

THE POST-DICTATORIAL THRILLER FORM

A Dissertation

by

AUDREY BRYANT POWELL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2012

Major Subject: Hispanic Studies

The Post-Dictatorial Thriller Form
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ABSTRACT

The Post-Dictatorial Thriller Form. (May 2012)

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This dissertation proposes a theoretical examination of the Latin American thriller through the framework of post-dictatorial Chile, with a concluding look at the post civil war Central American context. I define the thriller as a loose narrative structure reminiscent of the basic detective story, but that fuses the conventional investigation formula with more sensational elements such as political violence, institutional corruption and State terrorism. Unlike the classic form, in which crime traditionally occurs in the past, the thriller form engages violence as an event ongoing in the present or always lurking on the narrative horizon. The Chilean post-dictatorial and Central American postwar histories contain these precise thriller elements. Throughout the Chilean military dictatorship (1973-1990), the Central American civil wars (1960s-1990s) and the triumph of global capitalism, political violence emerges in diversified and oftentimes subtle ways, demanding new interpretational paradigms for explaining its manifestation in contemporary society.

In Chile, however, despite a history ripe with the narrative elements of the thriller, a consistent thriller novelistic tradition remains underdeveloped. My research reveals that contemporary Chilean – and by extension, Latin American – fiction continues to be analyzed under the aegis of melancholy and the tragic legacy of dictatorship or revolutionary insurgency. Therefore, a theoretical examination of the post-dictatorial/postwar thriller answers the need to not only move beyond previously established literary and political paradigms toward a more nuanced engagement with the present, but to envision a form of thinking beyond national tragedy and trauma.

This dissertation analyzes samples of the post-dictatorial detective narrative and testimonial account, which constitute the mirroring narrative components of the thriller. The detective texts and testimonial writings analyzed in this project demonstrate how the particular use of the detective story and testimonial account mirror one another at every fundamental level, articulating what I am theorizing as the thriller structure. Using the theoretical approximations of John Beverley, Brett Levinson, Alberto Moreiras, Jon Beasley-Murray, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Carl Schmitt and Carlo Galli, this project makes an original inquiry into why the thriller emerges as the most apt narrative framework for exploring the forms of violence in present-day Latin America.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my grandmother,
Virginia W. Rounsaville, 1915 – 2009.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION	1
Post-Dictatorial Melancholy and Memory Politics	8
The Post-Dictatorial Detective and Mourning	19
A Critique of Mourning/Melancholy	26
Mourning/Reconciliation	27
Memory/Forgetting	29
The Detective, the Critic and the Victim	34
The Post-Dictatorial Thriller: A Theoretical Approximation	39
II MELODRAMA, MELANCHOLY AND DETECTIVE FICTION: TOWARD A GENEALOGY OF THE THRILLER	50
Latin American Modernization: A Tale of Melodrama	53
Chilean Detective Fiction: Beyond Melancholy	66
The City and Restitution: Ramón Díaz Eterovic's <i>La ciudad está triste</i>	81
Urban Space and the Collective: Gonzalo Contreras' <i>La ciudad anterior</i>	90
<i>Fernando ha vuelto</i> and the Transgression of Forensic Investigation	102

III	THE TESTIMONIAL ROOTS OF THE THRILLER	111
	The Latin American Testimonio: A Voice From Below.....	122
	<i>Tejas Verdes</i> : Biopolitics and the Story of Anyone Whomsoever.....	137
	<i>El infierno</i> and <i>Mi verdad</i> : Biopolitics and Neoliberalism ...	149
IV	THE THRILLER AND GLOBAL WAR	170
	The Pinochet Case: A Legal Thriller	180
	Friends, Enemies and the <i>Nomos</i> of the Earth	190
	The Enemy and the End of the <i>Nomos</i> ?.....	206
V	THE THIRD SPACE AND MEMORY POLITICS.....	211
VI	CONCLUSION: THE THRILLER AND THE THIRD SPACE IN CENTRAL AMERICA: HORACIO CASTELLANOS MOYA AND FRANZ GALICH	234
	Horacio Castellanos Moya's <i>Insensatez</i> : A Tale of the Victim	247
	Franz Galich's <i>Managua, Salsa City</i> : A Tale of the Criminal.....	257
	WORKS CITED	270
	VITA.....	282

INTRODUCTION

The thriller is arguably the paradigmatic narrative structure of our time. Everywhere one looks literature and film increasingly incorporate topics of political intrigue into their plotlines. By thriller, I mean a loose narrative structure that is reminiscent of the basic detective story, but that reconfigures the conventional investigation formula, fusing it with other, arguably more sensational elements, such as political violence, institutional corruption and State terrorism. The recent history of Chile contains these precise thriller elements. Chile's historical account includes the US-backed overthrow of Salvador Allende's socialist government on September 11th, 1973, followed by seventeen years of one of Latin America's most violent military dictatorships (1973-1989) and an aggressive transition to a globalized market economy (1989-present).¹

Chile's post-dictatorial context, too, provides the essential narrative material for the thriller narrative form. This assertion is reinforced by critics such as Nelly Richard, who refers to the transition to democracy in Chile as a

This dissertation follows the style of the *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*.

¹ The military coup of September 11, 1973 marks the beginning of the dictatorship, which overthrew the democratically elected socialist president, Salvador Allende. For seventeen years, Chile remained under the rule of the dictator Augusto Pinochet until the nation's return to democracy in 1989, when Pinochet was succeeded by Patricio Aylwin. Throughout the transition, Pinochet remained in power as military Commander in Chief until 1998.

“conspiracy of agreements,” a national project of consensus that conceals its violent episodes under a myth of reconciliation and that relativizes conflicting versions of the past. For many Chileans, the new neoliberal “conspiracy” has been little more than a simulation of democracy.² For them, civilian rule implies the continuation of the dictatorial powers under the guise of democracy, which covers over the reality of political crime with a narrative of economic progress and stability.

This dissertation proposes a theoretical examination of the Latin American thriller structure through the framework of post-dictatorial Chile, with a concluding look at postwar Central America, and in particular Guatemala and Nicaragua. This region underwent a roughly thirty-year period of brutal civil war, during which hundreds of thousands of civilians were murdered at the hands of the government or guerrilla insurgents. While the Chilean and Central American contexts differ in the nature and course of the violence and oppression that traumatized these countries for nearly three decades, they are similar in that they now face the challenge of how to negotiate violent political histories into a “peaceful” constitutional democracy. Of interest to this dissertation is not to analyze specific samples of the “post-dictatorial” or “post civil war” thriller novel as such. Rather, this study will examine the development of narrative

² “Neoliberalism” is understood here as the putting into practice of the Chicago School’s reconfiguration of liberal economic doctrine. The neoliberal project in Latin America entailed a series of structural reforms intended to reduce the role of the state in the economy, give a larger role to the markets and to create macro-economic stability. It also entailed the liberalization of trade and capital flows, privatization of state assets and labor reforms.

components across the literary and political fields of these post-conflict settings. It is my contention that the detective story and the testimonial account, arguably the dominant narrative forms within post-dictatorial and postwar literature, constitute the mirroring narrative strands of the thriller. Both the fictional detective narrative and nonfictional testimonial account employ the basic detective formula, in which a detective-figure investigates a crime in search for an understanding of violence. Yet, they do so from mirroring vantage points: the detective narrative perceives the crime from what we could call a “top-down” perspective, as his position external to the crime and his capacity to investigate the criminal endows him a relative amount of authority. The latter form, the testimonial account, narrates an urgent experience with violent crime according to a “bottom-up” model. Testimonio narrates an encounter with violence from the perspective of a powerless, marginal victim who has suffered the event. Bereft of any authority, the testimonial subject experiences power as domination, and as such, bears unguarded witness to the totalizing effects of violence. In this sense, this dissertation considers the thriller as less of a consolidated genre than a loose narrative *structure*, whose particular components are used over and over again, many times unconsciously or unintentionally across the postwar and post-dictatorial contexts.

The detective story and testimonial account offer up a sensational investigation of political violence in contemporary post-dictatorial/postwar society. Violence remains a central theme within Latin American history and

culture. Throughout the Chilean military dictatorship, the Central American civil wars, the triumph of neoliberal capitalism and the more recent US sponsored “war on terror,” political violence appears in diversified and oftentimes subtle ways, demanding new interpretational paradigms for explaining its manifestation in contemporary society. For this reason, a theoretical examination of the post-dictatorial/postwar thriller form not only answers to the need to move beyond previously established literary and political paradigms toward a more nuanced engagement with the present, but also examines – in the case of Chile – why a movement of this sort appears underdeveloped.³

Indeed, despite a political history ripe with the narrative material proper to this form, the post-dictatorial thriller, as such, has yet to be examined in Chile. I believe a post-dictatorial thriller form has not been recognized because Chilean literature and critical thought have been caught up in memory politics. Memory politics encompasses the literary, cultural and political debate regarding how to deal with a history of political violence within a transnational, globalized context. The politics of memory includes recent cultural practices – such as the boom of memoirs, new historical fiction, the mass marketing of nostalgia, and the proliferation of discussions on social and political reparations for human rights

³ The post-dictatorial thriller novel, as a consistent literary tradition, has yet to be produced in Chile. Among post civil wars literature in Central America, Horacio Castellanos Moya (El Salvador) and Rodrigo Rey Rosa (Guatemala) can be considered contemporary thriller writers. I include Castellanos Moya’s novel *Insensatez* (2004), *Donde no están ustedes* (2004), and Rey Rosa’s *El material humano* (2009) within this category. Other examples of a Latin American thriller tradition developing in other places are Argentinian writers Tomás Eloy Martínez’s *El vuelo de la Reina* (2002), Mempo Giardinelli’s *Luna caliente* (1983) and Ricardo Piglia’s *Plata quemada* (2000), Peruvian author Santiago Roncagliolo’s *Abril rojo* (2009) and Colombian writer Antonio Ungar’s *Tres ataudes blancos* (2010).

infractions. At the core of memory politics and practices is the sustained conflict between the need to reconstitute the past and the impulse to forget it.⁴ Indeed, how to treat the legacies of violence during the dictatorships, genocides and violent Civil Wars in Latin America of the 1980s and 1990s remains one of the most fundamental questions affecting politics, culture and literature today.

Steve Stern, in his book *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory Question in Democratic Chile*, describes the effects of memory politics in terms of a “rolling memory impasse.” He writes:

Chile walked in a circle of impasse on the memory question . . . What memory struggles generated was not impasse in the static sense – a deadlock that freezes time, since the issue in play remains unresolved and the contending social forces prove unable to win, compromise, or cede ground. Instead, the memory question yielded a slow shifting center of gravity in an ongoing struggle, and return to a deadlock on a new focal point of contention. This was a society of rolling impasse, a making and breaking and remaking of standoff as Chileans reckoned with the legacy of Pinochet and the military regime . . . A society of slowly rolling impasse yields a peculiar experience: *the repeated sensation of ‘frozen’ or deadlocked transition.* (125, italics are mine)

While not to diminish or homogenize the need for collective bereavement after a crisis such as dictatorship or civil war, memory politics’ intense fixation around the nation’s unresolved history inevitably leads to melancholy, and in the

⁴ For politics of memory references, see *Chile in transition: the poetics and politics of memory* by Michael J. Lazzara, *Salt in the Sand: Memory, Violence, and the Nation-State in Chile, 1890 to the Present* by Lessie Jo Frazier, *Present pasts: urban palimpsests and the politics of memory* by Andreas Huyssen, *Reckoning with Pinochet: the Memory Question in Democratic Chile, 1989-2006* and *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London 1998* by Steve J. Stern, *The politics of memory: transitional justice in democratizing societies* by Carmen González, and also the *National Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report* and *The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report*.

worst case, to an impasse of critical thought. Melancholy can be understood as the failure to mourn and the inability to assimilate – to work through – the lost object. In the case of Chile, melancholy and mourning have been the preferred tropes of the literary and cultural apparatus to explain the dictatorial legacy. In fact, critic Idelber Avelar identifies mourning the past as the preeminent labor of post-dictatorial literature.⁵ From novels and poetry to written memoirs, Avelar claims post-dictatorial literature mourns the past as a strategy of opposition against the new neoliberal order, whose market driven policies are accused of treating the past as just one more commodity to be consumed. According to Avelar's interpretation, mourning and melancholy necessarily operate as tropes intended to symbolically rescue the victims of history and their political legacies. The problem that arises from Avelar's assessment is that clinging to previous social histories and national frameworks comes to produce a "memory impasse" (Stern 125) between the imperative to remember the past and the impossibility of thinking beyond it.

My objective in this dissertation will be to theorize the extent to which the structure I am delineating as the thriller articulates a movement beyond the memory impasse and the practices and paradigms of thought that it has engendered. Different from the conventional detective story, which seeks answers to political violence by attempting to reconstitute the past, the thriller

⁵ Avelar makes these assertions in his book *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999), and also in his article "Restitution and Mourning in Latin American Postdictatorship."

form engages with political crime as an ongoing threat always lurking on the horizon. The thriller highlights immediate political issues as the motivating background against which to dramatize an encounter with violence as it persists under the mantra of neoliberal democracy and globalization. Indeed, one of the far-reaching consequences of the entrance into a global market system is that the task of detecting the criminal becomes an indeterminate endeavor. The context of post-dictatorship is such that it is no longer feasible to identify and counteract a singular enemy power that imposes its rule, as was possible during the dictatorship. As in the second part of Patricio Guzmán's 1975 documentary "La batalla de Chile," with foreboding music playing in the background, the camera scans a group of generals and singles them out as the perpetrators of State crime. Rather, the contours of criminality in post-dictatorial Chile approximate what Salvador Vázquez de Parga describes as the aura of conspiracy that pervades the whole of the social milieu: "crime is no longer something personal and private, something objective that affects a reduced number of people, something analyzed in a cold and aseptic fashion; crime has transformed into a social phenomenon that affects all of society. Its power is something that is investigated passionately because it has a bearing on reality" (in Promis 155, my translation). In this regard, in light of the history of brutality that has persisted throughout the Chilean military dictatorship and the triumph of global capitalism, the thriller structure constitutes the most apt narrative form for exploring contemporary violence at a symbolic level.

Post-Dictatorial Melancholy and Memory Politics

By way of an overview of the basic structure of mourning according to the psychoanalytic model, Sigmund Freud argues that mourning is closely related to melancholy, and that both are equally necessary for individuals and for collectivities that have undergone serious trauma. Mourning is understood as the particular response towards what is left behind in the wake of the lost object. This lost “object” could represent a loved one, one’s country, liberty, or a collective ideal. Melancholia, which could be interpreted as the inability to mourn, implies an obsession with locating the lost object that the process of mourning could not incorporate. The melancholic remainder (the lost object) becomes an uncertain and ambiguous concept since the melancholic subject is incapable of determining what exactly was lost. In this sense, melancholia, to the extent that it causes the subject to remain fixated on the moment of loss, can produce an obsessive focus on past trauma, leading to what Nietzsche has called the “oversaturation of history.”⁶ For Nietzsche, too much emphasis on remembering the past clouds the recognition that not all past forms of knowledge and past experiences are beneficial for future development. Only a

⁶ In the second of his *Untimely Meditations*, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History,” Nietzsche warns that too much emphasis on the past precludes action, happiness and further development. Too much past, he says, tends to “return as a ghost and disturbs the peace of a later moment” (UD 61). He instead advocates for what he calls “active forgetting,” a reasoned abandonment of the past that attempts to rationalize the relation with the past, rendering conscious – in order to surpass – the haunting or traumatic past events that return to disturb any future development. Active forgetting, conceived as selective remembering, is a tenuous assertion when applied to post-dictatorial society since it must contend with dominant ethical positions, which equate the rescue, or remembering, of the past with the “truth” of history. This position has been called into question by recent critics and scholars, but nonetheless, the imperative to cling to history, is deeply engrained within the post-dictatorial imaginary.

reasoned employment of forgetting, argues Nietzsche, can break through the fantasy by which restituting the past serves as a unifying principle, or as a horizon of identity formation of a given society or nation.

