ghost, as an allegory of the unidentifiable remains of the *detenidos desaparecidos* during Pinochet's regime. Once again, we have two anonymous characters, this time a pair of lovers, a man and woman, ex-militants of a leftist cell who now live their lives prostrated in a small bed where the narrator, the woman, contests historical knowledge and the imperative to forget with what I call "the paranoid strategy" as the woman's quest for knowledge in unveiling the traumatic death of her son at hands of her lover. This traumatic knot turns each narrative element into an allegory: the bed becomes an allegorical tomb where the negotiations between the political oblivion and the imperative to remember the dead, insofar as unforgettable, take place and to which the ghosts of the leftist militants return. The

woman becomes an allegory of the imperative to remember while the man represents the Chilean politics of oblivion and her son, the exigency to mourn while remaining faithful to that which, insofar as forgotten, is unforgettable.

The analysis of Cecilia Vicuña's multifaceted art and Diamela Eltit's dense and complex narratives within the context of the post-dictatorship throws light on the necessity of thinking again the possibilities of working through the past even when the turn of the millennium may seem to rapidly leave the past behind. Their works actively re-enact mourning by renewing its figures. They are able to find historical continuities within the image of loss and to pose the disappeared body as an allegory of all that was lost since the process of national constitution in order to make legible that which is forgotten. It is only by becoming present and legible that memory can become a knowledge capable of withstanding the Chilean politics of oblivion. Within aesthetic practice, and constitutive of it, the various allegorical monads with which Eltit and Vicuña pay debt to the past gain an unusual force: they become beacons which refuse political and literary defeat. They become new images of the past comprised in the polysemy of the allegorical figure. As new images they imply the need of conceiving of new knowledges with which to make legible the renewed ruin as image of the past and with which to make it operative in the realm of interpretation. The new allegorical impulse is hence the hinge which allows to speak of the disappeared body by never speaking for it; in other words, the allegorical monad illuminates all experiential and linguistic impossibility by allowing it to stand there, always renewable, always accessible, susceptible to resurrection.

In contrast to the monumental national effort to unearth the big male figures of the socialist movement (Allende, Neruda, and Jara), these feminist artists unearth the unmonumental: the anonymous, faceless, untraceable women whose bodies remain as sediments of the world of visibility. It is, perhaps, a feminist impulse to see in the ruin the seed of patrimony and renovation for it is the female body—her memory, work, and genealogies—which erupts through the ruins of history leaking in a different time. It is perhaps a feminist impulse to use the master’s tools to oppose, in Vicuña’s words, “maximum fragility against maximum power.”

Ch. 1 Vicuña's Quipu-Making: Genealogies of History and Allegories of Time

“[A] quipu that is not/ time's ritual measure”

Cecilia Vicuña

It is within an already agitated political climate in Chile that Cecilia Vicuña's aesthetic production began in the 1960s, a period defined by intense social discontent and turbulence, which led, in 1969, to the constitution of the left party coalition, *Unidad popular*, and to the presidency of Salvador Allende in 1970. Indisputably, 1973 marked Chilean national history with one of its deepest historical wounds, the military coup, the effects of which are still felt today due to the violent crimes committed against the community at large and to the human rights of individuals. After Pinochet took control of the country three years into Allende's administration, many artists went into exile, fleeing the government's machinery of surveillance and censorship. Vicuña, already living in London at the time, decided to embark on a self-exile through Latin America where she became familiarized with Amerindian cultures.

Her commitment to the socialist cause and Allende's government along with her desire to transform the sociopolitical structures of the nation informed her aesthetic imagination and ethical commitment from the outset. She has explained this herself in her book *Precario/Precarious* and since then has been an active member in social and political movements not only in Chile but in the Americas. However, Vicuña's work fails to neatly fit into what Adorno has called “committed art” in his essay “Commitment.” Nor can it be seen as an example of fetishizing textile and aesthetic practices into “autonomous” constructs.

Committed to reality though far from the mockeries of propaganda, her art is undeniably abstract, conceptual, and avant-garde. Juliet Lynd, in her panoramic analysis of Vicuña's oeuvre, calls her "a pioneer in experimental art in Chile a decade before happenings and other genre-bending artistic displays emerged in the mid-seventies as a deliberately cryptic form of resistance to the violent regime of Augusto Pinochet" (*PMLA* "Precarious Resistance" 1588). If the particularities of the Chilean political scenario demanded from writers and artists to make recourse to cryptic aesthetic forms in order to manifest their opposition, Vicuña's experimental art, already *a la vanguardia* from the beginning of her artistic production, has a different, although not opposite, aim in mind. The reality to which her artistic production responds has a very Quixotic ethical ambition: to unbury the other from the past, to encounter the other in the pre-history of national discourses so as to, from there, reinterpret the political present in hopes of opening up a symbolic time and place for the other in the future.

Vicuña, heeding the already quintessential Jamesonian dictum to always historicize, seeks to find the origin of the other's disappearance within national discourses for she conceives of this disappearance as the primary violence upon which the whole history of Chile has been written. She makes a particular synchronic cut in the tissue of history in order to return later this genealogy to the flux of time. This is her fundamental bet. For this reason, she historicizes the dictatorship and the post-dictatorship era as signposts of political and historical violence, by tracing a line, a thread, back to the pre-colonial times, showing that the whole issue of Chilean national history has to do precisely with its pre-national history insofar as absence. This particular connection to historical events defines her whole quipu-making as a practice, as a

methodology but also, and, more importantly, as a philosophy of time. Before we move forward a clarification is necessary. When I say thread, as in yarn or fiber, I also mean line, as in poetic line. Line and thread are ubiquitous and interchangeable in Vicuña's work not only because she is a poet and a visual artist but because thread and line are woven together into a whole new plastic cosmovision embodied in her new aesthetics: *arte precario*. Hence, what operates upon and moves across Vicuña's textile weaving operates upon her language and vice versa. This interrelation is constitutive of an integrated aesthetic sensibility wherein weaving and writing are inseparable and woven together in, as I wish to show, the creation of a new sense of temporality. The weaving of thread and line is, furthermore, the opening and intertwining of new worlds represented by each thread. Both are not, as Lynd suggests, parallel; they are allegories of each other. I will clarify the concept of weaving as an allegory of poetic writing and temporality shortly. Vicuña's multifaceted art is comprised by the weaving of plastic arts with poetry: sculptures, art installations, and paintings are fused with concrete and visual poetry, with comparative etymology, and digital films. Textiles and volumetric forms are intervened with poetic language, sometimes as a gloss when documented a posteriori in a book, sometimes as integral to the aesthetic procedure, but always calling into question the very ethos of all interpretation in terms of the creation of meaning and the constitution of national histories and identities.

Vicuña's art is essentially an art that aims to answer to political and historical violence not as a simple reaction to it but as a transformation of its fundamental elements. Therefore, she is committed to the reality of that which is invisible yet *a priori* to Chilean national and historical representations, for she finds in this pre-history an underlying

violence that has conditioned and permitted all historical violence in Chile. Her creative response to this state of profound violence is to re-use obsolete memory technologies associated with women's and Amerindian communities' trades: weaving textiles so as to re-weave the past. She weaves in the flexibility of memory's time to the fabric of history. Memory's time interrupts history with the images of its absence. Hence her use of the obsolete represented here by the art of pre-Columbian communities and their textile practices and her use of the discarded materials represented by her sculptures made of human and organic detritus which infuse her art (Vicuña's use of waste is the subject of chapter 3).

In the present chapter I posit that Vicuña's recourse to Amerindian textile art as a response to historico-political violence entails a re-evaluation of the concept of time and consequently of the notions of past, memory, and loss. Her aesthetic project exceeds the notions supported by post-dictatorship studies and secondary literature that conceive memory, the past, and its interpretations as melancholic and as allegories of failure. What are the implications that this reconceptualization springs forth? How does it affect memory's work? How does it affect allegory understood as a critique of history? If the pre-colonial past is the paradigm of Chilean historical obliviousness, Vicuña's effort to remember or to pay our debt to it seeks to name and heal this historical void. Her quipu-making is thus memory-making. I refer to this as the uses of the past. She is not neglecting the concreteness of her epoch by recurring to obsolescence and waste, reworked by and into an experimental aesthetics, but unearthing what she sees as the origin of Chilean historical violence. This is her urgency. My aim is to show how Vicuña transvalues the obsolete, first, into a critique of Chilean historical malady, and

second, into a massive allegory of time. I call this active, creative search for the unused images of the past *the will to remember*. Since this is my project's fundamental concept, I will explain it in further detail below.

The Will to Remember

I want to suggest that the art and literature of the two authors I study in this project, Cecilia Vicuña and Diamela Eltit, imply a re-evaluation of the past in terms of excess, of hyperabundance, as opposed to readings of the past that interpret it as lack, loss, and fracture. Their particular attitude towards the past embodied in their oeuvre represents a specific appropriation of the images contained within the past which suggests a redefinition of the concept of the past itself. Vicuña and Eltit contest reactive abuses of memory and propose an active, positive remembrance. The activity of memory, as opposed to a passive recollection, belongs to the realm of ethics for it is, first, a doing, an action, and second, because it is a reading, an interpretative act. The activity of memory, as opposed to its passion, is an ethical response to the individual and political oblivion suffered during the military regime and its aftermath. Memory conceived in these terms does not seek to restore any lost unity of sense or cosmovision but to envision a future otherwise. In other words, this memory does not aim to serve the past but the future.

The concept of the will to remember is Nietzschean in nature since I follow his principles of the will and active and reactive forces to envision a non-melancholic approach towards the past and memory. It signifies, first and foremost, a particular attitude when confronting the past and evaluating its uses to heal historical wounds. This will engender a particular aesthetic answer, what I call the tragic response of which the

textile art of Vicuña is a clear example. The will to remember assumes a) an active past; b) a creative, ethical memory; and c) the newness and potentialities of the future.

Post-dictatorship studies in Chile and in Latin America often draw on Walter Benjamin's vocabulary to redress the question of the violent past. The authoritative work of Idelber Avelar and Nelly Richard has become a privileged interpretative locus of the dictatorial and post-dictatorial condition and so is their use of Benjaminian terminology. As Susana Draper astutely and bluntly explains in her article "The Question of Awakening in Postdictatorship Times,"

it is important to understand the ways in which certain readings of Benjamin's work became dominant in the decade following the end of the military regime, and to raise a series of questions regarding other acts of reading that did not take place (88).

This does not imply there is a need to replace or disdain Benjamin's influence on post-dictatorship studies but rather that we should try to find and institute "other acts of reading." The will to remember is my contribution to this pursuit of alternative methodologies. As Draper points out "[t]he Benjaminian inspiration was...progressively reduced to a somehow exclusive focus on the figure of mourning and melancholy, which became a theoretical stereotype in any study of post-dictatorship thought" (89).

The problem of the allegorical conception of the past is precisely its status as "facies hippocratica of history as a petrified, primordial landscape" (Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 166) where the skull that represents the question of human existence, as well as the "biographical historicity of the individual," determines the allegorical way of seeing—and this is what I consider to be the problem of the allegorical notion to which the Chilean critics subscribe—where the passion of the world is fundamental only insofar as it shows the stations of its *decline*. The allegorical gaze is,

by necessity, melancholic. I believe the idea of an excess, of a virtuality (the pure memory of Bergson) can aid us to transform the lack, the decline, into a plastic, open notion of memory.¹ According to Nietzsche, the past weighs man down “or bends him over, hampers his gait as an invisible and obscure load that he pretends to disavow” (*Untimely Meditations* 88).² It brings strife, suffering and boredom. Its ponderousness curtails motility and that is why man and woman imagine (and envy) the child and the herd to be the paradigmatic examples of pure present. If the past is the place of weakness, suffering, and the perpetual stream of becoming, and, finally, despondency and unhappiness, it is not difficult to understand how Nietzsche envisages forgetfulness:

But in the case of the smallest and the greatest happiness, it is always just one thing alone that makes happiness happiness: the ability to forget, or, expressed in a more scholarly fashion, the capacity to feel ahistorically over the entire course of its duration. Anyone who cannot forget the past entirely and set himself down on the threshold of the moment, anyone who cannot stand, without dizziness or fear, on one single point like a victory goddess, will never know what happiness is; worse, he will never do anything that makes others happy. (*UM* 89)

The underpinning of happiness is a capability, not an essence, not an accident but a “[s]uitableness, fitness, [and] aptitude.”³ By definition, then, happiness depends on our competence; to feel ahistorically regarding the totality of the past implies that this capacity has to be active, constant, and pervasive. What to forget, when to forget, what to remember, and when to remember is a matter of degree. In order to determine this degree we would have to attend to what Nietzsche calls the “shaping power” of a human being, a people, and a culture which he defines as the “power to develop its own singular character out of itself, to shape and assimilate what is past and alien, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken forms out of itself alone.” (*UM* 89) This

¹ Deleuze explains that “Duration is essentially memory” and that “Bergson always presents this identity of memory and duration in two ways: “the conservation and preservation of the past in the present” (51).

² In what follows *UM*.

³ *OED Online*, <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50000387>, site last accessed March 13, 2011.

active force called forgetting depends on the graduation of its usefulness to life, on its capacity to, first, shape and reshape the subject; this essentially implies a creative movement—an artistic movement, according to Nietzsche—towards order and towards the future. Second, it implies assimilation, that is to say, incorporation –digestion- of that which belongs to me as my past and which belongs to the past of the humanity for I am the heir of this past. Third, and consequently, this active force tends to the health of the subject and her ability to grow stronger. This assimilation depends, ultimately, on the innermost nature of a human being. This is the reason why Nietzsche wants us “to consider the capacity to live to a certain degree ahistorically” (*UM* 91).

However, this total oblivion in which animals are submerged is not possible for man and woman, specifically after a traumatic event has uprooted, by its intensity, the value of life—and if life is the most important value for “[t]here is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power—assuming that life itself is the will to power,” and if this is precisely what has been injured and needs to be reformulated, we would have to say with Nietzsche that we need a *new value* (*Will to Power* 37, 4).⁴ There must be a moment when we have to forget about everything else in order to remember just one thing, to live *suprahistorically*—if, by remembering, we are able to create as the artist does, to make ourselves art, to live a life aesthetically, and from this point, from this “action,” to generate and strengthen. This, then, is my invitation: to think about remembering as an active force in order to incorporate a trauma into our history (the history of a people, a culture or an individual) in such a creative way that this news will endure appropriation.

⁴ In what follows *WP*

Now it is important to remember here that, to Nietzsche, what man and woman strive for, ultimately, is not happiness but power, not pleasure but an augmentation of power, and this is a key point for me to think about remembering as an active force. Happiness, in the end, is just a result of a battle of forces in which “[f]eelings of pleasure and displeasure are reactions of the will (affects)” (*WP* 353). Happiness, therefore, depends on the will to power and on a “game of resistance and victory” (371). Now, pain, is something different; it is not the opposite of pleasure, Nietzsche reminds us, but an intellectual occurrence, a protracted shock, a judgment. If this is so, pain is capable of being reevaluated or transvalued. Memory can be active and must be active: it must win the battle and overcome the resistance to extend towards the future and memory must be the will to power to heal the historical wounds of the traumatic past. The task is self-overcoming; it is to achieve power.

The active for Nietzsche is that which reaches out for power; conversely, the passive is “[t]o be hindered from moving forward: thus an act of resistance and reaction” (*WP* 346). According to this, memory and forgetfulness are basically degrees of forces where the dominant one is the latter. Deleuze defines the characteristics of active forces as “[a]ppropriating, possessing, subjugating, dominating” (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 43). This degree, at the same time, implies either a movement toward the future, a mobilization, or a withdrawal, a movement inwards. Nonetheless, memory abates forgetfulness in the particular case of the promise, but, then again, Nietzsche asks the question of competency. Who can promise? A promise can be made by the same subject who can forget; it is a right that just belongs to the emancipated man, a master of the free will, the superior man who has “a proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of

responsibility” (*Genealogy of Morals* 59). We have to remember because we are noble and strong enough to commit ourselves to the future. We have power “over fate”; therefore, the memory of the promised represents a desire, a “memory of the will.” We might have to think of the self as a promise, or, what’s more, we should think of life, itself, as a promise.

I would like to explore the possibility of a special kind of memory of the will, conceived also as an active force, an abrogation of forgetfulness, not of something that was once desired, but as the conquering—through affirming pain, through darkness because we do not fear obscurity and we are noble enough to undertake a tragic mission, through Dionysius—of a better life for the future.⁵ The will to power thus is a feeling, a wanting to manifest this power and it is a creative tool that relates to other forces and would not be possible outside these relations. The tension between different forces will lead to a qualitative difference—in other words, between active and reactive. It is important to distinguish here between memory as a reservoir and remembering as an action, as a force.⁶ We have to vacate a mnemonics of pain so as to empty ourselves of memory. That vacuity, that process is what I call the will to remember—that is to say, memory is a genealogical act to find the root of stagnation, of negation of life and to free oneself from it, incorporating the truth of pain through its creative potentialities or virtualities in a re-signified way. After this, we might be able to either embrace pain or to

⁵ And I have to insist on this: Dionysius is not Thanatos. It is not death drive. Nietzsche is very clear about it; pain is not the same as displeasure. I want to recuperate the tragic figure of Dionysius to the extent that he affirms pain through willing, through life, and a superabundance of pleasure. As opposed to some Apollonian answer as Deleuze, quoting *The Birth of Tragedy*, reminds us “‘Apollo overcomes the suffering of the individual by the radiant glorification of the eternity of the phenomena’, he obliterates pain.” (11)

⁶ I am not referring here to involuntary memory; Proust and Benjamin have already explained its appearance and significance, and we might call it without hesitation a passive memory. Neither am I referring here to nostalgia, which Nietzsche would consider to be a perpetual atrophy of life, a nihilist act that negates life.

find in the multiplicity of virtuality of the past that figure, that new understanding that will direct us to the actualization of the traumatic memory, and hopefully to the creation of a future. It is only in the unlimited potentialities of the past understood as virtual where I can find a new meaning that is in no way identical to the present. Who can, thus, remember critically? I want to suggest that a subject, a culture, or a people that has experienced a traumatic event should enter this dangerous region as a political act, as an ethics, in order to, not restore because the will to remember is not a nostalgic gesture, but to create a new value, a new truth, because the will to remember *is* a critical action.⁷ A subject, a culture, and a people might do so if they want to avoid falling into the passive waters of nihilism, which implies “[t]hat the highest values devalue themselves” (WP, 9).

When a traumatic experience has occurred, for example, to a people or to a culture, this experience has the required intensity to devalue and to empty the armature of sense that structures that community (e.g. human rights); it is, according to Nietzsche, an obvious consequence. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler explains that what is uprooted or exposed after a traumatic event are the ties that bind us together: “[l]oss and vulnerability seem to follow from our socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments” (20). In this regard, in order to answer to a traumatic event, Vicuña’s textile genealogy seeks to bind the social together but not through the re-attachment of what just has been lost but through the creation of new connections. Her recourse to obsolete memory techniques and waste needs to be understood in these terms and not as a mere mending of the social fabric.

⁷ If, as Deleuze reminds us, “[c]ritique is not a re-action of re-sentiment but the active expression of an active mode of existence,” the will to remember would be primarily an active critique of history (3).

Once these social values and bonds have been uprooted or evacuated of meaning, a people have the imperative to erect new systems of values, a new morality that reformulates the past. Here precisely resides the question of the uses and misuses of history and the historical. To the author of *The Birth of Tragedy*, nihilism is, thus, a logical consequence of valuelessness, yet it is not an ultimate desideratum: its transitional status proves that the lack of values is unhealthy. It is for this reason that the figure of loss as allegories of histories need to be revalued. We might have to imagine now every system or organism as built and conducted by a net or an articulation of falseness that is useful enough to endure, to continue in time. These valuations, of course, are related to innumerable conditions proper to a system or organism, but, as Nietzsche points out, eventually, they are all associated with survival, with preservation and continuation. The traumatic event has such an intensity that its sole occurrence is enough to expose the fictionality of the system of values which subsequently becomes obsolete, unable to preserve what it used to. With its falseness revealed, it demands re-signification, because the tools the system or organism has had so far are insufficient to explain or support the present and definitely cannot lead to the future. The threatened value, denuded, shows its nature and leaves an individual, a culture, and a people uncovered and unsheltered. The traumatic event, by definition, cannot make sense, cannot be symbolized, and cannot dwell within language. We are stripped, thrown into the present, yet still tethered to an inexplicable past.

If “A thread is not a thread”

After a traumatic event, a new battle of forces appears on our horizon: forgetfulness obscures the practical impossibility of naming, of healing with its veil, but if we want to reach out for life, we must remember, reshape, and incorporate this past. The question that the artist faces within this context is how to deal with historical and political violence? Do we incorporate violence? Do we resist it? Do we mock it or embody it? Is it ethical to represent violence? Is it cannibalism to heal it?

I suggest that the way in which art interacts with violence moves along two axes where violence, as an action, takes place: the violence of art and the art of violence. First, we have, in Pierre Klossowski’s words, “a will to do violence” (*Nietzsche’s Vicious Circle* 101-115). Second, there is the violence of imposing a form upon the amorphous, the original sin of art, as Nietzsche recounts in the *Genealogy of Morals*. Third, as Nelly Richard explains in *Art and Politics*, art can represent, portray, or denounce violence. This is how she defines “socially committed art” (16).⁸ Fourth, it can have a violent effect, a cathartic effect on the artist and/or the recipient (as in Lacan’s *Ethics*), or a therapeutic effect on the artist and/or recipient (Nietzsche). Fifth, as Adorno states in *Aesthetic Theory*, it can do violence to itself and to the recipient of art by manufacturing suffering without aesthetic struggle, conceptualizing violence and turning it into a zone of comfort, a cliché which “cultivate[s] coercion” (160).⁹ Finally, there is “[t]he violence of the new,” of the avant garde’s experimentation (*AT*, 23).

If art has the force to create values, the question of how to transform the cruelty and violence of the past through art by means of its own violence is an urgent and ethical

⁸ Subsequently *AP*.

⁹ Subsequently *AT*.

matter—in this particular case, I am more interested in the art of violence, that is, that which is produced under violent socio-political circumstances (whether to denounce it, to transmute it, to re-elaborate it, to overcome it, etc.). In other words, I want to explore how art can appropriate violence, exceed it, do violence to itself and to the self (if necessary) in order to treat violence and the work of art as an event that demands, by its unique circumstance, an ethical response to the past. The cathartic and the therapeutic consequences of the ethical attitude towards art represent to me an ethical means to the extent that they aid the subject in her ethico-aesthetic project. This, I believe, is part of making ourselves, our world and lives, aesthetic phenomena: the call is to be poets of our lives for poets, as Nietzsche claims, are the signposts of the future (*Gay Science* 299 and *Human all too Human* 235).¹⁰

As Nelly Richard explains, socially committed art represents an artistic and ideological vector “of social agitation and political militancy” (*AP* 16). However important and transgressive this art may be, it is not the aim of my analysis, first, because of its didactic and pedagogical stance and, second, because of its pretensions of representing or transmitting a fixed and/or unitary cosmovision, which is generally utopian.¹¹ Rather, I am interested in the avant-garde movements or *neovanguardias*, as Nelly Richard calls them, since they attempt an aesthetic transgression as an institutional detonator, by dissolving limits, merging frontiers, and violating traditions through alternative formats. This is Adorno’s “violence of the new.” The violence of the new is a particularly interesting operation, since it situates violence within both form as well as

¹⁰ In what follows *GS* and *HH*, respectively.

¹¹ For a very interesting analysis of the creative and affirmative force of utopia in the construction of political futures, see Susan McManus’ article “Theorizing Utopian Agency: Two Steps Toward Utopian Techniques of the Self,” *Theory and Event* 10:3 (2007).

content; thus, experimental art responds to the insecurity and violence of a determined social or political content/context. Second, the artist exercises violence upon the amorphous by experimenting with forms which, in turn, do violence to the recipient by generating a new way of seeing/hearing/reading/perceiving—that is, by a new aesthetical experience. In this sense, this art of the *neovanguardia* enters into a double relationship with violence—an external one in which art comes into dialogue with violence to either support it or conflict with it and an internal one in which it critically reflects upon violence through its own materiality in order to create something new which exceeds the past-present relationship of the work of art in its sociopolitical context, to introduce a new sphere of meanings and transfigurations, and to impel it toward wakefulness and the future.

Experimental art, in this regard, represents for Vicuña an archeological tool and a direct consequence of her allegorical attitude and way of reading history. As Craig Owens simply puts it, “allegory is an attitude as well as a technique, a perception as well as a procedure” (“The Allegorical Impulse” 68). Vicuña’s art seems to embody this definition if by “procedure” we understand an interpretative modality of disinterment. This disinterment, as I aim to show in what follows, does not respond to the already reified concept of Benjamin’s nostalgic gaze with which the secondary literature in Chile has interpreted the process of remembering the past in a post-dictatorial context. Vicuña’s abstract art corresponds then to what I call the tragic answer to violence.

When animal, man, and/or woman is convoked to become a subject, in Badiou’s terms, by a particular kind of circumstance, that is, by a truth which might be defined as “something extra, something that happens in situations as something that they (animal)

and the usual way of behaving in them cannot account for,” this something, this truth, makes the animal go beyond the animal, and this extra, this supplement, is what Badiou calls an event whose irreducible singularity compels the animal to become “immortal,” beyond human or, according to Lacan, inhuman (*Ethics* 41; *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 263).¹² Badiou asks, consequently, how do we relate, then, to this event. His answer consists in a process of fidelity to the supplemental character of the event: “[t]o be faithful to an event is to move within the situation that this event has supplemented, by thinking the situation according to the event” (41). The important aspect of this event and the faithful act to it is that the subject must create newness and act accordingly. Experimental art, as the violence of the new, in this regard is both answer and procedure; it is the act according to the supplement of the event and it is the new. What is interesting then is the potentiality of this newness to break the order—in this particular case, the political situation of Chile, where violence took place. The break that Vicuña’s experimental art instantiates is to name the oblivion of the other as the origin of Chilean historical violence, an oblivion that supports and conceals the disappearance of bodies during the military regime. Vicuña’s art is her faithful answer to the violence of the event and her allegory of time through the experimental re-appropriation of the quipu, her production of newness. This truth is thus procedural; something is being produced in time. This truth also has a revolutionary potentiality, that is, it can perforate the “instituted knowledges of the situation” (*E* 43). While, for Badiou, this fidelity to an event marks the bearer of truth with the title of subjectivity, it is not my aim to discuss or to prove if this is so, since, to me, this fidelity represents a mode of becoming and

¹² Subsequently *E*; subsequently *EP*.

overcoming and not a mark of being.¹³ Nevertheless, I believe it serves my purposes on account of this process of answering to the convocation of changing, of inventiveness, of bearing witness to the event by reinterpreting. Vicuña's reinterpretation of political violence operates through a particular confiscation and arrangement of the images of the past. Newness as reinterpretation of the obsolete is where I want to situate what I call the tragic answer of art, which is a joyful answer. Where Badiou envisions fidelity, I hold affirmation as the highest faithfulness, as an ethical answer to an event.¹⁴

The Splendor of the Thread's Poverty

"Life and death are knotted in the thread"

Cecilia Vicuña

Badiou's concept of excess is vital in understanding art as an ethical response to violence, as a new response to an event in which the work of art is an excessive subject itself. Therefore, there are two events, violence and art, which add uncertainty and strengthen the openness to newness wherein the artist, as a body, doesn't know, following Spinoza's proverbial statement, what she is capable of. But, the work of art is a body too, an encounter of forces, and the excess of it is also subject to uncertainty and to ethics, and, if we remember Butler's quote above, as a body, art after violence is also able to be disconnected or to expose its previous connections. To play with Spinoza's proverb: art did not know what it was capable of until it faced the supplemental character of the event. Insofar as an answer to violence, only violence, its context and texture, can convoke art to do what it did not know it could do.

¹³ According to Badiou, this subject has no preexistence, neither psychological nor transcendental.

¹⁴ It is also interesting to note here the relation between memory and becoming as Klossowski suggests that "[f]orgetting [...] conceals eternal becoming" (*NVC* 56); anamnesis, on the contrary, will reveal becoming.

The consistency of which Badiou speaks, the perseverance that opposes to self-preservation, if needed, is vital to my analysis since it allows the question of the affirmation of pain and violence and elevates the question from the individual to the collective and it allows a detour from Spinoza's often called "egotistical ethics." This consistency is thus an excess, beyond the individual, beyond the law, beyond the present to the continuation of truth in which truth endures and is incorporated. Badiou states that the maxim of consistency is "[d]o[ing] all that you can to persevere in that which exceeds your perseverance. Persevere in the irruption, seize in your being that which has seized and broken you" (*E* 47). This excess is also temporal as it perseveres in time and points to the future. Badiou's ethical question—"how will I continue to exceed my own being?"—will be answered by following the thread of the encounter with the Real (50). The Nietzschean question, on the other hand—"how much truth can I endure and how does it make me stronger?"—can be answered by following the "guiding thread of the body" or by corporealizing thought (Klossowski *NVC* 50). Vicuña's weaving thread and poetic line are the following of the body *qua* materiality becoming an aesthetic thought. The aesthetic thought is the result of the encounter between the body (the sensory memory of which Vicuña speaks) with the sensuous world of materiality (feathers, yarns, stones). Memory, in this regard, is a corporealized thought, "the result of a momentary relation of power between impulses" (Eleanor Kaufman "Klossowski or Thoughts-Becoming," *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures* 154).

Now let's envision the relationship between art and violence from an ethical perspective: we first have violence as an event, a sociopolitical violence that expresses as much collective oppression, fear, and terror as physical and psychological violence.

Violence itself, of course, can relate to art without even signifying an ethical act since “not every novelty is an event” (*E* 72); this is what I will call Apollonian art. Conversely, in order to have an ethical response, violence must be, first, situated and located, and, supplementarily, it must exceed the situation itself (*E* 68). The event, thus, marks or shows a void in the preceding situation; it proves that there is an absence in the relationship between art and violence. This absence is, however, much less straightforward than just a questioning of the aesthetic apprehension of political violence. The whole of Vicuña’s weaving points to this complexity. This absence demands a net of answers capable of connecting all areas affected or supported by that void. The thread turns, in Vicuña’s imagination, the only possibility of weaving art, politics, history, nationhood, otherness, memory, and violence. The historical present, for Vicuña, was founded upon a void, the absence of the other. This is the fundamental void. A traumatic and violent event will convoke the artist and operate a change, a break with the situation, and develop newness.

Newness has baptismal powers: it names the void and the new and creates a new (also violent, as explained above following Adorno) way of expressing. It makes recourse to other means, codes, and artistic supports. This is the fundamental value of the obsolete textile art of weaving and of quipu-making. The re-contextualization of the obsolete seeks to alter its original meaning by gifting the aesthetic object with new formal qualities that respond to the specificities of the new societal conditions of production. As an aesthetic form and as a memory technology, the obsolete represents an active use of the past which not only serves as a new modality of expression but also of opposing the neoliberal ideal of consuming the new. The re-inscription of the obsolete into newness

serves the purposes of unveiling the internal dynamics of the work of art and its materiality along with unveiling, by way of these internal dynamics, societal dynamics. Newness, in this regard, must not be confused with the production of new commodities for fast consumption. Vicuña's use of the quipu and of Amerindian textile practices belongs, to some extent, to what Adriana Valdés calls *arte refractario*, aesthetic practices which are not content with representing a mere contestation or a dualistic position of negativity with regards to the military regime and its system of signification but rather an aesthetic practice that attempts to "traspasar su reclamo a todo el régimen de discursividad" (Nelly Richard *La insubordinación de los signos*, 16-7). I say here that Vicuña's art belongs to *arte refractario* to some extent for two reasons: first, the concept itself is Benjaminean in principle and, second, as a consequence, its two main characteristics are "negación" and "desviación." Although the impulse behind Vicuña's art is to critique all discursivity insofar as it allows and perpetuates the system of historical violence and invisibility, her art does not represent a "negación tenaz" of the past nor the present but an assimilation of the past and the present into the possibilities of the future. And although her art is, of course, "un arte de ruptura," as an impulse it was not born "para escapar del autoritarismo military [and] para fugarse de ciertos reduccionismos ideológicos...y técnicos" (Richard 17). As I mentioned at the beginning, Vicuña's avant-gardism is anterior to the coup and, hence, it critiques an entire ideological machinery that will have later supported the military regime. The rupture of Vicuña's art is, as I have mentioned, genealogical.

Vicuña's integration of the obsolete (and of waste as we will see in chapter 3) defines her ecology of time and her concept of newness as creative uses of the unused

images of the past. Second, newness implies the perseverance of the fidelity which goes to the very depths of violence and bears witness to it, which goes to the core of the material support and forces the work of art. Lastly, violence and its overcoming through artistic means will represent a new understanding, a new truth.¹⁵ The power of truth resides, then, in its revolutionizing action and inscription of new knowledges and meanings among a set of devalued or uprooted beliefs. It is precisely for these reasons that memory should not be melancholic or recuperative for once a system of beliefs or values have been devalued, they have exposed their fundamental fictitiousness. Why then to wish to return to them! The power of art resides in creating new and stronger ones to endure for the future. This is the power of the art of not only individual but of collective becoming: the future can and must be otherwise. Now, how do we resolve this Lacanian/Badiouian ethical imperative of “keep going” (Badiou, *E* 91) with the “be active and affirmative” injunction of Nietzsche? I will try to answer the latter with the “tragic answer” and the former with “catharsis.”

Neither dialectics nor Christianity can provide a positive tragic answer, an affirmation of pain, since both understand the tragic as a negative phenomenon, as “[t]he contradiction of suffering and life, of finite and infinite in life itself, of particular destiny and universal spirit in the idea, the movement of contradiction and its resolution” (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 11). We must then understand it from Nietzsche’s

¹⁵ Truth here, of course, must not be understood in any transcendental way. I use it in Nietzsche’s sense exclusively. A belief originates in the consideration of something true (*WTP* 14); truth has its origin in its valuation or in its utility, that is to say, it “is made from a definitive perspective: that of the preservation of the individual, a community, a race, a state, a church, a faith, a culture” (*WTP* 149). This valuation or belief system is considered “the essence of truth,” yet there is no such thing as a reality or an essence of truth. A truth is an appearance, and any given truth is held to be true merely because of its service to life.

perspective and think about the resolution of the contradiction in a different way.¹⁶ The contradiction of life is exemplified by the divine opposition between Apollo and Dionysus where the former is the origin of all appearance. At this point, we might be able to consider the answer of the creative lie or some forms of art such as the “illustrative epic” of what Guillermo Machuca calls the monumentalization of history through art after the coup in 1973, or the art of recycled images, co-opted by the market and the spectacle, as an Apollonian solution to violence (*Alas de plomo* 25-35). There are, of course, cruel examples of it: for instance, to transform violence into pleasure. As Bataille explains, “[w]hen horror is subject to the transfiguration of an authentic art, it becomes a pleasure, and intense pleasure but a pleasure all the same” (“*The Cruel practice of Art*”). There is a “process” in transfiguring horror into pleasure but it does not involve perseverance in time; it is rather an instant, a “flash of destruction,”¹⁷ whereas Dionysus “reproduces the contradiction[s] as the pain of individuation but resolves them in a higher pleasure, by making us participate in the superabundance of unique being or universal willing” (Deleuze *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 11-2). The creative lie, the entertaining and numbing forms of art, in this sense, will represent the Apollonian mediation of suffering, the foundation of a new value, a new lie in the virtuality of the past to create an effective appearance. Tragedy, hence, seems to be the conciliation between both forces. The tragic answer would be “the objectivation of Dionysus beneath an Apollonian form and in an Apollonian world,” but the contradiction is, so far, resolved by reproducing it (12). We can recognize that there is still a semi-dialectical perspective

¹⁶ This is the young Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the one who still believed in Schopenhauer and Wagner.

¹⁷ Although pleasure, as Lacan reminds us via Aristotle, also brings about catharsis, the pleasure to which Bataille refers here and which he explains at length in his essay is instantaneous, where horror is just a bait, a trap, an appearance.

inscribed in the resolution of pain rather than in the affirmation of life. Nietzsche returned to his *Birth of Tragedy* and, as Deleuze comments, he made two innovations to it. The one which interests us the most here is the affirming character of Dionysus:

He is not content which “resolving” pain in a higher and suprapersonal pleasure but rather he affirms it and turns it into someone’s pleasure. This is why Dionysus is himself transformed in multiple affirmations, rather than being dissolved in original being or reabsorbing multiplicity into primeval depths [...] He is the god who affirms life, for whom life must be affirmed, but not justified or redeemed.
(13)

Let us ask now the question of how to symbolize a traumatic event, how to remember and what to remember. Both Dionysus and Nietzsche—by means of his unique understanding of tragedy—interpolate us: the resolution of pain is neither a justification nor a redemption of life but rather a transformation to a higher sphere of pleasure, of joy, by affirming the innocence of life. How can I affirm pain? By affirming and embracing the multiplicity of this pain and by negating, fighting, attacking the real enemy of life, the essential negation of life, which is Christianity or any of its forms (bad conscience, guilt, redemption, Christian joy, nihilism). The tragic answer would incarnate the *passion*, as Christ and Dionysus did, but it will not accuse life; it will rather affirm it through pain.¹⁸

The tragic answer to a traumatic event would grasp the value of transformation; then again, it is ultimately a matter of creativity. Life affirms the cruelest pain and brutality in its exteriorization (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 16). The element of the exteriority in the traumatic event might be performed, inscribed in the body, and transvaluated (as opposed to the Christian transubstantiation). The tragic will suffer “from superabundance of life,” and I believe that the vision of blood, laceration, and torture might make us *see*

¹⁸ Suffering for Christianity is a consequence of a primeval injustice; life must, then, be justified. The subject of a traumatic event in terms of Christianity must internalize the pain and seek salvation in someone or something else.

this abundance by its radical exteriorization.¹⁹ The *intoxication* would be transformed into activity, and the exteriority would lead to paroxysm. Cecilia Vicuña's "*quipu menstrual*," a quipu made of red strings of yarn which represent both women's historical sacrifice and the destruction of the Chilean glaciers (Fig. 1), is an example of this radical exteriorization of violence. The menstrual quipu is accompanied by a diary composed by Vicuña starting on January 15th, 2006, the day of Michelle Bachelet's election as the first woman president of Chile. The first entry reads: "On election day, I place my vote at the foot of the glacier of El Plomo near Santiago, by creating 'the menstrual quipu.' The condor comes" (http://www.ceciliavicuna.org/en_exhibition.htm). The monumentality of the political event finds its correlative in the unmonumentality of the quipu. This monument of time, a historical milestone, signifies the search, in Vicuña's imaginary, of a new kind of memory that gives an account of both women's and nature's past. On May 20th, Vicuña sends a letter to Bachelet. This is an excerpt:

On the day of the election I climbed up to the mountains and made a large Menstrual Quipu at an altitude of 2000 meters, in front of El Plomo. A quipu dedicated to you, your triumph, so that you and us, women (,) will remember the connection between water and blood... Water is life and water is memory. Our ancestors lived and died for water and water will give life to those to come (http://www.ceciliavicuna.org/en_exhibition.htm).

The vision of blood here has a very specific function, defined already for its political context. Not only was Bachelet elected president, which in itself represents a milestone in Chilean political history, hence the name *quipu menstrual*, which points to women's silence and sacrificial locus within political history, but, just as importantly, the glaciers were sold to Toronto-based Barrick Gold Corporation, "the world's largest gold producer." Vicuña renames the quipu, which started as a critique of women's silence and

¹⁹ This, of course, is an aesthetical practice, more or less mediated by any particular art. That is, the tragic does not seek this feeling by making others suffer, nor does she/he abide it.

persecution, “The blood of the glaciers.” As Vicuña herself explains, blood is water, water is life, and water is memory. This seemingly simple string of metaphors illustrates Vicuña’s *allegoresis*, her allegorical impulse. If “[w]ater is life and water is memory,” memory, itself, is life. Memory as life, memory in particular that “will give life to those to come,” is a clear example of the will to remember wherein memory is to serve life and the future to come. The remembrance of the passion of nature, the blood of nature, and the blood of women constitutes life; its vision constitutes the intoxication.



Figure 1. Quipu menstrual installation in the Centro Cultural Palacio de la Moneda.

Blood as an allegory of decline, death, loss, and destruction is affirmed in the presence and vision of the strings of blood whose knots resemble coagula. The quipu does not

deny the sacrificial character of women in the past; it emulates it through its most radical visibility. Death is thus transvalued into life through the work of memory. The quipu is, therefore, an invitation to remember women and nature, women and water, women and memory in the service of life and of life to come.

Interestingly (although somehow expectably), the vision of this massive bloody quipu did not sit well with the cleanliness of Chilean forgetfulness. The installation was indeed not welcomed by Vicuña's fellow artists in the exhibit where it was re-installed, named "Del otro lado. Artistas Chilenas" (from the other side: Chilean women artists). Each artist in the *muestra* was allotted a particular space. However, after Vicuña installed her menstrual quipu, the artists complained that "it was too big" and that its size prevented their own work from being showcased properly. Despite this petty dispute, Vicuña heeded the curator's request to diminish its size. Vicuña writes in her diary entry from November the 6th,

I wish to remove my work from the show, but then I see: *the violence against the threads is the violence against the glaciers*. In Chile, the subject of the glaciers, and the struggle against the Pascua Lama project have been completely removed from the press. Nobody mentions it, and I don't see art about it. . . so I decide to stay, and create a "Versión débil", a "Weak version", a wounded quipu that tells the story of the censorship it endured

(http://www.ceciliavicuna.org/en_exhibition.htm, my emphasis).

Vicuña's art responds to this violence, to the violence of absolute silence and oblivion of those things that hinder life not only from the most socially sanctioned Chilean institution, the press, but also from other artists. Vicuña's critique shows that even art in Chile has been sequestered by the politics of forgetfulness, even if by forgetting we hinder life and the future. The blood of her quipu installation represents thus all these levels of violence, from ecological struggles to aesthetic numbness. Vicuña removes the 28 original thick strings of coagulated blood and makes them thinner. She calls this a

“weak version.” This new, reduced, apparently feebler version, a “wounded quipu,” perseveres with its wound in order to tell the story of its censorship. The intoxication of which we spoke above did not lead to everyone’s paroxysm, sadly. The affirmation of blood and sacrifice was met with resistance, not necessarily by the public but by the artists themselves. This, of course, did not deter Vicuña; as the tragic artist she is, faithful to the event, she persevered and created a street performance with the banned strings of blood, right in front of the Palacio de la Moneda where the exhibit was held. Once again, she uses the discarded in order to create something entirely new. From the pain of censorship, of women’s and nature’s sacrifice, she creates joy.

The will to remember, in a tragic way, is an invitation to “[s]omething higher than all reconciliation” (16), which is affirmation and transvaluation of the past, memory, remembering, the present, and art. To say yes to pain, suffering, and cruelty:

This is the essence of the tragic. This will become clearer if we consider the difficulties of making *everything* an object of affirmation. Here the effort and the genius of pluralism are necessary, the power of transformations, Dionysian laceration. (Deleuze *NP*, 17)

Affirmation implies, or is the same, as joy, and joy is to be understood as an aesthetic phenomenon. The tragic is precisely life, as joy, lived aesthetically. The real tragedy has nothing to do with fear or pity; these reactions belong to the sphere of bad conscience for Nietzsche. The answer to the question of how to remember when a traumatic event has occurred is to be answered in strictly Nietzschean terms by the ethics of joy.

Remembering, thus, becomes an ethical act. We have to ask again, at this point, who can embody the tragic answer to the traumatic memory, and we would have to say, with Nietzsche, just the noble men and women, the strongest ones, the artists. The joyful

affirmation belongs to the tragic heroine who knows how to dance and how to play, and she must learn from the master of dancing, from the god of the thousand joys, Dionysus.

What kind of process is this ethical affirmation? It can be a therapeutic process and/or a cathartic one. For Nietzsche, “[e]very art, every philosophy may be viewed as a cure and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life; they always presuppose suffering and sufferers” (GS 370, 328). We can consider violence, pain, cruelty, and destruction as the basis for a strong health; this implies not only enduring violence but desiring it as a “fertilizing energy that can still turn any desert into lush farmland” (ibid);²⁰ this is, of course, an ethical therapeutics. Now, nothing resonates better with tragedy (tragic artist and philosopher, tragic response, etc.) than catharsis, so I will follow very closely here Lacan’s account of tragedy and catharsis in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

Catharsis is linked here to Freud’s notion of abreaction or discharge which implies “that the action [emotion, traumatic experience] may be discharged in the words that articulate it” (EP, 244) and, we are compelled to add, through the art that articulates it, through, as Aristotle claims, the “Dionysian frenzy” (245). The essence of tragedy is thus catharsis: through the intervention of fear and pity we are purged of the imaginary order (246) by the dissipating power of an image. Lacan refers again to both emotions only to mention they are absent, particularly in *Antigone*. In their place, he will put Antigone’s beauty. The place she occupies “as intermediary between two fields that are symbolically differentiated,” life and death (248). It is neither Vicuña, the artist, who occupies this intermediary place nor her art but the knot of the thread, the yarn in her weaving and the line in her poetry since “life and death are knotted in a thread” (*quipoe*

²⁰ It is instructive here to re-read Zarathustra’s tarantulas.

27). The thread insofar as limit, by itself, in its poverty, is not capable of reaching and traversing itself as a limit; the knot is the transgression. Only weaving can permeate life and death and death and life. The mediation is effected by the thread not in its solitude or poverty but in its weaving. The knotting of the thread brings forth death, the dead, whereby the obsolete represents the Amerindian communities and women with which the art of weaving has been associated. Within this zone there is, thus, a certain permeation of death into life, “a death lived in anticipation, that crosses over into the sphere of life, a life that moves into the realm of death” (246). This place which the knotted thread occupies signifies a dialectic between life and death, between weft and warp. What is interesting here is the raising of the aesthetic phenomenon, that is, when desire passes through this zone it refracts, and this refraction or reflection is what induces the effect on us, “which is the effect of beauty in desire” (ibid). The counter-tragic function resides in Creon whose fault, in seeking the good, is *error*—an error of judgment as Aristotle explains. But his error, according to Lacan, is to seek the good of all “as the law without limits, the sovereign law, the law that goes beyond or crosses the limit” (EP 258).²¹ He traverses the limit of precisely what Antigone defends: the unwritten laws. The unwritten law takes the form of the unwritten history of pre-colonial times for Vicuña. Memory is the guarantor of such histories. Now the presupposed identity between law and reason shows that “[t]he good cannot reign over all without an excess emerging whose fatal consequences are revealed to us in tragedy” (258). This excess is the mark of Até and the possibility of transgression. For the Marques de Sade, there is an excess, something

²¹ I will return to the question of sovereign law in the chapter devoted to Diamela Eltit’s *Impuesto a la carne*, but, for now and not without caution, I’d like to mention that dictatorial regimes do operate within the symbolic space of the law that crosses the limit. It would be nefarious to equate here Creon with Pinochet, despite the right wing common narrative that he was looking for the good of the country and despite his own first political decree with the force of law, *el bando número uno*.

beyond this limit that can be transgressed through crime: “what one has to sweep aside in order to force nature to start again from zero, so to speak, is the reproduction of forms against which nature’s both harmonious and contradictory possibilities are stifled in an impasse of conflicting forces. That is the aim of the Sadean crime” (260). In other words, all that it takes to free nature is to rule out the reproduction of those forms which suffocate life. Sade’s technique is his phantasm of eternal suffering where the subject becomes the bearer, the support of this suffering. Analysis, says Lacan, “shows clearly that the subject separates out a double of himself who is made inaccessible to destruction, so as to make it support what [...] one cannot help calling the play of pain.” In the case of violence as an event, the doubling can be seen in the work of art itself as that which has to endure the violence upon the amorphous, to represent and bear the violence of the new, to be the “indestructible support.” This zone, this place is where the play of pain and the phenomena of beauty can be found in conjunction; Lacan calls it a “space of freedom” (261). What is then the result of this conjunction? It creates an image that persists or remains in a state of suffering (for instance, Christ on the cross), representing “the apotheosis of sadism” (262). This image is always thus an image of passion.

This limit is At , the goddess of folly who drives man to suffering and death, which can only be briefly traversed, and that’s where Antigone wants to go: “This limit we have reached here is the one where the possibility of metamorphosis is located” (263-5). This plastic concept of metamorphosis is important to my analysis since art can be situated in this limit by being that which has been metamorphosed and whose effect is metamorphic; it will represent the power of an ethics of newness to create. When the limit is traversed, Dionysus is invoked (thus goes the Chorus in Antigone). His

invocation proves that the limit has been violated and, if we think about the tragic answer as a joyful affirmation, there is an ethical transvaluation in operation. The Sadean phantasm of suffering is inverted into joy. If the mark of this invocation is the conflagration or the breaching of the limit, it does not signify or represent the limit of At , nor is it there only “to remind us where the limit is situated” (269). It also marks a zone of transgression through joy. This ethical possibility signalizes the splendor, the phenomena of beauty to which Lacan refers.

The gesture of weaving, the intersection of warp and weft are representations of such transgression. If “the poverty of the thread/ was the limit/ and edge/ of the world,” then this poverty, and consequently all that the thread stands for in its allegorical character, is transvalued into splendor where two threads, two edges of the world, in the process of weaving, go across the limit and permeate life with death in a single knot (Vicu a, *quipoem* 36. See fig. 2).

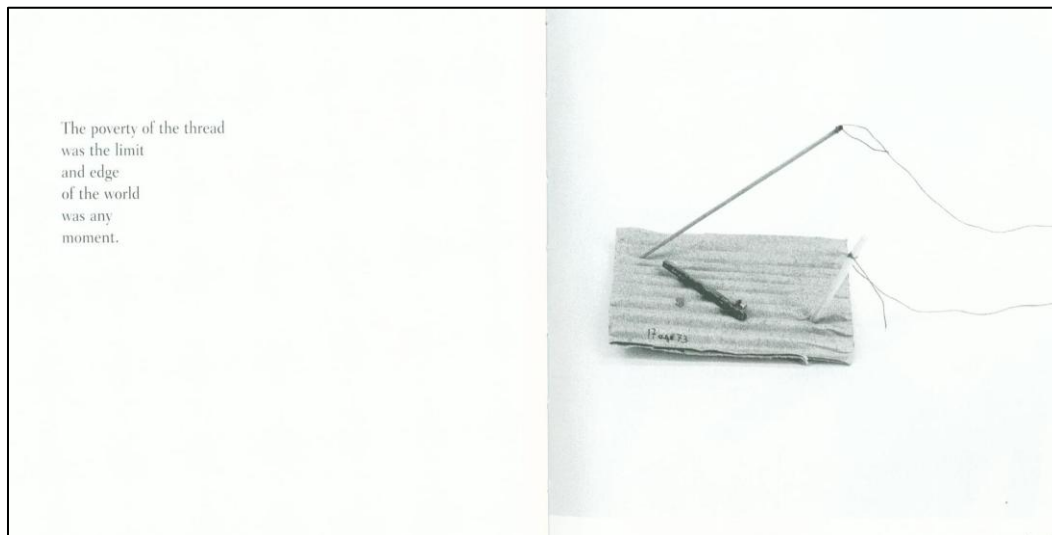


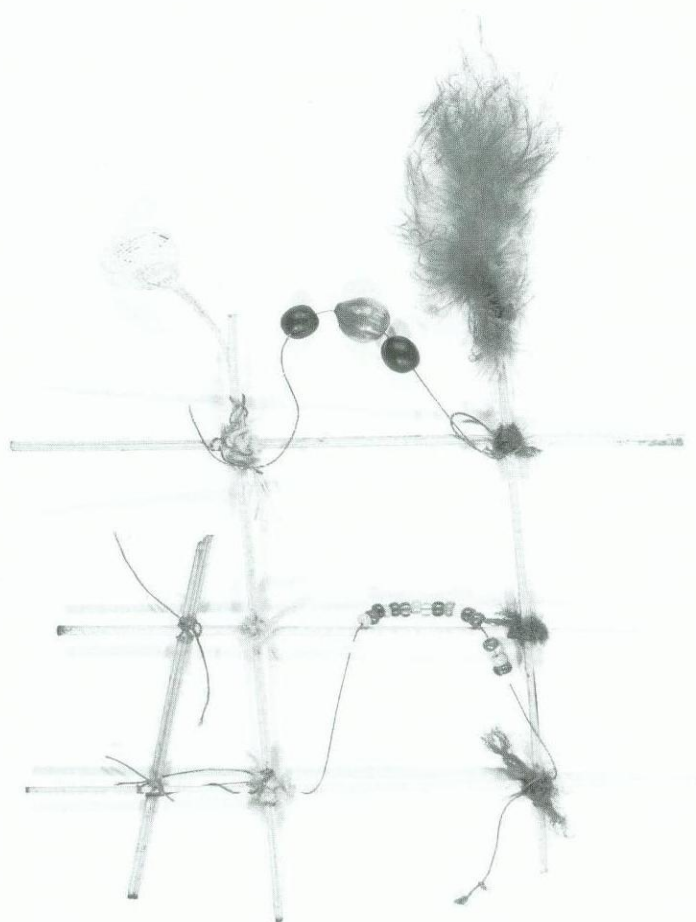
Figure 2.

Consequently, to free memory and the other who resides buried under national history, as sediment, is to prevent the constant repetition of precisely that which has buried and

continues to bury the other. Vicuña's doubling here is of course her own art. The thread, bent and knotted, is to endure the violence of remembrance and the violence upon the amorphous for it is the "indestructible support" of which we spoke above. It is, in Lacan's words, "the space of freedom" for it represents the possibility of the injunction of life and death, of violence and beauty, of memory and history. Weaving's movements go through Até only to come back from her suffering. This thread in its solitude, what Vicuña calls "poverty," transgresses the limit in the gesture of weaving: one world woven into another, the obsolete woven into newness, the pre-colonial past woven into post-dictatorial Chile, memory woven into history. Vicuña's tragic answer is thus "maximum fragility against maximum power" (41, fig 3). Fragility, poverty, solitude, invisibility are not gazed upon with melancholy, nor is it weaving as an obsolete form of textuality; they are affirmed in their beauty as revolutionary. These are Vicuña's creative uses of the past. Hence, she transvalues their cultural meaning, as well as their historical locus, into joy, wherein the innocence of fragility can not only withstand, as in opposition and resistance, but metamorphose into beauty, hope, and joy. Weaving, quipu-making, is then in Vicuña's aesthetic, a massive allegory of violence, memory, nature, women, the past, and writing. The quipu's allegorical function is equally complex. It aims to unveil the locus of historical forgetfulness. It wishes to respond to violence. It wants to bring back the death. As a calendrical artifact, the quipu constitutes the knotting, the connecting and evaluation of different, seemingly disparate historical events into new units of time and meaning. The quipu serves to create a sense of genealogy whereby the temporality of the events contained in the quipu are transformed by their contiguity with other disparate events. Not only each event is transformed but it is reconciled into

something higher, to echo here Deleuze's words above. This reconciliation does not aim to be a recuperation of anything lost but a construction of possible nets of encounters, wherein the juxtaposition of events remains forever fragile and thus capable of being relocated, woven again, knotted to other limits, to other worlds, according to the needs of the present. Always open to that which is to come, Vicuña's evaluations are temporal. All allegory is thus always in time and subjected to time's transformations.

In tying up the ethical relationship between art and violence, I want to come back to three elements that Lacan discusses: that of image, beauty, and locus. The ethical splendor encompasses an image which portrays passion. It is a sadistic apotheosis which the work of art must represent and incarnate as passion. The beauty of this image is set up by tragedy and the aesthetic phenomenon effects catharsis by showing the conjunction of beauty and pain at the limit of life and death. Beyond the limit, the space already transgressed, is the place of joyous affirmation. Only through weaving is the guiding thread of Vicuña's art capable of breaching the limit because the thread is the limit itself. But the limit—and I believe this is one of the most important philosophical insights that her work provides us—is only historical and it is in time where it must be reworked. Weaving, in Vicuña's imagination, is a process of active interpretation of images wherein the transgression and disinterment that it implies, not just the recourse to the textile but also the very interaction of threads as limits of the world, seek to add another yet new layer of interpretation to national histories.



Weft of incense sticks: maximum fragility
against maximum power.

London, 1973

q.41

Figure 3.

The textile is thus both a carving out of memory images and hence an arbitrary creative constellation and juxtaposition of meaning and an interpretative modality, adding to the present a new memory, a new meaning, with which to act in the future. In any case, for the allegorist, art is always the reproduction of images through other images. The allegorist “lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his [or her] hands the image becomes something other (*allos*=other +*agoreuei* = to speak)” (Owens 69). The unused images of the past reworked by the impulse of the will to remember into a tragic response belong to what Craig Owens calls the allegorical impulse. This double process of subtracting and adding represents Vicuña’s allegorical interpretation of time, and insofar as creation, it belongs to the realm of the *facere*, of doing, acting, intervening, which is inevitably an ethical endeavor. In Benjaminean terminology, the historical problem for Vicuña is not necessarily the aesthetic citability of the past for hers is an art of impermanence but the awakening of the past contained in its entirety within the raw material of her art. The aesthetic material, consequently, is already in Vicuña’s reading an allegory which encodes two (or more) contents within one form. This other reading, her double gesture of subtracting while adding something new, is Vicuña’s critique of history’s citability of the past. In Nietzschean terms, the textile practice, in general, and the figure of the quipu, in particular, critique history’s abuses of the past. The question has to do then with the way in which history cites and uses the images of the past.

If “A thread is not a thread” then the Line is not a Line

Before analyzing Vicuña’s perhaps most well known visual poem, “The quipu that remembers nothing,” we need to understand, albeit in a simple manner given the difficulties of apprehending its meaning, what a quipu was (Fig. 4).

Khipu derives from the Quechua word for “knot.” Vicuña does not use the Quechua spelling but the Spanish “Quipu.” Knotted, colored threads were supposed to have been used for different purposes from statistical records to historical narrative. For Galen Brokaw, in his erudite article entitled “The Poetics of Khipu Historiography,” the quipu belongs to what he calls an Andean poetics and he defines the quipu as a semiotic, communicative medium (111). For Gary Urton, perhaps the biggest authority on the quipu tradition, the quipu is a “powerful system of coding information in pre-Columbian South America and which, like the coding system used in present-day computer language, was structured primarily as a binary code.” Sadly, we have no way of actually interpreting the material contained within the few 600 quipus that are extant today (*Signs of the Inka Khipu*, 1-2). Although through colonial records we know that the quipus were used for as varied purposes as to record “censuses, tribute, ritual and calendrical organization, genealogies, and other such matters from Inka times,” the discussion continues whether to conceive of the quipu as a simple mnemonic or, indeed, as a form of writing.



Figure 4. Traditional quipu.

If the quipu was merely a mnemonic or not or if it constituted some kind of coded alphabet is not really the point of this chapter since Vicuña re-interprets it for other reasons. The quipu, as we will see shortly, does not remember anything.

I want to briefly develop two elements pertaining to the structure and value of the quipu for that will allow me to analyze later the particularities of Vicuña's quipu-making. The first concerns the quipu structure: "Khipu are composed of a main, or primary cord to which are attached a variable number of what are termed pendant strings" (Urton 4). There is in Vicuña's work a movement from a rather mimetic quipu-making which looks two-dimensional, as in her quipu from 1991 simply entitled "quipu," to a volumetric representation of the quipu without a main cord as in her quipu menstrual already studied above, to an even more radical representation of it in her film *Kon Kon*, which she defines as a "digital quipu." In figure 5, we can appreciate a primary cord to which eight

knotted pendant strings are attached. The cords vary slightly in color and seem to be messily knotted and arranged; some of the strings appear to be knotted to each other, creating a circular motion. We cannot discern any narrative, any fixed meaning from it, since Vicuña did not add any poem to it or explain what the knots constitute. This mimetic quipu speaks only as expressivity, in the tension of form and context. Threads and knots are there only as a representation of a tradition and are not intended to signify anything other than the existence of the quipu. This is perhaps Vicuña's most melancholic quipu and the least avant-garde of them all. What we can infer, however, by virtue of its own expressivity is the precariousness of the threads, the fragility of the knots, and the small, shy scale of the quipu in contrast with her "menstrual quipu." Quipu-making was by 1991 still in an inchoate state. I will return to the quipu structure in my analysis of "the quipu that remembers nothing." For now, let us retain this structure of "main thread" and "pendant strings."

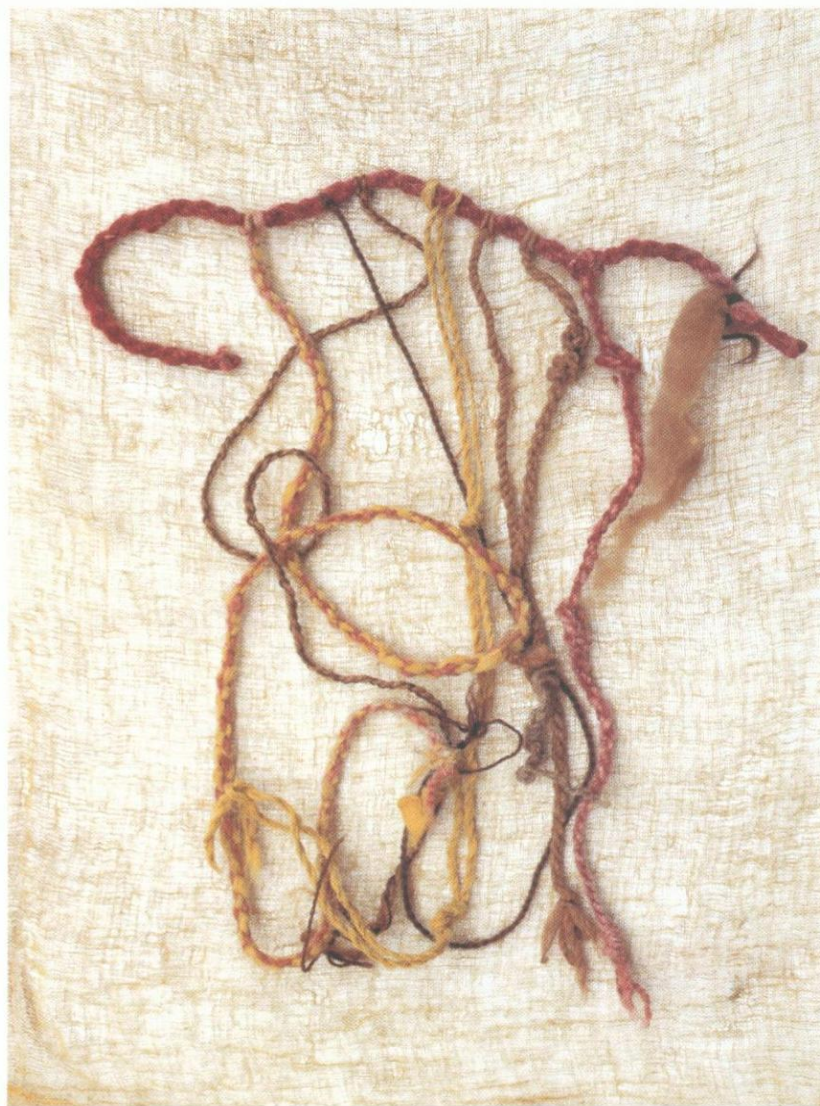
The second element is the quipu's colonial use: it is interesting to note here that the content of the quipus were used in principle by the Spanish colonizers to understand the past and social structure of the Amerindian civilizations. However, in time, the Spanish became wary of them since, as social registers, they competed with the Spanish's records particularly in legalistic matters (Quilter and Urton, *Narrative Threads* 4). The question of competence is of vital importance to my study because it points towards the primacy of the written language represented by the colonizer versus the textile technology of the colonized. Ángel Rama has studied extensively the relationship between the lettered man and power in his posthumous work *La ciudad letrada*. It is not too difficult to envision how the written alphabet in colonial times, insofar as a monopoly

and control of the signs, took over the sign systems that were not alphabetical, such as the figure of the quipu.

As Rama explains, the demands of colonial administration and of evangelization contributed to the constitution and consolidation of the power of the letter (23-27). The power of the alphabet was, of course, vital in the process of indigenous institutionalization. The fate of the quipu was thus inevitable.

Vicuña as *quipocamayoc* (quipu-maker)

The ambiguous social function of the pre-Columbian quipu accentuates Vicuña's creative use and the aesthetic and political qualities she attributes to her own quipus as allegories of temporality and not so much as history, historiography, or narrativized versions of particular historical or cultural events. Form (threads, knots, quipu) functions within the Chilean post-dictatorial context as an intervention within the registers of memory determined by the cultural and political imposition to forget. The quipu enters in competition with historical narratives not by virtue of a parallel content but by virtue of its own allegorical structure. The book *quipodem*, which contains the visual re-writing of the original "quipu que no recuerda nada," is from 1997, almost a decade after the plebiscite that led to Pinochet's removal as president of Chile. The book as quipu, hence the name *quipodem*, is thus a direct critique of the politics of memory and reconciliation and the state of silence by which the Chilean nation has decided to continue to bury the past. As archeological memories, Vicuña's quipus are, in summa, not historical; however, this does not mean to suggest they are ahistorical either. They are calendrical objects.



Quipu, 1991

q.92

Figure 5.

The “disparity between European and Andean cultural modes of thought and representation,” represented by the Andean quipu in contrast with the written language of the Spanish, is exacerbated by Vicuña’s decontextualized use of them (Brokaw 112). Outside of its original social system of signification and inserted within a different tradition and cultural system, quipu-making has become an obsolete communicative technology. Vicuña’s will to remember as a genealogical effort moves her to unbury this system of communication in order to catalyze a whole new system of values attributed to it. Recontextualized, the quipu asks the question of the place of memory and its uses in the constitution of political life. Is the memory of our own past threatening to become obsolete too? Can our present historical technologies, the annals of history, withstand the pressure of time? What has been incorporated into the civic life of the nation and what remains invisible yet actively sacrificed to the forces of the market, the forces of neocolonial powers, the forces of oblivion?

In “the quipu that remembers nothing,” the alleged function of the quipu to remember has been lost (fig 6). The quipu remembers nothing, not because *it* cannot but because we cannot. What we lack is a way to remember, not memory. The past is already contained within the thread. The reality of what is ostensibly lost is concurrent, although virtual, as I shall shortly show, stored in time, with the historical present. It is hence not devoid of historicity but awaiting actualization. The first consequence that this has to theories of power, subaltern studies, post-colonial theories and Latin American studies in general is to move away from the restrictive topology of theories of dependency that circumscribes ethics and politics to the dyad center-periphery. The quipu with its colorful threads, then, is there; the images, although unused, are there. What we lack is a

modality of interpretation and this is what Vicuña is trying to create, a new way of remembering the past through the uses (positive, affirmative, and transformative) of it. Hence, she performs an ever increasing disparity, an ever greater distance and mediation of registers between the pre-Columbian memory, the colonial past, and the post-colonial situation of Chile.

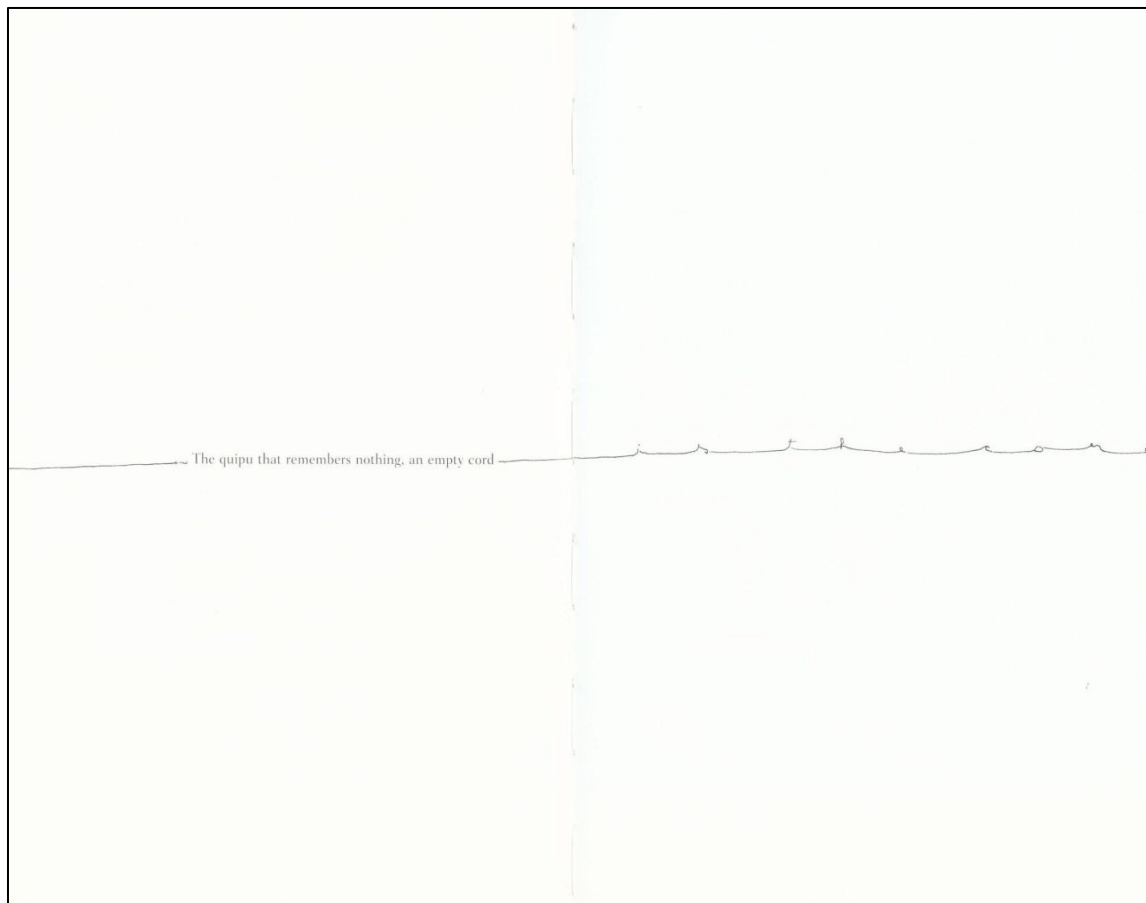


Figure 6. First two pages of “the quipu that remembers nothing.”

Vicuña’s art objects encode a knowledge that does not seek to represent nor to reconstruct or restore the cultural past in which the quipu had functioned. As I explained earlier, the obsolete is reworked into sheer newness.

Since this is a visual poem, Vicuña relies on the interrelation of the pictographic and the alphabetical to, on the one hand, convey and comprise the meaning of her *ars*

poetica, and, on the other, to open her compilatory book *quipodem* as an epigraph to introduce her theories of time. Reproductions of some of her art installations, sculptures, poems, and documents are woven together in the whole new matrix of time and meaning that the name *quipodem* represents: poetry and quipu, quipu as poems, poems within quipu, a book as a quipu, a biographical existence as a quipu, time as a quipu, quipu-making as changing time and hence memory and history, etc. The unity of quipu and poem results in a new aesthetics which both requires and creates a new language. The line as thread and the thread as line involve the encounter of two aesthetic media. If the thread is the limit of the world, the knotting of line and thread represents the knotting of two worlds, the world of time and the world of language, the time of art and the time of memory conveyed into the visual arrangement of the thread/line. It is the synthesis of thread and line, weaving and writing, that constitutes for Vicuña the work of memory. Language alone and image alone are not able to interpret the images of the past without the repetition of the same.

Brokaw has explained that all quipus are in some way related to oral traditions (113). The fact that Vicuña's visual quipu "does not remember anything" does not refer to a lost oral tradition; it does not signal "the emptiness of the traces of the forgotten and unknowable," as Lynd suggests (1593). The trace, first and foremost, speaks for and by itself as a trace, not in the emptiness and not as emptiness. It certainly says this is invisible, this is forgotten, this is unknowable to our alphabet, but it also says this is a possibility of remembrance: the possibility of hearing, of creating, in summa, of interpreting "an ancient silence waiting to be heard" (*Precario/Precarious* n.p.). The textile work is thus a listening "with the fingers, a sensory memory" (*quipodem* 131). It is

interesting here how Lynd analyzes the first poem version of the quipu that remembers nothing as a melancholic gaze into the past and its reworking into a visual poem, conversely, as an indication of “a different way of representing memory” (1593). I could not agree more with the last statement that the quipu is a new way of remembering, but I read both versions as signifying the same thing. The viscosity of the poem now stretched along three pages only develops what the previous one had already suggested. The quipu cannot remember the past because it is the past that needs to be invented. The difference between the first and the second versions then resides in what I explained above. The visual poem, by definition, uses language and image as a media; it communicates in the interaction of both. The fact that Vicuña reworked the original poem into a visual one only emphasizes the openness and plasticity of memory as well as Vicuña’s consolidation of her own aesthetic practices and her urgent task to create the past; as Vicuña states in one of her poems, “the past is that which is yet to come” (*quipodem* 146). The visual aspect in relation to the traditional arrangement of its predecessor serves a glossing function. In other words, the poem has to be interpreted along the concept of time that the cord of the quipu suggests.

“The quipu that remembers nothing” is perhaps Vicuña’s better known and fascinating of her poems (*quipodem* 132). Its simplicity borders on abstract minimalism and stems from Vicuña’s participation in conceptual art as well as her own aesthetic of precariousness. The poem extends along three pages in which the white page is almost cut across in the middle by a straight, hand-drawn line that seems to come from the back of the page. The origin of the line points to an ever expanding and always connected thread to the past. In a medium-sized font, the first page reads, “The quipu that

remembers nothing, an empty cord.” After the word “cord,” the hand-drawn line continues across the second page where it is suddenly interrupted by hand-written words that minimally differ from a straight line. They seem to be part of the line, as if it were suddenly and softly warped by a ripple of memory, as if a memory was just recollected and made the line quiver to slightly record its vital signs as in a cardiogram. The quipu records the brevity of this movement. The line suggestively reads “is the core.”

The third page continues in yet another font which seems almost contiguous to the verse of the second page; it reads, “the heart of memory,” followed by a long hand-drawn line that ends in the book bindings (Fig 3).²² The comma here after the word memory clearly suggests the indetermination and unpredictability of what is to come. The lines that are about to be written are suspended since the comma, which in Spanish signifies a brief pause, is followed by a line thrown into the future. If the comma separates while coordinating two sentences, Vicuña seems to suggest that what is to come, futurity, represented by the empty line here, is related but not determined by the previous lines. There is between past and future a relation of indeterminacy.

The quipu as an aesthetic object and as a memory technology belongs to the experience of what Bergson calls pure memory. For the French philosopher, the past survives in two different ways: motor mechanisms or learnt recollections and independent or spontaneous recollections. I want to stop here for a second to think about this idea of the past as surviving for it is fundamental to the understanding of the creative uses of the past of which the quipu is an example. To the common idea of the past as that which is gone for good, Bergson opposes his notion of the past as preserved in its

²² Juliet Lynd reads this poem along with the image contained in page 4 called Con Con. I do not see them as part of the same poem nor do I think the meaning of the quipu is enhanced by the image.

entirety in two different ways: one informing learning and the other informing volition. What is even more interesting is the fact that memory is fluid and mobile, since it needs to pass (contract) from one plane to the other. It needs to descend from pure memory into a recollection. This ultimately signifies a kind of progression and adjustment of memory in order to fit within the requirements of the present (see Bergson's famous cone of memory in fig. 6).

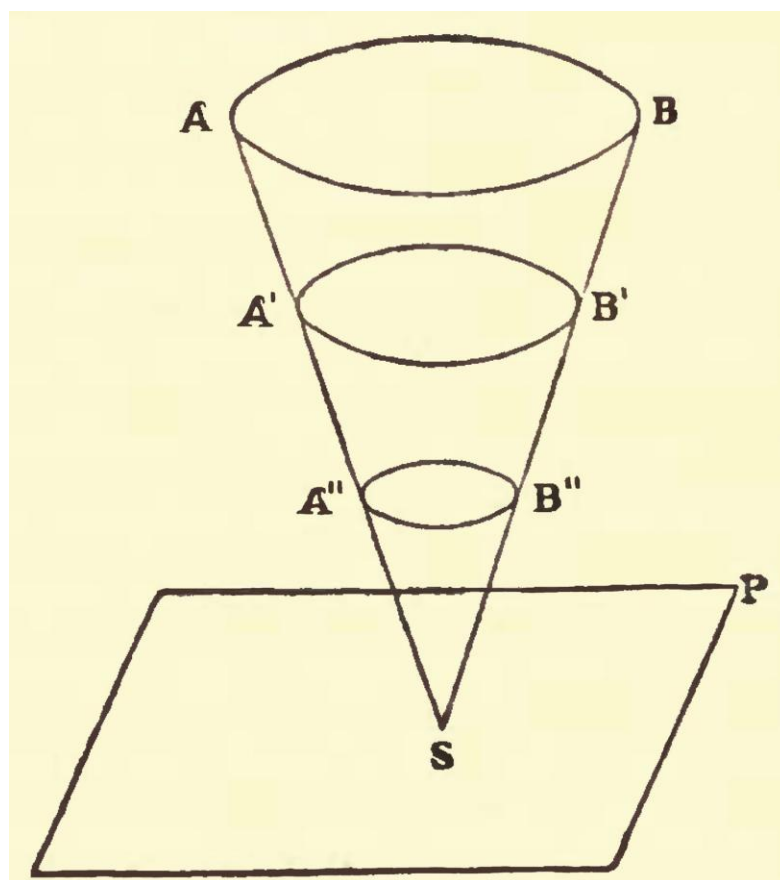


Figure 7. Cone of memory wherein the plane P represents "my actual representation of the universe" (*Matter and Memory*, 196).

What interests me here is what Bergson calls memory par excellence: "the effort of the mind that seeks in the past, in order to apply them to the present, those representations which are best able to enter into the present situation" (*Matter and Memory* 87).²³

²³ Subsequently *MM*.

Spontaneous memory stores all the events of our life; it is a faculty “which permits us to retain the image itself, for a limited time, within the field of our consciousness” (98).

Memory thus defined emphasizes the fact that remembrance is, in fact, an interpretative modality that does not occur *ex nihilo*. Vicuña’s thread, in her visual poem as well as in her first mimetic quipu from 1991, correspond to the typical structure of the quipu as we saw above. The main cord represents the whole of memory, a different visuality to Bergson’s cone, however implying the same principles.

Two things come immediately to mind. The quipu that remembers nothing is not an empty cord. In fact, the main cord records at least three visible memories which would represent knotted pendant strings: the verse that names the quipu and qualifies it as empty, the verse that locates the quipu as the core, and, in page three, the verse that reads “is the heart of memory” (fig. 8). Vicuña’s quipu contradicts itself but only to prove the point that memory is, in fact, never empty; hence, the images of the past are the heart of memory, waiting to be knotted. If we play a little bit with the arrangement of the poem, we have: “the quipu that remembers nothing is the heart of memory.” At the heart of memory, we have its absolute latency. Knotting, weaving is remembrance. The empty cord (which is not empty) is Bergson’s cone. The point S in the plane P is action. SP is then a knot in the thread, the maximum concentration of pure memory into a recollection. The second point is that the three pages, connected by a line representing the whole of memory, contain different lines (verses), which we named above “pendant knotted strings.” This suggests that there are different kinds of recollection symbolized here by three different types of writing, suggesting different levels of remembrance as in Bergson’s cone (A”B,” A’B,’ and AB), and consequently, different actualizations of the

past, what I have termed interpretation. It suggests furthermore the commonality of the thread and of the construction of cultural memory, which, therefore, also signifies that each individual can access this line according to different needs and according to different contexts. Most importantly, it means that remembering is an interpretative modality which allows the past to take different shapes as implied in the different fonts. It involves the fluidity of the past, its plastic nature, and hence, its aesthetic value.