Scholar David Eng suggests melancholy to be the overriding memory paradigm of societies like Chile struggling to reconstitute a sense of post-crisis national identity. Not only this, but the spate of violent global crises of the twentieth century – World War I and World War II, the Holocaust, the genocides in Africa, the Central American revolutions and counterinsurgencies, just to mention a few – mark contemporary society with violence and a pervading sentiment of melancholy (Frazier 54). Critics Nelly Richard and Alberto Moreiras have extended the pervasiveness of melancholy to the realm of contemporary thought. For these scholars, post-dictatorial societies of the Southern Cone manifest an exacerbation of mourning, or what Moreiras refers to as “radical melancholy”.⁷ That is, post-crisis societies are bound between the indecidability of assimilating (remembering) traumatic memories or expulsing (forgetting) them.

The particular effects of “melancholisation” correlate directly with the phenomenon of memory politics. Andreas Huyssen suggests that the so-called “politics of memory” informs the way in which present-day nation-states attempt to reassert their authority in the wake of a traumatic social crisis (*Present Pasts* 11, 12). If, affirms Huyssen, in the earlier twentieth century, modern nations

⁷ See Moreiras’ “Postdictadura y reforma del pensamiento” and Richard’s “Las marcas del destroz y su reconjugación en plural.”

attempted to articulate their identity by way of imagining a possible future, societies today seem to concentrate heavily on the past and assume a moral position with regard to its tragedies. More specifically, Huyssen identifies the emergence of a new kind of memory discourse in the West in the 1960s and 1970s in the wake of decolonialization, the new social movements and their search for alternative and revisionist versions of the past. Their investigations of the past focus especially on rescuing the traditions of history's "others" as a way to construct a better political project for the future. Not only this, but the debates of memory politics appeared accompanied by multiple statements about endings: the demise of the nation, the end of history, and the end of the institution of literature and metanarratives. These versions pointing to the "end" of things following the 20th century crises foment an ever-growing obsession with the idea of symbolic rescue and restitution of the past. The politics of memory, then, not only maintains a dichotomy between remembering or forgetting the past, but it ultimately leads to a state of generalized melancholy, since it fixates on the loss or failure – of national projects or war-time subjects – as the starting point for a future politics.

Similar to other Latin American countries traumatized by dictatorship, Chile faces the considerable challenge of negotiating its violent past with neoliberal reforms and the entrance into a globalized society. This proves especially true since the country has been heralded globally as the "Chilean Miracle," as a successful "pragmatic reform" model for redemocratization and for

the resolution of past conflicts. These claims recognize Chile as a political model for forging the rubric of democratic reconciliation that has been appropriated by other countries such as South Africa and several in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twenty-first century. To be sure, economists and historians revere Chile as the ideal standard of contemporary nation-state formation in political, economic and judicial terms. The reinstallation of democratic practices and institutions, and civilian control of the army has led to relative stability and progress within a constitutional framework. From the economic perspective too, Chile is considered a model for market driven reforms as the neoliberal model has produced market growth and a relative reduction of poverty. And from the judicial point of view, despite the incidences of heinous torture, disappeared prisoners and death numbering more than 3,000, many acclaim the country's efforts to bring to public light the witness accounts of dictatorial violence. Truth and justice commissions such as the Rettig Report and The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report, which document deaths, disappearances and tortures, memory narratives and commemorative memorials claim an effective distribution of popular justice.⁸

⁸ The 1991 National Truth and Reconciliation Report — also called the Rettig Report, which was directed by chairman Raúl Rettig during the presidency of Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994) -- assumed a revelation of the "truth" of dictatorial violence by reporting only deaths and disappearances, and not acts of torture. In November of 2004, the Valech Report, also called The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report, was proposed to resolve what the Reconciliation Report did not by detailing not only deaths and disappearances, but also the testimonies of thousands of victims who underwent violent acts of torture. The complete investigation report, directed by Bishop Sergio Valech at the request of President Ricardo Lagos (presidency 2000-2006), includes over 35,000 accounts providing excruciating detail of torture at the hands of the military regime. It also locates 1,200 sites where torture took place and identifies the institutional association of those who inflicted the torture (police, DINA

These international acknowledgments helped fuel the widely held assumption that the dictatorship was a mere blip in an otherwise smooth and unproblematic democratic history.

And yet, Chile remains a nation deeply affected by the violence and crime during and after the dictatorship; memories of social upheaval and political corruption cast a sinister shadow over the completion of any real “transition” beyond dictatorship. In fact, as Brett Levinson has implied, the idea of a “transition,” by its very definition, can never truly break from the past, but rather inherits it in the form of a debt or obligation (“Obstinate Forgetting...” 219). Under this interpretation, the civilian administrations of Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994), Eduardo Ruiz-Tagle (1994-2000), Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006), Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010) and now Sebastian Piñera (incumbent) can never legitimately “forget” the criminals or the victims, but must now find ways to “deal” with them “democratically.” In the name of consensus and reconciliation, the new democratic governments are obligated to right past wrongs, to bring criminals to justice and to recompense the victims (“Obstinate Forgetting...” 219). Yet, as Levinson notes, the fulfillment of this obligation emerges in every case as incomplete, and the search for justice persists as an impossible fantasy.⁹ In this sense, any real transition is not only rendered impossible, but it

and CNI members, intelligence officials). The Report preempts further resolution attempts by withholding the names of the individual torturers.

⁹ Levinson elaborates on the notion of incomplete justice through what he calls “radical injustice.” In his book *The Ends of Literature*, “radical injustice” describes a crime so heinous that all conventions of representation and recollection fail. Radical injustice, then, is the traumatic

is linked with melancholy in that it inevitably remains suspended between the past and present, between dictatorship and democracy, and between the dictatorial victims and the criminals. The notion of “transition” clings to those irreconcilable aspects of the past that it cannot (democratically) eliminate or assimilate.

The search for real justice is therefore destined to be a melancholic enterprise, and one that has indelibly marked every aspect of post-dictatorial discourse. A glance at the larger social and historical framework suggests melancholy to be the product not only of dictatorship, but of a much longer story of Chile’s (and Latin America’s) transition to modernity. To understand the difficulty of surpassing post-dictatorial melancholy requires contextualizing the country’s fall into dictatorship within a much larger transitional process of modernization. Latin American history has been, among other things, a response (more often resistance) to the repeatedly failed impositions of Western, metropolitan modernity into the peripheral Latin American continent. In Chile, the Popular Unity socialist project headed by Salvador Allende was one of the few examples in Latin America in which a possible alternative to capitalist

remainder of crime that reveals the notion of real justice as fantasy. One of the reasons that Levinson points out, among many others, for which true transition and reconciliation was rendered impossible is that even after the end of the dictatorship, the military never ceded its dominance; the army was always more powerful than the transitional administrations that were attempting to prosecute military officials (219). The army is perhaps one of the most persistent legacies of the dictatorship and the most viable proof of its continuation in democracy.

rule acquired legitimate grounds for success.¹⁰ During the years of the Popular Unity Coalition (1970-1973), Chileans especially of the left saw the socialist project as a promising national endeavor and a peaceful transition into democratic non-capitalist modernity.¹¹

Hopes for a successful socialist project – Allende’s “via socialista” – were destroyed by General Pinochet’s military overthrow on September 11th, 1973. The *golpe de estado* was not only an epochal point of rupture marking the violent destruction of the “socialist dream.” The military coup interrupted the socialist transition with another model of modernity, this time a transition into neoliberalism and an aggressive restructuring of the economy. For many

¹⁰ The Popular Unity Coalition (*Unidad Popular* – UP) was a center-left alliance of parties that backed President Salvador Allende. The UP constituted mainly by the Socialist and Communist parties but also by the centrist Radicals and Christian leftists.

¹¹ Allende and his UP support established plans for the “Chilean Road to Socialism,” a self-proclaimed revolution that would modernize the nation and prepare a way for a more participatory democratic government. Within his first year of office, Allende and the UP government expropriated the US owned copper mines that made up two-thirds of Chilean exports. Also as part of the socialist project, the UP completed the agrarian reform begun by the Frei administration, which transformed thousands of landed estates into peasant cooperatives. Chile also experienced a surge in labor union participation and power. Union membership grew to include roughly one-third of the work force in 1972 alone. With the rapid ascension of the unions, the UP became heralded as the “government of the workers,” and indeed, the socialist government made the worker the promising new figure of the revolutionary process. This image was reiterated by leftist media, who praised the workers for their “class consciousness” and solidarity. Despite the increase in workers wages and social status, the revolutionary advances of the UP generated vehement political opposition from the center-right alliance of Christian Democrats and Nationalists. The increase in labor wages led to accelerating inflation, consumer shortages and economic instability, setbacks which fueled the opposition-controlled Congress to block any laws financing Allende’s road to socialism. When Allende turned to controversial executive means to enact his program, his opponents in Congress questioned their constitutionality. The infighting led to a political crisis that Chile’s governmental institutions proved unable to resolve. Allende’s opposition carried the increasing political instability into the streets and army sources, which, with covert funding of the United States, quickly began to destabilize the socialist government. As a consequence, the military coup that overthrew Allende on September 11th, 1973 would attest that the coup had the support of the Chilean electorate. See Peter Winn’s *Victims of the Chilean Miracle*, p 14-71.

writers, scholars and critics committed to social justice, then, the nation-state project – especially during the 1980s and 90s – became a contested site for mourning as well as for attempts to rescue the political projects that could have been, but that were destroyed by the dictatorship. In this way, the national imaginary of present day Chile is marked by melancholy not only due to the residual horrors of state violence and torture, but also because the memories of the aspired transition into a participatory national political system (ie. a peaceful road to socialism) rendered the country's collapse into military dictatorship all the more traumatic.

Literary production, also, can be understood within the difficult rubric of transition and melancholy. Literature has historically been revered as the cornerstone of nation-formation and as the collective project for reinforcing a sense of national self-understanding. In fact, many cultural critics have interpreted boom literature of the 1960s and 70s – say, of Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967), Mario Vargas Llosa's *Conversación en la Catedral* (1969) or Carlos Fuentes' *La región más transparente* (1958) – as the pinnacle of this project. Their literature embodied the utopian desire to develop and reinforce a distinctive Latin American identity as set off against an increasingly global and modernized community. Indeed, at a moment of economic transformation when Latin American literature became an attractive commodity within an expanding international reading public, the boom literature's narrative project of "magical realism" was thought to reveal to the

world Latin America's "marvelous" translation into modernity. And indeed, 20th century cultural criticism projected the boom as the apogee moment when Latin American literature successfully reconciled its properly "Latin American" identity with the modern world.

The problem with the identitarian- allegorical visions like those espoused by the boom's magical realism is not only that they entered into crisis with the Latin American dictatorships of the 70s and 80s, but, more importantly, they gloss over the perhaps more urgent political consequences underlying this literature: precisely, that magical realism was less the utopian translation of a unified Latin Americanism into first-world modernity than a response to the impossibility, or the lack, of such a translation. In other words, boom literature was born of a fundamental void, or incongruity inherent to Latin American modernity. It is not that a transition to modernity did not occur in Latin America or is still pending, but rather that it did not happen the way it was intended. In this sense, the boom's mystification of the national-popular tradition can be read as what we could call a "melodramatic" narrative that attempted to cover over Latin America's incomplete and contradictory modernization with a rhetoric of marvelous innocence.

The boom's grand melodrama of Latin American identity is perhaps nothing more than a covering over of the melancholic recognition of something already lost and irrecoverable. According to Avelar, the boom marked the "moment when literature imaginarily compensated for the loss of an identity,

which by definition, only came into being retrospectively, that is, only existed as lost identity” (*Untimely* 35). If the boom’s magical realism can be comprehended in this way, as a marvelous covering over the deep contradictions within Latin American national modernization, then it is no coincidence that Chile’s military coup in 1973 radically exposed these inconsistencies. The coup arguably put an end to the boom as well as to all populist and nationalist paradigms of non-capitalist modernity.¹² The dictatorship rendered boom-like literature’s innocent view of the world as irreconcilable with the new violent realities of dictatorship.¹³ Not only that, but the fall of Salvador Allende marked the end of the boom because the latter’s historical endeavor, namely, the (attempted) reconciliation between modernization and Latin American identity, was now violently appropriated and restructured within the parameters of dictatorship.

Following the creation of the national security state, the dream of modernization could no longer promise liberation and transformation as it did during the Popular Unity era. Similarly, literature could no longer maintain its organic association with the national tradition. Rather, modernization under the dictatorship implied the forced restructuration of society according to a narrative

¹² This is an assertion made by John Beverley. See Elisabeth Garrels, “Resumen de la discusión,” in *Más allá del boom*, ed. Angel Rama et al., 293.

¹³ Moreiras seems to suggest this fact by visualizing the end of magical realism in Arguedas’ *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* in 1971. According to Moreiras, the novel cuts through the conciliatory project of magical realism by literally writing violent death – the author’s own in this case – into the very material of the novel. Following this interpretation, murder would be the symbolic narrative act that closes a tradition of national-popular literature and perhaps simultaneously opens up another strain of literature obliged to confront the violent social realities that the dictatorships, civil wars and armed conflicts of the 1970s and 80s would usher in. For his in depth analysis, see *Exhaustion of Difference*, Ch. 6.

of neoliberal modernization, in which the very conception of “nation” was transformed into a contentious battleground in which the dictatorship could carry out its political activity (Avelar, *Untimely* 37). Moreiras specifies that under the dictatorship,

the Latin American national security state made politics center on the issue of revolution understood as a national revolution. Cultural workers of all shades were forced to confront the revolutionary question, because that was what ultimately regulated their relationship to the state. . . . Literary production came heavily and predominantly to figure as national-individual allegory in relation to the revolutionary configuration – a revolution that, for the cultural elite, was most significantly thought of in cultural-national rather than in socialist, anti-capitalist terms. (*Exhaustion* 210)

In this sense, the idea of “nation” became the contested point of reference around which political activity during the dictatorship revolved.

As much as it was a point of reference for political activity, for many the nation simultaneously figured as an object of mourning, since the dictatorship provoked forms of cultural and social resistance that attempted to symbolically reconstitute a utopian sense of nation by turning to history. For Avelar, while the dictatorship

appealed to specific national myths, [it] triggered a resistance that, despite continental and worldwide solidarity, followed a fundamentally national dynamic. The more intellectuals had to leave their countries . . . the more the nation acquired the obsessive status of lost object and utopian promise. For those who stayed, the history of the nation was the source to which the present could turn. (*Untimely* 37)

As the above passages suggest, under dictatorship the nation was radically transformed into both the locus of dictatorial activity and an object of mourning

by the opposition. Following Avelar, we can speak of post-dictatorial cultural production in terms of mourning and melancholy insofar as literature, perhaps moreso than ever before, saw itself forced to come to grips with the loss of the nationalist projects. That is, the dictatorship marked the breaking point at which literature could no longer sustain the harmonious link between culture and the nation: the dictatorship not only made visible the melodramatic link between literature and national identity, but it simultaneously exposed the irreparable rupture between the expectations of an anti-capitalist modernization and the real course of events. The dictatorship lay bare, if not intensified, a long-coming sentiment of melancholy now doubly inscribed into literature due to the end of the boom and the failure of socialist national modernization. It is no wonder, then, that from this rupture – both literary and political – arose literary and cultural forms obsessed with memory. Among these forms, the detective narrative emerged as one of the most popular forms for investigating the past and attempting to symbolically reconstitute the nation in the face of crisis.