Memory is a vast storage to which Vicuña connects, and each verse of her visual poem is indeed her search into the past for what she needs to face in the present. Above, we were saying that Vicuña's constellation takes us to the pre-Columbian era for it is this memory that serves the needs of the present. These are the images that can enter into the present. The long line, the thread that goes across the three pages of this visual poem is Vicuña's representation of temporality since, at each moment, "the present that endures divides at each instant into two directions, one oriented and dilated toward the past, the other contracted, contracting toward the future" (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 52). The line in the first page of the poem seems to be coming from this dilated past, whereas the one that continues in the last page of the poem stretches infinitely and hides from our vision in the book binding. The present is pure becoming. It acts but *is* not. The past is no longer useful but it *is*, and the future is a pending action; "[o]f the present, we must say at every instant that 'it was', and of the past, that it 'is,' that it is eternally, for all time" (55). This implies that both are different in kind. Indeed the past is no longer useful. The will to remember as an interpretative modality, as the work of memory, takes that which is not useful and turns it into usefulness; it acts only to support the future for it is there where action resides.

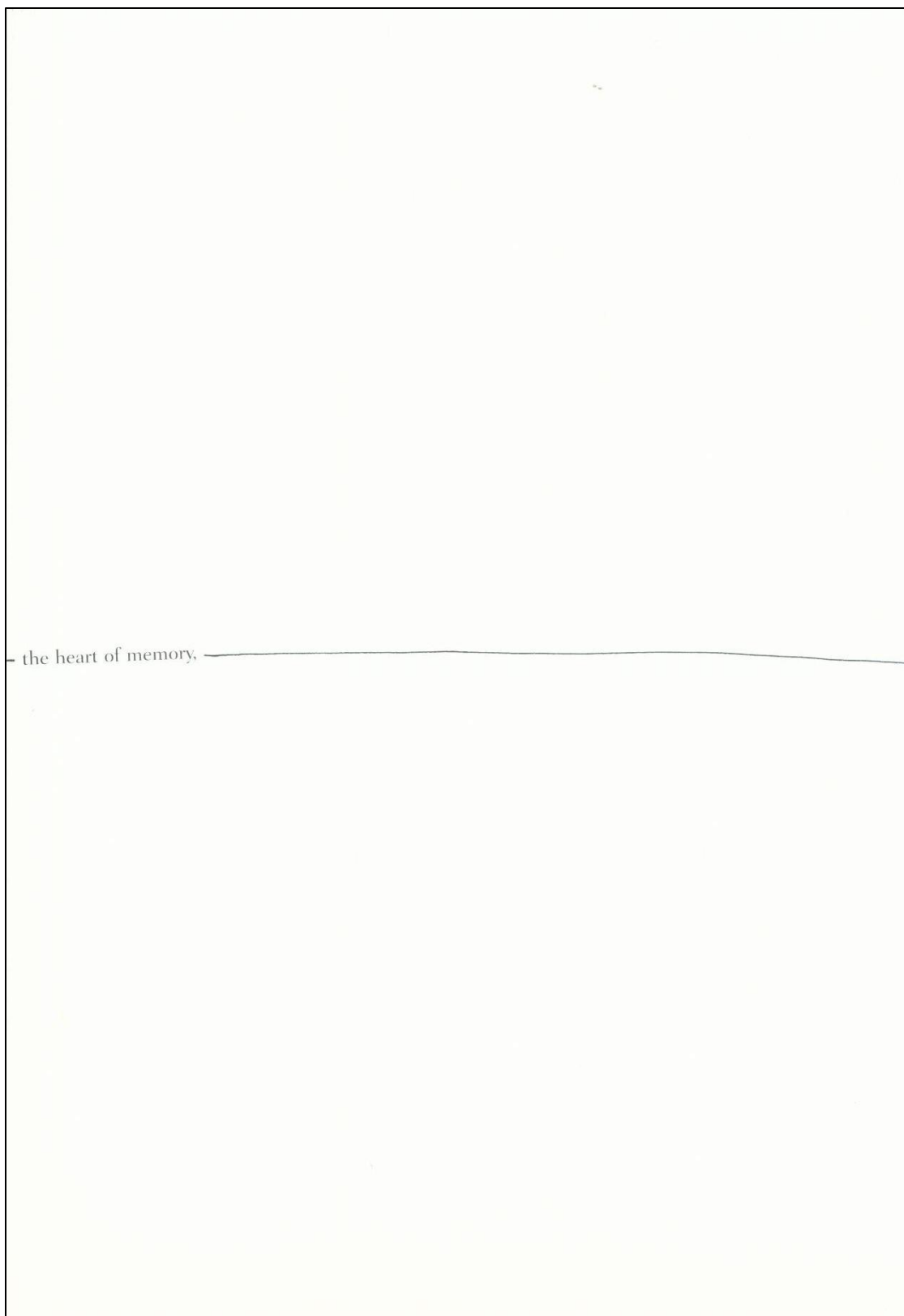


Figure 8. Last part of the visual poem.

Pure memory and pure recollections are virtual and unconscious, whereas the present belongs to the psychological experience:

Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act *sui generis* by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past—a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera. But our recollection still remains virtual; we simply prepare ourselves to receive it by adopting the appropriate attitude. Little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud; from the virtual state it passes into the actual. (Bergson, *MM* 171)

This process of actualization resembles Vicuña's "poetics of space" of which she speaks in her film *Kon Kon* in which she submerges herself into the silence of the landscape in order to detach herself from it. Since memory for Vicuña is sensory, the adjustment of memory corresponds to her listening with her fingers. The tactile in the textile is a form of hearing the past—the interaction between tactile and textile, the guiding thread and the corporealized thought. The yarn is thus the virtuality of the past, the weaving and knotting its actualization. The verses of Vicuña's visual poem are, accordingly, actualizations of sheer virtuality along the line, thread, of time. In Vicuña's aesthetic, this line is the allegory par excellence: it represents time as becoming, ever changing, ever open. It represents weaving, the thread, yarn, and fiber being constitutive of textile practices. It stands for a poetics of language in which each word is a thread, an aesthetic procedure, and a social and cultural vision of the world of what she calls "interconnectedness." As Lynd explains,

[f]ar from a mere celebration of the beauty of indigenous aesthetics, her [Vicuña's] references to weaving evoke the subordinated yet persistent cultural practices of Amerindian communities. The writing of poetry finds parallels in the semiotics of weaving, a textile-textual practice that alludes to the unspoken, unwritten stories of women and of the indigenous (1590).

Although I agree with Lynd, I believe that the relationship between the textile thread and the poetic line is much more than a parallel that alludes to a whole system of historical

erasures. It is what I call allegory. Between the poetic line and language, on the one hand, and the thread and the textile, on the other, there is a more complex relation of interpretation in which both line and thread are woven together by Vicuña in an effort to transvalue language and textile into affirmations of time's openness. In other words, weaving is not only a suggestion of a "lost way of life" or a "desire to know the precolonial past" but an evaluation of its creative uses within aesthetic practices as an active commentary and intervention within the whole system of memory politics and technologies. Certainly Vicuña is not interested only in a mere aesthetic celebration but her recourse to Amerindian traditions such as the *ceq'e* and the quipu represent her re-elaboration of a whole historical system supported by a specific conception of temporality. So hers is, primordially, a re-elaboration of theories of time, and the quipu is her allegory of it, as we can see in her calligramme *Ceq'e* (fig 10). The complexity of the thread as line, as we have discussed, gets further enriched with the figure of the *Ceq'e*, a sort of geographical quipu, a system of lines (*ceq'e* means line in Quechua). As César Paternosto explains, this system of lines represents a "geometric partition" of the Incan territory. These ideal lines arrange the organization of the sacred and the profane and the political and social structure of the Incan empire. For R. T. Zuidema, the *ceq'e* is comparable to a giant quipu "that served in the local representation of the Inca cosmological system, in its spatial, hierarchical, and temporal aspects" (qtd. in Paternosto, *The Stone and the Thread* 9). The *ceq'e* thus served not only as a spatial system (such as marking springs of water and shrines) but also as an astronomical, agricultural, and temporal one (9-10).

Vicuña, in her concrete poem, defines the *ce'q* in temporal terms. She denies the mere spatiality of it by stating that it is not a line, but an instant. This instant is somehow perceptible through vision and it is vision. The instant is a gaze, a snapshot of time. In other words, if the *ceq'e* is space, it is only insofar as time's spatialization. The line, the thread, represents an image of time, a contraction of it. This concept of the line allows her to redefine the quipu understood as a ritualistic calendrical technology. The already obsolete technology is also revalued in relation to its original function. The re-contextualization of its expressivity supposes a re-reading of its function and meaning. This is Vicuña's inversion of values. Time understood as a quipu is not "time's ritual measure." This quipu, an allegory of time, serves to "measure and mediate a thought," what I have called an interpretation of memory's images. The time of Vicuña's allegorical quipu signals the time to come as the Celan epigraph demonstrates: "there are / still songs to be sung on the other side / of mankind." This epiphany has been reached only because a line is not a line, but an instant. It is the snapshot of temporality which allows the poetic voice to claim that there is indeed a future. To this new vision of time corresponds a new vision of humanity. This is the other side of humanity, not its underside, its reverse, but its futurity. Time and memory are perceptible only insofar as remembrance, as recollection, as instances, images, knots of threads, knots of lines and threads. Weaving allows the epiphany of time and the transformation of the obsolete into an active technology of memory.

Contrary to Benjamin's transcendent vision of allegory and de Man's immanent one, Vicuña opposes a joyful one in which time is not equivalent to death and therefore humanity is not equivalent to the *facies hippocratica*. In Vicuña's re-elaboration of time,

in her use of detritus and the obsolete, she conceives of time as creativity and joy. The figure of the skull, the fragment, is not a melancholic sign of the human condition because “[l]a conciencia de la propia muerte trae una nueva visión del Tiempo. Una obra dedicada al gozo quiere hacer sentir la urgencia del presente que es la urgencia de la revolución” (*Precario/Precarious* n.p.). Since time is creativity, the melancholic and allegorical figures are transvalued into joy, *goce*. Vicuña’s work is devoted to this joy; it is born from the urgency of the present, from the demands of the present. The violence of history, the invisibility of the other, and the trauma of the past represents the calling of the will to remember both violence and trauma in order to establish a new vision of time. Only through conceiving of time as becoming can we later on both remember the past and envision a politics of the future. Vicuña’s quipu, and I should add, her aesthetics, responds to a whole set of violence supported by history’s abuses of the past, not only to political, class, and feminist struggles but also to ecological concerns related to land reclamation. The past, in this sense, for Vicuña, is a constellation of elements that creatively and conjointly imply a vast imaginary that ranges from geographical concerns, communities of fishermen in the coastal regions of Chile, music, dance, America, dunes, the sea, weaving arts, and traditional music.

Ceq'e

Thread Suns

"there are
still songs to be sung on the other side
of mankind"

— Paul Celan

The *ceq'e* is not a line, it is an instant, a gaze,

A mental quipu

to measure and mediate

a thought, radiating

an earthly sun

another meridian

a quipu that is not

time's ritual measure

or from below

seen from above

q.110

Figure 9.

Conclusion: Allegorical Affirmation

Vicuña's archeological impulse responds to her allegorical vision of the world in which interpretation is equivalent to disinterment. It is at this point where Vicuña seems to understand allegory in Benjaminean terms but this is only so in appearance.

There are several allegorical levels in her work: the material one as an allegory of the world in its tension between immanence and transcendence, the creative process whereby matter becomes form, which is Vicuña's *allegoresis* as interpretation, and finally, the aesthetic object, form, as an allegory of the disappeared other (however she does not conceive of the other as the margin). To the mnemonics of telling the past, of registering events, Vicuña opposes a different concept of history; as she has explained, the strings of wool stand for becoming thus opening history to cultural, aesthetic, and critical forces and connecting the untold past to the unforeseeable future.²⁴

The involvement of art in politics in Vicuña not only aims to unveil a system of abuse and oppression but also, and as importantly, to imagining that which is yet to come.

As Jean-Luc Nancy beautifully explains:

[w]e must be able to think a world...Our question, or rather our categorical imperative, or again our necessity in the sense of our poverty and our way of being needy because we have no world, but we must be able to imagine a world. To imagine the total impossibility of thinking a world immediately leads to madness, to death. (*Transcription* 20)

Vicuña is thinking a world, hence her definition of the quipu as able to record and measure a thought. She is, furthermore, seeing and listening to it (*quipodem* "Arte precario" 137). The bodily participation, what we called above with Klossowski, the corporealized thought, the entrenchment of the senses with a poetics of space as Vicuña explains in her movie *Kon Kon*, bequeaths her with a reading of the world where time

²⁴ From her performance at Rutgers University (2010).

(memory) is contracted into matter. Thinking the world is hence a movement from the dilation of time to the contraction of space. I refer to this as her *allegoresis*. To not imagine a world is death; to not imagine a world is melancholic in that it leads to madness. Vicuña's reading is an expansion, a letting loose of temporal threads that virtually lie in matter. Her operation is not merely metonymic as it may be thought but allegorical. That is, the stone or the thread does not participate in the world as part of a whole in which this whole assumes some unequivocal essence that can be also found as a whole, as essence, within organic matter. Hers is an *allegoresis* because the world of meaning signifies a possible layer of interpretation, never given, always primarily virtual, always sensitive to re-interpretation. Vicuña's art is hence involved with the creation of the world, a world, and multiple ones. That is her imperative. The encounter of form and matter, the formative process by which art emerges in her art is, consequently, always cosmogonic, a cosmogony of sense, of creative memories that heed the call of the material but also the call of political struggles. Form is imbricated in its historicity precisely because form allows (calls for) contextual interpretation, because it allows (calls for) a reading that emerges coetaneously as an answer to the pressure of time. Vicuña sees and lets us see the world through a grain of sand but this aesthetic vision is only perspectival; hence, it is never totalizing and it is always, insofar as it is an allegory, open to other new allegorical visions. The stone and the thread, to borrow the title of Cesar Paternosto's book on indigenous art, acquire the value of a world, of meaning production. Vicuña does not elevate, however as it may hastily be thought, the simple, the everyday objects, the mineral kingdom as well as the kingdom of organic and inorganic waste, into art as a capricious gesture to raise the marginal to the heights of the

museum. Threads and stones are allegories of the world; they are aesthetic objects by themselves. Her role is much simpler. Each sculpture, installation, and quipu are just Vicuña's recollections: her reading of the infinite and always expanding meaning of the world in a grain of sand.

Vicuña is well aware of art's relevance in mobilizing political transformation; she is hopeful that within the possibilities of artistic expression lies the possibility of envisioning a new politics, a new social encounter. But she is also well aware—her oeuvre, in general, and the figure of the quipu, in particular, testify to this—that there is a correspondence, an intimate agreement within different art manifestations and that the playful and skillful combination of them allows for more radical representations of the invisible, as well as allowing, by juxtaposition, to open up the past to different interpretations. In this sense, Vicuña's art is never entirely an art *in situ*, here and now, and so the immediacy of the page or of her sculptures should not deceive our senses. Vicuña's art is first and foremost an art of the future and this is my fundamental argument in this chapter.

The past, consequently, is as much unknown, constructible, and unforeseeable as is the future, and therefore, both are subject to the same aesthetic and political impulse: newness. Even newness itself here cannot be taken in an easy neoliberal sense which implies the rapid consumption of new values while producing a total oblivion of the past. Vicuña's art treats the obsolete as well as the discarded as essential in the process of building the new because the obsolete and the discarded belong to the inner structure of life and society. In this sense, Vicuña's *allegoresis* performs an immanent critique of both form and matter through the figure of detritus and the obsolete as a way to operate a

transcendent criticism. Hence, the old, the used, and the wasted are signs of hope and resurrection for her. This seemingly clear-cut dialectical reading is never entirely resolved and it need not be. While unveiling the ideological underside of national history and while troubling easy historical appropriations of the past, Vicuña's aesthetic form and interpretation still remains in transit due to its very allegorical nature.

Ch. 2 Writing Historical Violence: Diamela Eltit's Taxable Life

“Este hueco histórico es tuyo y mío y lo mantenemos las dos, mitad tú y mitad yo.”

“[S]ólo nosotras podemos jactarnos de ser un trofeo o un memorial que le refuerza al hospital el segmento de una historia que no se puede modular. No es posible, porque es una historia (la nuestra) que carece enteramente de historia.”

Diamela Eltit

On September 15, 2010, in anticipation of Chile's bicentennial anniversary of its independence from the Spanish crown, the president of the Senate, Jorge Pizarro, addressed the nation, compressing the country's past 200 years into a very particular historical narrative that highlighted the difficult path of establishing democracy. For Pizarro, the celebration of the nation's short but tumultuous history represented a unique opportunity for Chile to emerge as a strong democratic and internationally respected nation. The ideological effort behind Pizarro's speech was to consolidate Chile as a smoothly functioning democratic country and to pose the robust figure of the parliament as its guarantor. The cohesive element, the constitutive strength, of such a project is represented by its people, a land of “poetas y de estadistas; de literatos y constructores; y siempre de hombres y mujeres de bien” (bcn.cl). It is interesting to note here the supportive role that Pizarro attributes to literature (the Nobel prizes of Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda come immediately to mind) in the legitimization of the nation within an international context. Ironically, contemporary Chilean literature has been insistently questioning the very notion of such a strong democratic tradition and the definition of the country's people: who are these Chileans that constitute the nation and on what grounds? Who have been included and excluded as part of the discourses of history and why? Pizarro, for instance, never recognizes the ways in which women's suffrage in the 50's or

the women's movements in the 60's affect our current understanding of democracy and a politics of participation. He neither refers to the anonymous mass of people who fought for the construction of the nation in the past 200 years nor to the hundreds of years prior to the independence movement. There is no acknowledgement of the indigenous and *mestizo* elements in the process of national formation. It is only in the very last paragraph of his speech that the word "women" appear as part of the poets, statesmen, writers, and constructors that encompass the Chilean nation.

In 2010, Diamela Eltit, one of Chile's most important writers and critics, published the novel *Impuesto a la carne* and, in so doing, seized upon the bicentennial moment to ask fundamental questions of political and historical inclusion within national discourses.²⁵ As if in response to the selective history of Pizarro's patriotic speech, *Impuesto a la carne* brings to the fore the subjects of national omission and contrasts the apparent cleanliness and smoothness of the nation with the raw, violent material that lies on the margins of canonical and historical recognition. Eltit performs an *ad-hoc* supervising function with regards to the way in which history accesses the past by questioning history's boundaries, whether they be methodological, formal, or epistemological.

In this chapter, I aim to interrogate history and its limits—by this I mean not only history's own limitations but its relation to limit experiences such as violence and cruelty. How does history answer to violence? How does history include or exclude other subject positions and other non-canonical histories? I wish to show how Diamela Eltit's *Impuesto a la carne* (2010), performs an *ad-hoc* supervising function with regards to the way in which history accesses the past by questioning history's methodological, formal,

²⁵In what follows I will abbreviate the title to *Impuesto*.

and epistemological boundaries. From which subject position can history be criticized? Which cultural tools do we own to produce relevant criticisms of history's participation within politics and ethics? What do we gain from literature's interrogation of history and how can literature disrupt the politics of historical inclusion? To this end, the work of Diamela Eltit may prove fruitful in showing history's shortcomings and unveiling black holes within political structures. I argue that Eltit's "untimely engineering," to use and transform Benjamin's terminology, investigates three disparate but connected areas: history's complicity with politics in using and abusing the past, the place of women within history and politics, and finally the origins of the Chilean nation.²⁶

Eltit, as an eclectic engineer, "juxtaposes disparate and despised artifacts, forms and media, so as to generate an electrifying tension, an explosive illumination of elements in the present" (Gilloch 4). Eltit's eclecticism takes us to an eerie, asphyxiating hospital where the two main characters, a mother and a daughter, are confined among a

²⁶ There are several reasons why I do not call Eltit an "aesthetic engineer" as Benjamin would have it. In the first place, there is no redemption of the past in Eltit's work for that will assume that there is a "truth" in her work, a Platonic truth which assumes the past can be redeemed or reconnected to such truth. In other words, there is no ultimate truth in the work of art in the sense Benjamin proposes for that would assume a trans-historical value which can be actualized critically. But I do not mean to deny the value of the constellation as a mode of interpretation wherein the work of art acquires meaning or its meaning is accreted by its juxtaposition with other works of art. Truth for Benjamin, furthermore, appears through the contemplation of the work of art. I am trying to generate the opposite idea of an active subject, not a patient one as in the case of involuntary memory. The ethical subject who wills to remember does not perceive only in a "fleeting moment" or a "moment of danger" but actively enters into tension with the forces of the past. As Gilloch explains, "passing recognition is that in which the work of art comes to reveal itself as a fragment of the Idea of Art: namely, as the idea of its final dissolution and absorption" (39). Both subject and object enter a very specific dynamic which unfolds in time: an observer, an object in its demise, and a fleeting moment in which the observer completes the work of art by perceiving its inherent truth. This process constitutes Benjamin's immanent criticism. This kind of criticism, I suggest, assumes no mortification of the work of art and thinks of the past as latent rather than decomposed. Following Nietzsche's dictum, I argue that there are not facts only interpretations of phenomena where interpreting itself is a function of power. In other words, there is no truth other than what has socially been affirmed by usage, to crudely put it. A new use of the work of art, for instance, or a new use of the past will generate new principles to be affirmed (*Will to Power* 267). The past can be creatively used to release unused potentialities within it—what Bergson calls actualization. The past in this sense is not redeemed but created. On the other hand, I call this engineer "untimely" to hint towards Nietzsche's use of the word as an art that not only illuminates the past but is ahead of its time and whose lights aim to affect the future.

mass of nameless and silent patients. Both, *la madre y la hija*, will try to transmit, as a legacy, their misunderstood past. Their story and history, the daughter tells us “fue tan incomprendida que la esperanza de digitalizar una minúscula huella de nuestro recorrido (humano) nos parece una abierta ingenuidad.” Their hopeless story will reveal their human trajectory for it is the story of their lives as living bodies, as organic beings who have lost their “ímpetu organico,” that they wish to pass on. The aim of this “gesta hospitalaria” is to recount the passion of their bodies in an anonymous thanatography, as opposed to the heroic biographical names of the *chanson de geste*, to tell their trajectory towards death because “[n]os enfermó de muerte el hospital. Nos encerró. Nos mató. La historia nos inflingió una puñalada por la espalda” (9). It was history who sickened them, who secluded them, who killed them. The narration is thus inscribed from the first page at the intersection of two discourses: history and biopolitics.

The scant details that Eltit provides about the characters’ lives form a bizarre and even monstrous picture. The daughter dates the origin of their mistreatment and isolation to the day they were born since “[d]e inmediato la nación o la patria o el país se pusieron en contra de nosotras” (10). The hospital—and I will return to this in more detail later—becomes a massive historical allegory in which the discourses of nation, race, sex, class, progress, power, Pinochet’s dictatorial regime and its torture camps converge. This hospital is the place where the female body lives in a constant process of torture and mutilation and where an alternative history made of centuries of silence and blood-selling is recounted. The hospital is an interregnum where power, politics, and history coalesce to decide the faith of life. Eltit’s depiction of the hospital certainly resembles Pinochet’s “centros de tortura” and concentration camps, but she, more profoundly and incisively,

shows that the torture and disappearance of the female body and the suppression of her genealogy belong to a more arcane—albeit always historical—discourse on national evolution and bio-politics.

Within this allegorical machinery, the main characters are complex figures and dysmorphic mirrors that represent the process of national formation, the place that indigenous communities had and have within nation and history, the racially, sexually, and socially marginalized, and the place of memory within national discourses. Their representational character thus explains several of their monstrous characteristics. Both, mother and daughter are 200 years old, consequently, dating their birth to the paradigmatic *primera junta nacional de gobierno* in 1810. Although we never learn exactly when was the mother born, it appears as if she was alive well before that; suggestively, she seems to have been reborn “caóticamente,” when her daughter was born (15). Their joint birth coincides with the beginning of their torture, which their bodies, uncannily, seem to endure. It is unclear if their bodies have the ability to regenerate their organs, but we can assume they do, although their strength and longevity may be explained by the fact that, at times, it seems that the mother and daughter inhabit two separate bodies, whereas at others, the mother seems to reside inside her daughter forming a four-legged body like the one depicted in Lotty Rosenfeld’s front cover image (figure 1). I want to take Eltit’s allegory in all its seriousness and to re-trace the trajectory of the main character’s “carnal taxation” within the articulation of historical and biopolitical discourses.

“La historia nos infligió una puñalada por la espalda,” proclaims *la hija*. From the very first page of Eltit’s *Impuesto* the narration confronts the constitution of national

discourses and locates itself outside of history; it anticipates its own historical ambition and the urgency to open, so as to reconstruct, the historical wound or “*hueco histórico*.” History has stabbed the backs of the two main characters, the women who are known only by their familial bond, *la madre y la hija*. “[U]na puñalada por la espalda”—the wound is the written mark of the historical betrayal of these women, which presupposes that history had a duty (a promise) which it did not fulfill. *La puñalada*, the double gesture of performing while concealing, represents history’s disavowal of the main characters’ exclusion from history. *La puñalada* constitutes history’s perversion which *Impuesto* unveils and critiques.

The world in *Impuesto* has been divided according to the principles of visibility: the enlightened world of political recognition, inclusion, participation, and the penumbra—which Eltit strategically and constructively recuperates—as the interstice where historical outcasts dwell and from where mother and daughter speak.²⁷ It is the latter who carries the weight of the narration as well as the *will to remember* the wound. Both characters are isolated in a hospital where they have been for 200 years and where their bodies have been declared pariahs. Both characters are sick and tormented by a body of doctors and nurses at the service of *la nación y sus fans*. The hospital tortures the characters by harvesting and selling their organs and blood. *Impuesto* calls this operation *puñalada* which begets and signalizes the taxable value of their bodies. It is interesting here to note how Eltit has chosen the word “operation” to refer to history’s betrayal; in Spanish the word is *operación*, which suggests a resemblance between the

²⁷ This is not Heidegger’s use of the term dwelling as the place where being is at peace. It also signifies that Being has a place that belongs, which is the opposite case of *la madre y la hija* who inhabit what Arendt calls living made hell. See *Being and Time* and “The Image of Hell” in *Essays in Understanding*, respectively.

work of history and that of the doctors at the hospital where *sus cuerpos son operados*. History's operation is both strategic and "surgical" for it extirpates, removes, and recycles the body. In this sense, *Impuesto* mimics while exposing history's and politics' methodologies.



Figure 1

If the political future is to be otherwise, we need a different concept of history, one which gives an account of its underside, its repressed and hidden lining. *Impuesto* is Eltit's ethical commitment not only to unveil history's oppressed subjects but to open up their future and create an active socio-political locus for them within historical and national discourses. *Impuesto* not only contests history but its very origin and constitution, disputing the process of historical formation from an ethical perspective, that is, from the point of view of its value to life.²⁸ *Impuesto* operates an evaluation of historical value and stands as an effort to transvalue it.

In the first section, I develop the concept of *la penumbra* or the penumbra of history through Eltit's allegorical depiction of the hospital. I devote the second section to what I call *taxable life*, a term that engages with, while going beyond Giorgio Agamben's "bare life," Benjamin's "sacred life," and Jean-Luc Nancy's "distinct." In the third and final section, I elaborate a *history of the in-between*, giving an account of taxable life and showing how and where history can find its renewed ethical impetus. In order to do so, I synthesize the concept of the *penumbra* and *taxable life* through a reading of Paul Ricœur's ideas on memory and history.

El hospital and the Penumbra of History

The progress of history and the unfolding of historical time towards vested political ends leave a residual force in its path for they require the exploitation and segregation of life. The teleological movement of history towards a scientific,

²⁸I follow closely here Nietzsche's theory of evaluation and interpretation as depicted in his *Will to Power* on the one hand and his critique of history's value to life in his *Untimely Meditations* on the other. Thus, I use the word value as an interpretative mode by which a subject evaluates forces and use them creatively to strengthen her life.

explanatory modality, aligned with the narratives of social cohesion, economic evolution, and national identity, sacrifices life to a greater social narrative. For whom is life sacrificed? Who gets a part of the political share? What part of life is sacrificed? What is the cost of this sacrifice? Who and what mediates the sacrificial exchange? How can the apparent trans-historicity of the word “life” or “human” become historically significant for both ethical and political questions? How can we actively remember those sacrificed and how to give a historical account of the forgotten?

Impuesto’s aim is to ethically interpellate and fracture history and answer these questions. From outside of tradition or as that which has traditionally been sacrificed, *Impuesto* effects an immanent critique by moving to the fulcrum and origin of history’s and power’s contradiction. Thus, the main character’s narration punctuates historical registers and national discourses while the narration, by placing itself in the tension between historical exclusion and its transgression, mimics sacrifice by sacrificing the main characters to a history-beyond-being, that is, a history of alterity (I will return to this below). I coin and develop two terms which will help us understand how a history of the other is born and what it ethically implies: “the penumbra of history” and “taxable life.” I will show that the former constitutes history’s underside and that such a constitutive gesture begets taxable life as a doubly bare subject excluded from history by her capacity to be killed and by virtue of her sexual difference.

In order to envision the place of *la penumbra* we need to come back to the first page of *Impuesto*. Eltit ingeniously plays with the semantic proximity between the word “*hospital*” (*hospitālis*) and “*hospitalario/a*” (*hospital*) to suggest the relationship between dwelling and historical inclusion, reception, embracing, and welcoming. Thus, the

hospital represents an operation center, a place where history *operates*, decides, includes or excludes and where history *operates* on the body via the taxation of mother and daughter. The hospital is a complex and plural allegory within *Impuesto* which encompasses *la patria*, *el país* (18), *el territorio* (30), *la nación* (20), *history*, *government*, and *society* at large. Consequently, history enters in complicity with national structures, powers, and discourses. In this sense, the wound of which *la hija* speaks is constituted by multiple forces which unite and pierce the bodies; it marks them as separated and continues to use the bodies, now separated, from the penumbra. This movement implies the localization of their bodies in a place outside of political inclusion yet inside of the economy. As a dwelling place, as a guest house, the nation demands a payment, the sacrifice of life for inhabiting the shadows of national constitution. This is the first contradiction that *Impuesto* unveils and mocks. As tenants, as guests in national land, as subjects of the law, they pay with their sacrifice; they are sacrificed. As sacrifice and sacrificed, they are paid back with their own exclusion, thus perpetuating the historical wound. It is for this reason that both characters maintain and support the historical void. Those who are sacrificed are aware of their locus in the void, of their own invisibility. Outside of history, in its limits, mother and daughter know their otherness for they represent the necessary condition of historical intelligibility. The sacrificed regions, voices, and subjects must remain in the penumbra as an *a priori* substratum for all historical operations. Eltit creatively returns to these regions, to the penumbra which contains unactualized, latent forces, in order to unearth such forces. This is, therefore, the aporia of the sacrificial economy in which *la madre* and *la hija* live once the nation has rendered their bodies as taxable. From this “no-man’s-land” position,

history operates its disavowal. More tragically, *Impuesto* also calls the hospital *el teatro del grito* (58) and so it reminds us of a longer historical sacrificial process of torture which encompasses the forgotten blood that supported the processes of national independence as well as the tortures committed during Pinochet's regime. *Impuesto* also suggests that this allegorical hospital is the place, the continuous rehearsal, the show, and the execution forever to be represented, of the scream. And so *el grito* unfurls as *Impuesto*'s narration and constitutes its interpellation. Outside of history, however, the scream is a sinister register of silence.

There is a narrative tension between mother and daughter: although *la madre* is a witness to the story the daughter wishes to unveil,²⁹ she does not want to contend with it for she prefers the painful survival at the hands of the hospital, doctors, and their fans [*los medicos y sus fans*] (10). She fears the retaliation of the hospital whereas the daughter, who interweaves a received memory and a lived memory, a genealogical heritage of historical exclusion, wishes to remember her and her mother's past so as to create a register for the future. The narration, accessing the past, *el grito*, comes from the conflict of registers between *la madre y la hija*. The mother wishes to preserve the past as it is, in oblivion; although as the eldest, she has experienced more and so she can speak from a place of knowledge which the daughter lacks. The daughter, on the other hand, wishes to honor her genealogy. Her mission is untimely in a Nietzschean sense. It is out of time and place, and it is intended to have effects in posterity. She claims, "[v]amos a generar el gran manual histórico del maltrato y la postergación." This is the daughter's mission that she actualizes, anchoring the past of historical records and the future of historical

²⁹ In Spanish, "story" and "history" are homonyms, so we speak of *historia* as story, plot, and argument and of history as *historia*. To differentiate one from the other, we often say *Historia con H mayúscula*. This already implies a hierarchy between them, whereby *Historia* takes the qualifications of a proper name.

production in the present; “[e]sa es mi intención. Hoy,” she declares (82). The daughter’s intention from the start takes a particular curvature in time. From the present, she looks back upon history whereby her very gaze facilitates and ensures the possibility of a future recognition and the future writing of an alternative history (a history of mistreatment and deferral) as the present form of the verb “to be” indicates.³⁰ *Vamos a* at the same time indicates a plurality, an invitation to participation and inclusion since it is not only her story; this is *Impuesto*’s genealogical and communal effort. Both *madre e hija* represent the totality of what has being stabbed in the back by history, all that has been excluded, the subjects of any historical wound, what Benjamin calls the “history of the oppressed” (*Selected Writings*, 391). Nonetheless, this exclusion from history is prior to what has been oppressed because “[la] historia [...] se puso de antemano en contra de nosotras” due to history’s very nature as “petrea y desafortunada” (12), thus echoing Levinas for whom “history is the most profound limitation, the fundamental limitation” (*Unforseen History* 14). “[A]ntemano” also signals how history evaluates discourses, how it selects its actors and how, accordingly, history’s content and limits are pre-empted by such evaluations. “[A]ntemano” is the *a priori* condition of intelligibility I mentioned above, but this suggests, at the same time, that what is invisible within the politics of historical visibility has to be there beforehand (antemano) and that the invisibility, that which is unknown to the present, holds the potential for radical transformation.

³⁰At the level of speech, and this is the complex ethical value of *Impuesto*, the speech of the daughter encompasses more than a doubling of time for the mission of the daughter is threefold; past, present, and future are engaged in the open futurity which the promise involves. Her commitment to the future encompasses the present and the past.

The historical gesture of *la hija* encompasses tensed time,³¹ a history of their past from the point of view of present needs, their urgency, as Benjamin has it, whereby both past and present are to be completed in and for the future. The daughter's ambition is for her story to become history; her story encompasses and interrupts the tensed time, leaving history to the future and the very possibility of the future open to creation. Her narration does not write a new history; it signals both the space of her story's erasure and the space for its scriptability—it is the very spacing whose mark is absence. In this sense, *Impuesto* is sheer potency. Her narration, however, disjoins history. In this sense, *Impuesto* is a disruptive event: it makes a space between the historical marks and the absence upon which those marks have been built by history.

This displacement occurs—to use Levinas' terms from *Otherwise than Being*—as an interruption of the said by the saying (48, 143, 152). *Impuesto* is, in this regard, an intervention, a cut in time's synchronicity through the irreverence of the saying. The saying interrupts as the unexpected, as an event.³² It is interesting to note here that this

³¹ I use the word gesture here as Agamben does: “in it [gesture] nothing is produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported. The gesture, in other words, opens the sphere of *ethos* as the more proper sphere of that which is human” (*Means without End* 56.7). I claim *la hija*, by enduring and supporting the in-between, is acting in a mimetic and strategic way; she performs the position of the middle but also, from the in-between, she is creating a discourse or a space for her history. In this way, *la hija* performs a complete gesture, or rather a more complex gesture than that which Agamben proposes since her gesture is an ethical event (See footnote 9).

³² The word event has the ethical meaning Alain Badiou attributes to it in his *Ethics*. I am well aware I need to be cautious regarding the use of Badiou's event in relation to *Impuesto* as an ethics of history based on the recognition of the other because Badiou claims there is no ethics of difference (26-7). He considers difference to be in the realm of *what there is* and truth to be about *what is yet to come*. Following Irigaray, I need to refute Badiou and argue that there is no such thing as difference yet, and thus, an ethics of the other *qua* sexual difference, for instance, also belongs to the realm of the yet-to-come and, as such, it falls directly into Badiou's category of truth. It is true that the problem resides on the side of the Same and not on the side of the Other since the Same for Badiou is what comes to be, by definition, imbricated in what is yet to come. In other words, the event of the other as yet to come can summon the animal into becoming a subject; it is in time that both encounter each other and it is in time then that Same and Other find themselves. Now, in relation to the event as supplement (41), what is interesting to me here is that history is that ethical event that encompasses past, present, and future as irruption and unpredictability. The event retroactively transforms the past and re-writes it. The event awakens the past's latency and from there both present and past are also re-written. In this sense, it is the event of saying that captures the said. What is

interruption which I have set in terms of Levinas' said/saying dyad already speaks about an intertwining, a competence of meaning and of temporalities: the said, as a discourse on and about the past, imposes itself over the present. The said as that which has been said operates or, rather, moves along with the present, carrying with it the whole of the past acting *as if*, always said anew. It is power that renews and reinforces the said. This clearly reveals the imbrication of power and history. The saying, as Levinas teaches us, is already absorbed by and into the said. In this sense, Levinas echoes Benjamin's dictum to "awaken the dead" for the former wishes to "awaken in the said the saying which is absorbed in it and, *thus absorbed, enters into the history that the said imposes*" (43). For Levinas the question of the saying is prior to the said and here is where he locates the responsibility towards the other. Now, the saying appears as an interruption of essence; it is an interruption of the *otherwise*—it interrupts the time of essence's enunciation by unveiling the otherwise as outside of time.³³ Can taxable life within this framework have a time for herself? Can she speak of a time outside of time, the time that Levinas calls immemorial and dia-chronic? Is this her real time? What can we do with this time within the tension of appearing and disappearing from the said, animating the said although hiding within it? What does it mean to return time to that which is otherwise-than-being? I argue that as an event and an interruption, *Impuesto* anchors the slipperiness of "ethics" as *ethics of history* through a reversal of historical time, puncturing historical time with the time of memory. *Impuesto*, in its radical enunciation,

also interesting is that the fidelity the event demands implies a creation, "to invent a new way of being" (42), and thus historians need to find a way. This new way as product of the event is a truth.

³³ As Paul Ricœur explains in his article devoted to a reading of *Otherwise than Being*, the language of the saying belongs to the realm of the ethics of responsibility, as opposed to the "Said" which belongs to the language of ontology. This otherwise-than-being is unable to be absorbed by being; it is thus radically other than all other as variations of the "being" otherwise as opposed to "otherwise" than being.

cannot be entirely absorbed by the said, and from the limit experience of *la penumbra*, it continues to unsay the saying between appearance and disappearance. This is the paradox of the penumbra: it allows the interruption of the saying but as already absorbed by the said, however precariously. The saying can be and is disavowed but it cannot be captured, as Levinas believes, in its entirety for there remains a residue of which *la penumbra* attests,³⁴ since it is displaced by disavowal's operation to a beyond and that which is sent to a beyond, that which is repressed is destined to return. This beyond is the time of memory, a time about the past however still subdued by the time of history. The beyond returns from its dwelling in *la penumbra* as an ethical gesture—showing us, or at least approaching the time of the other, the time of the otherwise-than-being.

The interruption that the novel represents breaks the illusion of history's continuity, introducing messiness, distortion, dark holes, loops, and sediments. Memory and the in-between are like tectonic plates, dormant, latent, but convulsive, sensitive to both time and movement and, as such, capable of interrupting and de-stabilizing the axis of historical time. *Impuesto* thus exposes the raw, active material upon which history builds its discourses but it does not fall into its mode of discursivity since it remains both interior and anterior. Paradoxically, in order for their discursive locus, "*la penumbra*," in which mother and daughter dwell to become visible, to receive the light of political inclusion, their shadowed past needs to become history.

³⁴ To use here Levinas' language, the *infinity* of the saying cannot be substituted by the *totality* of the said. I do not agree however with Levinas' insistence upon the same, or being, or essence to reabsorb alterity as he claims both in *Totality and Infinity* and in *Otherwise than Being*. There is much more in the object of our perception than what appears in its nudity to the eye and thus the fantasy of total mastery upon the perceived object, the total absorption and possession by the "I" remains questionable. Nothing appears as it is to the eye; the mystery to which Merleau-Ponty and Levinas himself refer reveals itself in its very non-appearance.

Now what kind of history is this one and how does it relate to memory and time? The penumbra is cast by the light of history and depends upon it. By definition, the penumbra is part of the shadow but it is not its darkest side: the umbra. If the umbra is a total eclipse, the penumbra is a partial one; it is *paene*, almost a total shadow. If history is the light, the historical object is the opaque, occluding body which creates the interregnum, the in-between. Now it is interesting to note here that since the occluding body does not cover the totality of light some objects do receive light whereas others are cast under total shadow. If we return here to the idea of history, we can see now how some historical subjects are bestowed with light and recognition in opposition to others. Therefore, the mother's and daughter's stories need to be archived and registered. They need to become legible for "*la penumbra*" is "*la más amorfa, la más opaca y más excluyente*" (83). The political and cultural value of history, conversely, will bequeath their story with form, light, and inclusion. *La penumbra* is the underside of *la patria* and constitutes its lining and its limit, but it is not merely what marks a division between light and umbra. It is also a territory which mother and daughter experience as limit, as a limit experience. The daughter is conscious, though that inscription, what she calls "*digitalización*," can only take in a minute portion of the wound and that is an altogether naïve gesture (1). Whatever the case, this naïveté is rather rhetorical, and pushed to its very limits for the whole narration, *el grito*, is an attempt to record the historical wound as impossibility. *Impuesto* moves along the tension between possibility and impossibility.

This is Eltit's cultural ambition: registering the trace as an act of legacy, however fragmentary. Herein lies, I claim, the ethical force of *Impuesto*, in its non-totalizing

ambition, in its insistence upon de-totalizing history through “memory as an inversion of historical time.” (*Totality and Infinity* 56) Moreover, *Impuesto* questions the origin and juncture between nation and history and their power to decide upon life and death, to include or exclude for “el [the sovereign] tenía el poder o la gracia de permitir la vida y decidir la muerte” (25).

Taxable life

The excluded—the subjects which sovereignty judges and separates—have been stabbed in their backs. Hence, the *puñalada*, at sovereignty’s service, is history’s disavowal; it is history’s operation upon those which it wishes to repress. In chapter six of *Stanzas*, Agamben analyzes the double structure of disavowal through the figure of the fetish which

[c]onfronts us with the paradox of an unattainable object that satisfies a human need precisely through its being unattainable. Insofar as it is presence, the fetish object is in fact something concrete and tangible; but insofar as it is the presence of an absence, it is, at the same time, immaterial and intangible, because it alludes continuously beyond itself to something that can never really be possessed. (33)

Historical disavowal in *Impuesto* unfurls in the in-betweenness of presence and absence, amid inclusion and exclusion, fetishizing the body of *la madre e hija* and including their presence as absence in a sacrificial economy. As immaterial and intangible, they speak from *la penumbra*, revolting against the historical operation that has bound them to invisibility. But what is it that *la madre y la hija* substitute for in historical discourses? Is this the same lack attributed to women (the mother) by the gaze of the child? It is, I argue, also created by the gaze in a process of identification but at a national, constitutive level. In other words, the need *madre e hija* satisfy is the fantasy of racial homogeneity.

What they lack is sameness, the sameness that founded the nation upon the XIX century dyad of *civilización y barbarie*. I shall return to this *idem/ipse* issue in the last section. This is the reason for the main characters' age; they are 200 years old, "bicentenarias," dating the birth of their historical disavowal to the birth of the nation. *La madre y la hija*, "nosotras," ceaselessly define themselves as "económicas, parias, morenas, oblicuas, anarquistas" (72), "bajas/feas/seriadas" (25), "negras curiches" (33) versus "ellos, blancos y esterilizados" (37). They are disavowed because of how they look and what they lack. However, they are not "the presence of [...] nothingness" (*Stanzas* 31), as Agamben explains following Freud, but rather the constant presence of a beyond that returns as invisible or as "phantasm." There is a symbolic value added to the main characters within this fetishistic structure, that of being taxable, separated, sacred, distinct. This will become clearer shortly. As that which they do not have, they are both presence of what they do not have and a mark of such absence. By virtue of this tension the fracture is created, the dehiscence that is constitutive of history and sovereignty.

Recognition and disavowal, then, mark the dehiscence of sovereignty and history. From this wound, from this laceration, which I have named the in-between of history, is from where *Impuesto*, informed by both presence and absence in an endless dialectical process, makes itself visible. This is *Impuesto*'s political gesture. Interestingly, the substitution that operates within sovereignty and history is a synecdoche: the blood and organs of *la madre y la hija* are drained, extracted, and sold. This "malversación sanguínea" (60) denotes that, as partial objects and as history, they enter the realm of

national history as pieces, wounds, and fractures while they enter the sacrificial economy as commodities.³⁵

Mother and daughter go into the Agambenean no-man's land of bare life (*la nuda vita, la vida desnuda*) as parts; they do so as not-beings, or rather, as partial beings, living outside the time of history. In a Platonic sense, their beings are devoid of being.

Consequently, the lesser the being the more disposable they become. I argue that *Impuesto* is an effort to return temporality to *la madre y la hija*—not a temporality of history or universal history, in Levinas' terms, but that of interiority, which returns to them the quality of being that they (as bare life for Agamben or as taxable life for Eltit) lack.³⁶

Since the gaze has located difference outside of history via disavowal, *la penumbra* seems to be the privileged locus for both knowing and disavowing. History's perversion has found its perfect stage in the hospital as penumbra. *Impuesto*, in this sense, emulates the fetishization: it is part of the whole, the unfinished by definition, thus

³⁵ It is interesting to think here about the relationship between vision and partial objects. Following Melanie Klein, the child relates to the body of the mother only partially. In order to satisfy her needs, she sees only the breast; however, once the child grows and develops a more complete visual apparatus she is able to recognize total or whole objects. Following this logic and returning to the idea of the penumbra, only in these shadowy regions, depleted of social vision, can the bodies of the mother and daughter be rendered partial; conversely, the light which the daughter seeks could potentially de-fetishize their bodies. As partial objects they are sellable; as partial objects, their value for historico-political needs, is their blood. For Lacan, partial objects are always partial "not because these objects are part of a total object, the body, but because they represent only partially the function that produces them" (*Écrits: A Selection*, 241). Lacan thus suggests that the part-object is so according to the pleasure functions it performs and the need it satisfies. If for Klein the issue is that of developed or under-developed perception, and for Lacan that of an ungraspable image, desire, for Eltit the issue remains the same: the female body is totally or partially included or excluded (excluded because it is invisible and included since it is performing a function). The penumbra is Eltit's creative response and criticism to the politics of visibility which encompasses that which is desirably visible and that which, by virtue of its visibility, is socially sanctioned. I need to hastily add some caveats: the world of total visibility, or more visibility, does not imply a correlative total abuse of that which is visible when once it was not at all. This may serve as a criticism to consider any object in general as total, as whole, and thus as entirely comprehensible and absorbable. This is an ethical consideration: the other as object is never complete. It cannot be absorbed or integrated into sameness. And so the fantasies of conquest, knowledge, and dominion of the other, whether as partial or total object, should collapse along with the fetishistic fantasies.

³⁶ See Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*, 55.

mirroring the state of *la penumbra*, the impossibility of totality, and the possibility of de-totalizing history as transgression and interruption. As fragment, too, *Impuesto* evokes the possibility of bending and intertwining with the limits of history and so *la hija* thinks “que nuestros órganos podían ser los voceros de la historia” (127). Their dismembered bodies, their organs, can speak not as death but about death; they can speak to history and about history. Their organs are the messengers of memory, that which will unfold as memory, as irruption. Their organs speak the language of the past, carrying with them a hidden knowledge, the knowledge of a limit place and of the limit experiences that took place there. Their organs are the saying, the present evidence of the past still throbbing and as such, carriers of a possible disruption, bearers of a time outside of time.

Agamben establishes a relation between “the melancholic’s Saturnine incorporation to the fetishist’s operation of disavowal” (Justin Clemens *The Abandonment of Sex* N.pag.); for him, both phenomena require creativity via simulation or synecdoche. In other words, the melancholic and the fetishist create the conditions for losing an object they have never possessed, but this is from the point of view of the subject in relation to the object wherein the object itself is still trapped within the fantasy of the subject. *La madre y la hija* are subjected to history’s *puñalada*. In other words, history, power, politics, and the law have created the conditions to set the object away, and from *la penumbra*, as suspended locus, *la madre y la hija* try to rebel against the commodity status that history has imposed upon them. As creator, history has indeed manifested commodities and phantasms. As creator, history’s ethical imperative is to be responsible for its value creations. *Impuesto* competes with these historical registers and evaluations asking which one is better for life. For this is a discussion about life. This is

a question about what life, whose life, and what part of life is and should be included within politics and history. *Impuesto*'s strategy is the gesture towards breaking the limits of historical fantasy by stretching the middle where negotiations between subject and object occur. *La madre y la hija* are taxable life because they partake in the double structure of the commodity for they have been fetishized and, as product, they "represent [not] only a use-value (its suitability to satisfy a determinate human need), but this use value is, at the same time, the material substrate of something else: the exchange value" (Agamben, *Stanzas* 37). For Agamben, bare life is constituted as exchange value.

Impuesto is not melancholic because it refuses to be a partial object, although it strategically mimics and mocks one, while creatively using this partial locus to unmask melancholy and fetishistic fantasies. *Impuesto* mimics the fragmentation of melancholic theories of memory as object, but, as untimely, *Impuesto* affirms, first and foremost, the future as the place of political transformation for "pese al hambre seguimos aguardando un hito histórico que todavía no se materializa pero que está vivo en el subsuelo luchando por emerger" (114). There is no dwelling in the past because of attachment or melancholia but to change the future, in hopes of that which is yet-to-come. In this sense, the main characters mimic sacrifice fearlessly, for they recognize they are untimely and that their only way to act accordingly is to write an untimely history. Echoing Nietzsche's concern in *Untimely Meditations*, the daughter criticizes historical maladies and fantasies and poses life as a higher value than historical knowledge and production. *Impuesto* certainly criticizes history's method and poses literature-writing as critique, remembering as critique, re-writing history as critique. To quote Deleuze's explanation

of the untimely, *Impuesto* “operates both in time and against time” (qtd. in Paul Patton *Deluzian Concepts* 88).

The Sacred and the Sacredness of Taxable Life

I can come back now to the logic that operates both in *Impuesto* and in *Homo Sacer*. In order to understand how taxable life reinstates the element of sacrifice to bare life, I will bring into discussion two texts that deal with the concept of the sacred: Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence” and Jean Luc Nancy’s reading of the sacred as “the distinct.”³⁷

The tension between inclusion and exclusion, possibility and impossibility, is the locus of Agamben’s bare life: “life exposed to death,” “the originary political element” (88) which becomes political “through its very capacity to be killed” (89). Bare life refers to “life that is excluded from the protection of the law” (Daniel McLoughlin, *The Sacred and the Unspeakable*, N.pag.). Agamben’s bare life is a juridical category born not only of sovereignty’s institution but also of the law. Bare life’s value extends to ethics and politics as opposed to a qualified life, that is, a good life worth being protected by the law. This Aristotelian terminology, *zoē* versus *bios*, with which Agamben introduces his analysis, signifies the very wound of which *la hija* speaks in the opening page of *Impuesto*. It implies that there is a natural dehiscence in the concept life once it is captured by the political sphere: bare life is separated from good life which, in turn,

³⁷ This is not a banal gesture for as Leland de la Durantaye has shown, in the very origin of Agamben’s definition of bare life lies Benjamin’s concept of bare life as depicted in his *Critique of Violence*. (Agamben: *A Critical Introduction* 203). Likewise, the inclusion of Nancy’s idea of the sacred as “the distinct” in relation to images serves us to elucidate the fundamental sacral character of that which has been shorn of its political status. In any case, the sacred is someone or something that has become visible as such only after an act, a divestment.

implies that we all are both qualified and bare regarding power and that only in the maternal bosom of the father's law can we find ourselves covered. This dehiscence is then both constitutive and constituted.

Impuesto's complexity resides in the fact that Eltit is positioning this primordial site as the problematic origin of political inclusion, nation, and history. In other words, *Impuesto* questions the legitimacy of the political's domain over life. It asks whose life is considered political and according to which principles; it examines the ways in which the political takes possession of, determines, and classifies bodies. It further interrogates the intertwining between sovereignty, law, and history in using and abusing this bare life for their constitution.

The mother's and daughter's bodies, spaces, and histories are included by the political while excluded from it by virtue of their very bodies, spaces, and histories. Although, as Agamben teaches us, sovereignty's power in an act of withdrawal of itself, by removing itself in a suspension of its own law, creates bare life and, as such, bare life is an inevitable byproduct of political life. Bare life, in this regard, it is not an originary life; it is born after entering into a relation with the law, after having been stripped of its political attributes or of law's protection. I argue that there is in this excluded inclusion an ethical force that can de-stabilize the very notion of sovereignty by way of ethical remembrance which introduces a new value to political and historical interpretation, by questioning the very origin, the dehiscence, of the political.³⁸ This fracture not only

³⁸ Chantal Mouffe, following Carl Schmitt's concept of antagonism, posits the primary element of the political in the distinction friend/enemy. Briefly, for Schmitt, there is an "ever present possibility of the friend/enemy distinction and the conflictual nature of politics constitutes the necessary starting point for envisaging the aims of democratic politics. Only by acknowledging 'the political' in its antagonistic dimension can we pose the central question for democratic politics" (*On the Political* 14). What is interesting to me here is the recognition of a constitutive exclusion as the mark of what is political. My project similarly tries to redefine this exclusion by approaching this we/they distinction from another

wounds the fabric of the political but it divides the world into principles of visibility. As Leland de la Durantaye notices, the untranslated epigraph to *Homo Sacer* says that “[t]he law has no existence in itself; its essence is instead the life of the lives of individuals—seen from a certain side” (*Giorgio Agamben: A Critical introduction* 203). The essence of the law is perspectival: it resides in what or whom it sees, from where it sees it, and what it does with what it sees. Thus, the side from which the law sees life determines what can be called life worth including within the political. Therefore, the law supports and perpetuates, if not constitutes, the politics of visibility. In this sense, the characters of *Impuesto* are what the law does not see, at least, not anymore, for one can assume it did see them first, at some originary time, so as to denude them secondarily. *La penumbra* is, then, paradoxically cast by the wound and it is the wound. In other words, the wound endures, endlessly perpetuating itself in *la penumbra*.

I want to show that *taxable life* implies a more complex notion than that of bare life for it imbricates primarily a sexually differentiated life, its place, and function as such within history. Taxable life a) is a modality of living, b) it exists inside and outside of history, c) it is defined by history’s oblivion, d) it shares bare life’s status though it refers to another origin, e) it can be and is sacrificed, and f) it is that which once cast out of the realms of history is subjected to oblivion. It will be, consequently, doubly forgotten.

perspective: “not the overcoming of the we/they opposition but the different way in which it is established. What democracy requires is drawing the we/they distinction in a way which is compatible with the recognition of the pluralism which is constitutive of modern democracy” (ibid.). What is also interesting in Mouffe’s work is the fact that if we construct the “they” differently, so the “we” is affected; the relational character of the political allows for a transformation from its interior articulation by reformulating the active locus of the “they.” Mouffe proposes a political relation which she calls agonism in which the conflictual relationship between “we” and “they” that occurs within the realm of enmity can be transformed into one of legitimate recognition of the other. Instead of enemies Mouffe proposes the term adversaries who “belong to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place. We could say that the task of democracy is to transform antagonism into agonism” (20).

Taxable life, in this sense, is reinforced (marked again) as such by the same oblivion that constituted it.

The difference between taxable life and bare life resides in that the former is able to be killed as well as sacrificed. For Agamben, and according to the Roman law, the sacred is declared as such after the commitment of a crime. Once declared sacred, *homo sacer* participates in a paradoxical status: he can be killed without impunity by anyone, but he cannot be sacrificed according to ritual practices. There is, in short, a ban of sacrifice upon him. For de la Durandaye, there is nothing really surprising about this double status for:

homo sacer does not seem at first glance to be in such an inexplicable situation. One cannot, after all, sacrifice that which no longer has any worth, and in such a case of banishment the *homo sacer* cannot represent a sacrifice for the group for the simple reason that he is no longer a part of it. He cannot be used for ritual purposes because he has been declared unclean, his rights have been rendered forfeit, and his status as a member of the group has effectively been suspended. (*Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* 207)

What Agamben is looking for in the institution of the *homo sacer* is “an originary *political* structure that is located in a zone prior to the distinction between sacred and profane, religious and juridical” (74, Agamben’s emphasis). I am not concerned here with the origin of neither bare life nor with the origin of what I call taxable life as much as with its ethical value and functioning within history.³⁹ What interests me in particular is the sacrificial economy of which *homo sacer* does not participate (the sacrificial ban) and it is precisely here where I introduce the concept of taxable life. For that reason, Benjamin’s sacred life, which resembles Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of the sacred as “distinct,” is useful here.

³⁹ In this respect, Agamben’s work can be called philological whereas mine is a genealogical attempt, as proposed by Nietzsche, to trace the value and preservation of a concept or institution.

For Nancy, the sacred “is set aside, removed, cut off. In one sense, then, religion and the sacred are opposed, as the bond is opposed to the cut” (*The Ground of the Image* 1). Clearly Nancy is alluding here to the etymological origin of religion as *religare*, as double bond. Bare life, in this sense, still belongs to the realm of the sacred (as that which is *cut off* from the polis, from the law, from sacred rituals) and so does taxable life (as that which has been cut off from history, from politics, from recognition). The sacred thus “is what it is only through its separation” (ibid). Nancy calls it “the distinct” which:

according to its etymology, is what is separated by marks (the word refers back to *stigma*, a branding mark, a pinprick or puncture, an incision, a tattoo): what is withdrawn and set apart by a line or trait, by being marked also as withdrawn. (1-2)

The sacred as distinct introduces here the politics of visibility. There is a visible mark, something that allows us to recognize the sacred as sacred. How else can we know what has been cast out? In the case of taxable life, it is by virtue of what is visible (their racial, class, and sexual difference) that the main characters are marked as sacred; yet the mark withdraws them from the politics of the visible. Thus, the sacred as a visible mark is founded upon a visible mark and so taxable life, as I have been arguing, is doubly bare

As bare lives, *la madre y la hija* are expelled. They are, however, sacred only insofar as separation and by virtue of such expelling. As sacred lives, as distinct and marked, they are re-admitted not into the polis but into a sacrificial economy *qua* exchange value. Bare life supposes a sanctioned violence (she can be killed by anyone and it will not be considered a crime). Taxable life participates in this sanction insofar as it is “distinct” but it also subject to an unsanctioned violence once outside the law: the sacrificial violence. Taxable life, consequently, is the object of both legitimate and illegitimate violence. They have been legitimately expelled and declared sacred, and as

sacred, outside the law and its protection, they are subjected to yet another kind of violence, the *malversación sanguínea* of which *la madre y la hija* attest. It may be argued here that they are legitimately subjected to the sacrificial violence outside of the law since the law itself has cast them out; however, this is so only as a foundational moment, as a foundational act of separation and distinction (and here, of course, legitimacy has nothing to do with ethics). The possibility for such a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence is the origin of Benjamin's critique; the evaluation (an interpretation of value) which allows such a distinction is the origin of mine. The distinct and the sacred imply a separation and, as such, they belong to the realm of the exception if we attend to its etymology (*ex-capere*). This separation is double: *la madre y la hija* have been separated due to their mark as different, as *ipse*, and as those from whom the law has withdrawn. By virtue of their *ipseity*, they have been regarded sacred (distinct for Nancy) and by sovereignty's power, they have been abandoned according to law's withdrawal (according to Agamben). Eltit's taxable life is both forsaken and stigmatized. It is doubly bare.

For Nancy:

the sacred is what it is only through its separation, and there is no bond with it... The sacred is what, of itself, remains set apart, at a distance, and with which one forms no bond (or only a very paradoxical one). It is what one cannot touch (or only by a touch without contact). To avoid confusion, I will call it *the distinct* (*The Ground of the Image* 1).

What is revealing to me here is the form that such a paradoxical bond may take in taxable life and which often manifests itself in the sacrifice whereby the indistinct, to use Nancy's language, touches the distinct. The main characters, according to this logic, can be both killed and sacrificed. They are precisely subjected to such a paradoxical (and utilitarian) contact through sacrifice where they remain constantly marked as distinct,

supporting, or rather, reinscribing the distinction that marked them as sacred and sustaining the production and iteration of values of visibility. Being touched again through the economy of sacrifice introduces the use and abuse of the main character's bodies.

“The distinct is at a distance...What is not near can be set apart in two ways: separated from contact or from identity. The distinct is distinct according to these two modes: it does not touch, and it is dissimilar” (2). I have mentioned something already about taxable life's *ipseity* and I will return to this in the final section. From a distance, the sacred exercises its disruptive action (*action at distans* to borrow Nietzsche's vocabulary), and so *Impuesto* in the very place of the sacred, as sacred, acts upon history, at a distance, without ever crossing this distance, through the register of memory. It acts as an *a priori*, as a condition of possibility for history's and politics' inclusion and exclusion. It is only as sacred, as distinct, that their bodies can be sacrificed (and therefore have a value for history) and so they need to be perpetually maintained as sacred in order to continue this paradoxical bond and thus preserve their availability for usufruct. “What is withdrawn from this world has no use, or has a completely different use” (ibid). It is in their withdrawal, by being withdrawn, that they acquire a different use. Caught in an endless intertwining of temporalities, *la madre y la hija* always reaffirm the act by which they have been deemed sacred; their usufruct legitimizes the time of the first institution of the sacred but always, and at the same time, producing a time that, outside of history, as distinct from historical time, cannot entirely be recovered or captured for it belongs to the sacred as distinct, as separated, that is, it belongs to that which does not belong.

The time of the sacrifice is what traverses and connects the visible and the invisible, what represents the transgression of the time of history and the time of memory. The classification of something as sacred brings with it its transgression; both are born at the same time. But both, the sacred and the sacrifice, are created from within history in a single act, from within power whose effect, nevertheless, falls upon the outside or what has been cast off. “The essence of such a crossing lies in its *not* establishing a continuity: it does not suppress the distinction,” but reinforces it (3). It is the very same separation that bonds and connects. Now, the concept of the sacred as distinct is useful here in order to reintroduce the element of sacredness into bare life. However, in the case of taxable life, as well as bare life, it is not accurate to suggest, as Nancy does, that “[t]he distinct *distinguishes itself*: it sets itself apart and at a distance, it therefore marks this separation and thus causes it to be remarked” (6). It is not accurate since both bare life and taxable life are produced by an act—the sovereign ban in the former and history’s oblivion in the latter. Taxable life does not set itself apart. If that were the case, sacrifice as a transgression as well as the entire sacrificial economy would imply a sublation (a purification) of their bodies and with that, their bodies would have the power to bring into the realm of the sacred that which it is not.

We can now revise Benjamin’s “Critique on Violence” and his distinction between law-making and law-preserving and the distinction between mythical and divine violence. The first distinction supposes:

the founding violence, the one that institutes and positions law (... “law making violence”) and the violence that conserves, the one that maintains, confirms, insures the permanence and enforceability of law.” (Derrida *The Mystical Foundation of Authority* 31)

It is in order to preserve the law that the law withdraws itself, generating bare life, but once bare life has thus been constituted, it threatens the law as its outside. This is why *la madre y la hija* call themselves “anarquistas” for once they are outside of the law they are united as a-political with respect to the *polis*. Taxable life is a result of violence as law-preserving, of “violence as a means,” but if we go to the foundation of the nation, taxable life is both law-preserving and law-making where taxable life is at the same time the content of the law and the preservation of such content (the *a priori* element I defined above). At the juncture of both, taxable life preserves power; as the point of juncture, taxable life is begotten by the foundational logic of national myths in which the violence required for national constitution has the power of mythical law. What is interesting here to note is the fact that law as myth and mythical violence belong to the realm of the a-historical and not to the time of history so the foundational act exercises its first violence, to put it crudely, outside of time, as natural right. “Mythical violence is bloody power over mere life [bare life] for its own sake, divine violence pure power over all life for the sake of the living. The first demands sacrifice, the second accepts it,” taxable life, insofar as bare life, is subjected once and again to mythical violence (for violence depends upon its own repetition), but since the law has withdrawn already from taxable life and thus it has been defined as sacred, it cannot touch taxable life and thus it must share its monopoly of violence or rather it must bequeath it to the economy of the sacrifice. This is the distribution of violence. On the other hand, the mythical violence that both creates and perpetuates taxable life demands the continuous sacrifice, through a continuous transgression, of taxable life (Benjamin 297). The violence to which taxable life is subjected by the economy of sacrifice derives from the fact that taxable life is no longer

“before the law.” Analogously, the oblivion to which history subjects *la madre y la hija* depends upon the fact that taxable life is no longer before history, and this *before* here implies a presence to be present. Outside the law, outside of history, taxable life is the product of a foundational violence and of an annihilating (sacrificial) violence.

Therefore, the possibilities to contest the law and history do not come from within them but from a time outside of history: the time of memory. I argue that Eltit has traced, creatively,⁴⁰ taxable life to the origins of the nation in the XIX century for they are supported and created by a mythical discourse whose force, in order to take up existence, demands a sacrifice. Taxable life is sacrificed life by violence as a means to both create and preserve the law, but once it acquires this character, violence, too, morphs and merges with the law.

Femina Sacra

We may now come back to bare life in its relation to taxable life. Agamben’s project is concerned with the “hidden point of intersection between the juridico-institutional and the biopolitical models of power” (6). He situates this intersection as the origin of sovereign power in the political inclusion of “bare life” as excluded from “the city of men” (7). So, “[i]n what way does bare life dwell in the *polis*?” (8), asks Agamben, to which I reply through Eltit: it dwells in the penumbra and in *la penumbra* as taxable life. Agamben’s bare life and Eltit’s taxable life are in opposition to a qualified political existence (life included in the polis, the city of man). They are in principle

⁴⁰ I say creatively for neither *Impuesto* nor I are concerned with real origins but with strategic and creative appropriations of the past, with creative origins, that by themselves and within constellated forms are capable of unburying sedimented structures that support and conceal the use and abuse of the past. In other words, *Impuesto* creates the possibility for new readings of the past.

created similarly by the movement of law's recession, but they differ in various respects: their rapport with sacrifice, their relation to history, and their temporalities.

Both Eltit and Agamben are concerned with sovereignty's origin but their archeological gesture unearths different sediments of political life. For Agamben, *homo sacer* is a masculine institution established by the patrician and archaic Roman law which befell primarily on the son. The sacred life that can be killed but cannot be sacrificed has still an added layer of nudity. Eltit's taxable life is both able to be killed and sacrificed; it is politically disposable and economically (re)usable. History easily accommodates both aspects, the use and abuse, and this is something Nietzsche in his *Untimely Meditations* knew well, echoing King Thammus' distrust of the power of writing over memory.⁴¹ Sacrifice is reintroduced in taxable life as opposed to the unsacrificeable character of the *homo sacer* via law, history, and economics. I have hitherto shown its relationship to the law. Regarding history, a structure parallel to that of the law operates. History, Levinas tells us, by definition, sacrifices interiority (*Totality and Infinity* 57) and it is precisely this interiority *qua* memory that Eltit unveils and opposes to history in *Impuesto* (30, 86). Economically, they are doubly sacrificed as lives without logos and as commodities. Firstly, if life has been qualified as good life, as political existence according to the law, once the law has withdrawn, life "devolves" to a base state shared with animals, what Aristotle calls *zoē*. Interestingly, this is the very distinction to which Agamben makes recourse in the beginning of *Homo Sacer* to introduce bare life. *Zoē* returns qualified life to a state prior to the political, to dehiscence. Contrary to Agamben's assertions, bare life, as animal, is reintroduced to the realm of sacrifice. As Bataille notes, sacrifice, as "a suspension of the commandment not to kill," operates via substitution of animals for

⁴¹See Plato's *Phaedrus* on the myth of writing's origin.

men; if taboos “tended to separate beast from man” (*Erotism* 81), the suspension of taboo will narrow that gap. Bare life breaks the “fundamental limit to man’s sovereignty” (ibid). Wouldn’t life, as animal, devoid of political qualification, return to the realm of the sacred?:

As soon as human beings give rein to animal nature in some way we enter the world of transgression forming the synthesis between animal nature and humanity through the persistence of the taboo; we enter a sacred world, a world of holy things. (Bataille 84)

La madre y la hija speak as sacrificial bodies. Their bodies are records, traces, the very tension between the visible and the invisible, the passage from exterior history to interiority for “[l]os cuerpos, los nuestros portan los signos más confiables para establecer el primer archivo del desastre” (127).

Bare life is included in its exclusion, that is, in its capacity to be killed, but such exclusion in time “frees itself in the city and becomes both the subject and object of the conflicts of the political order” (9). Bare life is subject and object, but as taxable lives, *la madre y la hija* dwell in-between subject and object in a neutralizing zone wherein their exclusion (*la penumbra*) hides and sustain their inclusion as “*impuesto*,” as a carnal tax, as unredeemed and unredeemable bodies. The status of Agamben’s *homo sacer* has

[t]he particular character of the double exclusion into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed. This violence—the unsanctionable killing that, in his case, anyone may commit—is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege. Subtracting itself from the sanctioned forms of both human and divine law, this violence opens a sphere of human action that is neither the sphere of the *sacrum facere* nor that of the profane action. (82-3)

This is the sphere of sovereignty where sacred life has been captured; bare life,

Benjamin’s sacred life, is sovereignty’s ban. I claim *Impuesto* embodies and bears witness to a more ancient political bond than that of sovereignty. Borrowing Carl

Schmitt's definition of the sovereign, Agamben claims he is the one "who decides on the exception" (*Homo Sacer* 11). For the latter then, bare life as excluding inclusion takes place through sovereign's ban. Nonetheless, there are figures whose excluding inclusion operates within sovereignty regardless of any political or exceptional ban. In other words, there is a deeper bare life than that of states of exception. It is not just life as such that is at stake in sovereign power but a sexually differentiated life which is doubly excluded in reference to power or rather whose inclusion is always banned. Eltit's taxable life is more ancient than the sovereign's ban, which reintroduces to bare life the domain of the sacrificial, a life which can politically be both killed and sacrificed, a *femina sacra*, whose organic life as abjection goes beyond Bataille's or Benjamin's logic of the sacred and Agamben's logic of political exception. This taxable life is first and foremost feminine.⁴² We can find an axiomatic correlative here to Agamben's politicization of life in totalitarian regimes and pose history as totalitarian by definition and not exceptionally, whereby history also produces bare life and whereby history also politicizes life; this means that there is an intimate bond between history and law. As history, taxable life differs from the set *homo sacer* represents. The exclusion to which Eltit refers is multiple: *la madre y la hija* are in the penumbra, outside history, outside the law, but not outside of economy, hence their sacrificial character. Bare life implies that law has suspended itself and, in doing so, life is deprived of its politico-juridical status. The law, sovereignty, abandons life and submits it to violence. Agamben quotes Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of "unsacrificeable existence" and deems it "insufficient to grasp the violence at issue in modern biopolitics" (113). *Homo sacer* seems to embody such

⁴² Only women live in the hospital with *la madre y la hija*; they all provide organs for the doctor's national experiments.

complex violence devoid of any sacrificial character for, according to Agamben, modernity's principle of sacredness seems to have lost its archaic semantic weight (114). Hitherto, I have tried to show that bare life is also insufficient with regards to illegitimate violence as well as to sexually differentiated life condemned both to physical and symbolic violence, which I have expressed with the idea of the perpetual ban. It is true that sacrifice does not belong to the realm of the religious anymore, but this does not mean that there are not sacrificial structures still operating within totalitarian systems, as I have shown with Nancy's concept of the distinct and Benjamin's sovereign violence. Modern democracies subtract and immolate the other while offering her to a greater good: the law. Since we are mortals, history exists to heal the wounds of future oblivion and decides upon life and death, inclusion and exclusion in favor of what Agamben calls "qualified life." We are to be cautious when using *homo sacer*'s double status: as bare life, *homo sacer* does not answer for all violence, particularly for the symbolic one to which Eltit returns in each one of her novels. *Homo sacer* cannot answer for women's specific position within historico-political valuations. Eltit certainly inscribes *Impuesto* into bare life's domain, "the politics of the great totalitarian states of the twentieth century," (*Homo Sacer* 119) for what else can Pinochet's regime be! But her gesture goes beyond it, or rather, before it, and thus she traces a longer "state of exception." *La madre y la hija* have been placed in the hospital for two hundred years, since 1810, the moment in which the nation was founded; since then, they have lived in (perpetual) exception.

History's in-between.

Impuesto a la carne is an allegorical document of that what does not yet belong to

historiographic documentation. The daughter tells us that the history of their torture is a secret since:

Jamás van a ser públicos nuestros secretos, ni las maquinaciones, porque cuando nosotras (mi madre y yo) estemos muertas, pero muertas de verdad, no como ahora, ellos van a destruir mi documentación, harán polvo mis escritos (86).

The daughter knows that what supports history is the status of the document as a trace that stands for or rather that “takes the place of the past,” as Ricœur’s explains (*The Reality of the Historical Past* 3). The place of the document within history “makes the difference between history and fiction” and so the reality of the mother and daughter historical past would be deemed fictitious or altogether invisible, unintelligible, without the daughter’s writing to support or verify their past (1). The historical document mediates between the place of the public and the private and it has the force to remove the trace from the past and make it visible, public, and intelligible. This, of course, is a direct criticism to the ways in which documentations are handled and selected by historians; memory, in this sense, serves to extend, contradict, and reconfigure the value of historical documentation. The document’s status is that of truth; its degree of veracity supports the historical interpretation of the past and only under this assumption does the document serve in the reconstruction of the past. The document as a trace of the past “is left by the past, [and] it *stands for* the past” (2). *Impuesto* is the positive presence of a past that was and it represents it however, as the daughter constantly claims during her narration, it is an historical reference that will never be historical documentation. In its not-being, in its impossibility of being recognized as history lies, nonetheless, its ethical dimension. *Impuesto* operates a reversal of its negative status by affirming such impossibility as the source of any ethical possibility to recount the past. The memory of

the past, the trace, is not lost for their very loss (the possibility of their documents to be burned after their death) is the source of memory. I express this paradoxical situation with the idea of the in-betweeness.

The very status of the historical document as truth and of memory in relation to the past proves that as such the past cannot be known. It can be imagined, re-enacted, re-traced but not known in itself. This essential negativity in relation to the historical past reinforces the locus from where the daughter speaks. The past is excessive to knowledge and appropriation, consequently, any representation of the past is always a creation of the past which highlights the role of imagination regarding any work of interpretation and any scientific historical pretension. *Impuesto* as a reversal of negativity is sheer positivity. It stands for the past's excess. It is the positivity of testifying that something did happen. It is the positivity of testifying that there are other multiple histories.

Memory, however, can be and has been treated as a document in the process of historical reconstruction; this is what Ricœur calls the “documentary phase” or the process of registering memory which has two stages: *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*. The first one is declarative memory and the second one is documentary proof (*Memory, History, Forgetting* 146). Eltit's work, in this sense, belongs in/to a middle ground, a bridging point between memory and history—an in-between where memory is evoked and history convoked— and it serves as much as a document as a declarative statement of history's abuses which the daughter calls “la costumbre histórica por adormecer y matar” (72). The impossibility of the mother's and daughter's story to become history is essayed by the narration itself as the pressing need to make their history possible in spite of this “costumbre histórica.” The narration stands as much for

the necessity of historical inclusion and recognition as for its total impossibility.

Impuesto a la carne dwells in this in-between mirroring the *penumbra* which *madre e hija* also inhabit. In the “in-between,” where memory becomes proof and history insofar as discursive inclusion in *la patria*, the invisible becomes visible. This is what Levinas calls “sacred history.”⁴³ (Cohen xxiii) At an aesthetic level, at the level of imaging, and at a rhetoric level, at the level of allegory, Eltit’s novel criticizes and perforates historiographical operations while having, at the same time, historical ambition and thus the daughters “human program” is:

apelar a un escrito sin pretensiones, escalofriantemente sencillo, a un simple diario local o a una memoria que no se termine de comprender del todo y que, sin embargo, nos permita hacer un milímetro de historia (31)

Impuesto a la carne is an invitation to history to revisit its content (what is included within history’s annals) and its methodology (how does it speak in behalf of the past and how does it treat the documents that support the reconstruction of the past, which at the end, also implies a process of inclusion and exclusion). Her work, accordingly, is the ethical imperative *par excellence*. She poses the necessity of a future time and space for the invisible (what has been shadowed) to inform history. Through an aesthetic object, Eltit links memory, history, and politics to a genesiactal time where both history and memory have obscured their very origin—the content of *la penumbra*, where the strength and malleability of the past reside. Eltit’s creative gesture is to bring together the very common dialectical image of shadow and light to go beyond it, to overcome the

⁴³ It is however difficult to call *Impuesto a la carne* a sacred or holy history as Levinas would have it for he is talking about the ethical relationship that the Jews have with their God. There is no God in Eltit’s work but an ethical relation established towards the other. It is “carried by a people”; it does “coexist with history” (*Unforseen History* 97). It cannot be called profane as a mere opposition.

dichotomy by spacing, stretching the middle. The in-between, the interval, is the site of multiple dialectics which have an immobile center. On the contrary, the point of contact, the center, if any, is time *qua* change in itself. Thus, only in the snapshot that registering memory signifies, time can *a posteriori* be perceived and tensed; this historical snapshot is but one bead in Benjamin's rosary. Not only has the in-between no clear center, it has no space (national territory, for instance) to which to attach history. *Impuesto a la carne* is, in a radical sense, a criticism to Hegel's idea of history, as the big narrative of nations and states according to a homogenous time of causality and progression. The penumbra is the outside of nation within nation, while partaking in its sovereign space; mother and daughter have been occluded, denied, and rendered invisible; furthermore, while partaking in nation's space, they have been banned from sovereignty's protection. How can the history of an invisible people be built? How can their space be recognized? That is the fundamental *ethos* of *Impuesto a la carne*.