The Post-Dictatorial Detective and Mourning

Perhaps the most effective way Chileans found for reflecting on political violence and the impossibility of a socialist horizon (which was understood for many of the left as the basis for the construction of a national modernization project) was through detective fiction. It is significant to note that the detective tradition received limited attention prior to the dictatorship. Following Ramón

Díaz Eterovic's publication of *La ciudad está triste* in 1987, initiating perhaps one of the most enduring *neopolicial* series – also called the *novela negra* (the “black novel”), which is the Spanish American appropriation of the Anglo-Saxon hard-boiled detective variation –, detective fiction became the most practiced literary-cultural model for investigating the repercussions of the transition from a repressive military regime to a neoliberal democracy.¹⁴ The detective story's formulaic literary codes – a crime, violence, an ethically compromised detective figure who operates on the margins of institutional law in search of some restitution of justice, even if partial – constructed an adept model for investigating what was repressed or forgotten by dictatorial politics. And indeed, the formulaic progression of the detective's quest generally moves forward such that the reconstitution of the past becomes one of the exclusive themes of Chilean detective literature.

During the 1980s and 1990s particularly, a consolidated group of detective writers began to rigorously cultivate the “new detective” variation. The literary production of detective fiction writers including Ramón Díaz Eterovic (1956), Luis Sepúlveda (1949), Roberto Ampuero (1953), Marco Antonio de la Parra (1952), Sergio Gómez (1962), Carlos Tromben (1963), and Marcela Serrano (1951) can be understood as a collective investigation of the social and

¹⁴ *Neopolicial* fiction in Chile appears slightly later than other Latin American countries like Argentina or Mexico, for example (which both enjoy particularly robust detective traditions). Attempts at a Southern Cone hard-boiled variation can be observed as early as 1948 with Ernesto Sabato's (1911) *El túnel*. A glimpse of the hard-boiled tradition can also be seen in later authors like Silvina Ocampo (1903 – 1993), María Angélica Bosco (1917), Marco Denevi (1922 – 1998), Luisa Valenzuela (1938) and Fernando del Paso (1935).

political violence of the dictatorial period.¹⁵ Chilean critic Rodrigo Cánovas sustains this affirmation, associating the new detective narrative with the recuperation of national memory. He asserts that new detective fiction constitutes “the privileged mode of rescuing the past . . . a private detective conducts an investigation in a society in crisis” (*Novela chilena* 135, my translation here and below). Magda Sepúlveda also asserts that “detective fiction emerges as a new way of representing the national reality. The crimes described in novels written beginning in the 1980s affect the entire community and its reconstitution are linked to the articulation of the nation’s memory” (*Novela chilena* 135).

Given the new detective variation’s use for reflecting upon the past, this narrative played a significant role in shaping a critical vocabulary of denouncement that was adopted by many of the members of the Chilean New Narrative of the 1980s, or that corpus of authors born between 1950 and 1964, whose very identity as a literary promotion revolved around having witnessed

¹⁵ Ramón Díaz Eterovic and Roberto Ampuero are traditionally recognized as the most prolific detective fiction writers in Chile, as both have created ongoing detective sagas of thirteen novels and six novels respectively. Díaz Eterovic’s detective series about the private detective Heredia includes the novels *La ciudad está triste* (1987), *Sólo en la oscuridad* (1992), *Nadie sabe más que los muertos* (1993), *Ángeles y solitarios* (1995), *Nunca enamores a un forastero* (1999), *Los siete hijos de Simenon* (2000), *El ojo del alma* (2001), *El hombre que pregunta* (2002), *El color de la piel* (2003), *A la sombra del dinero* (2005), *El segundo deseo* (2006), *La oscura memoria de las armas* (2008) and *La muerte juega a ganador* (2010). Ampuero’s narrative series with the Chilean/Cuban detective Cayetano Brulé contains the novels *¿Quién mató a Cristián Kustermann* (1993), *Boleros en La Habana* (1994), *El alemán de Atacama* (1996), *Cita en el Azul Profundo* (2004), *Halcones de la noche* (2005) and *El caso Neruda* (2008).

the military coup of 1973.¹⁶ This literary generation is situated at a critical juncture between past and present, as their writings attempt to recall a social horizon previous to the dictatorship and its subsequent destruction in post-dictatorship. The detective stories of these writers are thus marked on the one hand, by a profound sense of loss of the shared utopias of social integration and solidarity which circulated during the socialist Allende years, and on the other hand by a sentiment of deception and betrayal with the new neoliberal order.¹⁷

Historically, then, the critical import of the new detective narrative seems to be two-fold: on the one hand, mourning a lost national project, and on the other, denouncing the institutional corruption, state crime and injustice of post-dictatorial society. Guillermo García-Corales sustains this point when he describes the post-golpe Chilean detective narrative as part of a realist aesthetic that exposes the failure of justice within post-dictatorial society: the crimes

¹⁶ According to Cedomil Goic's generational schema of Chilean writers, the New Narrative refers to a heterogeneous group of writers born roughly after 1948. This rather loose grouping of writers encompasses the co-presence of three generations of writers, although the generations most immediately affected by the dictatorship were the generations 1972 and that of 1987 (many times called the Post Golpe, NN or Marginales). In the Generation of 1972, Goic names Antonio Skármeta, Poli Délano, Ariel Dorfman, Diamela Eltit, Ana María del Río and Luis Sepúlveda. In the Generation of 1987, Goic identifies Jaime Collyer, Díaz Eterovic, Ampuero, Diego Muñoz Valenzuela, Pía Barros, Sonia González, Gonzalo Contreras, Marco Antonio de la Parra, Marcela Serrano, Gregory Cohen, Hernán Rivera Letelier and others. And the Generation of 2002, the most recent generation in which dictatorial references occur more tangentially, includes Andrea Maturana, Carolina Rivas, Alejandra Costamagna, Andrea Jeftanovic, Nona Fernández and Roberto Fuentes.

¹⁷ Neil Brooks and Tosh Toth's book titled *The Mourning After: attending the Wake of Postmodernism* makes an interesting association between betrayal and mourning that I associate with the overriding sentiment of post-dictatorial Chilean detective narrative. Toth identifies mourning as the current attitude of contemporary thought and philosophy, and he defines this concept as the particular ethical response to what is left behind in the wake of the lost object. The act of mourning the death of a loved one or the loss of a collective ideal is commonly experienced in the sense of a betrayal, as the object's absence and our loss. In such a scenario, the affective focus is necessarily on the "violence done to we who are left behind, who exist in the turbulence of absence" (75).

narrated most always remain unresolved, the villain escapes unpunished and the official legal system is revealed as incapable of restoring an adequate measure of justice to its citizens. At the heart of the post-dictatorial detective story is an investigation predicated on an absence – a lack – and on the impossibility of ever arriving at a solution. Put another way, this variation of the detective formula invokes an examination of the social and historical milieu that can never recover its lost object. In this sense, the potential to “detect” and “resolve” underlying each police investigation is most always frustrated; the very act of detection therefore becomes, at best, a melancholic reflection on historical failure and on the inevitable degeneration of post-dictatorial society (Eterovic, “Novela policial” 44).

While not to diminish the relevance of the detective narrative as a tool for confronting the myths and manipulations of totalitarian forms of authority in post-dictatorship, it begs to be questioned if today, over thirty years after the dictatorship, its use to “rescue the past” (Cánovas) and “represent national reality” (Sepúlveda) is a sufficient response for engaging with the complex challenges facing present-day Chile. If “rescuing the past” and “representing national reality” are to be understood as among the fundamental critical legacies associated with the post-dictatorial detective narrative, then we must additionally ask if the detective story in post-dictatorship risks producing what Kriss Ravetto calls a “negative dialectic,” that is, a stagnant culture of melancholy and excessive self-reflexivity (216).

According to this interpretation, the post-dictatorial detective form risks propagating a melancholic attachment to the national projects of yesteryear. Denis Porter sums the implicit backward gaze of the detective: “the [detective] genre is the radicalization of nostalgia: the search for the restitution of a traditional order and the mourning of a lost utopia, all of which projects a sentiment of melancholy and consequently a Manichean view of present society as a generally corrupt and amoral place (in Simpson 14). Ravetto also describes the overriding sentiment of the detective narrative – and particularly the *novela negra* – as a “prophetic way of seeing everything as painted black” (216). Taking from Adorno and Horkheimer’s famous reading of the culture industry as the herald of such a negative dialectic, she claims that the contemporary critic many times employs the detective story as a privileged vehicle for lamenting the basic banality of a world gone irreparably wrong (Ravetto 216). She specifies this particular relationship between detective fiction and its criticism, saying that

countless cultural critics continue to shroud their readings of noir in the language of uncertainty and betrayal – debating as to whether it can be called a genre, a style, a mode of circuitous critical discourse, or purely an expression of cultural nihilism – many of these same critics want to contain, tame, control and patrol it by plugging it into prepackaged theoretical paradigms. . . What interests me . . . is that [noir criticism] is usually coupled with a prophecy of doom – a narrative of failure, failed desires, failed communities, and dysfunctional families. (211)

The danger of this “painted black” criticism is that it risks burying any hopes for constructing a politics of the future in the name of disenchanting crusades for a

lost national horizon and its promissory values of revolution, justice and social unity (Ravetto 211).

A cursory examination of the post-dictatorial detective narrative and its scholarship suggests the presence of such a “negative dialectic.” Not infrequently melancholy and nostalgia characterize the dominant tropes of cultural reflection on the military government and its passage into a neoliberal democracy. For example, during its apical years, the detective form lent itself easily, on the one hand, as a framework through which to lament the loss of the popular solidarity associated with the Allende years (take, for example, Díaz Eterovic’s first novel *La ciudad está triste* (1987) or his third novel *Nadie sabe más que los muertos* (1993)). The concomitant brand of criticism used the detective story as a model for symbolically rescuing the utopian ideals of social justice and equality as a refuge against the neoliberal present. The basic consequence of these analyses is that the detection impulse, which could otherwise introduce a controversial and active impulse into the so-called neoliberal “conspiracy of agreements,” risks losing its contentious potential and finds itself gazing backwards within something of a “poetics of melancholy.”

Given these critical claims, the variation of the detective story in post-dictatorial Chilean can be read as a parable of the decline of the nation and its political legacy. That is to say that if the detective formula rehearses a literary investigation of the socio-historical circumstance that is always premised on the impossibility of any conclusion – after all, there can be no resolution to a history

of brutal violence and torture – then the detective formula risks becoming merely an affectively charged commentary on political violence and crime and a symptomatic reinvigoration of society's demise. The prevalence of post-dictatorial melancholy merits being examined across the wider spectrum of recent cultural production and scholarship.

A Critique of Mourning/Melancholy

One of the central motivations of my investigation arises from a questioning of resistance and resistance strategies throughout post-dictatorial literature. For many critics and artists, rescuing the past has constituted an effective mode of opposition against neoliberalism's tendency to reconcile difference and singularity with a global market economy. In cultural production this expression of opposition is many times articulated through the rescue of the allegorical, the fragment or the victim as means of symbolically counteracting the present and its reconciliatory projects. My apprehensions regarding the varying conceptualizations of mourning are not an effort to disregard the critical dialogues already developed. Rather, my interest is to identify in these critiques a debilitating pattern of opposition that does not seek to look *past* mourning, but instead merely reverses (and hence maintains) the very paradigms of domination it attempts to oppose. I believe analyzing some of the salient critiques published during post-dictatorship underscores the dualist structures of thought that have been propagated and maintained by memory politics.

Mourning/Reconciliation

One such critical project exemplifying the notion of recuperating the past as resistance is Idelber Avelar's *The Untimely Present: Post-dictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999). His piece glorifies the mournful tenor of post-dictatorial fiction and art. Avelar understands neoliberal capitalism as a totalizing market project that demands reconciliation with the past by incessantly replacing old commodities with new. Literary texts, according to this interpretation, can (and must) resist the commodification logic of the market by withholding irreducible fragments of a lost past that cannot be incorporated by capitalist logic. This allegorically charged ruin – the residual fragment that cannot be reduced – is imbued with an innate resistive potential that by mere virtue of its partial and fragmentary nature freezes the relentless flow of history. Recalling Benjamin, Avelar underscores the irreducible link between mourning and allegory. Using the example of the loss of a loved one, Avelar describes how the mournful subject holds onto objects of the one who died. The mourner (like Benjamin's collector) makes rescuing fragments an act of remembrance. Mourning for Avelar (as for Benjamin) is thus a cyclical movement of bereavement that allegorizes at the same time that it preempts its own conclusion; in other words, what gives mourning its resistive potential is its ability to posit itself as an irreconcilable, interminable task.

While Avelar's interpretation provides an attractive and insightful reading of post-dictatorial literary production as a collective task of mourning, my main

contention with this notion of mourning as resistance is that it does not attempt to move beyond the mourning/reconciliation paradigm, but merely ends up reversing its strategies and fetishizing the idea of ruin. Similarly, by reaffirming the Benjaminian association between mourning and allegory, Avelar suggests not only that post-dictatorial literature possesses an innate tendency to allegorize ruin, but also that it is circumscribed within the national horizon. Avelar seems to confirm Fredric Jameson's (belated, if not rendered incorrect) assumption that all Third World literatures are necessarily national allegories. Finally, by linking post-dictatorial literature to an allegory of loss – loss of lives, previous national imaginaries and social projects – Avelar's interpretation depresses the development of alternative forms of resistance that might attempt to reflect upon history from *outside* the mourning/reconciliation paradigm and the nation. If it is true, as Lessie Jo Frazier has commented, that mourning "boxes the national subject, as an ideological proposition, into the category of the mourner" (*Salt in the Sand* 233), then it could equally be argued that mourning – conceived in the sense that Avelar uses it, as the interminable task of lamenting the past – boxes literature into a memory project always suspended between two poles of the same paradigm: between rescuing the past and resisting the present.

Memory/Forgetting

Another use of the allegorical and the fragmentary as resistance to totalitarian forms of thought is Nelly Richard's work on refractory strategies. In her book *The Insubordination of Signs*, Richard employs the visual metaphor of dismembered or unidentified human remains to confront authoritarian discourse: bodies that have not been recuperated or buried represent the indelible mark of a collective trauma. The absence of burial is the sign of a perpetual historical process of mourning that never assimilates loss, but that rather conserves the lost object in an always incomplete, transitional version. Taking examples from the first stage of post-coup artistic-cultural works by Enrique Lihn, Raúl Zurita, and other adherents of the radical 1970s *Escena Avanzada* group, Richard describes the dual resistance of the "refractory" as both a vehement denunciation and a rescue of the marginal.

Richard does, however, make an attempt towards rupturing the traditional memory/forgetting dyad by mobilizing discontinuous and fragmented memory formations in order to overwhelm the time of the present. She employs memory in these terms, as "an open process of reinterpreting the past that unties and reties its knots so that events and understandings can be recast ... affording the static past new open-ended meanings that put its memory to work" (*Cultural Residues* 29). The idea behind Richard's "insubordinate" fragment is that – similar to Avelar's allegorical trace – by virtue of its very existence as incomplete, the fragment is imbued with the capacity of resisting assimilation by

any totalizing discourse (which could refer to authoritarian, neoliberal, democratic, etc.). For Richard, the fragment accesses the power of the oppressed and the forgotten in what could be conceptualized as a revolt from the margins; it believes itself powerful by garnering up the incoherent and the fractured as privileged loci of resistance, first against dictatorship and later against the neoliberal transition.

Her reading of Diamela Eltit's *El padre mío* (1989), for example, exemplifies the opposition between the margins and the center. In this novel, the refractory attempts to confront authoritarian discourse by fracturing the metaphorical figure of "my father" into an endless concatenation of different names of power that are reiterated or altered until ultimately rendering themselves incomprehensible. Despite the critical depth of Richard's claims, it seems that the use of refractory strategies, as a means of opposing assimilation by both the totalizing logic of military/authoritarian discourse and the reactionary left, fixates too heavily on the margins (the fragment, the past, the marginalized victim) in a way that ends up being a reactionary, if not almost militant, affront against the strategies she theorizes against. That is to say that Richard's call to the margins does not move beyond the very oppositional logic she seeks to resist, as it both confirms and reconstructs a vanished center. "Cultural residues," then, as the essential target of memory for Richard, are an attempt to reconstruct the past and at the same time a melancholic acknowledgment of this impossibility. Although Richard recognizes the impossibility of restituting any

lost totality, her theorizations reflect a latent nostalgia for the totalizing projects of the past.

In fact, it seems that both Avelar and Richard fall into the trap of fetishising the historical remainder, leading to the restricting assumption that the task of post-dictatorial literature is to cultivate the fragmented or marginal discourse strictly for the sake of resistance. Not only this, but both conceptualizations of mourning collapse Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholy, focusing instead on mourning as melancholy. As synthesized in the following passage, Avelar's work describes mourning in terms of melancholy, and hence sustains an attachment of loyalty to the lost object:

What is most proper to mourning is to resist its own accomplishment, to oppose its own conclusion: 'this is what mourning is, the history of its refusal'. . . mourning is never really completed. It is in this sense, then, that one speaks of the interminability of mourning work: mourning necessarily poses itself as an unrealizable task. Unlike the replacement of old by new commodities, the substitution proper to the work of mourning always includes the persistence of an unmourned, unresolved remainder, which is the very index of the interminability of mourning. (*Untimely* 5)

Avelar's interpretation is problematic in that it makes visible how a "politics of melancholy" (as some post-dictatorial critics might title their mode of resisting neoliberalism) has maintained post-dictatorial literature and criticism irreparably bound within the oppositional logic it seeks to confront. In applying the effects of melancholy to the work of mourning, the irreducible trace (the lost object, the marginalized victim, which under normal mourning circumstances is assimilated completely) is resuscitated in all of its irreducibility. Approached in this way,

Avelar's mourning associates closely with what Foucault has called an "active pessimism;" that is, an active movement that does not actually signal any movement forward. It is instead an elliptical motion that revolves obsessively around the vestiges of a lost past.

Francine Masiello, in her book *The Art of Transition*, presents a suggestive counterpoint to the strategies described above when she asks, "is the fragment sufficient" (13)? Put another way, is simply rescuing the victim and writing him/her back into official history enough? Do the marginal and the fragment provide an adequate resistive strategy for engaging with present-day Chilean politics and the nuances of a globalized economy? Rather than focusing on lost victims or failed social projects, this project advocates for a structure of thought that might extend beyond literature's self-understanding as the center of national expression (as it was before the dictatorship), or the privileged ruin of national crisis (as after the dictatorship). Would it be possible to conceive of a narrative structure that thinks itself not strictly born of "resistance to" or "denouncement of" neoliberalism, but rather as the grounds for engaging with an immediate present and an uncertain future? Is it plausible to engage with political violence without falling into the usual pitfalls of melancholic angst or memory politics? These conceptualizations surrounding the rescue of the past and the marginal as opposition to a neoliberal present lay the groundwork for thinking beyond the dualistic paradigms of thought that have characterized post-dictatorial literature and thought.

I believe the melancholisation of thought perceived in post-dictatorial Chile offers a point of departure for examining the limits of memory politics. As suggested earlier, the detective story is one of the predominant narrative forms of post-dictatorship, whose conventions appear in more than just fictional literature. They emerge – perhaps unconsciously or inadvertently – within the narrative structure of other cultural forms, like documentaries, political proceedings, memoirs and, especially, in the testimonio. The detective stories and testimonial forms referenced over the course of this project – Ramón Díaz Eterovic's *La ciudad está triste*, Gonzalo Contreras' *La ciudad anterior*, Silvio Caiozzi's documentary *Fernando ha vuelto*, Hernán Valdes' *Tejas Verdes*, Luz Arce's *El infierno*, Alejandra "La Flaca" Merino Vega's *Mi verdad*, Patricio Guzmán's documentary *El Caso Pinochet*, Alejandra Costamagna's story "Boca abierta," Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez* and Franz Galich's *Managua, Salsa City*, – will flesh out how the particular use of the detective story and testimonial account articulates what I am theorizing as the post-dictatorial thriller structure. I will examine how the detective narrative and the testimonial account in this corpus of texts mirror one other at every fundamental level, proposing a movement beyond the dualist paradigms underlying post-dictatorial thought and criticism.

The Detective, the Critic and the Victim

Although a number of critics have analyzed the predominance of detective fiction and testimonial writings following the dictatorship, few have considered their structural parallels. Javier Coma, for one, alludes to the fact that detective fiction can be read as the precise reverse of the testimonial form. For him, the detective structure is a sort of testimonial account, “a critique of society from the perspective of the crime told by a specialized narrator” (in Colmeiro 57). This “specialized” figure – who could represent a private investigator, journalist or critic – occupies a position of authority, as he acts on behalf of a victim of violence in hopes of restoring justice. According to Coma’s definition, the detective formula mirrors the basic structural pattern of testimonio writings in the sense that both give testament to a set of violent historical events, albeit according to obverse perspectives.

As mentioned, the detective form narrates an encounter with social or political crime according to what we could call a “top-down” model by a “specialized” historical figure who uses critical investigation and knowledge to resolve the crime. In the *neopolicial* novels of Ramón Díaz Eterovic, Roberto Ampuero and Luis Sepúlveda, for example, a detective emerges from the chaos and social fragmentation as the intellectual force that directs the investigation and defines the activity as such. While the motivations for the detective’s involvement with individual cases range from financial need, personal commitment, or to social or political interest, the detective figure nonetheless

gives form and investigative focus to the narrative. In fact, the detective's position as a mediator between the forces of criminality and a victim of political violence is precisely what has elevated the detective form as cultural critics' choice literary trope for examining issues of national identity and the historical violence that has constantly necessitated such examinations (Close et al. xxxiii).

The latter form, testimonial literature, narrates an experience with crime according to a "bottom-up" model from the perspective of a powerless marginal figure, who has usually witnessed or been the victim of a heinous experience with violence. For testimonio critic John Beverley, the preeminent purpose of this form is to recuperate the "Real," or that nonrepresentational experience of "otherness" that cannot be assimilated into language. Testimonio points to the non-literary, as it marks a remnant of the victim's experience that, by virtue of the position of powerlessness from which it narrates, throws an unsettling wrench into the dominant narratives informing the State and neoliberal modernity. It must be remembered that testimonio surged in Chile during the 70s and 80s as a narrative form giving witness to the brutality of dictatorship. Testimonio forms became a powerful defense of the victimized subject who spoke out against violence and corruption and created networks of solidarity that transcended national borders.

My reading of detective fiction and its scholarship in post-dictatorial Chile, however, reveals a correspondence between the detective's position in society and that of the post-dictatorial critic, and that both together have domesticated

the vantage point of the testimonial narrative. Elaborating on the link between the detective and critic, Fredric Jameson notes that the detective figure occupies a position of dominance within society, as he parallels the structural position of the intellectual by virtue of the premium that is placed on his knowledge and attention to the crime (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 39). Just as the detective's investigation attempts to retrace previous events in order to solve the crime, so too the post-dictatorial critic (*a propos* Nelly Richard or Idelber Avelar) many times rescues elements of the past as a solution to the present. In this sense, both private investigator and critic symbolically rescue the victim's account of the crime and attempt to reconstruct it into a coherent motive for political activity – albeit from a position external to the victim's circumstance.¹⁸

And yet, if the structure of this “top-down” investigative model in post-dictatorship is to somehow reconstruct the testimonial experience into a coherent narrative, then what becomes proper to the detection impulse itself is a restitutive gesture toward the victimized Other – toward the dictatorial prisoners, the marginal, or the socialist horizon of possibility. The post-dictatorial detective narrative thus dialogs in many ways with the melancholisation of critical thought insofar as the crime it desires to “detect” and to “resolve” is irreparable loss. The crime ultimately being investigated in post-dictatorship is not simply the social or political violence directed toward individuals. Nor is it merely the destruction of

¹⁸ Jameson concludes that this “top-down” perspective of both the detective and the critic acquires a certain degree of collective resonance, thus turning the work of investigation/analysis into a privileged vehicle for judgments on society and didactic commentary about its hidden nature (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 39).

the socialist project and the dream of an alternative paradigm of modernity. The crime motivating any search for justice in post-dictatorship is precisely the irrecoverable past-ness of the past: the destruction to that secret of historical violence that can be neither recovered nor symbolized. In this sense, a critique that has surprisingly not been addressed is how the work of rescue inherent to the detective narrative not only plays directly into memory politics, and therefore merely maintains the very paradigms of domination that it seeks to oppose, but that it also risks subordinating the testimonial Other to the traumatized Self's doleful search for a lost identity.

I believe the restitutive impulse of the post-dictatorial critic presents perilous implications for a critical understanding of the testimonial text. Not only does an approach of this kind strip the testimonial voice of the urgency of its claim, but it risks domesticating the nonrepresentational aspect of the testimonial account. If we can understand testimonio's preeminent political import to be the appeal to an experience of radical otherness existing always exterior to dominant systems of power/knowledge, then under the investigative eye of the post-dictatorial detective/critic, the testimonial experience risks becoming merely the object of a melancholic restitutive gesture by the contemporary intellectual. The testimonial experience remains relegated to a position of marginality, and can hence never acquire resonance from outside the paradigms of power/knowledge that seek to explain it. Given the hierarchical, restitutive relationship between the detective/critic and the testimonial subject, then, it is no

surprise that both post-dictatorial detective fiction and its criticism risk running up against a melancholic impasse: even as the detective narrative is premised on the existence of a crime, its ultimate trajectory is destined for failure since there can be no true restitution of the victims and their political legacies.

How to overcome this impasse, then, is the question that this dissertation seeks to problematize. What is needed is a form of understanding that breaks with the hierarchical, restitutorial relationship between the contemporary critic and the testimonial victim, and that will instead offer a more critical interpretation of post-dictatorship that centers on the urgency and immediacy of violence as it is posited by the victims of terror. In this sense, I understand the thriller not merely as a consolidated narrative form, but – perhaps more importantly – a structure of thought that approaches the detective narrative *in conjunction with* the testimonial account. A theory of the thriller form does not attempt to incorporate or domesticate the testimonial experience, but instead makes of its position exterior to power the starting point for a more critical understanding of contemporary violence. By centering on the zones of experience and subjectivity that cannot be restituted or represented, the post-dictatorial thriller form proposes a more forceful engagement with the nature of violence underlying our global society.

The Post-Dictatorial Thriller: A Theoretical Approximation

This dissertation will attempt a theoretical examination of the thriller structure within the post-dictatorial and post civil war contexts. I will attempt to do so by drawing from a diverse range of literary and political theories. Some initial clarification is first needed disassociating my use of the term “thriller” from prevailing assumptions that link it strictly to the North American and European generic vein. By way of reiteration, we can call the thriller structure the paradigmatic narrative structure of post-dictatorial society insofar as it is comprised of the two dominant narrative forms since the dictatorship: the “top down” detective narrative and the “bottom-up” testimonial account, which mirror one another at every fundamental level. The conjunction of these narrative perspectives produces a highly flexible narrative structure evocative of the basic detective story. Unlike this latter form, however, in which the crime traditionally occurs in the past, the Latin American thriller form engages the conventional investigation formula with sensational criminal elements – such as political murder, institutional corruption and conspiracy –, which are to be understood as events ongoing in the present or always lying on the narrative horizon.

Since no organic study has been completed on the Chilean (and even very little on the Latin American) thriller form, and since any existing generic/critical works on the thriller tend to conflate it with previous detective traditions, my use of the notion will avoid conceptualizing the post-dictatorial

thriller in reference to the hard-boiled detective corpus.¹⁹ Although the Chilean *neopolicial*, or *novela negra*, share some basic characteristics with the thriller – such as the element of suspense, violence and the uncertainty of any resolution –, I view their use of the detective story as largely a melancholic response born of the dictatorship and the transition to democracy. That is, the “new detective” variation of the 80s and 90s, generally speaking, falls within the paradigm of literary production generated by and against the dictatorship’s legacy. Similarly, my use of the term thriller encompasses the narrative of the victim, which, by virtue of the immediacy and exigency of the experience it relates, introduces a direct appeal to a space beyond all representation, wherein lies the political impetus of the thriller form.

Furthermore, this dissertation will associate the thriller form less with an independent genre than with a cultural-political structure arising from the need to move beyond the melancholic, restitutive drives of former literary projects and

¹⁹ The term “Thriller” first appeared in British usage during the last part of the nineteenth century in reference to tales of heroic adventure situated in criminal scenarios. The plots of thrillers bore kinship to the Gothic novel for their use of criminal intrigue, sinister villains and atmosphere categorized them with the popular police memoirs of the time. The type of “thriller” writing is practiced by North American authors such as Mickey Spillane and Michael Shayne, as well as British writers like John Buchan and Ian Fleming. In its North American and European vein, the thriller is more loosely defined so that at times it might include suspenseful tales of individual detectives along with stories about espionage, terrorism, and corporate scheming. In *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre* (1978) Jerry Palmer describes this subgenre as a “structure dominated by the presence of a competitively individualistic protagonist engaged in suspenseful struggle against a conspiracy,” a model Palmer describes as derivative from the field of ideology that has prevailed in Great Britain and the United States since the turn of industrialism. For Ralph Harper, in *The World of the Thriller* (1969), it is a literature of crisis that actively engages its public because the hunt and chase of the plot, with their attendant fear of peril and relief in escaping it, correspond to real life political situations.

to engage with forms of political violence that emerge in today's globalized society. Critics have, in fact, speculated as to whether noir itself is even a literary genre, or if it is instead something else. Among them, Slavoj Žižek, in a psychoanalytic interpretation of North American thrillers, proposes that this form is perhaps more than an independent genre. It is more a distortive impulse that is only realized when fused with other narrative components (in Copjec 200).

Nadya Aisenberg has affirmed that the thriller, by virtue of its dynamic, forward moving progression, raises questions that the basic detective form cannot. Different from the basic detective form, which adheres to more fixed narrative elements – such as the presence of the detective, an investigation, and a crime –, the thriller structure does not require the specificity of a crime, or a mystery, to trigger its action; the same sensations may be produced by the mere aura of conspiracy, violence, proximity of the unknown or the possibility of future escape (Aisenberg 114). Returning to Žižek's point, then, it is a reasonable assertion that the possibility of theorizing a thriller form introduces a distortive impulse into the post-dictatorship scene that pushes beyond the limits of the dualistic paradigms – such as mourning/reconciliation, memory/forgetting, victim/criminal – that have characterized post-dictatorial discourse.

The forward moving impetus of the thriller form necessarily implies a particular relationship with the past that has no room for melancholic restitution. Not only does the thriller structure activate certain structural elements of the detective story (namely, the crime, the investigation and a possible detective

figure), but it utilizes them to place special focus around the victim's narrative. That is to say that the premium placed on the detective's rationale and on his basic command of the investigation gives way to an immediate and ongoing engagement with violence that is narrated from the stance of the witness-position. Aisenberg coincides with this argument, suggesting that the events presented in the thriller occur always as an impending threat, in what is called the *progression d'effet*.²⁰ In other words, the mystery does not unfold to the thriller subject in sequenced, nonsimultaneous bits that he can retrace and reconstitute in some explicative or rational fashion. Instead, the thriller reflects an uncanny, disruptive terrain of conspiracy that appears to its subjects only as an inconsistent and always nondescript presence.

Copjec comments on the impetus inherent to the thriller structure, which allows that "nothing remain veiled in its universe only to be given meaning in some future moment" (ix). And Todorov, in his theorization of the thriller form, echoes this assumption. He states that no thriller is presented in the form of memoirs. There is no point in the action where the detective figure restitutes a complete knowledge of the events (Todorov 48); in fact, the reader probably already knows *more* than the protagonist.

²⁰ Aisenberg acknowledges the thriller as the only narrative form capable of treating truly contemporary forms, which, according to her interpretation in *A Common Spring: Crime Novel and Classic*, are distinguished from previous Victorian forms. In her analysis of Joseph Conrad and the thriller, only the political thriller can convey the accelerated tempo of modern life and the violence that accompanies it. "In writing a novel, every word set on paper must carry the story forward . . . the story must be carried forward faster and faster and with more and more intensity. This is called *progression d'effet*. This is precisely the effect which the thriller desires" (116).