The daughter appears to be alone in her intention since the mother is not interested in the future but in survival, which implies that within the very registers of pre-historical discourses, memory, testimony, and document compete among themselves. The daughter has "*la obligación de poner en marcha una historia (efímera, soslayable)*" (128). The mother, in contrast, does not wish to become visible; darkness, *la penumbra*, bestows her with protection and survival, however precarious. For the mother, their history can survive as absence, as sediment, as that which is invisible for that invisibility itself creates the historical and social space for survival. Between mother and daughter there is, therefore, a genealogical tension. The daughter is interested in recovering,

begetting, and the transmission of genealogies while the mother disavows her very origin and in consequence, the constructability of a future-otherwise:

tal vez ha llegado la hora de entregar todos los antecedentes y entregar a los interesados un recuento abiertamente biográfico que consiga cautivar a las masas que esperan, que espera, que esperan, el momento (iluminado) de la confesión. (128)

The content of the history *Impuesto a la carne* wishes to write is defined by elements improper to history, as I explained above. This is the un-capturability of the saying by the said. Firstly, the daughter defines the narration as a “gesta hospitalaria” (1) inscribing it within the realm of the *chanson de geste*; nonetheless, the anonymity of the characters, “unas mujeres solas en el mundo,” “dos ancianas,” opposes the heroic character of the *chanson* wherein the hero not only is a man but has a royal background and a name which sustains his actions (31). Secondly, the *chanson* tells the development of the hero and, as such, it does not remember his past but follows his growth. *Impuesto a la carne* is, conversely, tanatographic; it is the story of how “nuestro ímpetus orgánico terminó por fracasar” (1). This is the story of their decaying, of their anonymous path to death. Thirdly, the content of their story is not about heroic actions but about their historical mistreatment and deferral (82). Lastly, its exemplary value resides in their passion (from *padecere*) and splendor because, like Antigone, they are between two deaths.⁴⁴ The daughter’s intention is illumination, the unveiling of their story not for their own sake but

⁴⁴ I speak of splendor here in two ways: in a Nietzschean way for both *la madre y la hija* affirm life because of death and in a Lacanian sense. The splendor of the daughter, in particular, has to do “with the place it occupies as intermediary between two fields that are symbolically differentiated” (*Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 248). This in-between where the daughter resides is the limit, and, like Antigone, “life can only be approached, can only be lived or thought about, from the place of that limit where her life is already lost, where she is already on the other side. But from that place she can see it and live it as something already lost” (280). The penumbra where *la hija* experiences her path to death is already beyond the limit; it has crossed the limit and from beyond that crossing line she speaks. Entombed in the hospital, the in-between marks the limit and stretches beyond it. *Impuesto* does exactly that: it spaces in the frontiers of the in-between so as to push the limits of history, so as to, from the shadows, intertwine light and shadow, adumbrate the light and let some historical light illumine the beyond.

for others who await the transformation of the future through confession. This is yet another opposition to history. The documenting process stems from an intimate register, from “nuestros secretos” which “[j]amás van a ser públicos” (86). Confession then illuminates; the novel becomes the strategic locus, the confessional, for such intimacy, for unveiling the interiority of *la penumbra* despite the national efforts “para no dejar el menor rastro de la hemorragia maternal.” (21) This interiority is itself a radical interruption to history’s universality for:

[u]niversal history belongs to the functional relatedness of works, including the work of the social fact itself, but the inverted historical time of interiority announces the possibility of a continuous act of breaking with historical totality. (Horowitz, *Ethics at a Standstill*, 50)

The story of *la madre y la hija*, their trajectory to death as confession, as interiority, is the possibility of de-totalizing history by breaking not only with history’s aim to totalize but by introducing a new temporality to history. If memory here acts as a trace of the past, it does so as a non-totality. It knows it cannot be the totality of the past but only a “minúscula huella.” This is yet another of *Impuesto*’s reversals: the inversion of the time of history, a social, public time, by that of memory. To this I will return shortly. *Impuesto a la carne* discloses the sacrificial structure of historical discourses whereby competing discourses overpower each other through an evaluative process; in other words, it shows the form and the content of historico-political and ethical interpretations and enters this economy to oppose to history the register of memory:

[a]un en el centro de lo que será mi fracaso voy a completar esta tarea necesaria para adquirir fortaleza y hasta una partícula de influencia. Entraré en mi cuerpo como en un libro para transformarlo en memoria. Quiero preparar mi cuerpo para convertirlo en una crónica urgente y desesperada (129).

Impuesto does oppose memory to history, certainly, but with the object of turning memory into the-otherwise-than-history, through the materialization of intimacy. A

necessary caveat here, the daughter is quite clear regarding what to expect of this materialization or rather how will memory intertwine with history's epistemology; she knows that her story is not meant to be totally legible. Absolute legibility will permit their story to lose some of the strength they carry as the unsaying. Total legibility will imply a belonging to the saying as history. As memory and only as memory, their story can de-totalize history and be un-total. This materialization, however, does not access historical discourses; it is rather, in process, in time, not yet fixed by social sanctions. The daughter's body is here the book, the technology, and materiality for registering; her body is the mark of exteriority by which memory either enters or defies the annals of history and, as such, it belongs to the expanded field of inscription of which Ricœur speaks. Her project is that of futurity, and the future, the yet-to-come, is what imposes upon her the ethical imperative to perforate history or rather to enter the economy of interpretative valuation:

luchamos para que el terrible y hostil paso del tiempo nos garantice que en los próximos doscientos años que se avecinan va a empezar a circular nuestro legado. No, me dice mi madre, nunca va a circular ni un pedacito de palabra...Ni siquiera en cuatrocientos años" (31).

The daughter, in this sense, wishes to generate a new value; one which she assumes has little power to compete with history in spite of her mother's hopelessness. Nevertheless, the urgency of her past is what presses against the present. The urgency is the futurity of the other—the body of the other as a book, surface of inscription, and container of memory. Her body as memory and memory as the other of history put history itself into question. The body of the daughter not only speaks of her past and her torture but also, insofar as the bearer of genealogies since she carries within her body the body of her

mother, she speaks for and about a longer history of abuse against the female body; she speaks for and about a longer history of abuse against the other.

As Ricœur reminds us, Plato in the *Phaedrus* values history for it criticizes memory; it “compensate[s] its weaknesses on the cognitive as much as the pragmatic plane” (147). As a counterbalance to the corrective value of history, Ricœur claims, “we have nothing better than testimony” as the point of origin. There are indeed several issues with the relationship between memory and history thus established, the first being that it assumes an evolution,⁴⁵ a bettering of the past from memory to history whereby not only orality is looked down upon but also different forms of embodied memory, what Taylor has called “the repertoire” (*The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20). The second issue is its alleged origin. I wish to contest these implications with interiority’s alternate form of inscription, not as substitution to history, but as an enhancement, an excess to it. I take my cue from Ricœur’s nomenclature and take up again his notion of inscription:

whose amplitude exceeds that of writing in the precise sense of the fixation of oral expressions of discourse by a material support. The dominant idea is that of external marks adopted as a basis and intermediary for the work of memory (147).

It is in this ample sense of inscription that the body of the daughter represents a material support, defined by its external marks, certainly, but not exclusively, for she has to submerge herself in the interiority of her body to tell her story and in that interiority not only her memory inhabits but also her mother so when she submerges herself into the interiority of her body she encounters her mother. In order to use Ricœur’s concept of the mark as amplitude to address the place of in-between, I need to start with the witness’

⁴⁵ I wish to entertain here a wordplay: history understood as the evolution of memory would be an uncreative evolution, to play with Bergson’s title, for evolution assumes the opposite of stability and stagnation, that is, mutability, accumulation, growth, fluidity. If memory as latency allows its endless re-creation and elaboration according to present needs, memory, as previous to history, is the creative evolution of the past.

will to remember, to exteriorize memory. For Ricœur, the witness starts with the “I was there” wherein memory is defined as the imperfect past tense (I was) in conjunction with the adverb (there) which obviously locates a double distance both temporal and spatial between memory and recollection. For the French philosopher the witness speaks from the past. However, in Eltit’s work, testimony is not in the past tense; it comes from “I am here,” a present tense (I am) and an adverb of place (here) which assumes, conversely, a double proximity, or rather an immersion in and encroachment on time and space. This is the strange Levinasean present that “comes from the past” (*Existence and Existents* 98). Mother and daughter then speak from “I am here,” the living experience. The point in time from where daughter and mother stand to tell their story is the ever-present witnessing (their tense is the continuous present for their suffering and exclusion has not passed), the living experience of time and space, which is also the living experience of a remembrance for, as Bergson reminds us, the totality of the past coalesces with the present which means that when we jump into the past, when we recall the past, we do it from and in the present where the past (as ever present in its wholeness) can be accessed (*Matter and Memory* 176-181, 210-226). If we follow Ricœur’s account of the “I was there,” the living experience is eliminated. This is so because he follows Kant’s transcendental aesthetics⁴⁶ and dyad of time and space and takes as his starting point the latter. I follow Bergson here who, conversely, starts from temporality for, as he states in *Matter and Memory*, “questions concerning the subject and the object, their distinction and union, should be asked in terms of time and not of space” (74, Bergson’s emphasis).

⁴⁶ For Kant both time and space are a priori and non-derivative, that is, pure. (See his *Critique of Pure Reason*, 153-162) However, as Bergson has shown, only time is a priori and space is constructed or derived from time’s spatialization. Homogenous space does not exist in principle for it is created by movement.

At this point, we can now come back to the question of inscription. Ricœur's cartographical and geographical account begins with "the mark of exteriority" (148). Here, Ricœur remains all too Platonic. However, as Bergson has also shown, this implies to sacrifice the beginning to the end (149). It is then not in the exteriority of writing as trace where the underside needs to be found but in the invisibility, in that which does not have a mark. The mark, of course, has within it, as its negative or as its difference, the invisible.⁴⁷ However, the invisible not as negativity but as difference resides in the origin previous to any mark, for the mark itself has erased it. "At the beginning," claims Ricœur, "we have the corporeal and environmental spatiality inherent to the evocation of memory" (148). Here, Ricœur seems to attribute memory to experience. This, nevertheless, is not the beginning for its very origin remains hidden by recollection, that is, we do not follow the memory that appears to us to pure memory, the reservoir of all the past: "if we did follow it, we would experience the actualized memory(-image) as an emissary from the past" (McLure *The Philosophy of Time* 17). Have we caught a contradiction in Ricœur's thought? How can the corporeal and environmental spatiality leave aside lived experience? Isn't the intersection between corporeity and space part of the realm of lived experience? Isn't time part of this intersection and, even more, the moment of such intersection?

The beginning, then, for Ricœur, has to do with space (the environment). If we start here, history becomes recognizable only as exteriority and, spatialized, it only becomes recognizable as causal; its constancy, what gives history identity, cohesion, will never allow change and difference. In this regard, his own concept of self as

⁴⁷ I use the concept of negativity as Hegel and Irigaray after him did, as *that which is not*. I use the word "difference" to refer to Bergson's contribution, as Deleuze reminds us in his *Bergsonism* to theories of difference for he "think[s] difference independently of any form of negation" (41).

encompassing sameness and difference, constancy and mutability becomes instrumental for what lies at the origin of his own definition of the self is time and not space.⁴⁸ Time as change. Ricœur's solution is what he calls narrative identity, for narration "mediates the extremes of the course of time: sameness and change" (Halsema, *Time in Feminist Phenomenology* 112). Although I, in principle, agree with Ricœur, I think the concept of mediation is better explained through other rhetorical figures which, in turn, can mediate in a larger scale and introduce peculiar and unexpected linkages between sameness and change. I argue it is not only the narrativity imbued in time but in the radical ontological jump inherent to time *qua* creation where history can find a way to incorporate difference within its discourses. *Impuesto*, in this sense, breaks the synchronous time of the same through the register of interiority. It is through time that history can incorporate the *ipse* as impermanence and mutability in the form of the promise, the paradigmatical ethical mode of being in Nietzsche's genealogy (*Genealogy of Morals* 51). History's lack of future constancy in the sense of keeping its promise is the "*puñalada por la espalda*"; it is the wound. This is, I claim, Eltit's project in *Impuesto a la carne*, to show that there is no promise and had there ever been one, "[l]a nación no cumplía con sus pactos" (76). History has betrayed the object of its discourse by taxing the body, a tax on the carnal which is double: it implies the open violence against women and outcasts on the one hand, and on the other, their exemption from history. It is a tax that subtracts their bodies and histories in sacrifice for a history of sameness. Sameness, in this sense, always demands the bloody sacrifice of the other. This is history's cruelty or a history of cruelty if we attend to the etymology of the word (*cruor*). It is in the promise of the other where

⁴⁸See Ricœur's *Oneself as Another*.

futurity resides. Isn't this Levinas' ethical definition of time? A time beyond being?⁴⁹

The in-between synthesizes the *ipse* insofar as it is non-identical, non-coincidental, excessive to history. It affects the interval, the dialectical process, with its openness to the future but also with its bridging the past (the moment where the promise was made) with that which is yet-to-come. For Ricœur, the promise denies time. I argue, on the contrary, that the promise affirms time in its entirety by willing to remember, by willing to commit yourself to time's openness and unpredictability. "The self is [...] situated in the interval of *idem* and *ipse*" (Halsema 114). I have until here tried to show a parallel corollary: History is also situated in a similar interval between its narrative and the promise of the other's history. Thus from this interval, in the in-betweenness, history can be the event, the interruption, and the inscription of the otherwise.

Conclusion

This far I have tried to show that *Impuesto*'s most striking ethical value is its evaluation of the historical national discourses according to their value to remedy, heal, or poison life.⁵⁰ When *Impuesto* declares that history has stabbed the main characters in the back, what I have called history's betrayal, this represents *Impuesto*'s negative to enter into the absorption of the said and that is why, although the daughter wishes for their story to become history, she knows that in so doing, in becoming part of historical documentation, their story, their memory, signifies a betrayal to the radical otherness she and her mother stand for, that is, their history is not that of being-otherwise, but an

⁴⁹ Beyond in the sense of beyond "Heidegger's Being and Husserl's determination of Being." (McLure 71) This is the opening of time towards the Other, outside of Being, or better, the time that has opened because it has ethically encountered the Other.

⁵⁰ See Nietzsche's 4th *Untimely Meditation*.

otherwise altogether, the other of being, that is, otherwise-than-being. As taxable life and due to their sexual, racial, and class difference, the main characters have been included within sacrificial economies as others, but not as a radical one. Memory seems to be the privileged site for the saying to swiftly be unsaid and thus removed from the absorption of the said, or the discourses of history. The site of memory in *Impuesto* –although not for Levinas who remains weary of both history and memory in their capture of what is immemorial/able: the radical other- represents the possibility of ceaselessly uttering the saying without betraying the saying. This is the ethics of responsibility performed in *Impuesto* which implies, to use Ricœur’s words “a denunciation fed by an accusation of betrayal” (“Otherwise: A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas’s ‘Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence’” 86). This betrayal is the mark of dominion, of the power of the said. *El grito* is the accusation. The most remarkable ethical act thus is not as much the interruption of the saying in the said but the unsaying of the saying in the said. *Impuesto*’s saying, its event, is of course already inscribed in the saying of the book, inevitably, but this is the main character’s sacrifice, its mimesis, in their search for historical recognition and political inclusion. Justice, recognition, and visibility are part of the said or rather, exist in the said. This fixation of the saying, however necessary, neither reduces nor precludes responsibility. A history-beyond-being, conceived in and about what is otherwise-than-being, it is alas! always re-absorbed into the synchronous aspect of language, however, the proximity, the approach, -the coming of the other as diachrony-, has brought us closer to that radical other which resides outside the time of history, and this exercise, this attempt alone to always reach towards this radical otherness is in itself an ethical effort to respond to the faceless call of the other, of the

other that inhabits beyond representation or that is not co-present with me. This proximity is the saying of *Impuesto*, making visible (or audible, since *Impuesto* is a scream, *el grito*?) the face that does not appear in history.

It can be argued that history, as the said, is always a betrayal of the saying, or it is so by definition and this would be, at least according to Levinas, true. However, and this is my wager with *Impuesto*, the tectonic movements that the saying and its ulterior unsaying inflict upon the smooth temporality of history, can, only if slightly, disjoint, striate historical time and thus push its limits beyond its own limits. In spite of Levinas own condemnation of memory, *Impuesto*'s scream comes from the infinite and elastic time of memory, as a gesture of justice or, as an approximation to it.

Impuesto is an attempt to bridge, to approximate an ethics of transcendence with an ethics of immanence; it moves along the possible and the impossible, between what we *should* do and what we *can* do. It is the impossibility of the saying what impulses *Impuesto* not as impossibility but as potentiality. The impossibility of the saying is the source of all trace and memory as such is only one trace, among many others, to create the past. This never ending source allows the daughter to do what she *can* do. *Impuesto* also tries to remind us that the distance, both in time and space, between possibility and impossibility, between the sacred and the profane, between memory and history, can be traversed even if it will ultimately fall back into the realm of history; for the gesture is not banal but necessary. Only thus we remember. This is *Impuesto*'s will to remember.

Ch. 3 Allegories of Memory: Precariousness, Abjection, and the Poetics of
Dissolution

“[O]n the tree of the future build we our nest.”

Zarathustra 115

“[H]ow we understand the past, and our links to it through reminiscence,
melancholy or nostalgia, prefigure and contain corresponding conceptions about the
present and future.”

Elizabeth Grosz

“Pensé que todo esto era una forma de recordar.”

Cecilia Vicuña

Cecilia Vicuña, the great weaver, is one of the most original and important female Chilean artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Although formally trained as a plastic artist, Vicuña has enjoyed a prolific and well-known career as a poet, performer, painter, sculptor, editor, and filmmaker. Founder of *La Tribu NO* in the 60's along with Chilean poet Claudio Bertoni and co-founder of Artists for Democracy in London in the 70's, Vicuña has always been driven by social and political struggles. In the early 70's, she was an active supporter of Salvador Allende and the left-wing party coalition known as *Unidad Popular* (UP). Her commitment to Allende's government and to the transformation of ankylosed, colonial political structures of class, race, and sex are central to her art; consequently, she was and is highly committed to the women's liberation movement which she conceives as indispensable for any revolutionary political thought or action (figure 1).

In 1973, after Salvador Allende's death on September 11, Vicuña, who was at the time in London, went into exile and settled in Bogotá, Colombia where she learned about Andean shamanism and oral traditions. She moved to New York City in 1980, where she currently lives. (memoriachilena.cl)

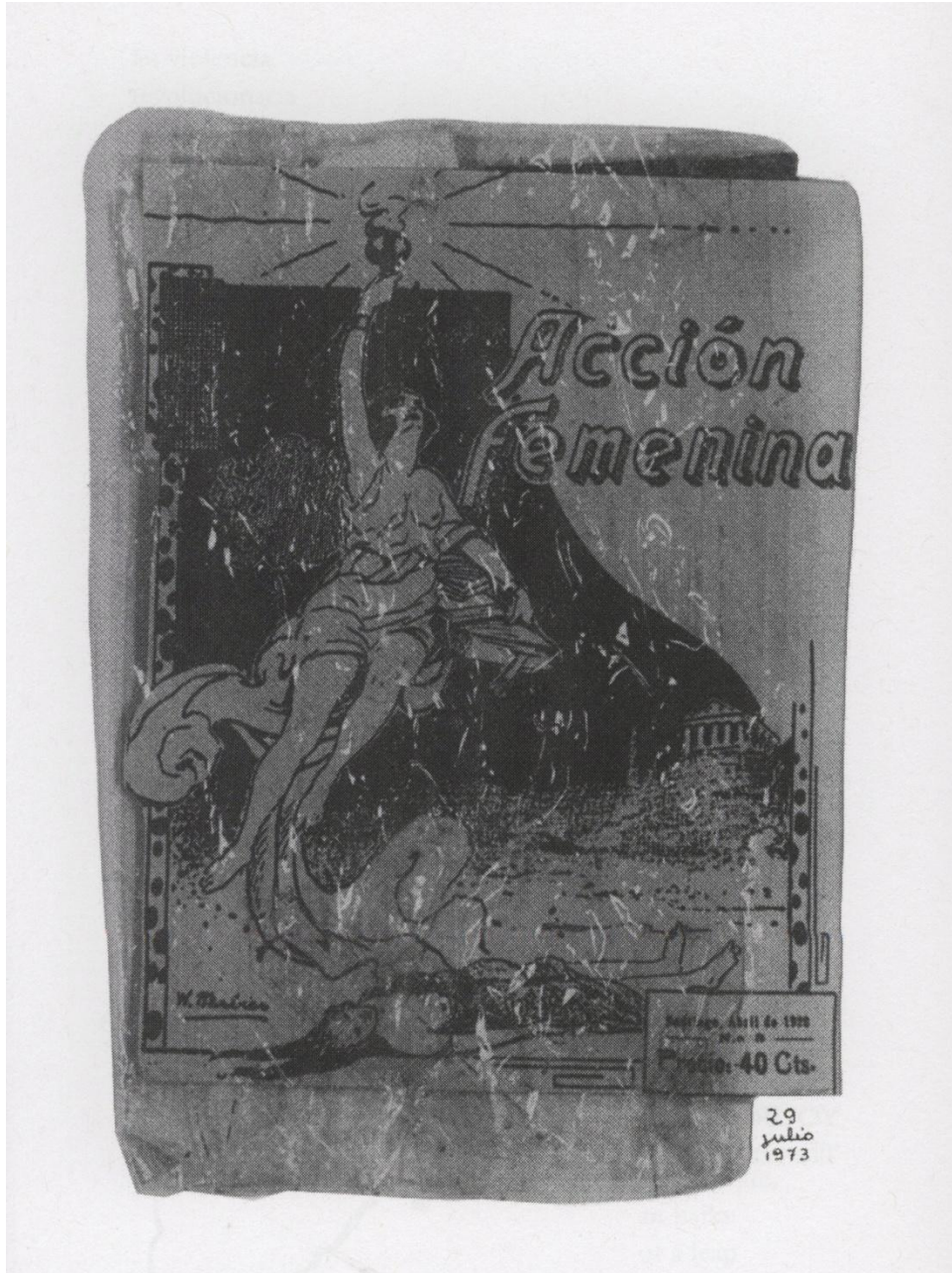


Figure 10. Acción femenina. Collage from 1973.

In accordance with her political views, Vicuña conceives the role of art both as a formal and a political search since:

[b]uscando la forma en los cuadros, no puedo evitar encontrar otras formas, concebir edificios para establecer un tipo de sociedad, porque cualquier búsqueda, cualquier investigación que no está asociada a la

búsqueda de una manera de vivir, es una búsqueda castrada, una ocupación apolítica que a nadie puede servir, o que sirve para mantener las estructuras que hoy están, estructuras que han sido establecidas para, inventadas para servir a unos pocos y explotar y destruir a los demás. (*Saborami* 68-9)

As a direct consequence of Vicuña's search for the plastic form, societal forms inevitably appear to her. I situate my analysis of her paradigmatic sculptures, *los precarios*, at the crossroads of her political and formal search as the transformation of pre-established political structures. I claim that Vicuña's project is eminently ethical not only because she is looking for "una manera de vivir" capable of including the lives of those who have been excluded from politics, "*los demás*," but because, in so doing, each sculpture, each poem, each painting, is a search for the life of the other, a bridging towards the other, a revelation of the time of the other not in its representation but only in its disappearance. Her aesthetics, in other words, is informed by an ethics of alterity.

In her second book from 1983, Vicuña traces an interesting etymological definition for *los precarios*, the small sculptures made of sea-drift which she invented when she was sixteen: "*Precarious* is what is obtained by prayer. Uncertain, exposed to hazards, insecure. From the latin 'precarious,' from 'precis': prayer" (*Saborami* n.p). She prays to the past whereby *los precarios* themselves are a petition, a convocation, a crystallized yet fragile search for connection, but also, by etymological contiguity, *los precarios* imprecate (*imprecari*, *in-precari*, to pray within) and deprecate (*de-precari*, to pray away); thus, *los precarios* are not only what are obtained by prayer, but once formed, they have the power to avert oblivion, violence, and totalitarianisms, while bringing to the fore what is within, by virtue of what is within. In other words, they connect the inside and the outside; their effect is both to voice what lives in uncertainty and insecurity as well as the desire to change the conditions of uncertainty and insecurity.

the Latin *texere*, with her own woven text. History's fabric, from the Latin *faber*, is thus a product, the result of a system of inclusion and exclusions. What history did not weave is a loose thread; this is the thread that inspires and gathers all of Vicuña's work. The excluded lives outside of documentation are a surplus of historical discourses, and as such, a potential document, a document in potential which does not mean to suggest that they aim to be a historical document but rather that they exist *vis-à-vis* history. This outside, this potentiality, is not only a repository of future histories insofar as their potential quality as documents, but of future memory, of pasts yet-to-come since, as excess and as outside, they remain unexplored. Accordingly, in her art installation from 1992 called "El Ande Futuro," she quotes the following Andean sayings: "The time has come to renew the past" and "The future is behind: it has not yet arrived" (*quipoe*m 98). From this temporality which we will construct through the figure of the interval, they interrogate historical documentation, the status of the document, the places of history, and the modality and forces of production of historical discourses. *Los precarios* are, consequently, an interrogation of the ways in which history, at the service of national and political ends, organizes the past. In opposition to the historiographical process, they pose waste, abjection, and memory as the elements of meaning production and intelligibility. Vicuña's *precarios* are first and foremost acts of memory which question the nation's colonial and postcolonial discourses from the perspective of those who have been excluded by and from history; they are, in sum, creative interpretations of the past which aim to ethically use the unexplored regions of the past represented by the residues, bones, and waste of society as living metaphors of those who have been excluded, *qua* abjection, from history. If history is a fabric, *un tejido*, a text whose threads are made of

presence and absence, of inclusion and exclusion, then *los precarios*, as excluded from the registers of history, perform that exclusion while creating and reinscribing themselves in another fabric, that of memory or rather, they weave the fabric of memory as a poetics.⁵¹

In their quality as “non-documentation [*los precarios*] established their non-place as another reality” (*quipoe* 135). The non-place of memory,⁵² its no-realm, refers, on the one hand, to its locality in relation to the historical discourses wherein the document constitutes and is constitutive of a place and wherein any trace that lacks the status of a document consequently lacks a social and national place, and Vicuña goes so far as to suggest that without a place, a trace does not belong to (historical and national) reality. In this regard, every trace, thread, and waste that she uses in her art would signify an attempt not only to bestow the objects with a certain spatiality—I say a certain spatiality since the place of memory does not overlap with that of history nor could they ever meet since the place of memory is time, but also with the possibility of accessing another form of reality, which is at once the reality of the art object and that of an alter-life. The non-place of memory refers to a whole system of exclusions: that of woman from politics, the social place of “the marginal people—children, the insane, the uneducated,” the exclusion of indigenous communities from the national territory whose connection to the land is not remembered (Vicuña qtd in Lippard 9). The question of memory as we can see is linked

⁵¹ I say poetics here since each strand, bone, and detritus is a metaphor in the composition of Vicuña’s poem and where each poem is, at the same time, a question about the possibilities of poetic language and ultimately of language itself.

⁵² I cannot help but to think here about the locality that both Derrida’s and Heidegger’s give to the operation between poetic naming and thinking (*dichten* and *denken*). If “[t]he neighborhood of *Dichten* and *Denken* is convened by the Other’s silent call,” *los precarios* whose aim as poems is to answer this ancient silence, take place in this locality, in the in-betweeness which is constituted as something other than space. (Ned Lukacher’s introduction to *Cinders* 15). This resonates with Vicuña’s definition of *los precarios*’ place as a non-place not because they have no spatiality but because they refer to another relationship to space, that of the interval, the in between, as I will see shortly.

in Vicuña's work to honoring the place of the other; remembering is thus a way of heeding the call of the forgotten. The non-place of memory, finally, attests to a certain impossibility of representing the system of exclusion within space (this may be the reason why *los precarios* are metaphors in space thus anchoring in space this impossibility or rather its lack of space); this impossibility suggests, at the same time, the possibility and necessity of sheer invention, of a space of possibility for something to come in the future: *los precarios* open this door without ever telling what is coming or who is coming. *Los precarios* therefore indicate a very particular relationship between the impossibility of representing the absence, the exclusion, the other, and the possibility of its future appearance. It is thus not banal that Vicuña's *precarios* are poems in space or metaphoric sculptures.

As Lucy R. Lippard notes, despite the multifaceted character of Vicuña's art, "[s]ince 1966...the consistent element in her art making has been the *precarios*, a series of very small sculptures and installations constructed of found objects, or 'rubbish,' made in landscape, streets, or studio" (Catherine de Zegher Ed. *The Precarious: The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña* 8). But these sculptures are much more than that. *Los precarios* belong to and are informed by an aesthetic principle, precariousness, *lo precario*, "una poética espacial realizada en la naturaleza, calles y museos como 'una forma de oír un antiguo silencio'" (ceciliavicuna.org/esp_sobre.htm). *Lo precario*, as a spatial poetic, is a way of remembering, of honoring the ancient silence that lies dormant in time, and it is this silence that guides the formal principles of *los precarios*. The formal search to hear this ancient silence is what gives birth, meaning, and form to *los precarios*. The form, the assemblage of waste, results in a poetic of precariousness.

Therefore, form and content are indissolubly connected and, like a Mobius strip, form and content intertwine and mobilize the outside into the inside and vice versa, in order to make intelligible and to interpret the rumors and sounds of the past. It is this ancient silence, the voice of the past that speaks through the textuality and materiality of *los precarios* and that, as waste, speaks from what I wish to unveil. How can this past speak? What does it tell us and what do we do with its language? How do we honor the past of which *los precarios* speak? What can they reveal about the concept of history, about national discourses of inclusion and exclusions, and about the nation, “[e]l más eficaz, tenaz y sangriento de los conceptos políticos del siglo XIX y XX? (Jean-Louis Déotte *Catástrofe y olvido* 15). What can waste, residues, remnants, tell us about the past and how can they, as waste, become affirmative and not melancholic marks? How can their imminent disintegration have effects of futurity? In other words, how can waste as trace become an active memory that stands against the oblivion that defines the very concept of nation and national history?

In its march towards the nineteenth-century bastions of reason and progress that forged the early Latin American nations, Chile wills to forget the past and excludes that which signals remembrance. This is the same foundational oblivion that constituted the *de facto* government of Pinochet. Such a constitutive, mythical moment also operates upon a system of historical inclusions and exclusions, whereby the present stands, first, as an original time of genesis in history whose strength is such that it can change the course of the future while retroactively operating upon the past through its oblivion and, second, as a denigration of the past: the aboriginal people of the Americas and Allende’s government are conceived as devolutions that go against the values of colonial structures

and the progress of the nascent neoliberal state, respectively. Oblivion here becomes synonymous with silence, so in order to hear the ancient silence, we need to remember. This erasure, nonetheless, has left marks upon different layers of the past. *Los precarios*, in this sense, function as an archeology of memory, and this is why bones abound in the construction of *los precarios* for “trail of bones these sticks are/ each in search of the disappeared body” (“Death and Resurrection” *quipocem* 62, see figure 3). The formal and political search of Vicuña’s art is catapulted by waste and bones as traces of disappearance, as marks of oblivion. The disappeared body represented in Vicuña’s *precarios* by bones and, as we shall see, by all kinds of detritus, stand for, firstly, the trace as a dialectic

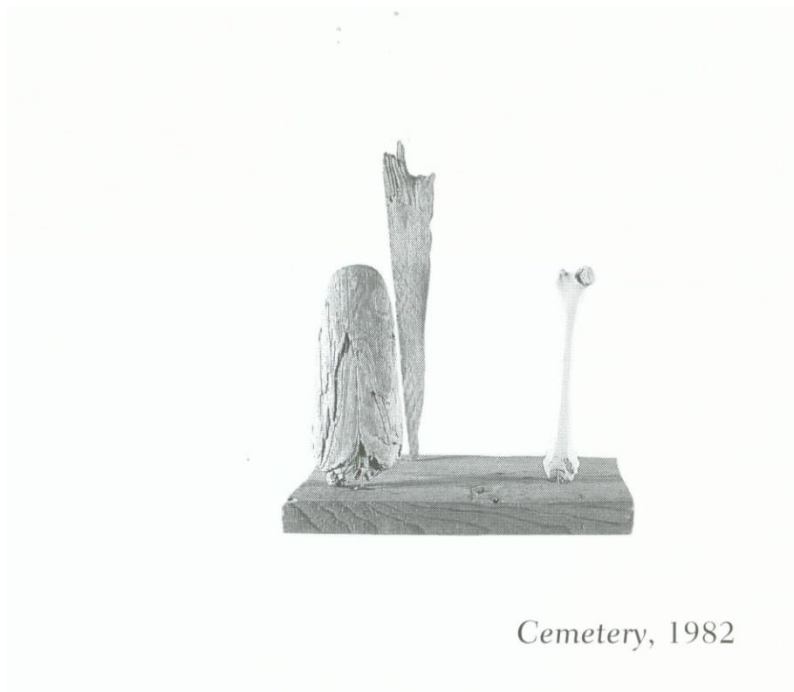


Figure 12. Cemetery, from 1982.

locus between presence and absence, time and space, and between past and future.

Secondly, the bones interrogate the place of the disappearance of the body which is of particular importance if we think about the bodies of *los detenidos desaparecidos* during

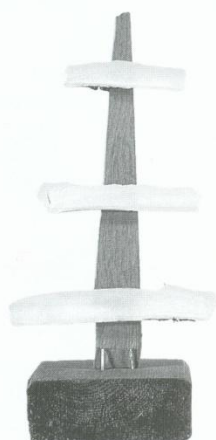
Pinochet's regime. Thirdly, the bones stand for the body itself in its process of dissolution, in its inherent mortality but, moreover, in its possibility of resurrection; in this sense, bones are signs or rather traces of hope and futurity. Lastly, they stand for that which has disappeared, that has been erased from history and politics and of which we only know its remnants. The bone as a ruin is not only a mark of ruination and decay but of resurrection. This is why in "Cemetery" the bone is standing up, almost as a living body among other marks of natural detritus which seem to rise with the bone in order to access the other reality of the "non-place of memory." "Cemetery" shows that bones, in the work of art, do not signal the return of the same; they come back as something other, as a newly instituted imaginary which imagines a new life for the residue. In other words, the bones are brought back to another life through the aesthetic object, illuminated by Vicuña's prayer (this may very well be what Vicuña calls the "other reality" of her *precarios*). This is the fundamental political role that Vicuña attributes to her work as a whole: to bring back (to) the time of memory. The new life, the non-place, bequeathed by the will to remember and gathered in the work of art is not a paralyzing, mummifying gesture but a creative one of newness. Vicuña is bringing back the space of absence left by that which has disappeared not only from vision, from history, but also from cultural registers through the active will to remember. Consequently, *los precarios* uncover the marks of disappearance while showing that any national discourse, its cohesion and fundamentals, are built upon waste and bones. Nation and history, in Vicuña's imaginary, are ossuaries that need to be excavated for they have been built upon the disappearance of the other via the politics of inclusion and visibility. However, and *los precarios* testify to this, such a politics always leaves behind bones, remnants, sites of absences, and

memories to be built whose force as excess, as outside, is to constitute and underlie the very instability of national discourses (see figure 4).

In this chapter, I want to explore the relationship *los precarios*, as critical, aesthetic, and evaluative art objects, have to Chilean historico-political discourses about the place of the other; in particular, I want to analyze how *los precarios* make time for women's past and the value this past has to life. I argue that we need both an ethical interpretation of the past as well as a new understanding of its potentialities in order to bring about a time for the other. There is in women's memory an unexplored, unused, creative ethical and political value capable of unsettling the present and thus of opening up the future, allowing the passage toward the other. Precisely because, as Irigaray reminds us, women have been historically and philosophically spatialized while men have been temporalized, a reclamation of women's past within the time of history and politics and their involvement in the creation of futurity signify a fundamental critique to their exclusion from evaluative, interpretative discourses (*Ethics of Sexual Difference* 7).⁵³

In order to set the background and start the movement from the concept of a single past to a multiplicity that will allow us to think about the particular symbolic position of women's past, I will re-read Benjamin's well known allegory of the angel of history from a feminist perspective, using Irigaray's approach to the figure of the angel.

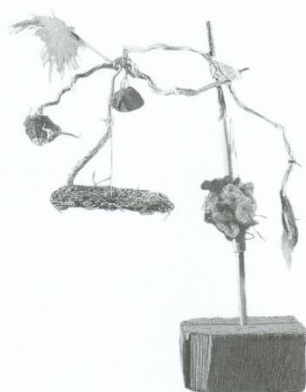
⁵³ From now on *ESD*.



Treno, 1984



Bone, 1982



Tree of Life, 1984



Little Lace, 1982

q.74

Figure 13. *Precarios* made of bones. From 1982 to 1984.

For the angel of history to recognize and embrace women's past as part of a multiplicity of pasts and, consequently, for women's past to enable the creation of values and futures, the angel needs, first, a new joyful vision, in opposition to the vision of the past as catastrophe and the future as abhorrence, and secondly, the angel needs an interval of time and space to traverse so as to re-interpret the past and to open it to the unpredictability and newness of the future. I do not wish to suggest the fact that masculine accounts of memory collated with female accounts of memory will produce a unity, a totality, or an absolute memory, but rather I wish to show that "at least two" memories stand for the very elasticity of memory in its relation to the future for ethical interpretations of the past according to our needs as well as for different agents and technologies that produce accounts of the past. I start by reading Benjamin's angel through the lens of Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject so as to question the vision of the angel of history. Secondly, I connect Irigaray's concept of the interval with Henri Bergson's through the economy of the angel as defined by Irigaray so as to interrogate the angel's lack of mobility. The last section brings together an analysis of *los precarios* as intervals to constitute the very possibility of women's future.

That which passes through

In *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche claims that, "[w]e want to serve history, only to the extent that history serves life" (59). How can history serve life after oppression? If, as Benjamin suggests, history is always on the side of the victorious, it is "the tradition of the oppressed" that urges non-hegemonic histories to be founded and told against the grain. Vicuña's *precarious* answer the call to remember the oppression of those excluded

from historical and national discourses. In her poetic imaginary, the historical exclusion and its memory takes the form of a silence and her art is a prayer that wishes to hear it. How can we tell the “tradition of the oppressed” in the case of women’s memory? Or posed in ethical terms: what *can* we *do* with this past? What can we do with the “antiguo silencio” which Vicuña wishes to hear? I argue that in order to find active, creative, and ethical uses of the past within the historical discourses that take hold of it, we need an angel of memory. But, why an angel? Firstly, because we need the “[m]ediation of the message before any message exists” as “the condition of presentation and representation” (Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* 38).⁵⁴ How can *los precarios* be this condition, the mediation necessary for the delivery of an untold memory? This means that in order to deliver the message of women’s past and of the other subjects excluded from history, we first need to have *that* which passes through; thus, the angel constitutes that which secures representation since she *is* “the condition of representation and presentation.” The angel, therefore, announces the coming while not being the coming itself—for this will determine the future. Second, we need an angel for she represents an “active memory,” “keeping the space open, marking the trail from the oldest of days to the furthest future of the world” (40). In this sense, the angel is the memory of time and space and a reminder that there is a passage both to the past and to the present. Finally, the angel will stand as difference and not as undifferentiation or resemblance, as that which is not. The angel is the mark of multiplicity. I do not wish so much to invert Benjamin’s famous angel of history and make her turn from the catastrophic past to merely contemplate the future, nor do I wish to deny the value of Benjamin’s allegory of history; rather, I wish to augment and mobilize the angel’s vision. Why? Firstly, because

⁵⁴ From now on *SG*.

the angel, that which passes through, is paralyzed, stunned by the vision of the past.

Therefore, the passage itself is inefficacious. In order to awaken from her melancholic gaze, the angel needs to be able to move freely.⁵⁵ However, her eyes looking only at the future will not suffice for her to politically imbricate both past and future in an ethical attempt to produce newness.⁵⁶ In order to effect this passage, we need to look at Irigaray's notion of the interval to arrive at a spatiotemporal doorway, a passage that allows passage. The interval is thus the link that will allow the angel the recognition of the other and the possibility of intertwining with this other outside of a narcissistic apprehension of the world and of history.⁵⁷ Irigaray has explained that without such an interval there is no possible questioning and encounter with the other (*ESD* 183).

⁵⁵ I use the word "her" here as opposed to the word "he" in order to bequeath women with a messenger, for, as Irigaray says, "[t]here seems to be only one angel, who obeys the son...[Woman] seems to have no angel. She is thrown away and pulled back by means of the angel, but she herself cannot use that mediation, that messenger" (*Sexes and Genealogies* 37). The use of "her" here tries to prepare the path for an angel that tells the specificities of women's memory and histories.