In this way, the thriller form performs a transgressive operation with regard to post-dictatorial memory politics in that its structure does not privilege the reconstitution of the past for the sake of the political present, nor does it warrant a doleful lamentation of its irreparable past-ness. For the actions therein occur either coetaneous with the narrative present or are always looming on the horizon. Thus the literary configuration of the thriller form opens up the possibility of reconceptualizing the function of memory itself. Memory in the thriller form does not serve the dynamic of the narrative in any way, nor does it endow the protagonist with an authoritative knowledge over how to reconstitute the crime. Rather, memory should allow the conditions and the fulminating grounds for simultaneous and equally relevant knowledge(s) of the past. It allows their indecidability, their contradiction, their critique and perhaps their elimination.

As Tomas Narcejac – French thriller writer *par excellence* – sustains, the thriller validates the perspective of the victim alongside or over that of the detective (in Lloyd 38). What makes the thriller “thrilling” is a suspenseful, propelling engagement with the continuing threat of violence told from the victim-perspective. The thriller draws the witness-position – or what Saskia Sassen calls “informal political subjects” – into the center of the narration, “point[ing] to the possibility that the excluded . . . can also make history, thereby signaling the complexity of powerlessness” (321). Murder and violence in the thriller form, then, are almost never events externally restituted by a “specialized” historical

figure, but are rather experienced as urgent and immediate events constitutive of the very social space inhabited by the characters. In this way, the thriller does not warrant a melancholic reflection upon a lost past, nor a militant resistance against the present; rather, it reveals the stalemate of such responses.

This project focuses on three principal aspects of the thriller structure that theorize why I believe this form begs to be examined within the scope of post-dictatorship. These aspects will be expanded upon in the content chapters of this project, with a final examination of the Central American postwar context. The first two are its narrative components: the detective narrative and the testimonial account. The third aspect to be examined are the political implications of the Latin American thriller form, which will interrogate how the conjunction of the detective narrative and witness account propose a movement beyond the dominant political paradigms of post-dictatorship. As this type of critical work has never been done on the Chilean (and very little on the Latin American) thriller, I anticipate that these precepts will not only help to articulate a necessary movement beyond memory politics in Chile, but it will also make an original inquiry into why the thriller form constitutes the most apt narrative framework for engaging with forms of violence in present-day Latin America.

Chapter Two, titled “Melodrama, Melancholy and Detective Fiction: Toward a Genealogy of the Thriller,” outlines a history of the “top-down” detective narrative component of the post-dictatorial thriller structure through the framework of Chilean modernization, melodrama and contemporary detective

texts. It will first provide a genealogic overview of how the Chilean detective narrative has evolved, tracing it through its roots in European and American classic police fiction, and the “black novel” (also called the hard-boiled narrative or the new detective novel). The basic thesis developed in this chapter is that the classic variation of the detective story, which emerged before and alongside boom literature, can be read as part of a bourgeois melodrama, which covered over the violent realities of modernization with a fixed narrative of reconciliation and resolution. I look at the emergence of the “black novel” as the rupture of this melodrama and as a melancholic response to the dictatorship that is doubly inscribed by the boom’s closure and the failure of the socialist project of the 70s. The second part of this chapter will examine how the use of the detective form in three Chilean texts – Ramón Díaz Eterovic’s first detective novel *La ciudad está triste* (1987), Gonzalo Contreras’ police novel *La ciudad anterior* (1991), and Fernando Cazzo’s documentary film *Fernando ha vuelto* (1998) – rehearse the top-down detective perspective proper to the thriller form. The detective narrative exposed in these texts poses a viable critique of neoliberal modernization, at the same time making visible some of the pitfalls of attempting to reconstitute a previous national horizon as a solution to the present.

Chapter Three, “The Testimonial Roots of the Thriller,” will engage with the testimonial element within the post-dictatorial thriller structure. The section will begin with a theoretical and historical overview of the testimonio and will necessarily touch upon the critical debates that this form has provoked across

the spectrum of Latin American discourse. Testimonio forms draw into the center of the narration precisely the voice of the powerless and oppressed subaltern “other,” who, recalling Beverley, represents “the mark of a desire not to be silenced or defeated, to impose oneself on an institution of power like literature from the position of the excluded or the marginal” (*Against Literature* 175). By situating a sample of Chilean testimonies – Hernán Valdes’ *Tejas Verdes* (1991), *El infierno* (1993) by Luz Arce, and *Mi verdad* (1993) by Alejandra “La Flaca” Merino Vega – within this debate, this section will demonstrate how these testimonio texts articulate a “bottom up” model for engaging with political violence.

What makes the thriller a sensational reading experience is, in part, the way in which it projects an encounter with political violence made possible through the direct and unguarded testimony of the victim. It is in these ostensibly apolitical moments, where a victim of crime or the spectator of a murder gives an unguarded testament to his/her movement into the center of crime, that the thriller executes its most political work. In this sense, the thriller form possesses an essential, and essentially political, testimonial element: just as testimonio writings point to an extraliterary or postliterary component that unsettles the authorial dominance of official historiography and sanctioned literary forms (Beverley, *Against Literature* 178), the thriller structure, too, projects alternative ways of engaging the dictatorial experience that move outside national forms and traditional narrative models.

Chapters Four and Five, titled “The Thriller and Global War” and “The Third Space and Memory Politics,” respectively, will examine the political implications of the thriller form. These sections contend that the thriller structure engages with what Italian thinker Carlo Galli considers to be the most suitable explanatory horizon for political violence in our globalized society today: global war. Global war describes the mode of international association accompanying the decline of the modern and late-modern State and the triumph of a capitalist world system. This means that the spatial political dualities that sustained the modern nation-state – such as internal/external, friend/enemy, victim/criminal – have been definitively ruptured. Global war not only marks the exhaustion of modern dualities, but also propagates the creation of a liminal space that lies beyond modern politics’ legacy of historical and political binaries. The extent to which post-dictatorial Chile can be analyzed within the framework of global war will be examined using Galli’s critique of Carl Schmitt’s concept of the *nomos* of the earth, which is based on the division between friends and enemies, and using Alberto Moreiras’ notion of the third space. Through a reading of Patricio Guzmán’s documentary *El Caso Pinochet* (2001), Chapter Four asserts that the critical possibility offered by the post-dictatorial thriller structure is a third space of political understanding from which new forms and political subjectivities can be reimagined. Chapter Five will extend the notion of the third space and the thriller to the field of post-dictatorial memory politics. If, for Galli, global war signals the end of oppositional politics based on the friend/enemy distinction,

then could the onset of global war not also necessarily imply the exhaustion of memory politics, which revolves around the conflict between remembering and forgetting, and which has constituted the most persistent, if not controversial, form of politics within post-dictatorial Chile? In Chapter Five, a reading of Alejandra Costamagna's story "Boca abierta" (2000) explores the possibility of the exhaustion of memory politics and points to the forms of subjectivity that emerge in its dissolution.

Finally, the Conclusion will examine the degree to which the thriller form constitutes the paradigmatic narrative structure of post civil war Central America. Several Latin American countries that underwent dictatorships or violent revolutions during the 1970s and 80s (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay or Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador, to name a few) now face the task of coming to terms with their national political histories within a more globalized context. What is at stake for the future of Chile, and by extension, Central America, is determining how to move beyond a history of political murder and violence without inadvertently falling into a politics of duality: that is, either adhering to the prevailing tendency to forget the past, or to the opposite reaction to cling to it. I will conclude this final chapter analyzing how contemporary writers across Central America are increasingly employing what Beatriz Cortez has called an "aesthetic of cynicism" to begin thinking beyond their post-trauma circumstance.

Different from melancholy, which facilitates an obsessive attachment to the lost object – the past, victims of political violence or failed revolutionary

projects – the aesthetic of cynicism that characterizes postwar fiction decries both the (failed) projects of the revolutionary left and the global market policies enacted following the post-conflict “Acuerdos de Paz.” In this sense, the critical import of an aesthetic of cynicism, and why I believe it to be concomitant to a theory of the post civil war thriller, is that by criticizing both past and present political projects, it points to the possibility of a third space for examining postwar violence. This conclusion will examine how El Salvadoran writer Horacio Castellanos Moya’s novel *Insensatez* (2004) and Nicaraguan author Franz Galich’s *Managua, Salsa City* (1999) employ the detective narrative and the testimonial account to articulate a third space of political understanding.

CHAPTER II
MELODRAMA, MELANCHOLY AND DETECTIVE FICTION:
TOWARD A GENEALOGY OF THE THRILLER

Spanish America has as its principle historical referent the narrative event that detective stories – and all thrillers – seek to uncover: violence. Beginning with the colonial encounter, the sensationalism of *Las Casas' crónicas*, passing through the Romantic novel, the national allegories of the nation-building period, the Indianist and Indigenista literature, to finally arrive at the boom and the post-boom narratives, the continent's literary production articulates a history of violence. From *Amalia* (1844) by José Mármol to *La fiesta del Chivo* (2000) by Mario Vargas Llosa, from *Señor Presidente* (1946) by Miguel Asturias to *Detectives salvajes* (1998) by Roberto Bolaño, crime and violence seem to emanate from those in power and pervade the whole social milieu. In this way, the Latin American archive proliferates in the narrative material proper to the thriller form. Furthermore, a large part of recent post-revolution Hispano-American literary forms – such as post-civil war Central American adventures, Mexican Narco-thrillers or the border *bildungsroman* – have begun to write violence and its political implications into their narrative structures.

The variations of the detective formula just mentioned can be read as attempts to reveal what Roger Bartra calls the secret of contemporary society. The key, Bartra asserts, to revealing the mysteries of society is unconcealing the

violence that makes possible its development. To accomplish this feat requires that “[w]e . . . exercise a degree of violence in order that things surrender, as it were, the key to their structure” (Bartra 1). Thus, to unveil violence is to also unveil the mystery of society.

Nonetheless, the implications of this challenge, of unconcealing forms of violence, have remained largely sublimated in Latin American reflection, if not covered over, by cultural models that reflect upon violence through a narrative framework best called melodrama. The way I view it, melodrama upholds a false dialectic of equivalences between cultural production and the nation. In the case of Chile, I would go as far to say that melodrama has been a predominant aesthetic-cultural paradigm of modern literature and has determined a significant portion of the nation’s critical discourse of the 20th century.

This dialectic between nation and cultural expression was radically fissured by the *golpe de estado* on September 11th, 1973, the military dictatorship and the nation’s entrance into a neoliberal economy. With the onset of military rule, State violence became the unavoidable center of social and political life, and the previous alliance between nation and literature reached a point of crisis in which it could no longer legitimize and organize civil society. Confronted with the inadequacy of national literatures, the new detective narrative and testimonio writings surged in response to the vacancy left by national narratives and to the legacy of dictatorial violence. Together these

forms not only articulate the frailty of national sovereignty, but anticipate a powerful exploration of the economies of violence underlying neoliberal society.

This chapter attempts to locate an emerging genealogy of the thriller structure in contemporary Chile. By way of reiteration, the thriller form engages the conventional detective story with other, more sensational topics such as State murder, institutional corruption and political violence. The thriller structure conjoins the mirroring narrative strands of the detective investigation and the testimonial account in what becomes a transgressive engagement with contemporary violence. This chapter will pay particular attention to the development of the detective narrative component first through two police novels, *La ciudad está triste* (1987) by Ramón Díaz Eterovic and *La ciudad anterior* (1991) by Gonzalo Contreras. My reading will flesh out the implications of what I am calling a “top-down” structure of reflection, particularly through the novels’ treatment of the city space and the collective subject.

Although considered a *neopolicial* novel, *La ciudad está triste* shares closer similarity to the classic detective novel than oftentimes recognized. I suggest that the novel is symptomatic of the tendency within post-dictatorial literature and criticism to symbolically reconstitute the past and its victims as a strategy of melancholic opposition against neoliberal modernization. As such, the novel ultimately fails to contend with the present circumstance, making visible the stalemate that maintains much of post-dictatorial critical reflection fixated on the revolutionary past and its political legacy. The second novel in

question traces a movement beyond these melancholic drives by fusing elements of the conventional detective story with aspects of a police thriller. Contreras' *La ciudad anterior* portrays the collective and the city as emptied of any cohesive, redemptive potential and presents a model for approaching post-dictatorship that is not circumscribed to melancholy. The final analysis in this chapter, *Fernando ha vuelto* (1998), a forensic documentary produced by Silvio Caiozzi, can be approached as a thriller form that attempts to break with the melodramatic certainties of post-dictatorial forensic science. To understand the stronghold of melodrama in Chile requires contextualizing the close ties between melodrama and the modernization of Latin America.

Latin American Modernization: A Tale of Melodrama

The contours of the melodramatic structure emerge at various points during the process of Latin American modernization. On its most basic level, melodrama refers to a dramatic piece in which binary forces of good and evil are resolved within the context of a moral universe through conclusive resolutions. The melodramatic structure projects the desire for the reconciliation of differences by superficially reaching “representations of a stable ‘I’, that is, of identity narratives which articulate the tensions of our times” (Colón 142). In this realm of fixed conclusions and limited options of movement, melodrama operates like a veneer, covering over the real condition with a coherent, ideologically fixed conception of history.

It is in the realm of simulated resolutions that melodrama becomes a useful form for comprehending the narrative of modernization in Chile. The paradigm of change we are calling “modernization” began in Chile at the turn of the 20th century and lasted roughly up through the transition to democracy. For our purposes, “modernization” will refer to the program of social, economic and political developments believed to enhance the progress of the nation. Heavily influenced by modernity, the idea behind modernization was that each nation-state be considered free to rationally control its progressive development. The elaboration of these ideas within political economy, however, produced the grounds for the appearance of developmentalist ideology, which became predominately adopted by western (Europe and later, North America) capitalist societies.²¹ Developmentalism posited the notion of the existence of a capitalist world system divided into a center (the First World) and the periphery (the so-called Third World). The idea was that in order to combat Latin American “backwardness” and “feudalism,” First World economies should intervene by promoting foreign capital investments and economic liberalism. This, in turn, would inevitably produce modern “happy, liberal, socially just, democratic

²¹ In his book *Historia de las Ideas y de la Cultura*, Bernardo Subercaseaux notes some of the changes brought by Chilean modernization, which included the gradual shift from the traditional oligarchic and parliamentary social structure toward a more modern one. For example, the nitrate mining in the early 20th century brought migrations of workers into the cities and to the north of Chile. The mining economy also attracted sectors of German and Italian immigrants. The universities, *liceos* and schools became sites where the mesocratization of the country was articulated, resulting in the semblance of a middle class: workers, students, and artisans. In Santiago, a public water and sewage system, the telephone, the cinema, were all innovations brought about by modernization. Modernization also brought a different kind of intellectual to Chile: a cosmopolitan intellectual, like Vicente Huidobro, that opened up to the new European aesthetics, or like Pablo de Rokha, who articulated “the new” through national-popular elements.

regimes” (Wiarda 38). Inevitably, the notion of a “transition to modernity” through economic developmentalism supports the hegemony of the West to the degree that the capitalist world system gains credibility by developing a few successful peripheral zones. In this sense, not only did the project of “modernity” favor the model of dominant industrialized countries, but it maintained the hierarchies of power inequality – such as European/non-European, Creole/Indian – that have been sustained throughout the history of Latin America.²²

If we can compare the trope of melodrama to modernization, then, melodrama implies a narrative of domination that is imposed from an outside power. It enjoys the status of a false reality that is appropriated by dominant power structures and lived out upon the constituent members of society. Speaking of melodrama and the experiences of those subordinated by it, Althusser notes its homogenizing effects:

The motor of their dramatic conduct is their identification with the myths of bourgeois morality: these unfortunates live their misery within the arguments of a religious and moral conscious . . . In it they disguise their problems and even their condition. In this sense, melodrama is a foreign consciousness as a veneer on a real condition. The dialectic of the melodramatic consciousness is only possible at this price: this consciousness must be borrowed from the outside (from the world of alibis, sublimations and lies of bourgeois morality), and it must still be lived as the consciousness of a condition (that of the poor) even though this condition is radically foreign to the consciousness. (*For Marx* 139-140)

²² For a detailed overview of the process of Latin American modernization see Wiarda, *Dilemmas of Democracy in Latin America: crises and opportunity*. For a theoretical examination of Developmentalism ideology, see Ramón Grosfoguel’s article “Developmentalism, Modernity and Dependency Theory in Latin America.”

What Althusser suggests in this passage is that melodrama effectuates a double operation of suppression and suture. Insofar as we can read this form as a “vener on a real condition,” melodrama effectuates an epistemological suture to a fragmented social reality that attempts to cover any ruptures with a narrative of conciliation and consensus. Thomas Elsaesser echoes the oppressive effects on those subjected to melodrama’s fixed historical and representative structure: “Melodrama, at its most accomplished form, seems capable of reproducing . . . the patterns of domination and exploitation of a given society . . . by emphasizing so clearly an emotional dynamic whose social correlative is a framework of external forces directed oppressively inwards, and with which the characters themselves unwittingly collude to become their agents” (390).

One of the most obvious manifestations of the melodrama structure in the Latin American canon are the early national allegories and their subsequent “transculturation” with the rest of the world through boom literature of the 60s and 70s.²³ The fundamental act of early nation-building novels like *Iracema* (1865), *Doña Barbara* (1916), and *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926) naturalized the violent tensions accompanying Latin American urbanization through a

²³ Here I am understanding “transculturation” in the sense that Fernando Ortiz and later Angel Rama use it. Ortiz conceived the term in a loosely anthropological sense to describe the mutual alterations that occur during a cultural encounter. Rama extends Ortiz’s basic conception of the term to designate a self-conscious process of cultural mixing in which the host culture regulates the flexible incorporation of external influences into its own by reformulating the regional cultural structures (*Procesos* 12). I am interested in looking at transculturation as some sort of self-regulating operating device that pretends a harmonious negotiation of cultural differences through a series of acculturations and deculturations. What is at stake in the various examples of literary transculturation (magical realism, for one) is its sublimation of the violence inherent in any cultural encounter (literary, political, social or otherwise).

harmonious consensus between regional identity and metropolitan cultural structures. In this sense, Moacir – the *mestizo* offspring of the Brazilian native Iracema and her European lover Martim – and Marisela – the hybrid of Santos Luzardo and Doña Barbara – appear as melodramatic amalgamations of cultural differences; both can be read as metaphors of conciliatory unification in the face of accelerated modernization.

In her seminal book *Foundational Fictions*, Doris Sommer argues that these national melodramas bolstered nation-building “through reconciliations and amalgamations of national constituencies cast as lovers destined to desire each other” (24). The basic operation of these texts created a model for reconciliation and dialectical unification with the rest of the world. As a consequence, however, they violently excluded everything that did not fit within that model. The violence underlying these texts, then, reflects the violence that accompanied the development of the modern nation; namely, the suppression of any possibility of cultural heterogeneity within the national historical account. On both a literary and political level, the melodrama structure is tied to the legitimization of the modern nation-state. As the examples above suggest, although restituting the “transcultured” subject (the *creole* or *mestizo*) and incorporating him into the national narrative helped legitimize the modernizing project, it suppressed the violence inherent in this process.²⁴

²⁴ Naturally, the “transition to modernity” favors the dominant industrialized countries. Modernity in Latin America then becomes a historical necessity that, following a path of transition, is to repeat the same phases of modernization already accomplished by advanced societies.

Chilean modernization centered on the reconciliation of the old oligarchic and agrarian order with new socio-economic changes. Bernardo Subercaseaux specifies the Chilean modernizing project in terms of three central tenets of development: economic expansion, secularization within judicial, political and scientific branches, and the integration of all the nation's inhabitants within the right to education, health, work and political representation (*Chile* 89). As he notes, the narrative of modernity functioned like a melodrama: it was more a utopian aspiration promoted by foreign and elite classes than an actual political reality. In essence, modernization promulgated the creation of a narrative of consensus in which the state continually reproduced its power through a "national identity" under which racial, cultural and social differences disappeared. As a narrative construct, then, we can say that the melodrama of Latin American modernity sought its ultimate fulfillment in the fixed certitudes of the modern State, where reaching a consensual resolution is the story's defining activity.

Key to creating this consensual idea of the nation was through the image of the popular subject, not as an individual figure in his own right, but rather as a collective representation of *the* original identity of the nation. Gareth Williams comments on the harmonious link created between national identity and the popular. He explains that the modernization of Latin America was predicated on forging a coherent, inclusive discourse that would help constitute national history as well as stabilize national identity formations:

The universal development of capitalism in Latin America was largely predicated on the formation of the modern nation-state. However, the formation of the modern nation-state in Latin America . . . was for the most part predicated on the active integration . . . of the notion of the people – of the common populace . . . as the originary ground from which to consider the contours of national history . . . and national modernization. (4)

Concomitant to capitalist development in Latin America was the construction of the category of *lo popular*. Invocations to the notion of the popular were later recycled by cultural and political discourse not only as resistance against the threat of vigorous modernization, but as a repository of difference that, by virtue of its marginality, necessarily resisted assimilation. The notion of a populace was presumably to unify the entirety of the nation's cultural and ethnic differences beneath the homogenous banner of the nation. So pervasive was the melodramatic link between the popular subject and national self-understanding that cultural production was, whether intentionally or not, frequently complicit in both legitimizing the modernization process and the power of the State. From the national figure of the *roto* or *huaso* in Chile during the 1930s and 1940s, the public murals of Diego Rivera and David Siquieros in post-revolutionary Mexico, or to the Andean *indianismo* and *indigenismo*, the popular figure many times helped cover over the violence underlying the nation's transition into modernity.

And yet, as any study of capitalist development in Latin America would demonstrate, the attempt to reconcile marginal sectors into civil society was nowhere a peaceful endeavor; it was, rather, explicitly a project of oppression

and exclusion. In virtually every case, the modernizing project resulted in a melodrama of domination, which ultimately sparked the social turbulence of the second half of the 20th century. Williams notes:

The nation-state's need to produce the people as a national community capable of forging state hegemony, and thereby consolidating the universal history of capitalist development in Latin America, largely paved the way for the people/power bloc antagonisms that fueled the revolutionary period of post World War II Latin America. (7)

In this sense, the treatment of the national-popular community in Latin America provoked the conditions for the militarized national security policies of the 1970s and 80s, many of which were designed to quell the increasing threat of revolutionary insurrection.

The work of Chantal Mouffe poignantly demonstrates how programs of consensual thinking – of forging harmonious equivalences between social sectors – are themselves a form of violence. Consensus most always depends on exclusion. It requires the suppression of something else that exists outside the very social field defined by the chosen equivalences themselves. Mouffe affirms that “there is no consensus without exclusion, no ‘we’ without a ‘they’ and no politics without the drawing of a frontier” (*On the Political* 73). Based on this theory, the modern Latin American nation has been historically successful in creating and sustaining a homogenous narrative of modernization by excluding the figures and experiences that were presumably nonnormative or nonnational (Williams 5). Thus, the narrative act of “rescuing” the popular subject – the Chilean *huaso*, or the vagabond – fundamental to early national literature and art

aided in the exclusion of everything that was not easily constituted within the category of the “popular” subject. This tendency is equally tenable during neoliberal modernization. For example, following the dictatorship, official truth commissions alleged to recover the marginal or victimized subject as a way to deliver justice to the Chilean populace. This restitutive act, however, risked propagating a melodrama of exclusion, as it left out subjects of the dictatorship that did not neatly fit within the category of the “victim.”

Let me briefly specify two manifestations of melodrama in Chile that reveal its pervasiveness as well as demonstrate its continuation throughout the neoliberal administrations. During Allende’s socialist modernization that lasted from 1970-1973, the government capitalized heavily on the collective subject – the worker, the *campesino* – as the protagonist of integrationist policies that were designed to gloss over social fragmentation. The desperate need to legitimize a peaceful socialist project in the wake of Cold War trepidations necessitated reinforcing the image of a politically unified nation. From the onset of the socialist project, the Popular Unity Coalition fomented a political narrative that actively drew the popular sectors into the national imaginary. The emphasis on collective memory and national identity through the incorporation of *lo popular* was an essential strategy for reinforcing solidarity against the threat of increasing social instability and international critiques of Marxism. Using the collective figure as the central motivation of Popular Unity social developments – such as the agrarian reform, literacy campaigns and other food distribution

programs –, the collective subject became incorporated into a State-sponsored melodrama of social accord.²⁵ The literature and cultural expressions of this period appropriated and reproduced the Popular Unity's emphasis on *lo popular* by focusing on manifestations of traditional Chilean popular music and on the appearance of marginal voices.²⁶ For example, the songs of the *Nueva Canción Chilena* such as those of Violeta Parra and Victor Jara, or the poems of Pablo Neruda, filled political rallies and the popular imagination with expressions symbolic of revolution and collective struggle.²⁷

Critics will frequently mark the dissolution of the socialist project, the dictatorship and Chile's transition into neoliberal market capitalism as a drastic rupture in this harmonious dialectic between the nation and its people. They also identify the *golpe de estado* in 1973 as the symbolic end not only of the

²⁵ Food distribution campaigns became a catalyst of one of CADA's (*Colectivo de acciones de arte*) most recognized project. "Para no morir de hambre en el arte" was an urban artistic performance that attempted to rescue images of one of the Popular Unity's milk distribution campaigns. The performance used milk, or its lack, in distinct urban locales as a visual denouncement of dictatorial violence.

²⁶ Figures such as Pablo Neruda and singer Violeta Parra became symbolic figures during the dictatorship as they came to represent the Chilean folklore and popular culture closely related to the Popular Unity. Manifestations of popular culture were violently repressed during dictatorship, and they only experienced resurgence later during the 1970s as artistic interventions of resistance. It is curious that these cultural icons reemerged during the dictatorship only as the melancholic fragments of the socialist project; for many artists and cultural critics of later periods, these figures evoked the collective values that were destroyed by the dictatorship.

²⁷ Culture and art forms were associated with developing a social consciousness that was closely tied to progressive politics and protest. The songs of Violeta Parra and Victor Jara – which addressed social problems such as inequality and poverty – had clear left wing connections. In 1970, Chilean New Song musicians participated in the electoral campaign of the Popular Unity Coalition, and when Allende assumed the presidency, he urged the media to pay more attention to the New Song. The New Song sponsored government programs, such as land reform, and a few of the musicians even toured abroad to motivate foreign support for Allende's Coalition. Violeta Parra's "Gracias a la vida" was one of the most recognized songs; it reflected solidarity and identification with the common people. This song became a popular anthem during the dictatorship.

apogee of national-popular cultural forms – namely, the boom – but also of the notion of the “collective” or the “popular” itself. This is perhaps true, that the failure of the socialist State signaled the demise of the popular subject as a legitimizing force of the nation. Nevertheless, I believe that the melodramatic impulse persists in perhaps its most violent reconfiguration during the neoliberal period. The “neoliberal conspiracy” – to borrow critic Nelly Richard’s term – functions much like a veneer that glosses over the harrowing memories of dictatorial violence with market driven strategies and discourses of national reconciliation. With market capital as its crutch, neoliberalism depends on the reconciliation of the individual experiences of dictatorial violence into a narrative of collective healing. Richard affirms that neoliberal consensus produces an altogether different quality of violence by rendering indistinct the threat of difference, “of different counterpoints, antagonistic and polemical stances . . . by means of an institutional pluralism that forces diversity to become noncontradictory” (*Cultural Residues* 16).

One of the most powerful visual examples of neoliberal melodrama is the iceberg, an actual replica of which was transported to the Seville World Fair in 1992 as the symbol of “New Chile’s” peaceful insertion into the global economy. The iceberg represented an operation of reconciliation, which was designed to neutralize the traumatic realities of dictatorship with a national narrative of truth and justice. Thomas Moulian comments that “the iceberg represented New Chile’s grand debut into society, now cleaned up, sanitized, and purified . . .

there were no traces of blood and no disappeared prisoners. Not even the shadow of Pinochet could be glimpsed” (34-35).

The iceberg created a national metaphor of the peaceful integration of the personal testimonies of dictatorial violence. Similarly, as the symbol of democratic transparency, the iceberg projected the idea that the trauma suffered by individual victims of dictatorial violence had been successfully “worked through” by the national project of reconciliation. That is to say that truth commissions inaugurated by the transition administrations, such as the 1991 Truth and Reconciliation Report and the thousands of testimonios published during post-dictatorship, were treated as proof of accomplished national mourning via the collective victim. Lessie Jo Frazier notes how, paradoxically, official truth investigations capitalized on the dictatorial victim by reinforcing the discourse of mourning. She explains how official commissions purported to “resolve” the incommensurability of torture and violence and contested sites of dictatorial violence by minimizing the political dimension of the truth reports. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was presented by the Aylwin administration as the government’s response to the families of dictatorial victims or disappeared prisoners. The Commission, however, curtailed the participation of families by attempting to pacify their potentially conflictive demands. The reparation requests were treated as if they emanated from the entire Chilean society, which ultimately smoothed over the revindications that helped motivate the formation of the Commission in the first place (Peris Blanes, *Historia* 275).

Frazier notes that the mantra of “working through” past wrongs legitimated to a certain degree the transition ideology: “the current vocabulary shuns words like fight, right, liberty . . . In this context, the vocabulary of mourning, as a tool for soothing grief in order to supersede it, accommodates neoliberal discourse” (“Subverted” 108).

Needless to say, the representation of the dictatorial victim harmoniously reconciled into the “New Chile” cannot be separated from the violence underlying neoliberal consensus. What official promotions of reconciliation cover over is the fact that they were predicated on demands for reconciliation without complete revelation of the past and justice for those responsible for military violence. For example, the Truth and Reconciliation Report was presented as the disclosure of the “truth” of dictatorial violence, even though it reported only deaths and disappearances, and not acts of torture. Furthermore, the Commission was very explicit in mandating that the report’s content could not be used in court as proof against military officials.²⁸

In November of 2004, the Valech Report, also called the The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report, proposed to resolve what the Truth and Reconciliation Report had not by detailing not only deaths and disappearances, but also the testimonies of thousands of victims who

²⁸ The second article of Decree 335, which created the Commission, was very explicit in this regard: “En caso alguno la Comisión podrá asumir funciones jurisdiccionales propias de los Tribunales de Justicia ni interferir en procesos pendientes ante ellos. No podrá, en consecuencia, pronunciarse sobre la responsabilidad que con arreglo a las leyes pudiera haber a personas individuales por los hechos de que haya tomado conocimiento.”

underwent violent acts of torture. The complete investigation report directed by Bishop Sergio Valech includes over 35,000 accounts providing excruciating detail of torture at the hands of the military regime. It also locates 1,200 sites where torture took place and identifies the institutional association of those who inflicted the torture (police, DINA and CNI members, intelligence officials). Even though the Torture and Prison Report filled a laguna left by the Truth and Reconciliation Report by recording real testimonies, it preempted any sort of real “working through” by withholding the names of the individual torturers. In this sense, beneath the glimmering narrative of national reconciliation (via the testimonial subject) lie the unresolved remains of unspeakable sufferings, nonrepresentable responses and muted languages that remain forgotten from, and always irreducible to, the category of the “victim.”