⁵⁶ The angel of which I speak here is not, as it might be assumed, the owl of Minerva. The Hegelian owl only knows, or rather, only appears at the end of an era, which is in total agreement with Hegel's own understanding of history. This linearity of both time and history is, however, the opposite of my project and of Benjamin's work—that is, the owl can only tell, travel, fly, and know after dusk; as Bataille sarcastically explains, the owl of Minerva speaks only after the fact (*On Nietzsche* 151). The angel of the perhaps supposes a mobility which surpasses historical time, that is, the mobility of the time of memory and the total uncertainty of the time of the perhaps. The idea of a necessary maturity of age for philosophy to understand, to speak after the fact, opposes the fluidity of Irigaray's angels as well as to the possibility of disruptive knowledge. The owl, furthermore, will also involve a clear progression in societal development as well as a consciousness (the philosopher's?) which can attest to such progression. Theorizing society at its dusk paralyzes all efforts to disrupt, unsettle, and change the status quo, for the owl has a retrospective gaze and a fairly secured position from which to gaze upon. The angel I am proposing is more akin to Nietzsche's "philosophy of the morning," which, as Gianni Vattimo explains, "represents a symmetrical opposite to Hegel's image of philosophy as the 'Owl of Minerva'" (*Nietzsche* 78). If "the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk," would not Hegel's retrospective owl imply a melancholic and totalizing gaze towards the past? Too many ethical and political questions remain: When are we at the end of history or of historical progress? Is history a totality, a wholeness, a teleological movement of human consciousness? Is philosophy messianic? (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* 13). In any case, if only to play with the idea, the owl of Minerva is of course a symbol of wisdom with its eyes open to the night. In Nietzsche's bestiary, the owl is a monster that crosses Zarathustra's path as a bad auspice, as a carrier of a somehow unwanted wisdom (the loss of memory). Notwithstanding, an owl that takes its flight in the morning may very well be a monstrous vision.

⁵⁷ As Dorothea Olkowski has noted, this interval or the process of retroaction and anticipation holds the potential for a real phenomenological change or what Irigaray, after Merleau-Ponty, calls "wild meaning" (77).

Although well known, I wish to start here with Benjamin's paradigmatic 9th

Thesis *in toto*:

A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to say, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. ("On the Concept of History" 257-8)⁵⁸

While most commentators of this passage focus on Benjamin's concept of allegory or on its historical context (World War II), I analyze the angel from a feminist perspective which imbricates her melancholic vision and her lack of mobility according to its usefulness to the future, thus shifting the gaze of the angel (and the critics) from the past. If we establish the preeminence of the future over the past and the present, not only time but history and memory will become open to unpredictable elaboration while allowing difference—which was hitherto invisible in and to historical discourses—to emerge.

The angel encompasses the terrifying concept of time as catastrophe while beckoning for another concept of time and history, one capable of activating the angel's movement and voice, one capable of changing her gaze from horror to joy, one, finally, capable of allowing a willful movement towards the past. Now this movement to the past is not melancholic (as is the vision of the angel) but an active, political endeavor "to awaken the dead." This is why Vicuña recurs to the word "resurrection" as a function of her archeology of memory whereby the bones are not only the presence of the dead but their calling to awake. Her prayer is the poetic gesture to resurrect the dead. Thus,

⁵⁸ From now on *CH*.

Vicuña's *precarios* resignify the vision of the past as catastrophe into sheer potentiality; consequently, instead of a pile of wreckage upon wreckage which can be thought of as waste upon waste, *los precarios* transform waste into active, positive ways of knowing and understanding but it would be insufficient to think of them only as epistemological tools. If, furthermore, *los precarios* are poems in space, waste, the wreckage, becomes language, letters, metaphors, words, and writing. In this sense, the wreckage has been transformed into a poetics, which in the next section I will call a poetics of dissolution; it has been transformed, through its relation to language and as potential language, into a threshold, an entering and an exit since "[w]riting is the door to the underworld" (*quipoe*m 113). This underworld is a metaphor of all that is invisible: it too is behind, outside, underneath, in between, and absent. It is from this underworld where memory enters, coils over, twists, returns, metamorphoses whereby each bone, each stick, is a vestige that contains in itself the possibility of becoming a door or of becoming writing.

The awakening of the dead is, thus, creative and interpretative since the bones and waste tell of their ancient silence. It serves, first and foremost, the interests of life (in particular the life of those excluded from history) and, hence, cannot be melancholic for it does not dwell on the lost object; it considers the place of loss and absence as birth and possibility. Waste, as abjection, "is a resurrection that has gone through death...It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance" (Julia Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 15). Life, in this sense, is served by bestowing the remnant with a new significance; this is achieved by praying, by making "two or three lines, a marking,/ and the silence begins to speak" ("The Chibcha Trail"). Life (in its salutary, Nietzschean sense) is served by calling upon the dead not as an exemplary gesture (for

this would re-inscribe the angel within a progressive concept of history) or to merely recognize the dead's oppression but to create ripples in the present that would unsettle the stability of any prescribed future; in other words, the past and the present enter into a disjunctive and disruptive relationship not into a synchronous and equivalent one. In consequence, the awakening which I equate here with the construction of *los precarios* as writing, as an evaluative process, is immanently ethical for if it is begotten by an interpretative modality, if it is to serve life, it must necessarily be useful (in opposition to abusive renderings of the past). The degree of its usefulness responds to what Bergson calls *attention to life*;⁵⁹ the words that the angel would like to utter are vital in understanding this ethical and creative dimension of interpretation. "[T]o awaken the dead" is predicated upon interpretation since it entails a "mak[ing] whole [of] what has been smashed." *Los precarios*, in using what has been smashed, are trying to make a whole, a possible one among many others, and this is so due to their nature, their imminent dissolution. As constellations of waste, they can be modified, rearranged according to new needs, according to the principle of attention to life, which in turn means that any whole, any system or totality, is only momentary and by definition unstable but I shall return to this shortly. This whole, then, does not imply an immobile unity that the historian or the artist recovers; her role, on the contrary, is to put the smashed pieces into new contexts and thus make them whole in the present where they are to have value. *Los precarios*, therefore, imply a re-evaluation of the value attributed to what has been excluded. The role of the historian is equivalent here to that of the artist who makes "[a] constellation of darkness/ another of light/ A gesture to be completed/ by

⁵⁹ "Attention to life," as Bergson describes it, is a "localization [...] a growing effort of expansion" of memory; in other words, memory expands so as to make the process of finding a particular event easier (*MM* 224-27). This attention signifies that which is useful for both my present and my future.

light” (Vicuña *quipoe*m 118). The precarious disposition of *los precarios* as constellations is a gesture, an action, that is, an active, generative gesture which would otherwise remain as a melancholic, paralyzing gaze. What I want to awaken in order to make whole, to make sense of a catastrophic past of the oppressed, is women’s past, memory, and genealogies, and for this reason, we need to re-evaluate the angel of history.

Even though the angel is paralyzed, I suggest that there is an opportunity for her, as Benjamin says, to “appropriat[e] a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger.” In other words, there is in the angel a possibility, a latency—“[s]he is about to move”—but her vision deters her and in this split second between the pending movement and staring, paralysis overcomes her and thus she is pushed towards a future she cannot see. Both mouth and wings are open, suggesting another latency: the possibility not only of speaking but of embracing the wreckage.

The angel of history “is turned toward the past” (“CH” 392). Implicit in the direction of her stare is the manner in which she perceives it. Her glance divides time, visibility, knowledge, and the order of the world; we know that “[s]he sees a single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of h[er] feet” (392). What she sees is not known to us for she sees allegorically (and transcendently). This is what Benjamin calls the visionary glance which “is lit up by the rapidly departing past. That is, the visionary has turned away from the future: he perceives its shape in the dusk of the past that disappears before him into the night of times.”⁶⁰ This is the problem of the angel’s vision and her visionary glance, for it is the future toward which she should turn her gaze but it is in the endless passage between temporalities where she should reside, that is, she remains in movement if she is to serve

⁶⁰ Quoted in Werckmeister (257).

life. The problem is that the visionary apprehends the future reflected in the past and this is dangerous for if the future is already inscribed in the past we are back to a concept of a deterministic future and the irruption of newness may be at risk.

The angel's time has been ordered according to the visible: we see empty, homogenous time while the angel sees messianic time. Where the angel sees catastrophe, we see a chain of events. What she sees is invisible and therefore unknown to us. Whereas she knows that history is built upon wreckage, we, on the other hand, seem to be hypnotized by progress; we, on the other hand, don't know or don't want to know about the storm. However, she, who knows, cannot act accordingly and here lies the biggest issue: what can we do with this past, with this wreckage? How are we to act knowing what we know? There are at least two elements that impede the angel's action: her melancholic vision and her lack of movement. The temporality of the angel's utterance is, thus, conditionality. For the angel to speak, to look at the future, and to move, we need a reversal of the concept of the past as wreckage through a non-melancholic, affirmative one and we need the concept of the interval to allow the angel's mobility.

The Interval

Previous to Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray, Henri Bergson developed his notion of the interval as a moment of hesitation and indetermination in which memory elaborates an answer to a multiplicity of perceptions. As has been noted by many thinkers, there are similarities and differences between Merleau-Ponty's, Irigaray's, and Bergson's notion of the interval, but they need to be understood in tandem in order to re-conceive the interval as a point both in time *and* space in phenomenological and ontological discourses

wherein the world is accrued by the precedence of the in-betweeness of subject and object. Irigaray's interval is defined in terms of two sexually differentiated subjects as a space which marks the negative limit of otherness; although her concept does not exclude time, it does not develop it, and it is for this reason that we need Bergson's interval so as to think not only about the place but the time of/for women's past and future.

If we are to tell the memories of the past in direct relationship to its ethical uses in the future, we need a *parousia*, that is, according to Irigaray, "the expectation of a future not only as *utopia* or a *destiny* but also as here and now, the willed construction of a bridge in the present between the past and the future" (*ESD* 147). Although Irigaray never explicitly relates *parousia* to the interval, I argue that the very possibility of this expectation cannot be fulfilled without the bridging fluidity between past and future that the interval is. Secondly, if we want to bring the invisible—in this case, women's memory—into cognition and recognition as that which has silently and invisibly informed all philosophical systems, if, as Benjamin has suggested, we need to tell the story of the oppressed, and if we wish to conceive the possibility of the future, we need the "Other to keep the world open" (*ESD* 183). If there is no interval, there is no other, no questioning between you and me, between my history and yours. An interval, thus defined, will allow the presentation of the radical feminine other as well as the possibility of bridging the past and the future.

Irigaray, in her reading of Aristotle, tells us that an interval exists between matter and form, creating "the trilogy of the constitution of place" (7-8). The displacement (contraction and expansion) from one vortex to the other is effected or set into motion by desire in a relationship of "nearness or distance" (8). However, this conception of the

interval does not explain the Bergsonian movement from pure memory or virtuality to actuality wherein the interval is not defined in terms of spatial relationship between subject and object (a phenomenological tension) but in terms of openness or excitability (intensity). Irigaray defines the flexibility of distance as desire, as the “attractions, tensions, and actions occurring between *form* and *matter* but also as the remainder that subsists after each creation or work, *between* what has already been identified and what has still to be identified” (8, her emphasis). Difference ensures that this gap is maintained, this “separation that articulates every encounter and makes possible speech, promises, [and] alliances” (9). Every time we say *there is*, reflects Irigaray, we defer celebration (14), but how and why is this celebration important? The interval as the site of encounter of difference implicates the celebration or the *wedding* of difference in a moment of wonder. The interval, then, is the possibility of joy, affirming difference and creating unforeseeable encounters between differential forces. The interval thus resignifies the angels as:

messengers who never remain enclosed in a place, who are also never immobile. Between God, as the perfectly immobile act, [and] man, who is surrounded and enclosed by the world of his work, and woman, whose task would be to take care of nature and procreation, *angels* would circulate as mediators of that which has not yet happened, of what is still going to happen, of what is on the horizon. Endlessly reopening the enclosure of the universe, of universes, identities, the unfolding of actions, of history. (*ESD* 15)

If there is not a gap to be traversed, the angel cannot fulfill her mission of endlessly passing through what Irigaray calls envelopes or containers and, we should add, time. The angel of history cannot move: there is no interval and differentiation in conceiving history and politics as linearity and progression. The angel of history cannot speak: her message has been truncated by the impossibility of happiness and mobility through time and space, pushed forward by progress. But once the angels cross and produce the

interval, they can tell “of the passage between the envelope of God and that of the world as micro- or macrocosms. They proclaim that such a journey can be made by the body of man and above all by the body of woman” (16). What is interesting here is that both the male and female body can participate in newness and can not only recognize but create the interval that goes from one to the other. The interval is the possibility; it is the site and the time for creating difference. In this sense, the interval allows the alliance of women with the past, of women with the future, of women with history, as a celebration. The reason, then, why we need the angel of history to eventually entwine the other and the oppressed (the invisible in Merleau-Ponty and the excluded in Vicuña) antecedes the possibility of any ethics of difference to manifest. First, as Irigaray says, “we must constitute a possible place for each sex, body, and flesh to inhabit. *Which presupposes a memory of the past, a hope for the future*, memory bridging the present and disconcerting the mirror symmetry that annihilates the difference of identity” (*ESD* 18; my emphasis). Irigaray, perhaps without noticing, acknowledges that memory and time allow the very possibility of a sexually differentiated place and that, moreover, memory has not only the potency to disrupt identity but to bring about difference itself. We need then to give an account of women’s memory if we are to unsettle and eventually transform the logic of sameness that holds women’s past as invisible substrata, that denies women the ability of producing their own genealogies or to become part of, while augmenting, memory and history themselves.

Cecilia Sjöholm explains that Irigaray’s interval is “distinctly coded through the historically determined category of sexual difference” (“Crossing Lovers: Luce Irigaray’s *Elemental Passions*” 94), but not only sexual difference is historically determined—so is

the very notion of the interval. True, the interval of sexual difference marks and is marked by identity as a negative limit, and the irreducibility of the limit, the impossibility, thus, of total incorporation is fundamental in the process of telling the past and, consequently, of women's memory, since, as Irigaray states, thinking itself is produced in this interval. Bergson's interval, in this sense, ignores sexual difference for he is fundamentally interested in the process or movement that goes from pure memory to matter, but this interval must be problematized with the notion of sexed bodies.⁶¹

For Bergson, the body is a center of action and of action only (*Matter and Memory* 5, 178, 303),⁶² but this action, in its freedom, is no stranger to what Irigaray calls "morphology." If women are excess, that is, at least two, this plurality informs action and the initial question of how to act according to the past cannot ignore it. If the interval expresses relationships along one axis (the interval between past and future, Being and beings, etc.) then the figure of the chiasmus allows these axes to cross back and forth and to establish sets of new relations between visible and invisible, memory and history, women's history and men's history, vision and time, among others. For Merleau-Ponty, the chiasmus is the intertwining, a folding over, a "coiling over" of vision and touch (*VI* 146). In our case, the intertwining is produced by multiple axes and the center or interval is not only the self but a possible community.

The recognition of an interval of sexual difference allows for a chiasmus that does not obliterate the other in the constitution of the self. The chiasmus interrelates I and you (plural and singular), I and time, I and space but also you and time, us and time, etc. The

⁶¹ For an interesting take on the relationship between sexual difference and the interval in both Irigaray and Bergson, see Rebecca Hill's article "Interval, Sexual Difference: Luce Irigaray and Henri Bergson" which argues that Bergson's notion of duration and his philosophical method, intuition, exclude and disavow sexual difference.

⁶² From now on *MM*.

chiasmus will not only support but allow the promise of the future and the conscious immersion, what I have called in this project the will to remember as well as voluntary memory and Bergsonian intuition, into the past in search for its multiple appropriations. How does this then relate to women's memory? How do women constitute their own interval if "according to you, I have no past...[?] To have a past history requires completion." Women, however, do not search for completion, according to Irigaray, but for movement "[i]n the imaginary of ends, that could signify that...[they are] always future," but this is just an illusion too, for women partake of the double loop, the chiasmus that assures infinity (*Elemental Passions* 75). I can go in search for multiple pasts and return, enhanced, to continue moving. "For me," Irigaray says, "infinity means movement, the mobility of place. Engendering time, yes. Always becoming" (71). Therefore, time is infinite and plastic, marked by a chiastic fluidity which implies that a) women's memory is pure change and becoming and b) women's memory is receptive to constellational meanings and appropriations in which the connective bond between past and future is open, thus defying the notion of homogenous, empty time that underwrites uncritical histories.

The chiasmus allows women to return to themselves in a threefold way, from the outside (forms and space) to the inside, from the other (man and women) to the self, from the past (virtuality) to a present in which the future is always pending (actuality). These double movements are supported by the interval, which we can imagine as the intersection of two vectors in constant fluctuation. The dis-assimilation in which woman must construct herself from historical and cultural discourses as Irigaray has pointed out, is executed through the chiastic vectors (*ESD* 9). Having said that, the relationship

between form and matter is not exclusively one of space but one of intensity and temporality, of retroaction and anticipation, in Irigaray's language of contraction and expansion, recollection and perception as Bergson explains. The interval, therefore, is a point of confluence, reversal, and opening, a measure of intensity that responds to/as affectivity.⁶³ Affectivity passes in and out as memory and as the possibility of action.

On the other hand, if time has mythically been attributed to God and space as God's exteriorization, the interval will allow the chiasmic movement from space to time and from beings to gods (*ESD* 7). The spatialization of time, nevertheless, cannot be escaped; it is fundamental and inevitable not only to historical discourses but to discourses themselves, but before entering the realm of history, its critical approach should respond to the interval and to a fluid notion of time as becoming, pure change, and chance of which *los precarios* attest. To this we will return in the following section. The interval is "the moment in which all traditional metaphysical relations are transformed, not only matter and form but also power, act, force, energy, and desire" (Olkowski "The End of Phenomenology: Bergson's Interval in Irigaray" 82). I want to add that such a transformation occurs precisely through becoming and chance.

For Bergson, the interval "is the moment between two movements: one, a stimulus received affectively via the sensori-motor perception, and two, a movement executed in response to the call for action of the stimulus; thus the interval lies between affective excitation and reaction" (Olkowski 82). This is the moment of response and

⁶³ It is interesting here to refer to Dorothea Olkowski's understanding of affectivity as streams of fluid, affects that run through what Irigaray calls "morphology" which "provide fluid images of something real (although not actualized in space as an object [...]) Fluid structures are not lacking in relation to actual objects; a fluid affectivity that is in some sense a whole instead produces objects in an ontology of change." This means that there is a being whose style of being, paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty, does not have a body (80).

unforeseeable creativity where thinking is produced; the body is then this center, “a place of meeting and transfer, where stimulations received result in movements accomplished” (Bergson *MM* 227). The interval in Bergson’s philosophy is, therefore, a synthetic process executed by memory; the interval, hence, takes up continuity and breaks it up according to need—this is a selective and adaptive process. The philosopher is thus an integrator, but the same must be said of the historian, the artist, and of our angel, for “to make whole what has been smashed,” as Benjamin suggests, is to integrate “by starting from the differential,” which implies a reconstitution starting from the antecedents but always aggregating something new to it (*MM* 242).

The interval is of crucial importance to history and memory for it introduces the element of chance and unforeseen action; the future, in this sense, will never be able to be defined as progress, for all causality is suspended by the creativity of a pending extension or expansion. As pure difference and multiplicity, the interval is the sign of the future. Between time and space there lies a gap (between duration and exteriority) which Bergson proposes as the interval between memory and matter, between pure affectivity and space, where two vectors of becoming, one which goes to the subject and one which goes to the object, are interlaced. Freedom is thus a consequence of becoming *qua* possibility, of always actualizing something new.

The angel of history slowly acquires another face in front of us, a Janus face that represents the infinite chiasmus between past and future. The chiasmus, moreover, seems to give our angel a multiplied vision, freeing her of her melancholic gaze as she recognizes her mobility to pass from allegorical time to human time, for now both respond to a logic that has overcome homogeneity with pure heterogeneity in which the

emptiness has been replaced by the active play of the will's forces; in other words, time now is qualitative. Historical events are to die or resuscitate insofar as they serve life. We will them back for their active value in enhancing our lives. The angel of history regains her will to appropriate the past by awakening the dead, thus uttering the words that she couldn't say when she was pushed by the storm of progress. Hence, Benjamin's desire for "a philosophy of history that at all points has overcome the ideology of progress" (*The Arcades Project* 73) becomes possible through the interval. The affirmation of difference (and of sexual difference as the negative limit of being) and the interval allow the angel to see the past of women's own affectivity and temporality. Before, deprived of an interval, she was unable to let Carthage come back to life; her eyes were freezing the past under the image of catastrophe.⁶⁴ The tradition of the oppressed cannot emerge from catastrophe as future actuality.

Los precarios by their precarious constitution are in opposition to the patrimonial politics of the museum; they do not commemorate exceptional events that support the construction of national discourses, nor do they commemorate the ruin. If anything *los precarios*, like Derrida's cinders claim *waste there are*. What we do with what "there are" or with the angel's vision of wreckage is the ethical implication of such seemingly simple disclosure; this is its ethical implication. *Los precarios* are an interval in the process of dissolution, in-between the force that excludes or excretes objects as ruins, as waste, and their total disappearance as trace, loaded with the meaning of what is lost and its refusal to be lost. They are "straits between exterior and interior horizons ever gaping over" (Merleau-Ponty VI 132). Vicuña chooses to remember elements that have been

⁶⁴ The image of Carthage comes from a Flaubert line that Benjamin quotes in his seventh thesis to stress the fact that history has always been on the side of the victorious: "Few will suspect how sad one had to be to undertake the resuscitation of Carthage" (391).

excreted, what the nation chooses to forget; thus, *los precarios* are located in a place of cultural disruption. This is first and foremost a temporal disruption in the chain of causal determination: to intervene in the process of continuous dissolution, altering the expected and predetermined future of cinders, creating detours, alternatives in the productivity of time, of waste, and of history through the discontinuity of *los precarios* which are by definition alterable. What gathers *los precarios* together is “[t]heir ‘fastening’ [which] is so loose, so flexible, that the parts seem to have blown together into a whole that might metamorphose at any moment into another” (Lippard 10). The looseness of what gathers waste into one single artifact represents time as becoming; the interval cannot be otherwise since it is unstable, mobile, and precarious but not because of this precariousness it lacks the force to introduce changes and to participate in the construction of a future otherwise. Nothing is lost in Vicuña’s universe which seems to adhere to Heraclitus’ dictum that “[o]ne cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again it gathers; it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs” (“LI” 53). The will to remember in *los precarios* is that which has gathered together waste but it is the same will that lets it loose in search of other interpretations and creations that frees the past to metamorphose into another remembrance. It seems as if it is the very instability of the interval that calls upon the past, beckoning sediments and layers of it to become sensible anew.

Vicuña responds to the cultural and historical oblivion of what the nation excludes with a break in the very fabric of temporality; this break reorganizes the raw materials of the past and sets them in opposition to the politics of oblivion that supports the concept of

the nation. Someone needs to forget in order for a nation to form while Vicuña wills to remember.

The Angel's Vision: Abjection and the Poetics of Dissolution

The visionary glance has forced the angel to turn her eyes from the future, since she abhors the causality of progress. The trouble does not only reside in what she sees but in the way in which she sees it and, furthermore, in what she does not see. In "Walter Benjamin and his Angel," Gershom Scholem quotes Benjamin as saying "[t]he angel...resembles all from which I have had to part: persons and above all things. In the things I no longer have, [s]he resides" (Scholem in Smith 59). The angel has a double relationship to melancholy: she relates to loss by way of resemblance, of similarity. The angel mirrors the lost object while taking its place, filling the void with resemblance. The angel, thus depicted, functions as a mediator, fulfilling her mission as a messenger between the subject who experiences loss and the irremediably lost object, as a transition between sheer absence and remembrance. The angel is a sign of impossibility; the knowledge is thus bound to the absence and trapped in the shadow of the lost object. What the angel, with her allegorical vision, cannot see is, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, the "mystery as familiar as it is unexplained, of a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity" (*The Visible and the Invisible* 130).⁶⁵

In order to turn the gaze of the angel from melancholy to affirmation, we need a re-evaluation of the past as wreckage through the figure of waste and remains as abjection for, according to Julia Kristeva "[t]here looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant

⁶⁵ From now on VI.

outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated” (*Powers of Horror* 1). Vicuña’s *precarios*, and here lies their ethical value *par excellence*, are a radical transvaluation of what has been abjected; they heed the call of revolt that looms within the abject, which lives outside of meaning, nation, politics, and history as the underside, as the unthinkable and unfitting element of nation. Notice in figure 5 that Vicuña’s angel embraces abjection and, even more, it is defined by it. The unwoven thread of memory takes the shape of menstrual blood which, by leaping into the latency of the past, brings memory back so as to awaken the dead. Manraja is Vicuña’s allegory of memory. It responds to the impulse, the will to remember the past. The synthetic process between the interpretation of both the will as impulse and its content shapes remembrance since to remember implies the intertwining of thread and heart: “(*recordar*) in the sense of playing the strings (*cuerdas*) of emotion” which I have defined here as the guiding thread of memory and to “[r]e-member, [as in] *re-cordar*, from *cor*, *corazón*, heart” (*quipoe*m 131). Only through the intertwining of the string, the thread, and the heart memory can take form. Only through passing the thread, again, through the heart memory can manifest. For Vicuña memory is *recordar* from the latin *recordari* (*re*-again and *cordis*-heart). In this sense, Manraja is the interval; the point of openness between the will to remember the past and the time of memory. However, this repetition, the iteration of a passing through does not signify the return of the same, as a creative act that answers to the forces of the will, the vocation of the will, the passing is always different, always new. The thread, therefore, brings with it an actualization of the multiplicitous past.

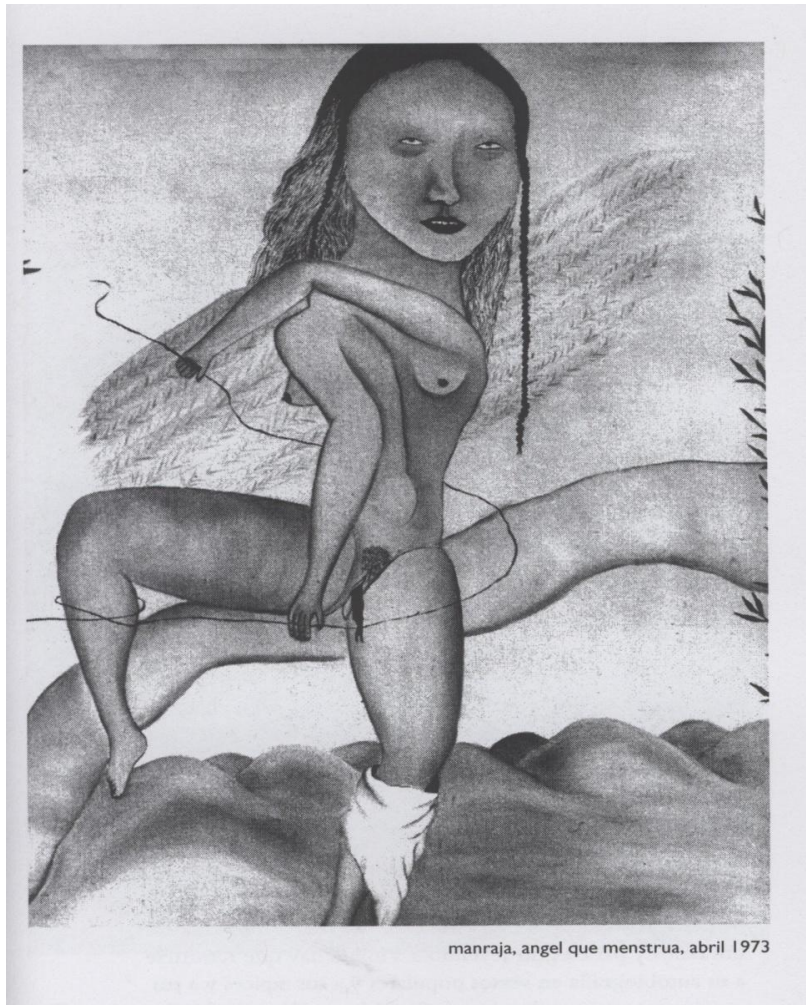


Figure 14. Vicuña's angel Manraja, from the proper Punjab name Manraj, meaning "the heart's king." The heart of the queen that pumps the blood and guides its thread of memory since for Vicuña remembrance comes from the heart.



Figure 15. Paul Klee famous "Angelus Novus," inspiration to Walter Benjamin's allegory of history.

For Vicuña a weaving, female angel, is an effort to think the place of the abject, or rather, to make time in memory for the abject, represented here by blood. In contradistinction to the stunned gaze of Benjamin's angel when confronting wreckage (figure 6), Manraja joyfully, as if entranced, weaves and is woven by the thread of memory and abjection. True, abjection cannot be assimilated by nation and the discourses that serve in its constitution and maintenance, but art can and must heed its calling to bring to memory the intolerable face of abjection which stands in radical opposition to the Chilean delirium of cleanliness and *la pureza de la sangre*, which was inherited from the colonial times and which continues to be politically disavowed in postcolonial times. The abject is "an affective, material excess that points toward a dimension of meaning prior to or outside of the symbolic code in which it appears (S. K. Keltner *Kristeva* 44). The angel, as that which passes through, brings with her this outside into the symbolic dimension, troubling meaning, threatening the stability of the subject, permeating her limits, and the limits of the world, with the threat of abjection.

The place abjection occupies stands in opposition to that of the subject: it is prior to her constitution and it is outside because:

[w]hat is abject, is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject, has only one quality of the object-that of being opposed to I" (1).

The materiality of *los precarios* as abjection stands as opposed to the relationship between subject and object where meaning is created. Thus, they do not support the construction of meaning; they collapse it. The arbitrary arrangement of abject elements, their social qualification as abject, in sum, the very spatial metaphoricity of *los precarios*, renders them as extraterritorial. They are "outside the world" of symbolic meaning,

which abjection threatens. *Los precarios* rely on the abjection of their materiality to defy the borders, to question the limits not only of the political and historical discourses but also the limits of the self, what the self includes or not within her own world. *Los precarios* attest to constitutive exclusions within society, by reintegrating these elements, aesthetically, within the realm of cultural action and knowledge. *Los precarios* unveil this constitutive process of abjection of all symbolic orders, of all political structures and perform, mimic, the movement and tension of the return of the repressed. This return is not stable or fixed; it cannot be assimilated or incorporated and this is the reason why the materiality of *los precarios* is precarious and this is the reason why only an a posteriori act of documentation can give us an idea of them, as a trace. As an ethical gesture, *los precarios* are doomed to go back to memory; this is why Vicuña's sculptures are made of detritus she finds in the shores of Concón beach and there she leaves them to be swallowed by the sea (figure 7). *Los precarios* only leave a trace of their own abjection. The double function of constituting and maintaining the political is disarmed in *los precarios*, which, as artifacts, enter the symbolic as a rupture of all limit, permeating the inside of political exclusion with this messy outside. "[W]hat is abject...the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. (Kristeva 2) *Los precarios*, as a metaphor of exclusion and as exclusion from the registers of history do more than that: they draw us towards the place where temporality collapses as we will see in the next section. Vicuña, in her use of the abject, resignifies the meaning of it, taking the abject outside of a system of significations which keep it in place, by mobilizing the abject and attributing new cultural and political meanings to it so

that the very center of meaning production, the whole signification system, is tilted, modified even if slightly.



Figure 16. Concón, Chile. 1967-1987.

In our separation from the abject, in making the abject what it is, we have become dejected, separated; the thread of the angel weaves both the abject and the dejected—not, I must emphasize, to produce unity, and here I go against Vicuña's own desire to recover unity since the process of abjection is constant and cannot be stopped without total dissolution, but to become other. This connection between abject and deject via the resignification of waste introduces the figure of the interval.

As S. K. Keltner explains “[a]t the level of socio-historical and personal experience, abjection...signif[ies] the subject’s encounter with the limits of meaning and being” (*Kristeva* 38). The artwork is the paradigmatic witness to such encounter or crisis. Every encounter, even with a limit, is relational; it is for this reason that Vicuña writes that “[a]n object is not an object, it is the witness to a relationship” (*quipocem* “Arte Precario” 136). The abjection of *los precarios* attests to a series of connections which we will study under the figure of the interval: it is a relationship of the self with the other, of memory and history, of the fragment with the total, of inside and outside, of time and space for “[i]f the poem is temporal, an oral temple, form is a spatial temple” and we have said already that *los precarios* are poems in space (131). This relation, the weaving of time and space, is the subject of the third section of this chapter.

Los precarios (as well as the Kipu as we saw in Chapter 1) are simultaneously a crystallization of signification and a break in signification. They break with the perception of the present by interweaving in it clusters decoded, recoded, and decodable meanings of the past. The very materiality of *los precarios* negotiates not only meaning but temporality. Their very materiality in space opens up time and they become thresholds, elusive intervals of time and space. The abject materials signify an encounter not only with the limits of meaning but with being’s own perception and anchoring of temporality. *Los precarios* in this sense overcome “the violence of mourning for an ‘object’ that has always already been lost” (*Kristeva PH* 15) and transform mourning into a ritualistic affirmation of the power of resignification of the abject. When the abject is remembered, when it is brought back from the dark waters of oblivion as an ethical gesture to not only give an account of the forgotten but also to honor their reinscription,

the abject erases or transforms the marks of melancholy and loss by reinserting memory, the memory of the abject, into the context of historical time not to become history but to break its linearity, its pretensions of homogeneity. *Los precarios* stand in their precariousness as a knot of disruptive temporal forces and for the collapse of historical documentation. Vicuña, the weaver, weaves the discarded materials with meaning; she weaves metaphors, mobilizing meaning from the outside of the socio-political into the inside. She makes of each object a new text found and founded in the limits: the limits of use-value, of society, of history, of meaning. Vicuña, the weaver, takes the limit of meaning to materialize her artifacts as hieroglyphs of the past, as archeological artifacts of sedimented and transformed meaning. For *los precarios*, first and foremost, are text; Vicuña is very clear regarding that: *los precarios* are poems and each one of their elements is a metaphor and each one of *los precarios* is a whole allegory of time. Their apparent simplicity conveyed by the waste and abject materials of their composition is yet another layer of meaning, another woven element into the crystallization of the poem. Vicuña is suggesting, furthermore, with each object that words are also abject and so is poetry; these are some of the constitutive elements of her poetics of dissolution. So poetry is the privileged space to give an account of what has been abjected; *los precarios* are hence embodiments of what has been abjected. They are the face of abjection for they represent the corpse of the past, and the excrement of society.

The bones, sticks, and feathers, in their abjection, invite the artist to arrange them according to a sensory memory. It is a touching upon the surfaces of memory. As if giving birth to a theodicy of memory, Vicuña alludes to the Book of Genesis to explain the experience of abjection's calling: "first there was listening with the finger, a sensory

memory:/ the shared/ bones, sticks (,) and feathers were sacred things I had to arrange” (“Entering” *quipoe*m 131). This creation myth of sensory memory situates *los precarios* as an answer to the vocation of memory, embodied in abjection, with the power to construct, to give birth and form to the yet-to-come. The remnants, the residues, and the abject could become the memory of the senses. Bones, sticks, and feathers are sacred, for they have been separated, set apart, or distinct in the sense Jean-Luc Nancy attributes to it (as I explained in the previous chapter).

By taking the remnants of nature and society as the starting point of a forgotten memory, Vicuña is performing an archeology of language and meaning where each abject object, each precarious piece of waste is a bone loaded with the remnants of the past. Vicuña takes on the task of creatively reconstructing the place and meaning of that bone within the past (in memory). She prays (*precarius/precis*) to the past and *los precarios* themselves are a form of prayer. Praying is analogous here to writing and an answer to the calling of abjection for a new meaning or at least to trouble meanings and this is why she claims that “[t]o follow their (waste) wishes was to rediscover a way of thinking: the paths of mind I traveled, listening to matter, took me to the ancient silence waiting to be heard” (“Entering” 131). It is interesting to note here the analogous movement of Vicuña’s art: to follow, to discover, to think, to listen. If we add a copulative verb “to be” here we would have: to follow is to discover, to discover is to think, to think is to listen. All of these actions are tied together in a progressive revelation which culminates in a silence becoming audible only as an interval, in the negation of spoken and written language, in its non-words, becoming audible only by becoming visible. Vicuña’s poetics, to write, is a prayer that implies the progressive

revelation “the paths of the mind [she] travelled” from following to hearing. From following to hearing, Vicuña has discovered a new “way of thinking.” She starts by following the wants and desires of waste; it seems as if the will to remember were not in the subject but, as it were, exterior to her, as if it belonged to the desire of the abject. *Los precarios* are so radical in nature that in order for them to become, to materialize, they require a new epistemology (each thread, each bone and feather is for Vicuña a new thought), not only one that facilitates their becoming but also one that enables their understanding. It is the material itself, the abjection itself, that contains within it a new epistemology which in turn requires a new phenomenology able to encompass the syncretic senses which the precarious deploy. *Los precarios*, as Levinas’ face, are expressions that pierce me; their materiality, their spatiality is “a surplus over the inevitable paralysis of manifestation” (*Deconstruction in Context* “The Trace of the Other” 352). Vicuña is well aware of the appearance of paralysis which manifestation signifies. However, as intervals in space and time, *los precarios* speak, as openings, as fissures in the tissue of manifestation, of space with the time of the other. Speaking about the time of the other as not contemporaneous with me, speaking of the space of the other as not coetaneous with me, *los precarios* are extra-ordinary and extra-territorial. The interval they represent is a radical openness; they are freed from manifestation’s paralysis due to their own becoming and dissolution.

Now that we have reversed the concept of the past as catastrophe, into an affirmative, creative vision of openness, we are ready to understand how is it that abjection can, through the work of art, be experienced. In his already paradigmatic essay “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” Pierre Nora considers “the

appearance of the trace, of mediation, of distance” a symptom that “we are not in the realm of true memory but history” (8). The trace, in this sense, seems to live outside of memory and belong to historical time, or rather, the trace for Nora, signifies the disappearance of the realm of real memory and a symptom of historical consciousness. However, how is the trace part of history? How does it enter history or does it ever enter it at all? How does it come to us as the experience of waste, of detritus? A caveat is necessary here before moving into the analysis of the small particles that constitute *los precarios*: if there are residues, whether cultural or natural, it is because there is a system that produces them or excretes them. To analyze or to creatively use waste, implies first and foremost an affirmation of the conditions of possibility of waste; only through this affirmation can the artist afterwards, criticize, negate, or confront the conditions of the production of waste. If waste threatens the order of socio-cultural cleanliness and historical inclusion, if it momentarily imposes itself as a “non-reality” to use Vicuña’s words, so is waste, as trace, constantly threatened not only by the system that produced it but by the very conditionality of waste’s existence: its dissolution. It is this fear of total disintegration what moves Jean-Louis Déotte to ask “¿Qué experiencia se puede tener de lo que llega arruinado? ¿Qué otra huella puede dejar que no sea ceniza? (*Catástrofe y olvido* 25). *Los precarios* are both an ethical and an aesthetical answer to such question. In using up natural and human detritus, Vicuña interrupts the process of decay, of fall, of ruination and poses art as an alternative to cinders and dissolution:

To name a work for its dissolution responds to an ancient vision:
 the path of the planets, the sun and the moon,
 is named for their disappearance,
ecliptic.
 Kwakuitl string figures receive names from their patterns of dissolution

in the hand (“Arte Precario” *quipocem* 136).⁶⁶ If Vicuña is naming her art as precarious it is because the inherent dissolution of waste, the mark it leaves in space is precarious but also, and perhaps more importantly, it suggests that history, nation, politics, colonial and postcolonial structures are in the process of dissolution; they are also becoming cultural waste that needs to be rethought and re-arranged. The trace they leave of themselves is their own precariousness. To build around the very process of disintegration a whole poetics of hope may seem difficult at first, but this is Vicuña’s effort to transvalue the meaning attributed to words and objects. This is Vicuña’s “wild meaning” and *los precarios* constitute her “power to resignify.” *Los precarios* are aesthetic reinterpretations of ankylosed systems of meaning. But her small sculptures, nonetheless, are not named for their disappearance but in lieu of their disappearance; right before they become cinders, not just for the sake of saving them but to awaken the raw material they contain, to awaken the dead as we explained above.