Chilean Detective Fiction: Beyond Melancholy

What the two previous manifestations demonstrate is that the narrative of Chilean modernization – from before the Popular Unity era up to the nation’s transition into democracy – created a powerful melodrama of social unity that blurred and sought to erase its accompanying violence. It has remained the challenge of post-dictatorial literature and cultural expressions to confront these manifestations of melodrama and reveal the forms of violence underlying the discourses of consensus or reconciliation. Yet, returning to Avelar’s earlier claim, post-dictatorial literature’s response has largely been an oppositional one

through the rhetoric of melancholy, which is marked by an obsession with recuperating the past. Characteristically, when confronted with neoliberal modernization, as well as with the decline of the nation as the praxis for cultural reflection, post-dictatorial literature turns its gaze to the past as the only viable solution to the present. Post-dictatorial literature turns its salvific focus to the marginal subject, the victim and fragments of a previous social order as resistance against the new neoliberal system.

The following genealogy of detective fiction demonstrates the stagnating implications of too much emphasis on the past. In *The Illusion of the End* Jean Baudrillard warns that the constant rehearsal of the past ultimately leads to a melancholic fixation on historical failures: “There are those who let the dead bury the dead, and there are those who are forever digging them up to finish them off. Having failed both in their symbolic murder and their work of mourning, it is not enough for them that others should be dead; they have to disinter them once again . . .” (24). Heavily determined by mourning (the need to rescue the past) and denouncement (a refusal of the present), melancholy can potentially confront political violence in the present, but it is ultimately bound to the moment of loss and therefore incapable of thinking beyond it.

The challenge faced by post-dictatorial Chilean literature can thus be understood as the opposition within memory politics – between melodrama, understood as any narrative which covers over the real condition, and melancholy, responses which seek to rescue the past as a solution to the

present. I propose that the post-dictatorial thriller structure seeks to explore experiences of violence in post-dictatorship by challenging this fundamental opposition. To theorize this movement requires outlining the “top-down” detective component of the thriller structure, whose development reveals the diverse challenges of moving beyond the impasse of memory politics. Let me first briefly introduce a genealogy of the detective story in Chile and contextualize its correspondence with the narrative of modernization.

Although the origins of the detective tale can be traced as far back as the Oedipus myth, Egyptian lore and the Bible, it is generally accepted that the first detective figure appeared in 1841 when the North American writer Edgar Allan Poe published “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.”²⁹ The basic structure of the classic detective story – also called the “closed room,” the “whodunit” or “enigma novel” – opens with a crime (which traditionally occurs in the past). The crime is usually a murder, and the mystery surrounding the culprit instigates the involvement of an aristocratic detective figure who solves the case through deductive reason. Poe’s stories, which fused the mystique of Romanticism with the rational Enlightenment values, established the literary model that has influenced detective fiction in North America and Europe since.

²⁹ It is interesting to note that the short story following the publication of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Mystery of Marie Roget” was inspired by the real-life case of the mysterious death of a New York woman named Mary Rogers. The murder of this woman gripped the public imagination as well as generated a great deal of media hype before inspiring Poe to write his story. So tremendous was the scandal surrounding the mysterious death of Roget that the case was instrumental in the formation of the New York’s Night and Day Police. This note in itself is significant in that it demonstrates the link between the advancement of the State justice system and the emergence of the brilliant detective character who strived to ensure that the values of the State were upheld.

Curiously, the classic detective story practiced by Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie emerges with the modernization of the modern North American and European State. This historical moment towards the middle of the 19th century coincided with agrarian societies' gradual transition into modernized capitalist cities. The traditional police narrative, then, can be read as a cultural response to the anxieties generated by the changing social and material conditions of capitalist modernization. The burgeoning growth of the bourgeoisie sector and the rapid influx of population into the metropolitan cities began transforming the traditional class structure of society. One of the central preoccupations that accompanied these transformations was the regulation of crime. The small rural communities of previous eras that could rely on self-regulation were gone, and the process of urbanization and the influx of a proletariat in the metropolis created new criminal classes and circles of organized violence. Thus, the new problem of how to approach violence within the new urban centers became a central preoccupation of the dominant bourgeoisie class and consequently a motivating factor in the rise of the classic detective novel.³⁰ Indeed, the imperative to defend the dominant social order

³⁰ None other than Karl Marx has commented on the way in which the rising preoccupation with violent death and crime in the European and North American State formations directly influenced classic detective literature:

The criminal moreover produces the whole of the police and criminal justice, constables, judges, hangmen, juries, etc.; and all of these different lines of business, which form equally many categories of the social division of labor, develop different capacities of the human spirit, create new needs and new ways of satisfying them . . . The criminal produces an impression, partly moral and partly tragic, as the case may be, and in this way renders a 'service' by arousing the moral and aesthetic feelings of the public. He produces not only

had a significant effect in determining the contours of both the crime and violence in the classic detective story.

The plot of the classic story traditionally entails the discovery of a crime – usually a murder – and provokes a suspenseful investigation and the restitution of social order thanks to the empirical deduction of the detective. Through aristocratic figures like Sherlock Holmes and the rational values he represented, the classic structure helped to produce a comforting and reassuring melodrama of society. Although the presence of murder and suspense in the stories sensationalized the threat of death, these conventions were ultimately subordinated to the deductive method and to the refined resolution-seeking strategies of the detective (Thompson 76). In this way, the classic detective story constructed superficial resolutions of the crime in order to reinforce the ideological values of the ruling class.³¹ Ernest Mandel comments that

[i]t [the traditional form] plays a powerful integrative role among all but extremely critical and sophisticated readers. It suggests to them that . . . the social order itself – bourgeois society – has to be accepted as such regardless of shortcomings and injustices, and that those who catch criminals and deliver them to law-enforcement agencies, the courts, and the gallows are serving the interests of the immense majority of the citizenry . . . The detective story is the realm of the happy ending. The criminal is always caught. Justice is always done. Crime never pays. (47)

compendia on Criminal Law, not only penal codes and along with them legislators in this field, but also art, novels, and even tragedies . . . The criminal breaks the monotony and everyday security of bourgeois life. In this way he keeps it from stagnation, and gives rise to that uneasy tension and agility without which even the spur of competition would get blunted. (qtd in Mandel 55)

³¹ For example, in the mystery to be solved in the short story “The Purloined Letter” involves the theft of a personal letter. The whole motivation of the investigation is the defense of bourgeois morality, the conquest of rational knowledge and the vindication of truth – these viewed as among the fundamental values of the bourgeoisie class.

The classic form, then, not only helped ratify the values of the dominant bourgeoisie, and implicitly those of the modern State, but it did so by reiterating the correlation between knowledge and power. Foucault has said that “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (*Discipline and Punish* 27). This knowledge-power construct imbued the detective figure with the ability to unravel the most enigmatic puzzles, giving him also the power to penetrate the mysteries of the modern capitalist city. Almost like mechanistic clockwork, the classic detective story created a melodramatic tale of modernity, which is described by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* as a myth “[that] organizes a world which is without contradictions, because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves” (143).

Jon Thompson also recounts how instead of depicting the reality of social crime, the classic detective story created “a world in which crime is intriguing, individual and eminently soluble, not an ugly social problem; a world in which urban squalor makes a quaint contrast to the elegance of London hansom cabs and gas street lamps; a world undisturbed by conflict, whether sexual or social. The myth of Sherlock Holmes is therefore, a myth of England as well” (77). By presenting the crime as little more than a sensational, yet momentary breach in the otherwise peaceful social order, the classic detective form covers over the

threat that real violence might impose on social life. As an alternative, it portrays societal violence as part of an exciting – perhaps even dramatic and suspenseful – but always conclusive historical enigma, reinforced in and through the modern State.

Critics like Carlos Monsivais, Amelia Simpson and writer Ramón Díaz Eterovic have commented on the *lack* of an original classic detective tradition in Latin America. Several different theories have been developed with regard to this ostensible absence. Simpson notes that the perception of the classic detective narrative as a copied form pervades the public consciousness in Latin America. Native writers have consequently been hard pressed to produce an original detective story that did not reproduce European and North American literary paradigms (Simpson 16). This lack of originality is underscored by the fact that the first classic detective stories in Latin America were published under English-sounding pseudonyms and appropriated foreign settings in order to simulate the translated European texts.³² Howard Haycroft's recognized essay "Dictators, Democrats and Detectives" propagated debate surrounding the incongruence of Latin American political realities with the ideology codified in the traditional detective story. The essay upholds the belief that the classic detective story is intended to bolster the principles and institutions of Western

³² Rodolfo Walsh, an Argentine detective fiction writer and journalistic works, commented on the scarcity of Latin American classic detective fiction writers: "Until very recently, perhaps not the public, but certainly our editors, have felt that for a detective novel to be commercially successful it had to have an English or North American setting. As a result, many authors would sign their works with presumably Anglo-Saxon names and simply 'invent' places and scenery" (qtd. in Simpson 18-19).

capitalist societies, reason for which Carlos Monsivais has boldly sustained that any existing classic detective literature in Latin America is a foreign imposition; it simulates easy, melodramatic resolutions to crime that uphold the values of the dominant oligarchic classes. Monsivais considers the conciliatory endings a foreign construct because, he says, “we [Latin Americans] have no faith in official justice” (qtd. in Simpson 21).

“El secuestro del candidato” (1914), a story by Chile’s most recognized classic detective writer Alberto Edwards (1874-1932), is one example of the classic form that rehearses the oligarchy’s concern with maintaining its social and political dominance.³³ The ten year period in which Edwards wrote his detective stories coincided with the final years of the Parliamentary Era (1891-1925) in Chilean politics.³⁴ During this time the nation was still largely controlled by the old oligarchy, although by then a burgeoning middle class and growing popular movements were beginning to destabilize the prevailing social order. Set in the world of the ruling classes, this story was attacked for reiterating Edwards’ own political affiliations and for reproducing the metropolitan elitism of

³³ This short story appears in Edwards’ anthology *Las aventuras de Román Calvo, el Sherlock Holmes Chileno* in 1953, although he wrote several stories and articles published under pen-names in the *Pacífico Magazine*, which Edwards and a colleague founded in 1913. The magazine was designed to circulate the styles and interests of the ruling Chilean class and the emerging middle class. Edwards’ affiliation with this magazine reflects not only his strong ties with the oligarchy, but it also revealed the link that Chile still maintained with Europe.

³⁴ The Parliamentary Era refers to the period following the Chilean Civil War from 1891 to 1925, when Chile drafted a new constitution giving legislative initiative powers to the president. Although characterized by intense rivalry and political corruption, an emerging middle and working class began to overshadow the conservative ruling oligarchy. The political left also grew in importance, especially the Democratic Party and the Radical Party.

Europe's Sherlock Holmes stories.³⁵ The story tells of Don Moisés Opazo, a political candidate on his way to an election in the North. Opazo is found to have disappeared during his trip and fraud is suspected, since he was carrying a significant amount of money. The detective figure, Román Calvo, resolves the mystery effortlessly and discovers that the candidate has been hiding in an abandoned cave for fear of risking his money on a corrupt campaign. Calvo persuades Opazo to resume his campaign, and the end of the story reveals that the candidate has won the election. The emphasis in this story is not on a suspenseful plot, since there is no horrible "crime" to be resolved; rather, the real interest lies in the superficial nature of the investigation. Depicted in almost petty terms, the political activity in the story belies the real political infighting that ultimately brought an end to the Parliamentary Era in Chile in 1925. The harmonious resolution to the mystery glosses over the tensions of Chilean modernity of that period, such as spiraling inflation, massive urbanization and growing social discontent. Therefore, the mystery of Edwards' story essentially serves to recreate the ideological values of his own class. The viability of the existing political framework is never questioned, and there is no transgressive investigation behind the simplistic portrayal of the political world.

A notable characteristic of classic texts like Edwards' story, however, is that it marks a pivotal moment in the history of modern literature in which crime,

³⁵ Besides Edwards, other Chilean classic detective writers include Camilo Pérez de Arce (1912-1970), Luis Insulza Venegas (1920), who wrote under the pen-name L.A. Isla, Luis Enrique Délano (1907-1984), Egidio Poblete (1868-1940) and Hernán del Solar (1901-1976).

or the mystery surrounding crime, becomes a popular obsession. Similarly, it ushers in what Foucault has called a “culture of danger,” in which crime and violence begin to lose their distant exteriority to everyday life and acquire a situated role in metropolitan life (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 66). With new journalistic-proximity to social violence, the classic story forges the thematic material that would become characteristic of the thriller. Yet, by presenting murder as a logical problem only, and as an external threat to society’s stability, the classic detective narrative anticipates the thriller form’s preoccupation with violence, but does so safely within the melodramatic certainties of fixed and easy solutions. In this way, classic detective stories like those of Alberto Edwards are significant in that they produce a thrilling effect around danger, but only insofar as the centrality of crime serves the purpose of neutralizing the sociopolitical tensions fundamental to the modernizing process of Latin America.

Curiously, the beginnings of the contemporary thriller coincided with the creation of the military State and the emerging threat of international war. In the United States, the World Wars and the Cold War period projects international violence into the national horizon in a way never before experienced. As a result, the aristocratic detective story was forced to evolve, attuning its formula to sensational violence and moral ambiguity as American culture absorbed the collective upsets of war. Todorov explains that the changing social conditions of the inter-war period required that the classic form engage more directly with contemporary reality: “at some point detective fiction experiences the unjust

burden of the constraints of this or that genre and gets rid of them in order to constitute a new code” (52). Therefore, at an historical moment when the fear of World War severed the presiding national accord, a new generation of writers in the United States began expanding the detective codes as a response to the increasing permeation of social violence.³⁶ The suspenseful narratives of inaugural thriller authors such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain and Chester Himes elaborated a sordid aesthetic – an “art of murder” – for reflecting upon the imbrication of crime and violence into the postwar social setting. The callous rhetoric of narratives such as *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) by Hammett, and “Spanish Blood” (1935) or *The Long Goodbye* (1953) by Chandler subsequently became the model emulated by a host of Western European and Latin American writers in the following decades. Their stories articulated a new mode of “dramatizing and mediating violence both psychic and social: the violence of war and everyday death” (Froula 15).

Certainly, what most distinguishes the thriller variant from its classic predecessor is its focus on the networks of social crime and violence within the modern urban landscape. The criminal incident that in the classic form momentarily disrupted the otherwise peaceful social order, in the thriller universe

³⁶ George Grella explains that

[p]ostwar America provided the hard-boiled school with an abundance of subjects. Undergoing the disorder that accompanies explosive social change, the nation coped unsuccessfully with a variety of problems – the Boom of the twenties, Prohibition, the national spiritual hangover of the depression, and gansterism on a spectacle scale . . . crime flourished in the mean streets of America’s great cities. (“Hard-Boiled Detective” 105)

permeates the whole of urban activity. Modern society is represented as falling apart: hierarchies inverting, institutions of order breaking down, governments shown to be crooked. In this sense, the thriller form transgresses the solution-seeking melodrama of the classic story with a method of discovery that reflects upon the social milieu and on the nature of social violence.

Despite a new narrative focus on the social milieu, writers like Hammett and Chandler (and even newer thriller writers like Vince Flynn and Henry Porter), express an implicit faith in the State and social order codified by their classic predecessors. As critic David Holloway observes in his analysis of contemporary thrillers, at the core of the North American thriller strain has always been a nationalist ideology that interjects a wholly unified American presence onto the global arena. He sums it up well in his article “The War on Terror Espionage Thriller and the Imperialism of Human Rights” when he asserts that contemporary writers increasingly resort to thrillers as a platform to legitimize the more recent US sponsored “war on terror.” He describes that in the post-9/11 human rights debates and the rise of the global war on terrorism, the North American thriller model tends to promote the US nation as the virtuous bringer of justice and human rights.

By contrast, a consolidated thriller tradition remains underdeveloped in Chile. What most characterizes contemporary Chilean detective fiction is a politically-inflected denunciation of the State apparatus itself. Far from upholding any faith in the State legal system, as its North American and

European precursors do, the Chilean detective narrative is characterized by a corrosive critique of the State system as the perpetrator of heinous crimes against humanity, of legal impunity and institutional forgetting. It is important to recall that within the narrative of detective fiction, the emergence of the Chilean *novela negra* (as contemporary Latin American detective fiction is frequently called) coincided very closely with a moment of multiple national crises. This historical moment was defined by the dissolution of the national-popular model of modernization, the creation of the Security State and the intensification of neoliberal economic policies. Given its coincidence with such drastic national transformations, the *novela negra* acquires both a critical focus on the violent realities and a social focus toward the victims of these national crises.