Vicuña’s artworks, while threatening to become memory by their constitutive fragility, are a conscious detour in temporality. They arrest their dissolution by convoking their presence as absence within historical registers. *Los precarios* are a complex experience: as abjection they are the experience of the failure of signification or of the symbolic collapse of which Kristeva speaks, and consequently, they renegotiate the limits of subject and world. The experience of waste, on the one hand, is an aesthetic and a political experience of detritus which give both a time and a space to the irreality of their non-documentary status. If Vicuña uses the negative form (non-document, non-space, non-reality), it is to emphasize the seemingly impossible experience of waste while

⁶⁶ The Kwakwaka'wakw is a First Nation community in British Columbia.

subverting such impossibility with the halt in its dissolution, transforming the past into a new memory whose destiny is to endlessly become a new memory. If *los precarios* as one interpretation of the past are possible, any other creative, affirmative use of the past is possible too, as well as any abuse of it; herein lies the fundamental and ethical distinction between the uses and abuses of the past. Dissolution, total oblivion, may not be the only path for those excluded from history and national discourses and *los precarios* are but one actualization of the multiplicitous past.

Los precarios may appear to be part of what Chilean critic Nelly Richard calls “la entrecruzijada entre la *memoria como resto* y la *narratividad del recuerdo*,” but this is so only superficially. Vicuña is not really concerned with the narrativization of the past, that is, with telling a more or less temporally organized account of the past, not only because she is making poetry but also because she is well aware that at the crossroads of memory and remembrance stand what remains. In other words, between the past whose mark may be identified with waste and remnants and the active production of memory, the remnant is itself the interval which signifies a break in temporality and its reversal, opening, and transformation. The past, which requires “la tematización crítica de lo *fragmentario* y de lo *residual*” (78, Richard’s emphasis) and which exceeds, according to Richard, the knowledges of philosophy and sociology, belongs to the task of art and literature. Vicuña heeds the vocation of the residues to construct what Richard calls “una poética de la memoria” but only to turn it into something more than memory (79). It is interesting to think here about the kinship that exists between residues and memory; this may be so not because memory is a fragment or acts as a fragment but due to the place that memory holds within national discourses or rather where it has been placed by national discourses.

It is not the case that memory is a residue or is conceived of as a residue as Richard explains but that it occupies a residual place *vis-à-vis* history. It is in short a topographical issue and not an ontological one; therefore, Vicuña's *precarios* are a fundamental answer and inversion of the topological status of memory within the Chilean nation—as space poems, *los precarios* seek to unsettle the stability of the place of memory as a residual discourse. This operation of mobilizing the inside to the outside is Vicuña's experience of the ruin, of waste, and it is her answer to the thematization of the fragment within the politics of oblivion. From the outside of historical time and national recognition, memory can speak *about* the residue, freed from any historico-political logic. Memory, consequently, is not a fragment and it is not fragmented but, due to its particular locus, can speak *about* the fragment, since by definition that which remains can be reconstituted, reinterpreted as a trace.

For Richard, waste, is that which:

exhibe marcas de inutilidad física o deterioro vital; lo que permanece como fragmento arruinado de una totalidad deshecha; lo que queda de un conjunto roto de pensamiento o existencia ya sin líneas de organicidad. Piezas inválidas de una quebrada economía de sentido que han extraviado su rol o degenerado su función de sentido. (*Residuos y metáforas* 77)

There are two elements here I wish to take up again: The residue as that which exhibits the markings of uselessness and the residue as fragment and ruin of a broken totality.

Vicuña does in fact take the abjected object, the very meaning and materiality of its abjection, in order to invert its value as we have seen. Simply put, Vicuña defies the physical uselessness of waste and uses it as her raw material. Secondly, the apparent uselessness of waste and residues is articulated by Vicuña in a new logic of sense whereby the residue is not a part of any broken or undone totality, and this tackles the second point of Richard's quote I want to revisit. This is fundamental because Vicuña's

precarios, as the rearrangement of waste, show that there is a condition, or rather a conditionality, inscribed in the materiality of any object and system (and of any subject for that matters), to be always part of an incomplete system which is defined as such by virtue of its articulation of inclusions and exclusions. This condition assumes that there is no such thing as a totality of meaning (although this does not impede totalizing fantasies). Emptying meaning, hollowing out meaning, *los precarios* show that any totality is always and firstly composed of absences, of arbitrariness, of marks of exclusion, which show that any totality is in reality an incompleteness, always emptying itself out in order to appear as a totality. Residues, waste, abjection are excretions of meaning but only a posteriori since in order to have any meaning, the object, the residue, the other is needed as a precondition for all meaning to emerge. Any totality is not only precarious, but only possible in its precariousness. It is important to emphasize here that *los precarios*, in my view, are not melancholic apprehensions of the past for they revolt against the sense of loss, against any logic of sense altogether, to follow, discover, to think, and to hear a new sense—what we call above wild meaning, which is already latent within the conditions of the past and the object itself. If it is sense that has been lost, *los precarios* do not linger in the feeling of being lost but actively, politically, try to establish a new sense. Deterioration can speak of a material totality and its ineludible dissolution and not of a totality of sense; the residue speaks of that which once appeared as whole only by virtue of its possibility of being removed from any wholeness. Vicuña's poetics of dissolution thus makes a distinction between memory and fragment whereby memory is an unexplored region and whereby waste is a formal and metaphorical tool to explore the time of memory. By arresting the time of dissolution and making a detour in the path

towards cinders, Vicuña incisively shows the limits of our cultural horizon. Not only history is limited by its imbrications to power and politics but so is our memory limited by our understanding of the fragment as a melancholic trace of what has been lost. The past, for Vicuña, is a reservoir of threads, more or less knotted yarns but always open to be unwoven and repatterned. *Los precarios* are perhaps the most dangerous critique to the positivist logic of history for they re-waste themselves, mocking while using the production of detritus. *Los precarios*, as the intertwining of time and space, as the very interval between them, are a destabilizing force of sense by which their aesthetic possibility, their appearance, signals the place of internal instability to all sense; this instability opens up the possibility for the coming of the other. Heeding the call of abjection, *los precarios* are not only an aesthetic response. They are also an active remembrance, a memory of both what is abjected and of its calling. It is important to note here that Vicuña is not suggesting that there is any total incorporation of the other, represented here by the figure of waste for *los precarios* are only a slowing down of time in the current of becoming. As intervals, they break into time. As archeological artifacts rearranged according to the will to remember, they speak of the past insofar as remembrance. They can never become history nor can they enter national discourses as documents since once time has been slowed down by the fabric of *los precarios*, immediately time continues its march.

Los precarios do not mourn the past or their future dissolution; they celebrate the will to remember to which they respond through what I have called the poetics of dissolution. Both the call of the abject and the answer to the calling are intertwined by the will to remember. *Los precarios* show that there is no appropriation without reminder

and that there is no reminder that cannot be remembered. It can be remembered—so we will—yet it cannot be assimilated without producing always anew another fragment to make a call. It is not that Vicuña has put the objects to rest by giving them a sort of proper burial through the figure of *los precarios*. The unearthing of the detritus is a genetic gesture; its aim is to give life, to bestow meaning through memory. In other words, it is not the memory of the dead but the memory of that which comes to life. *Los precarios* allow, even if for a moment, the legibility of an alternative to dissolution, to oblivion. Each constitutive molecule of *los precarios* is a creative anamnesis that makes an incision in the fabric of history and in the current of time; this incision allows for unactualized regions of memory to leak out, to spill over, and to permeate the present. As poetic objects, *los precarios* refuse to name what may come, so the ancient silence that wishes to be heard, the calling of the other, of abjection to which they respond, speaks of an experience and of an experience only. If the voice of the other is a silence, we cannot hear it as silence. We can only hear it once it has become something other. In other words, the abject, waste, detritus, never speak of their own experience as silence, but we, through the work of art can hear our own experience of that silence. The fact we cannot really hear the silence does not preclude our responsibility to give it a voice but it accentuates the necessity of constantly finding ways to allow that silence to enter our world. In this regard, *los precarios* are not only intervals of time but also intervals between me and the other. The call of the other takes the form of silence for us, and *los precarios* can only make audible, present, the answer to the calling but never really the content of the silence. Since it is silence that the other utters, Vicuña's *precarios* can only be but interpretations. *Los precarios* are interpretative modes of accessing the past,

an interpretative memory; they are necessarily creative. The will to remember, which unfurls in an interpretation of the past, is an act (an aesthetic one) by definition and as such it befalls into the category of the doing. What do we do and how do we do it? *Los precarios* are eminently a *facere* which means that they are, by definition, eminently ethical as well.

If the coming into being of *los precarios* responds to the will to remember, a sensory force that commands or requests an answer, then Vicuña's art corresponds to different manifestations or experiments in the weaving of the word with the world; they are, in this regard, a question about the possibilities of textual interpretation and about the possibilities of poetic language to allow the passage of the other. *Los precarios* are the weaving of abjection to meaning, of time to space. They are equations, complex sums of relations held together by an endless reversal, by an interval as brief and precarious as the objects that conform with her art.

What can *los precarios* tell us about the gruesome concept of nation? This is relevant since history is never an isolated discourse; it belongs to a nation, and this is relevant furthermore because both nation and history determine the politics of visibility and inclusion which *los precarios* interrogate. *Los precarios* seem to claim that nation is by definition precarious because what constitutes the nation "es un devenir; no es lo que ha sido y no será lo que es." Bones and detritus are proof of such inevitable transformation in time despite the efforts of historical consciousness to produce continuity (Déotte 20). *El devenir*, change, becoming, the differential movement of time, is what *los precarios* reintroduce to the concepts of nation and history—particularly to the concept of national land and territory. Consequently, the non-place of *los precarios*

of which Vicuña speaks, is intertwined with the time of their remembrance in an endless process of becoming. *Los precarios*, made of waste, of *deshechos*, are fragile snapshots of the very movement of becoming; they make and unmake and they are the unmaking, *los deshechos hacen y deshacen y son ese deshacer*. Fundamental transformation: *los precarios* become. They metamorphose the waste as a metaphor of the past, into a new, although precarious order, whose destiny is to be undone again, to be constantly morphing, and to become a different residue, a new trace; alas! always a trace.

Momentarily, *los precarios* become memory; they activate both time and space by anchoring the non-place of waste through the place of the art object. As an aesthetic artifact, waste gains a different status in space by bridging its non-place to the time of memory, to the time concealed yet evoked by waste. *Los precarios* are in time only in the very inflexion between past and future; that is, as an interval between past and future. Thrown into the future, they are already a new past, a new sediment of the past.

The place of the angel of memory *par excellence* is in between, in the place (and time) of differentiation, where truths-to-be-made await. The angel acquires a new vision now that difference has been affirmed in its virtuality. Perhaps Carthage, then, in the future. But here we must not forget Nietzsche's maxims: if Carthage is to be resuscitated, it cannot be under the guise of monumental nor antiquarian history.⁶⁷ It must represent a critique of time and history. How does the past serve life then? Firstly, if woman has a specific duration and "thus the kind of active extensity (action or objects generated in the interval on the basis of affective life) which would exclude... [her] disintegration and decomposition," not only her relationship to extension through the interval but extension itself is enhanced by her creativity (Olkowski 83). Her interval

⁶⁷ See "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" in *Untimely Meditations*.

intertwines with the interval of the other, not only affirming difference but, as Irigaray has suggested, producing thinking itself. This is the very promise of newness: the interaction of woman and the other.

According to Benjamin, the status of the past defines the urgency of the historical, “[f]or every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (“*CH*” 255). I equate, here, the question of women’s memory with Carthage: yes, we wish to resuscitate it, but not because we fear it will disappear, for, as Bergson has taught us, the whole of the past coexists with the present and therefore nothing is really lost and nothing is really lost in Vicuña’s Heraclitean imaginary. Vicuña’s use of waste as an answer to the will to remember is a clear example of this. It only needs to be remembered and this is, to me, one of the most significant political values of Bergson’s work of which Vicuña’s art seems to be a clear example. The very notion of allegorical time, intention, and vision is re-signified by the interval. The value of the past, thus, changes from fragmentary pieces of destruction, which the angel sees as human history, and becomes the virtual reservoir of multiplicity in which Carthage is always alive, sensitive to the stimulus of the will, in short, to constellations awaiting critical and historical interpretation. The task of the historian, then, is quite different, as is “the state of emergency” that inspires or rather should inspire history (Benjamin “*CH*” 257). The historian and the artist are also poetic and creative explorers of the past in search of its multiple usages. True, the state of emergency is the rule; history, thus, must be faithful to this insight, but this urgency itself changes according to different historical necessities, for the oppressed take many forms throughout history. As Heidegger incisively states, every epoch has its own issue to think

about. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray comes back to this idea and claims that sexual difference *is* the question of our age. Women stand as those who have not only been oppressed but made into the living sediment of philosophy, politics, and history. It cannot be said, however, that women's history or memory will disappear, for she can and must find herself in history, in her images sedimented throughout master discourses (9, 10). What we need, then, is a different notion of history *vis-à-vis* memory and a renewed angel to gaze upon it and to carry the images of Carthage to the future with aims of ethical and political transformation.

How do *los precarios* affect the angel of history as a messenger? The angel can now stand as the second coming (*parousia*), as a figure for a discontinuous qualitative time (becoming) wherein the predictability of history, the succession, and decay of eras is replaced by the suspensive power of the open future, but moreover, the angel now stands as the guarantor of difference and therefore as the messenger of other pasts not yet told, as the one who can awake Carthage from the dead.

Ch. 4 Allegorical Specters and Paranoid Memory in Diamela Eltit's *Jamás el fuego*

nunca

“It is necessary to speak *of the* ghost, indeed *to the* ghost and *with it*, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born.”

Jacques Derrida (*Specters of Marx*)

The title of Diamela Eltit's 2007 novel *Jamás el fuego nunca* (*JFN*) is a quote from the verses of Peruvian poet César Vallejo, verses which also serve as the book's epigraph: “Jamás el fuego nunca/ jugó mejor su rol de frío muerto.” The verses belong to Vallejo's posthumously published “Los nueve monstruos,” a poem about the doubling and multiplying pain of the human condition. But *JFN* is not a gloss or a commentary on the verses; taken apart from the context of the poem they imply a re-reading and actualization of that pain into what Roberto Ampuero and Luis Martín-Estudillo call “post-authoritarian orders” (*Post-Authoritarian Cultures* xii). *El fuego* becomes more than pain, more than loss, not because it is something necessarily worse but because it is something other. For José Antonio Rivera Soto, “[e]l fuego, desde luego, representa la energía política tanto a nivel colectivo como individual...al extinguirse ese fuego fundante, comenzó a jugar su rol de frío con miles de muertos como saldo” (“La muerte del tiempo utópico” 125). It is not entirely certain, as his phrase “desde luego” suggests, that the fire is this somehow lost political energy, which supports the idea of the death of a utopian time indicated in his title and the vision of the novel as leftist defeat and nostalgia. If it is so, knowing Eltit's allegorical imagination, it could never be only that. There are no clear cut meanings in Eltit's narration: her narrative style, the disorienting

narrative temporality, the doubling of the story, and the allegorical characters prevent us from reaching such a conclusion. “Ni utópico ni desencantado,” says Adrián Ferrero in his review of the novel, and certainly there is no such thing as merely utopian or disenchanted in any of Eltit’s works, but what he calls “equilibrio sobrio” in Eltit’s narrative perspective is far from being a balance and even farther from being sober or moderate. Once again, the very language of the novel does not allow for any impassible perspective (127). Given the post-dictatorial context of the novel as well as its subject, the fire is as much a quest for memory as it is a politics of memory. It is as much a love story, as Rubí Carreño proposes, as it is a criticism of historical knowledge and sexual hierarchies (“Historias de amor en *Jamás el fuego nunca*” 191).

The oxymoronic epigraph already suggests two realities that can only be equivalent, however precariously, by virtue of poetic license, but not even through oxymoron are these realities neatly configured. The fire playing its role of cold is not difficult to imagine in a poetic sense; a dead cold, however, takes us to a whole imaginary of opposite forces. Does the cold become fire after its death? “The dead become ghosts,” utters a rather desperate Benjamin in his *Trauerspiel* (136). The fire, now only a memory of itself and its original function, is playing a role, that of being other than itself, that of being its dead opposite. The fire is now a specter of itself. This fact alone gives us a first reading clue: that the novel, as well as its characters, are too playing a role and this suggests that the narration is the dramatization, the staging of the story in which the world of the living (fire) is inhabited by or is being played by the world of the dead (frío muerto).

JFN is a claustrophobic novel—perhaps because the narration is restricted to only one character, a woman; perhaps because the whole narration takes place, with minor exceptions, in a bed, where two anonymous characters, the narrator and a man, an old couple of leftist ex-militants, presumably of a communist faction, lovingly and violently wrestle for their space. With the discretion proper to a clandestine militant, the female character gives us as much as she feels is safe to reveal for giving away their names endangers the political position they once had and to which they still respond with secrecy and fear. Although it is been long since their active participation in what the woman calls “la célula,” they still live underground, grounded in fear by the knowledge of the past, a knowledge that appears to be dangerous to the present and that seems to uphold history; they, insofar as bearers of a counter historical knowledge, must remain silent: “[e]l silencio, el nuestro, forma parte de los secretos en los que se dirime la historia” (83). But this historical silence is what is being contested throughout the novel as is the imperative to forget—hence, the allegorical character of the woman and the man battling in this bed/tomb. As one may expect of Eltit, these allegories are complex and unstable: they interrelate, they exchange positions, they reject each other, and they mirror each other. For this reason, the main character explains, “[c]ontinuamos, en gran medida, clandestinos, nos situamos afuera, radicalmente. No contamos con nombres civiles, seguimos prendidos a nuestra última chapa” (32). Consequently, we do not even know their code names, what the female character calls “chapa.” Both characters are indeed attached to their dangerous past and are still besieged by it. What we know, what she lets us know, is what she remembers in a series of temporal to-and-fros and what she laboriously and painstakingly tries to organize through the work of memory -the

unforgettable-, in opposition to the lethargy of the male character and his insistence upon forgetting. I call her particular will to remember the past, to confront the disparities of history with those of silence and oblivion, the paranoid strategy. I will return to the work of memory as paranoid reading in section two.

Both anonymous figures seem to cohabitate in the closed space of a room in a poor neighborhood, and more accurately, in a small, old bed. It is in this bed where female and male, as bodies, flesh, bones, disease, and hunger, encounter and fight each other: “lucho contigo para establecer la competencia en torno al ínfimo territorio que poseemos, el litigio por el sitio en el que se disponen los pies, los nuestros, empecinados en no mezclarse” (65). The space, as limited as it is to a small bed, is in Eltit’s imaginary the allegory of sexual, social, and political dynamics and hierarchies in which although some positions are faithfully re-enacted (e.g. the male character always sleeps on one side while she faces the wall, she prepares the meals and takes care of the male character’s health), others are contested (the male character does not leave the private space and it is the female character who works and it is she who takes care of the finances). But the bed, as we shall see in section one, is also a sort of limbo, a tomb, a cemetery where the specters of memory wander and thus a place in which the negotiations between forgetfulness and the unforgettable take place.

According to the main’s character coexistence in the bed, there seem to be at least two possible versions of the story: one version suggests that there are two bodies resting in the bed, touching each other, and re-accommodating their flesh and bones during sleepless nights of remembrance—two alive bodies coexisting, as flesh and bone, as ex-lovers, in the same bed. A second version suggests there is only one living character, the

man, while the woman is either a ghost inhabiting the time of memory or a hallucination product of the male character's delusional guilt. But there is a third possibility: both the man and woman are dead. There seems to be some hints of this in the narration which implies that the dead are haunting the dead. The dialogical articulation of the first story as recovered memory seems to allow for the second version to emerge as if only by stoking the fires of memory can other hidden, repressed, and forgotten memories emerge to re-write the past.

The first version recounts the couple's past as ex-militants who now live in secrecy and poverty in a small, decrepit room. The woman works as an aide, assisting old, paralytic, and dying people with their personal hygiene. She goes to their houses, cleans their week-long waste and patiently showers them. She then returns home to provide a modest meal, bread, rice, and the occasional pleasure of chocolate, for her partner and herself. Once at home, she starts her customary account of living expenses in a flimsy notebook while the man rests in bed. The time of the narration, the present of the characters, goes by in this bed; from there the female character interrogates the past and questions her and her lover's participation in the political events of the past, as well as their love and commitment to each other and to their political faction. While they were young, they belonged to many active militant groups, "células," and were eventually arrested and imprisoned by the police. At this point, although this was previously implied in the narration (the first time is on page 33-4), the female character asks about the death of their two-year-old child. It is never clear if the son was from the male character, from other members of the party, or the result of torture and rape while she was imprisoned: "[d]e quién es? Qué pregunta más estúpida quiero contestarte, de

cualquiera, de todos, qué importa” (165). Since they would not risk the cell by going out and giving their names to the hospital, thus exposing themselves publicly, they decided to treat their feverish toddler at home; as a result the child died due to a lack of medical treatment. The death of the son introduces an auxiliary and suspicious third character, Ximena, and the second version of the story. At this point, it becomes clear that the female character and her son were violently killed by the man, her lover and comrade. Ximena had helped the woman find a place after her imprisonment where she could hide while the baby was born. The male character comes back from prison and finds the woman pregnant. The pregnancy, of course, represents a danger to the clandestine characters as much as to the man’s ego. Ximena writes a manual of birthing instructions for the man to follow when the time comes in order to avoid going to the hospital. But all along the man and Ximena had conceived of the woman’s and her son’s deaths: “[n]o alcancé a dar luz al siglo que venía. El niño, el mío, nació muerto después de mi muerte, un parto estéril” (162). After she remembers the traumatic and repressed event of her son’s death, we become aware that she is narrating the past as a ghost. Ximena, who was also caught and killed, remembers:

[m]orí, es cierto...con el convencimiento de que él te iba a matar. Te iba a matar de todas maneras, no, no me digas que tú lo ignorabas. Un militante asesino, un asesinato que no fue consignado en ningún juzgado, un crimen en el que nadie reparó, una muerte impune, te mató y se aprovechó de la clandestinidad, de su agónica militancia...Él te iba a cobrar lo del niño.
(163)

The woman’s death was covered up and justified by their clandestine position and motivated both by political reasons and by the man’s revenge. Ximena explains the man’s brutality: “Te mató de un tremendo palo en la cabeza que te destrozó el cráneo, después te quebró las manos.” He gave her an immense amount of ether; “[é]sa fue tu

tarea, tu misión, ese el encargo de la ultima célula que quedaba... Sé que no hubo nada personal en esa decisión, que se trataba de una simple pero urgente medida de seguridad,” the woman explains (162). The cold militant rigor with which she has justified her and her son’s death is just a performance, a way to cope with the knowledge that they were killed by her lover. The pain of unveiling the traumatic event destabilizes the second version of the story and so she begins to doubt the past as if adjusting the lens of memory to better define that which appears blurry: “[l]a cama y el éter, la sangre y el éter, mis piernas y el éter. No lo sé. No puedo asegurar nada. El niño nació muerto o murió a los dos años. O no nació. O no nació” (162). This doubt will introduce, one by one, a whole cohort of dead bodies and will resignify, allegorically, the meaning of the woman, the man, their bodies, the cells, and history.

The Unforgettable Exigency or Diamela Eltit is Haunting Chile

In this section, I argue that Eltit’s recourse to the figure of the specter is her attempt to envision, on the one hand, an “ontology of remains,” to borrow Derrida’s term, that is “to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead.” However, *JFN* problematizes the two main characteristics that Derrida attributes to such an ontology and from which an epistemology of mourning derive thus pointing to the difficulties in knowing “*who* and *where*, to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies—for it must stay in its place (*Specters of Marx* 9). This suggests, furthermore, that Eltit’s *JFN* proposes an alternative way of “making present” a spectral ontology of the remains, so as to envision an ethical reckoning with unidentifiable remains and, therefore, an alternative epistemology of mourning. On the

other hand, the specter's presence, its presentation, disjoints the stultified dyad memory/oblivion in the process of mourning with the rather spectral category of the unforgettable as conceived by Giorgio Agamben, which explains the confusing temporality of the novel and its allegorical character.

As we have seen above, the main characters remain unnamed during the narration; we, in fact, neither know *who* nor *where*. This is the first characteristic of Eltit's spectral ontology: the unrecognizability of the trace. If "the possibility of history is bound to the survival of the traces of what is past and to our ability to read these traces as traces," then the specter, in its specific condition and quality as trace, questions the very possibility of history as well as its in the writing and interpreting of history (Cadava, *Words of Light* 64). The archeology of remains, for instance the digging of common graves (*fosas comunes*), does not lead to closure or proper mourning in most cases, precisely because the trace is unrecognizable. The body *qua* remain remains, then, bare remnant, unidentifiable. It is indeed a specter, a bodily remnant of a spirit. Eltit insists on this ossuary confusion throughout the novel. The anonymity of the characters, the other members of the cells' *chapas*, and the impossibility to discern whose grave is the one in which the narration takes place emphasize this confusion: "[t]us huesos, son tuyos, pienso, tuyos, pero no tengo ninguna convicción, proyectada como un ovillo duplicado al lado tuyo, sí, hechos un ovillo en la cama." The woman, "aterrada ante la posibilidad de compartir la misma pierna," asks the man, "corre el pie, para separar el mío del tuyo. Aún pretendo que el pie es mío y que tus huesos te pertenecen, que no es tuya mi cadera ni mi dolor en los riñones...lo hago para salvar mi pierna de una terrible e implacable confusión" (60,65). "Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion

or doubt,” claims Derrida, and Eltit is all too aware of how this not-knowing affects the work of mourning, hence her need to think and work through the figure of the specter as remains. It is this not-knowing that introduces the category of the unforgettable: we do not know and because we do not know we cannot forget what is already forgotten. The unclassifiable remain is “[a] bag of bones [which] tells us nothing about disappearance. A bag of bones is not justice. A bag of bones is knowledge without acknowledgement” (Gordon 115). Eltit’s ontology in this regard aims to be this acknowledgement. Thus the specter resists the death of the disappeared and demands a negotiation between the disappeared and its appearance as unforgettable. This implies a “dynamic reintegration of the dead and the disappeared into contemporaneity” (Franco, “Death Camp Confessions” 14). This reintegration, as stated above, will not bring either justice or forgiveness but will allow a reckoning with the repressed. And reintegration here suggests acknowledgement and not reincorporation as we will see.

But we, furthermore, do not know where the remains are either: [e]n esta cama, en este mismo colchón, claro, si es que todavía se puede nombrar de esta manera, el colchón: tú, yo y el éter”; “la cama...que consumó la muerte” (159, 65). The bed where the woman and the man lie has become now a sepulcher as Rubí Carreño believes (193). This is the second element in Eltit’s spectral ontology: the unlocalization of the remains. “Ghostly apparitions occur only in places where a terrible deed has been committed”; the bed, as the site of the woman’s and her son’s death, as a vortex to which all the specters return, is, in this regard, the allegory of all political violence (Kracauer qtd. in Cadava 13). Still this bed refuses localization; it is any bed in any room in any building. This apparent generalization is not banal; it wishes to show the ubiquitous character of

political violence. There are clues in the narration that suggest the man could also dead: “[n]os vamos a morir, dices o quizás dices: estamos muertos o nos mataron, dices.” The woman also defines the body of the man as a *resto*, a remain, when she claims “[h]uyo del *resto de cuerpo* que te queda” (71; my emphasis). The bed is thus a tomb or a limbo where “time is out of joint,” where memory and the dead return compulsively, as waves of images which only merge in this disjointment, a limbo where the bodies are unable to rest and become presence as specters. But the bed can also be taken to signify detention centers, torture chambers, common graves, and mass exhumations. The persecutory haunting of the specters is in this regard a criticism of dictatorial state power and its exemplary violence as well as a criticism of the politics of agreement of the transitional era. Haunting unveils the historical placelessness of massive violence sites and their political concealment. The unlocalizable bed is hence a question regarding the geopolitics of trauma.⁶⁸ The bed as tomb or limbo ultimately raises the question of the places of the forgotten, which insofar as immemorial, cannot indeed find nor have a place. The bed/tomb is an opening that allows the permeation of the registers of memory with other competing invisible memories and the constant unsettling and working through of the forgotten.

By the end of the novel the lovers’ bed resembles a *fosa común*:

[y] aquí vienen todas las células, en grupos que parecen excesivos o interminables, llegan acuciosos justo cuando yo estoy demasiado cansada, vienen a apoderarse de nuestros cuerpos y a auscultar los dolores que tenemos... Las células nos mueven y nos dan vuelta. (165)

⁶⁸ The clandestine centers of torture and detention have now become public. The site *Memoriaviva* gives a thorough account of all the torture centers across the 13 regions. Most of the information regarding what happened in these places comes from the *Informe Rettig* and the *Informe Valech* (http://www.memoriaviva.com/Centros/centros_de_detencion.htm).

The specters (Derrida uses the term *revenant*) of the cell members come back; they seem to gather in this *fosa común*, emphasizing the communality of their deaths and their remains.

Perhaps the specters are convoked to return by the narrator's working through the past.

Perhaps they are constituted as specters by the same act of violence thus wandering together as dead cells of a dead organism, seeking to be recovered from the *frío muerto*.

This unidentifiable bed is therefore a place of endless procession and endless mourning; in other words, the remains that lie there are not in fact there. The knowledge of which Derrida speaks as a precondition for the work of mourning to take place does not respond to the anonymous body of remains that only remain as such, as remnant.

The specter as an unidentifiable remnant, unknown, invisible, and forgotten, will be, in this regard, the representation of that "which remains unforgettable," that is, "the shapeless chaos of the forgotten" (Agamben, *The Time that Remains* 39-40). So although the woman and the man are forgetting the face of the dead son, "lo que nunca podríamos olvidar era su inmanencia" (68). The unforgettable, insofar as forgotten, is still active within us. I permit myself a rather long quote in order to understand what the unforgettable represents and how it relates to Eltit's specters:

The exigency of the lost does not entail being remembered and commemorated; rather, it entails remaining in us and with us as forgotten, and in this way and only in this way, remaining unforgettable. From this stems the inadequacy in trying to restore to memory what is forgotten by inscribing it in the archives and monuments of history, or in trying to construct another tradition and history, of the oppressed and the defeated. While their history may be written with different tools than that of the dominant classes, it will never substantially differ from it... The alternatives at this juncture are therefore not to forget or remember, to be unaware or become conscious, but rather, the determining factor is the capacity to remain faithful to that which having perpetually been forgotten, must remain unforgettable (40).

The spectrality of the unidentifiable remains cannot be restored to either memory or history for they cannot be known. The unforgettable is, hence, immemorial; it cannot be commemorated and it rejects commemoration hence remaining spectral. Neither an awareness of the past nor a lack of it could ever indeed respond to the impossibility of mourning an unidentified remnant. For this reason, for it “remains in us,” the specters haunt us and for it “remains in us,” because it haunts us, it becomes unforgettable. The exigency of which Agamben speaks is the haunting itself. Eltit is thus suggesting that there needs to be a reformulation in the negotiation between the real and the possible, between historical time and the time of memory, and the place that the unforgettable, insofar as forgotten, has within knowledge. The question is therefore what is the possibility of working through that which although disappeared appears to us as apparition. How does this impossibility become real? For Avery Gordon,

[a] disappearance is real only when it is apparitional because the ghost or the apparition is the principal form by which something lost or invisible or seemingly not there makes itself known or apparent to us. The ghost makes itself apparent to us through haunting and pulls us affectively into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience as recognition. (63)

The figure of the specter allows the presentation of the disappeared or lost; the presentation in addition allows for its recognition—it represents an acknowledgement of an otherwise empty knowledge. This is how, then, Eltit bequeaths the lost, unidentifiable remain with reality, with *a* reality, by making it appear to cognition however much it defies cognition. The reformulation between the real and the possible becomes, in Eltit’s masterful imagination, an encounter between the real and the impossible because only through the apparition of the invisible can the unforgettable, insofar as forgotten, be mourned. To the impossibility of knowing whose remains or which remains, in other words, to the impossibility of naming, the spectral haunting becomes “a special way of

knowing what has happened or is happening” (Gordon 63). The female main character is suggesting, as a specter and as such as a survivor of an era, that there needs to be a new relation between the forces of memory and oblivion as well as a new rapport between memory and history. The figure of the specter, consequently, wishes to intervene in the world of causality, in particular to the world of causality that supports and contends knowledge. The specters in *JFN* suggest a different epistemology of mourning. Simply put, the narration is possible only because the dead speak; we must even say that the narration is possible because Eltit is haunted by the exigency of the unforgettable. The haunting specter of the narrator is unsettling the limits of knowability and the ways in which knowledge is accessed and produced. If the ghost is “a symptom of what is missing,” in *JFN* they are allegories not only of bodily remains but also of new ways of knowing. What is missing, then, is a way of accessing the past that gives an account of the unforgettable, a work of memory capable of imagining a visibility for what is missing without ever consigning such visibility to political conciliatory measurements, that is, by making the specter or what is missing, immemorial.

There is never only death, Eltit seems to be saying, but an eternal return of that which, in one way or another, has left. The responsibility towards the unforgettable is hence, in the first place, prophylactic, that is, to prevent the repressed from returning; Agamben writes,

[i]f, however, we refuse to respond, and if, on both the collective and individual level, we forgo each and every relation to the mass of the forgotten that accompanies us like a silent golem, then it will reappear within us in a destructive and perverse way, in the form Freud called the returned of the repressed, that is, as the return of the impossible as such. (*TR* 40-1)

The specter is, by definition, the return of the impossible as such! But the specters in *JFN* are paradoxical in this regard; they represent the repressed that returns because the

exigency of the forgotten was not heeded individually or collectively but also, and more interestingly, they return as the only ethical possibility for the unforgettable to continue to be “at work within us,” to continue to make itself knowable through its apparition, hence the haunting of the specter (40). I refer to this as Eltit’s spectral ontology of the remains. In other words, the specter is the possibility of the impossible. If the unforgettable “demands to remain with us and be possible for us in some manner,” as Agamben explains, the specter is Eltit’s way of making the unforgettable to be possible for us, spectrally (40). The specter’s paradoxical status, as the return of the repressed and as the ethical possibility for the forgotten to remain unforgettable, imply a new articulation between the real and the possible and, evidently, between traumatic memory and efficacious mourning.⁶⁹ I think Eltit’s fundamental bet in recurring to the figure of the haunting ghost is to configure other ways of knowing (wherein haunting is itself a modality of knowing).

As a writer conscious of her trade, Eltit wishes to show that any writing, as well as any act of interpretation and any seeing, any becoming visible, which already implies an interpretative action as Husserl has taught us, is indeed constantly haunted by that which is displaced or separated from and by that which serves, in its invisibility, as substrata (*The Shorter Logical Investigations* 398). Writing as an aesthetic practice and

⁶⁹ As Jelica Šumič explains, Agamben is concerned with redeeming the past, specifically with saving “what was not” (Giorgio Agamben’s *Godless Saints* 139). The “what was not” is linked to the idea of the irreparability of the world. If “the Irreparable is that things are just as they are,” it is only logical that redemption starts by recognizing this irreparability (Agamben qtd. in Šumič 139). Eltit’s specters are, conversely, a defiance of this irreparability. Simply put, the specter implies that the dead are not dead, that the impossible is possible. Hence, Eltit’s ontology will presuppose a redemption in the time of the future anterior, of saving that which will have been, thus freeing the past from its irreparability and opening it up to the future. In *The Time that Remains*, Agamben takes a statement from Leibniz’s “Primary Truths,” “every possibility demands to exist, to become real,” and inverts it: “Each existent demands its proper possibility, it demands that it become possible. Exigency consists in a relation between what is or has been, and its possibility” (39). Eltit’s specters are more radical: Every impossibility as such demands to become possible. Exigency consists of a relation between what will have been and its possibility.

remembrance as an interpretative modality are inherently inhabited and contested by the phantasmagoric presence of those who serve as intertextual support (in *JFN* the intertextual specter is Marx and his *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*, as well as messianic history,) or of those to whom the work of memory signals as absence and invisibility (e.g. *detenidos desaparecidos*).⁷⁰ The specter hence performs a documentary operation, that is, it evidences this disappearance; the figure of the specter, like Roland Barthes' photograph, "possesses an evidential force" (88).⁷¹ The specter as documentary evidence, however, does not authenticate itself; it questions the value of truth, of any evidence, the claim of authenticity, of visibility, and consequently, the structure of experience to which any truth or interpretation belong. As Gordon explains, ghosts highlight "the limitations of many of our prevalent modes of inquiry and the assumptions they make about the social world, the people who inhabit these worlds, and what is required to study them" (*Ghostly Matters* 8). Similarly, the ghosts in Eltit's *JFN* also point to the limitations of inquiry regarding the ways in which we can recover unidentifiable remains, the ways in which we can recover the unforgettable. What tools do we use to register that which is historically invisible but also that which is sheer visibility itself, whether exemplary, repressive, or simulated? How does the visible enjoin the invisible and vice versa? If the limit of the visible is the invisible, how do we transgress the limit or at least bend it? The specter seems to be that which while being invisible becomes visible or that which speaks from the realm of invisibility while

⁷⁰ Any semantic operation is, for that matter, already haunted by language, by virtue of itself!

⁷¹ This of course introduces another issue, that of reality. Barthes saw himself as a realist hence the photograph for him is "an emanation of a *past reality*"; it tells us "what has been" (88, 85). The principle operating behind this realism is that of certainty. The specter, as the "impossible as such," conversely is not an emanation of a past reality but an emanation of an impossibility.

intervening in the realm of the visible. The question of the specter's visibility or apparition is intimately linked to its function as apparition.

If the apparition is unstable in its appearance—it both appears and disappears; it does not “certificate presence” but rather makes presence—the evidential character of its becoming presence is to conjure up a new experience and a new evaluation of truth (87). The specter insofar as evidence therefore resists its evidential character for it wishes not be a document but to be an extended document as we shall shortly see. Slippery and aloof, the specter defies assimilation. The apparitional, in its disclosure, impedes mourning's closure and consequently the remains cannot be assimilated by memory and history and thusly, the specter remains in excess to commemoration. It is in this regard that the specter remains immemorial. If like the photograph, the specter's testimony “bears not on the object but on time,” this time can only be in excess to the time of mourning (Barthes 89). The time of the specter is hence “an additional time” (Agamben *TR* 69). The specter represents a time entirely other for, although an allegory of the unforgettable, the specter cannot be said to come from the past; in other words, what appears is not the past as such but a disjointment of time where the past coexists and amalgamates with the future. For Derrida, similarly, “no one can be sure if by returning [the specter] testifies to a living past or to a living future.” This excessive temporality puts to a halt any eschatology of time or history as well as any historical determinism. In this sense the specter stands in opposition to homogenous visions of time and proposes a time of unforeseeable irruption by virtue of its very excess for “a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back” (99).

Unredeemable, the specter is, hence, not messianic; it arrives only by coming back, interrupting the eternalization of history. The specter's temporality, its causality, is the afterwards of trauma. For the haunted one, the specter thus represents the belatedness of traumatic effects. If we conceive, for instance, the possibility of the male character being alive, old, and sick, tormented by the killings of his ex-lover and his son, the specter would be the man's hallucinatory condition proper to post-traumatic disorders. For Cathy Caruth, "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event" (*Trauma* 3-4). The man would be possessed here by the specters of his killings. The structural trauma of the novel, the death of the son, is a narrative whirlpool out of which all narrative elements, whether allegorical or not, spin and depend. In the very center of the story lies the repressed death of the son upon which the specters (man, woman, Ximena) seem to return endlessly. From this traumatic center the disappeared members of the cells now return to haunt and judge the death of the woman's son. The procession of mourners represents at the same time the disappeared ones under Pinochet's regime and those who mourn those disappearances. The traumatic knot of the son's death allegorically encompasses the individual and the collective trauma of the forgotten *qua* unforgettable. In this regard, the specter is a repetition and the only way to stay "absolutely *true* to the event" (Caruth 5). If both the man and woman are dead, on the other hand, the specters are haunting us, the readers, and the post-dictatorial Chilean community. We are now ready to add yet another interpretative layer to the allegorical character of the woman and man: an era haunts an era—the dictatorial past persecutes the post-dictatorship's obliviousness. Time is haunting us; it is interpellating us as members

of a traumatized community. “El siglo pena. Aún habla o murmura a diestra y siniestra...Lo escucho y me pena,” says the woman.

The experience of haunting is thus associated with the ability to hear the specter, who seems to speak, ceaselessly, “a diestra y siniestra.” Likewise, Ximena and the woman, organizing the traumatic material of the past, torment and haunt the peace the man wants for himself: “[d]éjame dormir, dices. Pero no duermes, se trata de un burdo intento para silenciarnos a Ximena y a mí. Quieres paz y silencio” (161). The question of haunting becomes then also a question of language: do specters speak? What are they saying? Or, rather, if they speak, can we understand them and speak back to them? The question, in summa, regarding the specters’ communication implies their function as apparition. This is very much in agreement with the Heideggerian formula that “every disclosure of a thing...reveals its ‘what-it-is-for’” (James Mensch, *Embodiments* 41). In *JFN* the specters haunt by speaking; this seems to be their unconcealment. If haunting is the “particular mediation...between an institution and an individual, a social structure and a subject, and history and a biography,” haunting emphasizes the gap between history and the individual, between collective and socially sanctioned memory and individual memory, and poses the possibility of re-signifying the negotiations that occur between both history and the historical subject (Gordon 19). Ximena’s haunting exposes both the man and her own participation in the traumatic event of the son’s death; her mediation consists in bridging the facts from the fabulations of the repressed. Her apparition makes the repressed content appear while conjuring the woman to become a haunting specter as well in order to reanimate the past; haunting is thus the paradigmatic sociality of the disappeared. The specter carries with her an unrecovered knowledge; in consequence,

the specter speaks only insofar as unrecovered. The specters of Eltit, the non-living, are of course not only representations of the *detenidos desaparecidos*; they also represent the unrecovered past insofar as forgotten. And here recovery must not be understood as a reconstitution or as restitution but “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (Heidegger qtd. in Hubert L. Dreyfus, 31).⁷² As Derrida explains, the difference between spirit and specter resides in what appears. The specter would thus be the embodiment of spirit, “[f]or it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral character” (6). The specter shows itself; it becomes itself exposure in order to become communication. Its appearing is its mediation while its appearance is already beyond the limits of knowledge. Yet this visibility is precarious and ambivalent; the specter appears and disappears. It remains in-between: “[y]a no dormimos, ni estamos despiertos” (164).

As allegory of the past and of the unforgettable, the specter, “this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one[,] *no longer belongs to knowledge*” (Derrida 6; my emphasis). As allegory then the specter points towards the not yet articulated, perhaps, even more, insofar as unforgettable, an unarticulable knowledge which defies both our sociability and our reckoning with ungraspable evidence and ways of knowing. The haunted one is then a witness to the specter, and her mission is ultimately to bear bearing witness, to be able to stand and hear the voice of the specter speaking “a diestra y siniestra.”

⁷² If the spectral figure belongs to Ricoeur’s concept of a hermeneutics of recovery as a phenomenological form of knowledge, the figure of paranoia, the subject of the next section, corresponds to his hermeneutics of suspicion. The latter will prevent the self from believing in itself as a “transparent center of experience” (David Kaplan *Reading Ricoeur*, 7-8). This suggests that the voices uttered by the ghosts and the story narrated by the main character, who is also a ghost, must also be questioned.

JFN is inevitably a site where diverse realities and levels of experience and knowledge production collide in a more or less violent manner. There is, of course, an inherent violence to the competence of registers that the novel performs: the woman as the exigency of the unforgettable and the man as the imperative to forget, not to mention the sententious haunting of the dead in their loquacious function. The specters of Marxism, of political militancy and commitment, are haunting not only the text, appearing here and there, but also represent the substrata of a whole concept of history (historical materialism). As we explained above, the specter also returns as an ethical engagement with the forgotten. The specters were, of course, spectators of that past and participants of a lost century, a lost millennia, and a lost concept of history; they do not return only as that which was lost, as a melancholic vision of the specter may suggest, but as disruption, as unruly, ceaseless voices which will not stop to return—in summa, they return too “as possibility” (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 12). This possibility, I suggest, is a revision of historical determinism and not a conflation or surrender of history to the forces of capitalism. Eltit’s revisionism implies no melancholy for any utopian dream or leftist defeat as the critics would have it.⁷³ It does a disservice to the novel to suggest Eltit is just pointing to what has been lost as if saying: here it is, this is what happened and now there is nothing else. We lost! Such perverse reading is insufficient and such a book would be of no ethical importance insofar as it is mere exposure. The specters of Eltit are not a swarm of defeated pasts with no place in the future—that would be equivalent to saying that their deaths, as well as their lives, were meaningless. “[T]o

⁷³ See, for instance, Javier Edwards’ “*Obituario para una esperanza muerta*” for whom “Jamás el fuego nunca es el relato...de un proyecto revolucionario de izquierda derrotado” and “la crónica de una pasión, de un fuego que nació bajo el signo del fracaso, que ya en el momento de su máxima expresión vital, acarreaba la muerte, como una bandera engañosa pero inevitable” (<http://www.lettras5.com/de1607071.htm>).

dwell means to leave traces” (Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life* 39). If Eltit rescues from the cinders of memory the haunting specter, it is because haunting allows their own recovery without introjections or incorporation. When the ghost awakes from the latency of the past it comes back as restless. It does not wish to continue to rest.

Between Memory and History: Paranoid Readings

Secrecy is a cautionary measurement in *JFN*. What we have called above Eltit’s spectral ontology of the remains is a direct consequence of the main characters’ clandestine militancy in an oppositional political cell. But given the allegorical nature of the narrative elements in *JFN*, secrecy becomes, too, the most viable answer for the main characters to remain faithful to and to act upon their opposition towards the military regime: “un verdadero militante [sigue] fielmente el trazado de [sus] principios. La gloriosa parquedad necesaria y resistente” (40). As a result, their identities are defined by its persecutory surveillance mechanisms: “[n]os habíamos convertido en profesionales de la clandestinidad, sabíamos como movernos.” “Entregados a la disciplina que requiere un militante...[c]aminábamos siguiendo nuestros propios pasos. Así nos convertimos en nuestros custodios” (109-62). But paranoia not only defines the ways in which the main characters relate to the social and the political; the narrative structure of *JFN* itself is an allegory of paranoid interpretation. Like the specters who haunt the male character and who, furthermore, haunt each other, the military regime and the capitalist logic brought about by it become invisible haunting specters as well. The ubiquitous state violence and the luring powers of commodity fetishism represented in the novel by the appeal of technology and window displays, furthermore, conflate in a higher macrostructure of

invisible forces which, in Eltit's imaginary, takes the form of history; I will call this macrostructure "the system."⁷⁴ History as the all "all-encompassing system," is the biggest specter of all; it is the "unrepresentable totality" which thus remains "absent" (Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* 299; Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* 10).

These political and economic forces follow the structure of the spectral ontology: they are invisible, unlocalizable forces from whose haunting derives the persecutory, fear-based epistemological search in the novel. Paranoia then serves as a bridge between competing visions of history, and more profoundly, between different conceptions of knowledge as history's foundation.

The dialectic between the local site of resistance represented by the clandestine cells and the global specter of history as the system *par excellence* introduces paranoia as the privileged structure for negotiating meaning, that is, it allows the translation and refraction of history as "the system" into aesthetic forms and into psychic structures. I understand paranoia not in a pathological sense but as a "cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds" (Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 126). The narrator's paranoid strategy, in this regard, will represent an alternative critical practice to that of the Latin American *testimonio* or to the melancholic work of memory, for instance. It is important to note here that I am not really interested in how right or wrong the female character is. In other words, I am not interested in the truth value of her assertions but in the way in which the paranoid strategy allows her a way of "seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge" (Sedgwick 130). Paranoia's cognitive function stems from its affective origin as "a species of fear based on the dysphoric apprehension

⁷⁴ I use the term "the system" here with all its connotations with conspiracy theory to emphasize the spectrality of history in *JFN* as "an abstract and holistic entity," "anthropomorphized into a subject capable of 'understanding' its enemies and 'dealing' with them accordingly" (Ngai 301, 300).

of a holistic and all-encompassing system” (Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* 299). The affective origin in *JFN* is the fear of history’s power; the woman explains, “nuestra célula, la última, estaba apunto de naufragar ante los imperativos de lo que tanto temíamos, la historia” (103). I will explore in more detail below the conflicting and at times contradictory visions of history in the novel.

Although Sedgwick remains critical and, ironically, suspicious of the “monopolistic program of paranoid knowing” in academic and professional scenarios where paranoid strategies become “doable and teachable protocols,” it cannot be argued without generalizing and compromising the position of other non-academic subjects, that third-world women, for instance, have had any historical monopoly of paranoia as an epistemology, in particular, if we consider the context of the Chilean military regime and its aftermath (144, 143). In this regard, Eltit is recovering this critical space for herself so as to suggest, as Naomi Schor does, the necessity of female theorizing even the most masculine laden inquiries but, contrary to Schor, not to create a sexually specific methodology of theorizing. This recuperation, as I aim to show, participates in what Sedgwick defines as reparative practices, that is, they are pleasure-seeking instead of merely anticipating surprise and preventing pain from occurring; hence Eltit distances herself from theoretically and pathologically mystified paranoia. This reparative function would be able to remove paranoia from mere exposure or unveiling of a system of oppression to find ways to repair the state of oppression.

For David Shapiro paranoia is a mode of functioning which stems from a “pathology of autonomy,” that is, the fear of being subjected to “some external control” (*Neurotic Styles* 79, 81, 80). An “unstable autonomy” generates a “defensive and

antagonistic relationship to the external world” (80). In Shapiro’s account the consequence of the paranoid’s response to the frailty of the subject’s autonomy is a rigid and narrow attentional focus which in turns results in the belief that “her interpretation of events is *the* interpretation. In other words, the paranoid becomes the only acceptable authority” (Linda Fisher, “Hermeneutics of Suspicion and Postmodern Paranoia” 108). The problem of such a vision of paranoia is that it will sustain and affirm “existing forms of compliance and subjection” (Ngai 302). Conversely and although, as I have explained, paranoia in *JFN* is also fear based, the narrator seems to be reacting and opposing to such interpretation in the novel and represented by the man’s orthodox reading of Marxist’s texts. Paranoia allows the woman to move from one position regarding knowledge and interpretation or “monumental” and “antiquarian” knowledge to a “critical” one. I am borrowing here these terms from Nietzsche’s analysis on history in his *Untimely Meditations*.⁷⁵ In short, monumental knowledge aims to relive the greatness of past eras which amounts to replicating its effects. Antiquarian knowledge incarnates tradition; it aims at preserving knowledge because it cannot engender it itself. Lastly, a critical knowledge is, “an attempt to give oneself a past, as it were, *a posteriori*” by “confront[ing] our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge” (76).

In the first part of the novel, the main characters participate in Shapiro’s paranoid structure: “[p]ensamos como militantes. Estamos convencidos de que *nuestra ética es la única pertinente*. Lo sabemos, lo constatamos a cada instante...sabemos que la historia terminará por darnos la razón” (28; my emphasis). It is this blind faith in their historical interpretation as well as in history’s determinism that arouses in the woman the impulse to suspicion and which will lead to her questioning of history and ethics throughout the

⁷⁵ See, in particular, pp.72-77.

novel. To this version of paranoid knowledge, the woman will respond, conversely, with a reparative paranoia which allows for elastic and surreal connections which permit the elaboration of individual fantasy with social structures. This, in consequence, allows the narrator to position herself with respect to “the system” in a new cognitive locus which permits her to represent “the system” while bestowing her with a certain mobility or a new sense of autonomy. The epistemological recognition product of paranoia would, in turn, free the narrator from fear; hence, by exercising a paranoid reading, she is able to uncover history’s and historical consciousness’s own paranoid structure as a “total system.”

Of How We Become Paranoid

It is perhaps due to Freud’s work on Dr. Schreber and his conclusion that paranoia occurs as a repression of same-sex desire that studies on paranoia have long been part of queer theory and, as Eve Sedgwick explains, since the 80’s, due to the work of Guy Hocquenghem, paranoia became “the privileged *object* of antihomophobic theory” (126; her emphasis). As Sianne Ngai reminds us, paranoia is “a distinctively male form of knowledge production” (“Bad Timing” 4). The role assigned to women’s inquiry, is, contrary to global male concerns, relegated to particularities (Monique Wittig “The Mark of Gender,” 81). This privileged relationship between male “hermeneutic quests” and theorization may stem from sources as varied as Plato, the principles of Enlightenment, Descartes’ *Meditations* and his notion of the evil genius or “Evil Deceiver,”⁷⁶ to Freud’s

⁷⁶ See Kurt Brandhorst’s analysis of Descartes’ *Meditations* in relation to the role of paranoid thought; although he doesn’t explicitly call his mode “paranoid,” his whole system including the principles of doubt, the deceiving God, the bad habit of dubious opinion, and the infamous evil genius as “an all-powerful and evil being who wishes to deceive [Descartes]” can easily fall within the mode of paranoiaic

reading of paranoia as homosexual latency in “Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)” to his dubious analysis of female paranoia in “A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psychoanalytic Theory of the Disease.”

It is Naomi Schor who perhaps for the first time attempts a feminist reading of paranoia to counter “the unexamined priority and primacy of the masculine paradigm,” in which female paranoia represents a “contradictory case” which “call[s] into question the universal validity of the theory of paranoia derived from the analysis of a male paranoiac (Schreber).” Schor’s fundamental question is “can females theorize, albeit in the caricatural mode of the mad? Does the homology between male and female paranoia include the prestigious intellectual (hyper)activity associated with the male model?” (“Female Paranoia” 205-6). Schor quotes Ruth Mack Brunswick, one of Freud’s disciples, to define female paranoia *vis-à-vis* a masculine one. There are “two types of true paranoia, the jealous and the persecutory”; the former is “both feminine and rudimentary,” as it were, closer to the normal and the neurotic, and the latter “is an elaborate psychosis of an essentially masculine nature” (207). The risks of any such essentialization are obvious and Naomi Schor does fall prey to it when trying to conceive of women’s theorizing as materially grounded.⁷⁷ Eltit’s recuperative mode wishes to

speculation (40-45). It may not be entirely delusional to add Descartes to Paul Ricoeur’s triumvirate of suspiciousness, Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx.

⁷⁷ In fact, I take issue with her reading of Freud’s “A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psychoanalytic Theory of the Disease.” The woman that visits Freud believes she is being cheated on and blackmailed by her lover so she takes the case to a lawyer who sends her to see Freud. In her first of two visits to her lover’s house she hears a clicking sound which she interprets to be a secret camera taking shots of their intimate relationship. Freud considers the sound to be a stimulus to the fantasy of eavesdropping, typical of a parental complex, and he goes as far as to suggest the clicking noise never occurred and that it was in fact a projection from the woman’s throbbing clitoris. From here, Schor establishes a connection between female paranoia and the body and that female paranoid theory is clitoral as opposed to the hysterical, vaginal mode of say, Kristeva and Irigaray. For Schor, “female theorizing is grounded in the

perform masculine paranoia so as to displace its essential locus in the production of knowledge and to show its positive use in reckoning with the past without ever trying to define its sexual specificities.

Persecution, like the traumatic narrative knot of the son's death, structures *JFN* allegorically. As a whole, *JFN* performs the persecution of the unforgettable with regards to history. History, in its turn, persecutes the main character. The main character persecutes the man, and Ximena persecutes the woman while all the members of the cells persecute the narrator.⁷⁸ As we mentioned above, history as a totalizing system encompasses the terror and violence of Pinochet's regime as well as the haunting and hunting power of commodity fetishism. In this regard, the city and its inhabitants perform the persecutory function which constrains the main characters to their bed. The allure of window displays and the hypnotic desire for consumption persecute the woman and tempt her to buy a dress. The persecutors in *JFN* hence correspond to "wide-ranging, even transglobal technological and political structures," that is, to the ultimate abstraction (Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* 298). If these abstractions are able to articulate "a system so vast that it cannot be encompassed by the natural and historically developed categories of perception with which human beings normally orient themselves," paranoia becomes a perceptual response, justified precisely by the vastness of the system insofar as a new historical force (Jameson 2). Paranoia is thus an answer to what we perceive and how is it that what we perceive affects our belief system. If philosophical curiosity, doubt, and

body. Indeed it may well be that female theorizing involves at least as much asserting the body's inscription in language, as demonstrating the female body's exclusion from language" (210). Schor is well aware that the alleged clitoris throbbing in Freud's theory is unconfirmed to say the least so to build up a whole paranoid clitoral model of French feminist theory from there seems to be a stretch and a rather convoluted way of arriving to what she calls a "hermeneutic of details" as proper of female theorizing.

⁷⁸ It is not entirely clear yet plausible that when the woman was captured by the police and tortured she may have given up the names of other cell members who were later killed. This may explain why the members come back to the bed to haunt her.

skepticism seem to be peremptory for judgment and for the possibility of knowledge production, for what else is the Cartesian cogito than a thinking consciousness aware of its own thinking, perhaps the appearance of paranoia has to do with the same consciousness that when confronted with the immense and infinite set of relations, the “potentially infinite network” which Jameson describes as the “world system,” asks the three primordial Kantian questions: what can I know, what can I do, what can I hope for (9). If the system as ultimate abstraction becomes in its infinity, unknowable, the Kantian cogito cannot know, cannot do, and cannot hope for anything except to suspect if she can apprehend at least a partiality of the infinite totality. Perhaps paranoia stems from the confrontation of the limits of our consciousness with the system that creates our consciousness, a confrontation that will ultimately unveil the fictive character of consciousness itself. Paul Ricœur refers to this when he poses Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx as masters of suspicion for they discover “the lie of consciousness and consciousness as a lie” (*The Conflict of Interpretations* 97).⁷⁹ If these limits introduce a conflict of interpretations between what the subject can interpret and what the system allows the subjects to interpret, these limits will, of course, structure our perception and consequently our conception of the world as well as our ethical engagement with it. If Jameson’s world system or history as the system, in our case, appears unmappable, impossible, infinite, perverse, etc., the answers to the Kantian questions become limited as is our possibility of acting upon the world. Reparative paranoia will, in this regard, push the limits of this impossibility in search for a possibility to know and to act

⁷⁹ For Melanie Klein, all ego formation belongs to a paranoid-squizoid position which is constitutive of ego development; neurosis would be the reparative state with which to tackle the paranoid anxieties (See Hanna Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*). Likewise, for Lacan, following Freud, “*the ego is paranoid in structure*” (qtd. in Phillipe Julien, *Jacques Lacan's Return to Freud* 16).

La analista:

The novel starts with the two main characters lying in bed and ready to sleep. However, the woman claims, “[n]o consigo dormir y entre los minutos, a través de los segundos que no alcanzo a precisar, se entromete una inquietud absurda pero que se impone como decisiva, la muerte de Franco, sí, la muerte de Franco” (12). The first question regarding the past, Franco’s death, will usher in the paranoid reading of the past.⁸⁰ This “inquietud absurda” becomes fundamental, unavoidable, “se impone como decisiva,” thus beginning the haunting of the past and the necessity of reorganizing it by finding a chronological root to anchor the slipperiness of memory, since Franco died “[u]n día preciso de un año preciso pero que no forma parte de un orden” (12). Of course, this seemingly absurd anxiety is allegorically decisive; it is imperative to remember here that Augusto Pinochet had died, untried, less than a year before the publication of *JFN*, in December of 2006, at age 91. The fact that the woman avoids Pinochet’s name and inquires about Franco’s death is not a sign of self-censorship but it points towards the impossibility of naming the past. It explains, in fact, the need to organize the events diffused by the time of memory while pointing to the difficulty of narrativizing the past in a coherent, chronological structure that keeps names and images straight (hence the need for the precise date and details of Franco’s death and hence the need to know the exact details of her and her son’s deaths which returns vehemently across the narration). There are, of course, similarities between Franco and Pinochet: both dictators were highly decorated, conservative, catholic generals. In addition, neither Franco nor Pinochet were prosecuted for their crimes. The question of Franco’s death, in

⁸⁰ For Rubí Carreño, the main characters “recuerdan compulsivamente el siglo XX y sus tragedias,” hence she understands the work of memory in *JFN* as neurotic and not psychotic (192).

this regard, signifies the unresolved Chilean national trauma in its quest for justice. Pinochet's impunity activates the paranoid strategy through the doubt regarding the mechanisms and possibilities of justice and the redemptive promise of history. Likewise, the killing perpetrated by the man also remains unpunished. "Cuándo murió Franco," she asks ceaselessly, "en qué año, en qué mes, bajo cuáles circunstancias" but he does not answer (12). This scenario will multiply along the pages of the novel: she will try to remember and he will constantly shut her off. The same occurs when she inquires regarding her and her son's deaths:

necesito que me mires directo a los ojos y me informes cómo iban a funcionar nuestras muertes, qué destino tendrían nuestros cuerpos, quiénes trabajarían de ayudistas, donde nos perderíamos... Recorro cuidadosamente las escenas, intento ponerlas en orden para examinarlas, pero se precipitan, se confunden. (160)

The trauma represented by her and her son's deaths impedes the organization of the cognitive and emotional material of her own past. She is unable to articulate her biography, and paranoia signifies a cognitive map, a way to repair the chronology of events while processing the traumatic material. This may explain the disjointed temporality of the narration. The woman states repeatedly:

Ya han transcurrido, de cierta manera, cinco decenios (no, no, no, mil años). Cinco decenios que se han deslizado sin dar más que una cuenta ultra precaria del tiempo, del mío, nuestro tiempo. (63)

Ya ha transcurrido un siglo. No, no, me dices, no un siglo, mucho más, más. Si, te contesto, todo circula de un cierto determinado modo, impreciso, nunca literal, jamás. (17)

Ha transcurrido más de un siglo, ¿te das cuenta?, te digo un siglo entero y quebrado, mil años, una época que termina sin ecos, como si no hubiera sucedido, ¿te das cuenta? Sin final y ya es memoria. (19)

Examples like these abound across the narration. What is interesting to note here is that every time the narrator expresses her confusion regarding time there is a pessimism associated to memory and history. The lack of clarity regarding the events of the past

and the woman's own temporal location with regards to them introduces despair and anxiety as to their existence.

The temporal misperception is a consequence of the unresolved trauma; in other words, this confusion dramatizes the impossibility of the narrator reckoning the cognitive with the affective materials: the calendrical knowledge of time with the time of memory as well as the lack of temporal clarity introduces anxiety with regards to the narrator's own existence so paranoia's reparative mode will seek to relieve this anxiety. This is why, she claims, "[r]esulta imperativo controlar el tiempo y el espacio. El nuestro, nuestro tiempo y nuestro espacio" (79). This control takes the form of the paranoid modality of inquiry. The temporality to which the female character refers is, however, ungraspable. Time cannot be measured chronologically; 100 years, 500 years, or 1000 years seem to be equivalent in the traumatic memory. The unfolding of time, our biographical experience of it, history as a register of its events, are unable, all together, to tell about that which is in time although inexperienced, unrecorded, and unregistered.

If paranoia as an affective reparative practice is pleasure and hope-seeking, the narrator knows that her paranoid anxiety will subside once she recovers the lost time: "[p]ero no puedo [dormir], no sé cómo dormir si no recupero el tramo perdido, si no sorteo el hueco nefasto del tiempo que requiero atraer" (13). The spectral "tramo perdido," the "hueco nefasto del tiempo" haunts the narrator. To go in search of the lost time is not pain-preventing; it occurs *in medias res*, amidst pain, in order to find a positive relation with lost time and, with it, a way of working through the past outside the impossibility of mourning that which has disappeared. The aim of the narrator's paranoid dramatization is thus a "reparative knowing" (Sedgwick 149). In this section, I will show

how paranoia is an epistemological and an affective strategy by which the main character organizes her past in relation to history as a global system while performing a criticism of historical consciousness, on the one hand, and on the other, how she negotiates her desire, and its renunciation, in a capitalist world.

As I have mentioned, we don't know the woman's name. What we do know is the functions she performed as a member of the cells when she started as a copyist of Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* and was later recognized for her "prestigio como analista [con] toda una experiencia prolongada y aguda en la rama de la lingüística y [su] preparación científica en el estudio de la historia," "una lingüista con un grado máximo, una militante considerada la más avezada en análisis y estrategias" (110-113). I contend here that both the copyist and the analyst represent different states in Eltit's criticism of epistemology and of history wherein copying will stand for the monumental and the antiquarian knowledge of which we spoke above, and her role of analyst will correspond to her critical, reparative knowledge. In this regard, the paranoid strategy is a dialectic movement between knowledge as a copy and register of concepts and the analysis of language structures as constitutive of concepts, between uncritical history insofar as blind reproduction and indoctrination of knowledge and a critical history able to actualize and revise its contents.

The place of both uncritical and critical knowledge is represented, too, allegorically in the novel. The man stands for orthodox attachment to and faithful repetition of Marx's thoughts; for him "la confusión en los conceptos trae trágicas consecuencias" (18). So when she feels that the concept *patria*, for instance, in *The Communist Manifesto* is deceiving and ambiguous, his orthodoxy does not allow him to

interpret the word for he feels the word itself contains its own truth value. “No hay ninguna ambigüedad,” he says, “la frase es directa, real, comprensible, certera” (22-3). It is this uncritical attitude towards the authoritative function of concepts that, according to the woman, dismantled the cell: “[n]os habíamos convertido en una célula sin destino, perdidos, desconectados, conducidos laxamente por un conjunto de palabras selectas y convincentes pero despojadas de realidad” (27). The authoritative value of the word and “the historical sense no longer conserves life, but mummifies it” (Nietzsche, *UM* 75).

There is a tremendous irony in Eltit’s tone when she refers to the narrator’s role as a copyist. The woman is “[u]na estudiosa copista, la encargada de seleccionar las enseñanzas imperiosas. Había [the woman] sido escogida como delegada *para encauzar sabiamente el malestar*” (57; my emphasis). Her role as a copyist was to direct the movement of social discontent as well as to select knowledge, but these activities better define a divulger, a spokesperson than a copyist. To make a mistake and transcribe a word incorrectly “entraba en el territorio del desviacionismo, [the woman] iba a intervenir perversamente un silogismo excepcional que estaba allí para convencer” (57). The irony extends not only to the function of transcription and reproduction but also to the value attributed to it: to convince. She explains her resistance to her labor as a copyist and how words became meaningless and purposeless: “[e]s que ya no sentía mientras copiaba una de las palabras que yo misma había seleccionado. De pronto empezaban a perder su propósito o sencillamente se alejaron de mi mano...me resistía a continuar con mi deber de copista” (58). Thus begins the woman’s hermeneutics of suspicion regarding the value and authority of concepts insofar as creators and holders of knowledge and of her own role in the reproduction and transmission of knowledge. Soon

she realizes the political potential of reinterpreting knowledge, of suspicion as a hermeneutical tool: “se trata de una acción política, de una reformulación productiva, de generar... un escenario actualizado, de volver a leer, de pensar, se trata...de tomar una decisión, de intervenir en los tiempos” (102-3). She sees the need to re-interpret the contents of historical materialism in order to actualize its meaning according to the pressure of new historical forces such as “the system” which is history itself. To think again implies to re-read and to reformulate—a political action is, in Eltit’s imaginary, and of which her novels are exemplary, an act of interpretation against the grain of temporality; hence memory and history are to be reread according to the present conditions (the here and now of the narrative voice which we have seen is distorted). It is time that presses against the work of memory and it is time that defies the limits of history. It may very well be that behind the big abstraction of history lies the even more fearsome and damning figure of time. Herein resides Eltit’s epistemological search.

I intimated above that the figure of the unforgettable allows Eltit to destabilize the dyad memory/oblivion with which the political past was interpreted in the post-dictatorial Chile. In agreement with her search for a third element with which to heed the call of the specter and the impossibility of mourning, epistemology too needs to be reinvented in order to think the spectral. If we are to remember the forgotten, if the unforgettable is to work within us, then epistemology, and language itself, needs to reformulate its terms. This does not deny the value of monumental and antiquarian knowledges, but, like Nietzsche, Eltit suggests their insufficiency in responding to the fundamental question of life, and of life as confronted by the dead. The narrator’s formation as a historical analyst and a linguist were based on the study of history, but from the very beginning she states

her suspicion of historical knowledge: “[m]e formé serenamente pero con una complete decisión, lo hice con una actitud marcada por la tenacidad y ordenada en la lucidez y *en una comprensión nunca ingenua de la historia*” (120; my emphasis). However, as a copyist, she was too complicit with the monumental and antiquarian view of knowledge. Thus, “[a]llí estaban disponibles...para mí las principales figuras ya antiguas, esas figuras frías pero no, no obsoletas ni menos equivocadas...Heladas y lúcidas y aun supremas en sus errores” (120). But this relationship to the tradition was interrupted by a materialism of which Marxist history did not speak and which the atrocities of the military regime made manifest: “pero nunca, nunca pensé en el funcionamiento autónomo del cuerpo, su cíclica sorpresa y su catástrofe” (121). The decaying and dying body and, hence, its counterpart, life, made her question the role of history in the socio-political development. It is, furthermore, the commitment to history that has marked the body: “un cuerpo que había experimentado la historia desnuda o real, una historia que en toda la extensión de su tiempo inconmensurable, hubo de volcarse siempre a aniquilar” (111). In other words, after the violence committed against human rights by Pinochet’s regime, Eltit needs to ask the question of the body in relation to politics and history. Thus the body of which she speaks is also the body politic. That is why the wounds, diseases, and pains of her body are caused by history, so what could appear to be a simple back pain becomes “el histórico dolor de la columna.” The body’s decay, as well as the decadence of the political cell, “es uno de los resultados del tiempo histórico, las señas de este tiempo, lo sabíamos...lo estudié. Es parte de un programa que se repite y se repite” (135). Knowledge of history both prepared her and sent her to her decadence. There seems to be an irremediable sense of *fatum*. Against this apparent irreversibility of historical time,

the female character opposes the narration as the quest for remembrance. I say “quest” here because memory is never entirely actualized in the novel. It stays inchoate, in between the discourse of paranoia and the paradoxes of history. But there is also an implicit criticism to such an ideation of a historical *fatum* that returns and returns which is exemplified by the criticism of monumental knowledge as well as by the very use of a reparative paranoia. In other words, the historical repetition and the traumatic repetition signify a sense of predetermination which the narrator aims to contest and repair with the concept of critical knowledge and with reparative paranoia.

The question behind the paranoid female character is what does history do? What do systems do? What and how do they perform? In this sense, the whole novel cannot be understood as a defeated dream, a lost utopia, or the aftermath of the political demise since the whole political action that the book exercises is precisely the creation of a reading to intervene in temporality. Whatever history, the capitalist history or the materialist history, both represent for the female character the same degree of fear. Since Eltit is an allegorist, “the system,” the totalizing structures of power, capitalism, and history, extend of course to her own practice; therefore, language is seen as the medium through which “the system” operates. Language is the expressivity of fear; at the same time it also is a safeguard to fear since it is within language that the paranoid speculation takes form. Language enacts the fight against the abstraction of “the system.”

The Episode of the Dress and the Haunting of Desire

As we have stated above, history plays a paradoxical role in *JFN*. On the one hand, there is a fear towards the oppressive and monstrous powers of history; the political

cells represent in this regard a way for the main characters to protect themselves from history's messianic arrival. On the other hand, the main character, in committing herself to history, has proscribed both her body and her desire; therefore, historical commitment or historical consciousness has annulled life. When she was young, she recalls having "una cuota exagerada de energía." She recalls her and her lover as having a face and a body: "teníamos una cara y también cuerpos, sí" (36). It is as bodies that they go in search of a political cell in which to participate, but this participation is also a precautionary measure:

porque nos habíamos convencido que era lo único posible, aquello que nos podía contener en la historia, una historia, decíamos, activa y decíamos: nunca encima de nosotros, jamás rigiéndonos con sus monstruosos presupuestos, estábamos esperando la llegada de la historia. (36)

However, she renounces her face in order to protect herself from history's development:

"Hemos perdido el rostro, el tiempo nos ha convertido en formas humanas radicalmente seriadas, multitudinarias, pero dotados de un rigor, esa serie opaca y disciplinada en la que se reconoce un militante" (40). If it is history that persecutes the main characters, it is also history that they hope for; they have renounced their own desire for the desire of history, that is, "un deseo inexcusable: esperar que la historia se manifieste." The faith the main character has is that once history manifests itself she will finally have a time for herself. Within this unmanifested history, the main characters are only "conviviendo con una época que no nos corresponde" (40). That history will manifest itself, that it will arrive is the certainty that defines the political conviction of the main characters.

Notwithstanding, the arrival of history (communism as the future of society or the logical stage after the fall of late capitalism and the consequent rule of the proletariat) as promised or as belonging to some unchangeable law of historical evolution has demanded

the life of the woman. She sees how history's promise enslaves the body, erasing the face as mark of individuality and, with it, her corporeality. With ironic nuance the narrator recalls the way in which singing *La Internacional* made her feel triumphant and fearful:

el sonido de La Internacional, su música, su letra elocuente y convincente, una fila mítica de cuerpos exultantes y jóvenes, tan jóvenes y ya encadenados a La Internacional mientras sellábamos un imperioso compromiso con la historia...y yo luchaba por fijar la letra de la canción, no quería equivocarme, era peligroso, si, cambiar una palabra o una sílaba en el interior de esa letra magna y rutilante y convertir la canción, nada menos que La Internacional, en un lastre, en un completo desastre. (107)

The multiplicity of marching young bodies represents her own youth and hope in the promise of history, but this promise has turned, in actuality, into a chain: to be chained to *La Internacional* is to seal a commitment with history. Eltit's criticism here is not against Marxism per se, but she poses a pertinent question about the role of the desiring body, insofar as flesh, within Marx's historical materialism. We can take this question even further and ask, "What is the role of a gendered body in Marx's theory?" The Marxist principle that states that humans are productive beings and that industry is the privileged place for productive interactions seems to deny the whole affective aspects of the human being such as desire. As a militant in a communist cell, the woman's commitment to history entailed a renunciation of the flesh, "de una carne ávida, insaciable en las vitrinas, contingente la carne, cautiva y alienada y disponible para darle la espalda a la historia y al materialismo extraordinario y majestuoso de los huesos" (112). History in this regard excinds the flesh from the bones where the flesh represents the alienation by the powers of the commodities.

Through rejection as a liberating strategy, the woman contends with the haunting powers of desire. She knows that the design of a dress "después de todo acecha en cada

una de las vitrinas frente a las cuales no, no, nunca nos deteníamos porque conocíamos su estructura y el poder del cual emanaban” (112). The feared power of the commodity emanates from its spectral character; the woman knows the haunting of the spectral so she understands “que detrás de cada una de las vitrinas yacía el fantasma expansivo de una dominación que calaba incluso la fortaleza de los huesos” (112). Armed with her rejection of the body, the woman goes out “exponiendo [su]figura ya abiertamente deformada,” when she suddenly sees a dress that “ocupó enteramente [su] deseo” (110). The dress represents here both the desire of her body as well as the lure of the commodity and so she felt

la urgente necesidad de comprar el vestido, vestirme, exhibirlo en mí, comerme el vestido, devorarlo enteramente, gastar en la tela, en el diseño, en la caída, entregarme sin pudor, ajena a cualquier átomo de culpa, a un placer bacanal y absoluto con la exterioridad. (110)

The language of consumption precipitates the woman’s desire; “it renders the non-sensuous sensuous” (Derrida 151). The haunting power of the dress as commodity possesses now the character of the fetish. However, it is the mystification of the dress that demystifies the woman’s desire; it unveils it in its raw nature: “un deseo que estalló imprevisible, que rompió límites”; “el deseo más primitivo del que guard[a] memoria” (111-114). Once the dress becomes mystified it becomes the apparition of the invisibility, -a specter-, and so it haunts the woman. It is the recognition of the invisibility, the spectral, that allows the mystification of the dress beyond its phenomenality. What haunts the woman is hence the spectral character of the commodity. This episode is suggestive in that, in strictly Marxist terms, it unveils the spectrality of the commodity and its haunting powers in the production of desire, but also, and this is Eltit’s reversal of the commodity, the dress represents the woman’s

renunciation to her own corporeal renunciation, of her lack of corporality and exteriority, and an attempt to regain autonomy from the chains of historical consciousness. If the dress in the window display arouses in her the compulsion to acquire it, which she does, it also creates a fissure in her commitment to history which will allow the reparation of the scission of flesh and bones; it allows her to be born again, to acquire a new corporeality—it allows her “acudir ciega o virginalmente hacia el vestido para renacer o resurgir o evitar un destino marcado por el exceso total del cuerpo” (111). The renunciation of her flesh brings with it a total excess of the body which becomes monstrous “por la ausencia de contornos” (111). The affective function of the dress’ episode is to return sensibility and corporeality to the narrator who practiced rejection as a liberation from the alienable character of the commodity; she finds a new freedom in the dress which “me iba a liberar de la infamia...me iba a distraer de un poder que finalmente había perforado hasta la médula de mis huesos” (111).

Conclusion

In *JFN*, history as a totalizing system encompasses the system of economic relations, modes of production, as well as patriarchal and political structures. For this reason, what appears to the cogito, to consciousness, are the deceiving mechanisms of social production, the whole paraphernalia of capitalism as well as the deceiving promise of messianic history. Paranoia in the novel serves many purposes which we have termed reparative and which aim in a general sense to answer an ontological and an ethical question: how to live as humans when confronted and defined by the system? In this very last section, we saw how being human implies desiring and how, ethically, desire is

to be accepted and experienced, carried, perhaps, to its ultimate consequences. Given the fact that the system in *JFN* is represented by history, Eltit is performing a hermeneutics of suspicion regarding the concept of neoliberal history, in particular, as instantiated by Pinochet's regime, but she is also suspicious of a Marxist historical determinism. The female character is an analyst, an interpreter of history but the recourse to paranoia which allows her to interpret history also leads her to doubt it. Just as capital, history is also a creator of false values, and just as capital, history is ignorant of it. To the historical values, to the value of the historical values, the analyst responds with the reparative circuit of a paranoid structure.

The same falsity of consciousness which moves the cogito to doubt, as we saw above, operates in *JFN* with regards to history. The paranoid strategy seeks to unveil this falseness, in particular, the ways in which affect the affective and cognitive structure of the subject. There is no synthesis here between the multiple dialectical movements involved in the paranoid strategy from affective to cognitive, from individual fantasy to social structures, from representation of the system to the system, from the regional to the global, from micropolitics to macropolitics, from politics to ethics; the paranoid structure of inquiry will not settle down in order to confirm or deny the very paranoid analysis. To do so, to synthesize, would signify the end of paranoia and the closure of analysis.

There is no romanticization of the militant life as there is no romanticization of the pre-dictatorial past in *JFN*; rather, there is a deep questioning of both right and left, a disarming of the modes of knowledge that support both the dictatorship and its opposition. The idea of militancy is revised not because it was defeated or it was doomed to be defeated but because it did not operate outside of ideology; perhaps, more crudely,

Eltit is confirming the impossibility of being outside of ideology and the necessity of living within it in the most ethical manner. Her recourse to a paranoid reconstruction of memory does not mean to define something ultimately so subversive that escapes “the system” but it aims to be another reading of the constitutional elements of any system. If Eltit is in the literary space where “se pueden realizar operaciones conceptuales y metafóricas,” her resort to the paranoid strategy as well as to the figure of the specter I have developed responds precisely to this kind of conceptual and ultimately epistemological operation which language and literature permit (Adrián Ferrero “Entrevista a Diamela Eltit” 151).

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