Juan Armando Epple notes several defining characteristics that adjust this particular detective variation to the social circumstance of Latin America: its concern for defending marginal subjects and restituting collective forms, its use of an oppositional vocabulary and its denouncement of official power structures.³⁷ Mempo Giardinelli offers a similar account of its social and political engagement: “we identify it with a particular mechanism of intrigue, realism, a certain social determinism, and by its own brutal and stark language” (13). Ultimately, the *novela negra* variation reveals that the modern State (understood as the praxis of judicial law) is incapable of upholding justice, and that any form

³⁷ For a detailed overview provided by Armando Epple of the defining characteristics of the *novela negra*, see his review of Cuban detective fiction writer, “Leonardo Padura Fuentes.” *Hispanamérica – Revista de literatura* 24. 1995: 49-66.

of real justice (a true measure of commensurability for dictatorial violence) lies always outside the State.

And yet, notwithstanding its oppositional, restitutive impulse, the *novela negra* variation of the detective narrative discloses a particular belatedness with regard to the sociopolitical realities of post-dictatorial Chile. It is this belated engagement that I believe has inhibited the production of a palpable and consistent thriller novelistic tradition in Chile. Ana María Amar Sánchez echoes this affirmation when she concludes that the late 20th century Latin American detective is defined not only by a profound self-awareness of his own generic limitations, but also by the systematic failure of his investigative enterprise (70). The post-dictatorial detective is destined to lose because in his degraded urban environment the most powerful criminal forces are protected by a corrupt justice system and are difficult to delineate. I extrapolate critic Glen S. Close's claim of a recent eclipse of the *novela negra* to argue that the detective's investigation of political crime has ultimately waned as a mechanism of transgression in post-dictatorial society, precisely because it remains melancholically anchored within the horizon of the national-popular State.

Close furthers this assertion, arguing that the *novela negra* investigation is essentially a melancholic reflection on the destruction of the national-popular horizon and a search for the restitution of the ideals and individuals associated with this project (Close et al. 147). The search for lost ideals, such as social solidarity, equality and the primacy of the collective subject, which are values

considered forgotten by neoliberal market logic, is focalized through the modern detective subject as he attempts to rescue “cohesive humanist values against the socially atomizing forces of transnational market capitalism” (Close et al. 147). In such a scenario, it is no wonder that the detective narrative is prone to reach a melancholic impasse, and that mourning and melancholia have been the preferred tropes of the critiques rendered through the detective form. I believe the melancholic drives Close associates with the post-dictatorial detective figure underscore the form’s deferred engagement with the social and political transformations in neoliberal Chile.

While the *novela negra* variation indeed remains a powerful medium of reflection on social and political questions, its affective attachment to a previous social order calls into question what restitution and denouncement can do in a transnational world in which “capitalist and consumerist objectification and quotidian violence defy formulaic ideological containment” (Close et al. 147). Close concludes her critique of the *novela negra* with a charge for an opening up of this detective formula and a movement beyond its redemptive, denunciative focus. Suggested at the end of her assessment is a broadening of the “top-down” narrative of the detective toward other possible perspectives of political violence and oppression. What Close’s charge anticipates is a movement beyond restitutive drives toward a thriller aesthetic: toward an urgent and immediate engagement with violence in the present. The following reading of Ramón Díaz Eterovic’s *La ciudad está triste* reveals emergent and initial

components of the thriller structure, and demonstrates the challenges of overcoming post-dictatorial melancholy.

The City and Restitution: Ramón Díaz Eterovic's *La ciudad está triste*

One of the inaugural attempts to confront the economies of violence in post-dictatorial Chile is the detective literature of Ramón Díaz Eterovic (1956). Eterovic's detective series of now thirteen novels constitutes one of the most sensational employments of the detective narrative to critique the neoliberal order.³⁸ The series' attention toward restituting a horizon of organic solidarity that existed prior to the dictatorship exemplifies the melancholic angst characteristic of a large portion of post-dictatorial literature and scholarship.

Eterovic's first novel, *La ciudad está triste* (1987), introduces the detective series' nostalgic investigator Heredia. This figure is one of contemporary Chilean literature's most recognized investigators of sociopolitical topics such as institutional corruption, political violence, drug trafficking and the problem of disappeared prisoners. Given its coincidence with the final years of dictatorial repression, the novel chronicles some of the urban transformations that would follow the dictatorial period and last up through the nation's transition into

³⁸ As mentioned, Díaz Eterovic's detective series includes the novels *La ciudad está triste* (1987), *Solo en la oscuridad* (1992), *Nadie sabe más que los muertos* (1993), *Ángeles y solitarios* (1995), *Nunca enamores a un forastero* (1999), *Los siete hijos de Simenon* (2000), *El ojo del alma* (2001), *El hombre que pregunta* (2002), *El color de la piel* (2003), *A la sombra del dinero* (2005), *El segundo deseo* (2006), *La oscura memoria de las armas* (2008) and *La muerte juega a ganador* (2010). In addition to his novelistic production, Díaz Eterovic has authored the short-story volume *Crímenes Criollos. Antología del cuento policial chileno* (1994), and is editor, along with writer Diego Muñoz Valenzuela, of the anthologies *Contando el cuento. Nueva narrativa chilena* (1986) and *Andar con cuentos. Joven narrativa chilena* (1992).

neoliberalism.³⁹ Published at a crucial moment when the dictatorial suppression and censorship threatened to stifle cultural opposition, this novel gives witness to the aura of violence and the ambiguous legacies of dictatorial power that pervaded the urban milieu. The private detective Heredia describes the violent forces still at work in the metropolitan context: “Quienes dirigían la ciudad se reservaban el juego sucio entre las manos y no se necesitaba mucha imaginación para saber de donde provenía la violencia. El poder avasallaba la verdad y yo tendría que verme las caras con ese poder” (47). In this way, the novel anticipates the political context of the post-dictatorial thriller structure by imagining the urban setting as if the backdrop of a political conspiracy of indistinct proportions.

The other merited aspect of this text is that it sensationalizes the “top-down” narrative component proper to the thriller structure: that is, it narrates the story from the perspective of an investigator in search of retribution for the crime and violence suffered by a large part of Chilean society. In other words, the

³⁹ In an interview with Freddy Vilches, Díaz Eterovic describes his novel’s sensationalization of political crime and its social implications:

Considero que uno de los fenómenos interesantes en la narrativa latinoamericana de los últimos años dice relación con la instalación del género policíaco que . . . reflexiona sobre situaciones donde la criminalidad, en la mayoría de los casos, proviene del poder político y económico. Una realidad condicionada por los antivalores que se impone en la sociedad, y por la vivencia y sobrevivencia a regímenes dictatoriales, la caída de las certezas ideológicas con su secuela de desencanto y falta de referentes, y la instalación de un modelo social neoliberal que se traduce en inseguridad, incremento delictivo y miedo para la mayoría de las persona. Una realidad también vinculada al crecimiento de las ciudades, la concentración de sus habitantes y al desconcierto y soledad en que éstos se desenvuelven (98).

detective figure Heredia exerts a certain amount of authority by mediating, or advocating for, the plight of the victim. The resolution-seeking impulse of the detective constructs a powerful discourse of denouncement that centers on rescuing the voice of the victimized “other.” Similarly, the private detective’s peripheral position with regard to the official justice system transforms him into an arbitrator between the victim and the dictatorial State. Epple affirms that the detective’s affinity for the destitute city spaces represents a desire for justice for crimes committed against subordinated social groups. It is equally an attempt to reconstitute “attention to heterogeneous cultural registers and topics of marginalization” (45).

The novel takes place in an unnamed city (presumably Santiago) toward the end of the dictatorial period. The story revolves around the disappearance of two university students, Beatriz Rojas and Fernando Leppe, who are suspected of clandestine involvement with revolutionary activism. Heredia is led to discover that both students have been brutally murdered by official agents of the National Security Agency attempting to put an end to the militant activity of the left. Through a suspenseful investigation of the urban spaces, Heredia discovers that the body of Beatriz, whose friends call her América, has been dismembered and strewn throughout the city. Not surprisingly, the fragmented body of the young América reads as a national allegory of the social unity that was fractured by dictatorial violence and oppression. According to this reading, Heredia’s search to reconstitute América/Beatriz’s body symbolizes the attempt

to reconstitute a horizon of collective solidarity and accord that existed previous to and against the dictatorship. Heredia's comments of "ganas de ser otra persona, en otro oficio y otro mundo" (10) and "otra vida por la que yo había perdido mi oportunidad" (83-84) are symptomatic of the novel's nostalgic references to a different, more unified past. The destruction of this previous social existence is noted in Heredia's melancholic vindication of the "sad city," which he describes as subsumed beneath the incessant pull toward neoliberal modernity:

Pensaba en la tristeza de la ciudad . . . En las luces que esa tarde de invierno veía encenderse paulatinamente a través de la ventana, y en las calles donde acostumbro caminar sin otra compañía que mi sombra y un cigarrillo que encierro entre las manos, reconociendo que, como la ciudad, estoy solo, esperando que el bullicio cotidiano se extinga para respirar a mi antojo, beber un par de tragos en algún bar de poca monta y regresar a mi oficina con la certeza de que lo único real es la oscuridad y el resuello de los lobos agazapados en las esquinas. (9)

Heredia's search for Beatriz's body leads to the disconcerting reality that not only were the students murdered by representatives of the State justice system, but also that the memory of their deaths was suppressed by media operations still directed by dictatorial affiliates. The revelation of the four criminals allegedly representing State justice "que tienen santos en la corte y varios de ellos se sientan en primera fila" (88) demonstrates the lack of any resolution to the crime: the police in the novel consider Beatriz's death as just one more disappearance among many, and the student's family will read a

simulated version of her death “que saldrá publicada en las primeras planas de todos los diarios” (89).

Yet, the discovery of Beatriz’s dismemberment evokes a political crime of greater gravity that runs through the entire novel and ultimately reveals the text’s incapacity to transcend the aegis of post-dictatorial melancholy. Evoking Brett Levinson’s theory of “radical injustice,” the principal crime in the novel goes beyond merely the indeterminacy of State justice or complicit media. Heredia’s discovery of Beatriz’s dismembered body reveals that no resolution, nor any revelation of the criminals, can ever compensate for the violence committed against Beatriz and the other disappeared prisoners. Just as no act of surgery can reconstitute Beatriz’s fragmented body, no desire for restitution can restore the city as the backdrop of a previous collective order. The reality that the detective’s investigation fails to apprehend is that the city *never did* exist as a locus of social accord; it was always a site of social violence and fragmentation, even – and perhaps especially – during the Allende years (1970-1973). Therefore, any conventions of melancholic restitution or heroic rescue – used as acts of resistance against the present – will surface as incompatible with the present reality, “pertaining to another time and place” (Levinson, *The Ends of Literature* 34-35).

The melancholic nature of Heredia’s investigation dialogues with Geoffrey Hartman and Enrico Santi’s notion of a “poetics of restitution” (Santi 89). For these critics, restitution desires to right past wrongs through the restoration of

voice to silenced or victimized classes of people. We can apply the general problem Hartman associates with this conception of restitution (of righting past wrongs) with the melancholic impulse of post-dictatorial literature. According to Santi's theorization, restitution functions like a detective investigation: it implies a compensatory hermeneutics to a crime that always points to an exaction of justice. In other words, restitution is meant to make amends for the necessary guilt of a crime, and therefore, it must result in some form of retribution or compensation. Indeed, if it is to retribute and not only restore, then the punishment need exceed the crime (Santi 90).⁴⁰ When applied to the context of post-dictatorial Chile, however, the compensatory gesture of restitution reaches its limit, as it does in this detective novel by Díaz Eterovic. The conclusion of *La ciudad está triste* demonstrates that, "No hay misterio que descubrir, en verdad nunca existió . . . las pistas que revelan al culpable en la última página son para las novelas; en realidad los asesinos ostentan sus culpas con luces de neón. Se conocen los nombres y sus apellidos, pero nadie hace nada por juzgarlos" (89).

To me, in a novel like *La ciudad está triste*, the improbable delegation of justice to a melancholic detective figure suggests the failure of the idea that rescuing the past can engage with political violence in any way relevant to the present. Moral vindications and melancholic denunciations perhaps secure a reading audience, but such responses garner only belated engagement with the

⁴⁰ For a comprehensive analysis of the notion of restitution and Latin American critical thought, see Moreiras' "Restitution and Appropriation," in *Exhaustion of Difference*, p 127-161.

present circumstance. Thus, what this novel does not apprehend are the limits of its own restitutive drives. It fails to come to terms with the reality that no attempt to redeem a previous moment can compensate for the radical injustice inflicted on the social body; hence, melancholy in the novel is the response to the futility of the investigation. Similarly, the novel's symbolic adherence to some kind of unredeemed historical victim seeks to validate the victim at the same time that it maintains his/her victimhood. This dialogues with what Wendy Brown calls a politics of recrimination: "In locating a site of blame for the powerlessness over its past – as past injury, a past as a hurt will – and locating a 'reason' for the 'unendurable pain' of social powerlessness in the present, it converts this reasoning into a . . . politics of recrimination that seeks to avenge the hurt even while it reaffirms it" (73-74). Heredia's reproach of the official justice system reveals the melancholisation of his investigative enterprise: "La policia está al tanto de todo, aunque no creo que mueva un dedo. La justicia tiene doble venda en la ciudad. Tienes que aprender que en la ciudad estamos solo, y sobrevivir ya es un milagro" (88).

Given these reflections on the ultimate failure of the detective's investigation, the novel questions the degree to which any restorative gesture toward the past – the socialist dream, the collective subject, or the city space – can ever move past melancholy and truly engage with the present. Indeed, Heredia's vehement search to restore a lost social order evokes Kristeva's ideas on the paralytic effects of melancholy. In *Black Sun*, she affirms that the

melancholic individual remains condemned to memory and to a perpetual desire for the past. This affective attachment to the past implies an obsessive search for a lost object that inhibits any movement beyond history (4-5). The fundamental desire for restitution in *La ciudad está triste* manifests the debilitating effects of melancholy, but it does not challenge them. In this way, even while the novel manifests the “top-down” narrative component of the thriller structure, the text limits itself to a melancholic impasse and a by now familiar dead-end denunciation of neoliberalism: for Heredia neoliberalism symbolizes the institutionalization of forgetting and is therefore a driving factor behind the detective’s restitutive impulse. This melancholic impasse merits being unpacked further, for it characterizes the general tenor of the New Chilean Narrative.

The melancholic undertones in detective novels like *La ciudad está triste* are characteristic of the rhetoric adopted by many of the members of the New Chilean Narrative during the 1980s and 90s.⁴¹ The literary expressions of this generation emphasize a predominantly restitutive impulse. One must remember that the literature of this period was largely a response to the fall of Salvador Allende in 1973 and the accompanying demise of socialist modernization. The

⁴¹ Recalling Goic’s generational schema of Chilean writers, the New Narrative refers to a heterogeneous group of writers born roughly after 1948. Díaz Eterovic’s particular generation includes writers such as Jaime Collyer, Diego Muñoz Valenzuela, Pía Barros, Sonia González, Gonzalo Contreras, Roberto Ampuero, Marco Antonio de la Parra, Juan Mihovilovic, Marcela Serrano, Carlos Franz, Gregory Cohen, Arturo Fontaine, Hernán Rivera Letelier, Alberto Fuguet, Sergio Gómez and others.

disillusion of the socialist past during the 1980s fomented the sensation of national crisis that extended beyond Chile's borders. Countries like Germany, Italy, France and Spain, where socialism previously governed with wide popular support, also experienced during these years a predicament of how to fill the void left by socialism.

This void expresses itself across the Chilean literary and cultural landscape: José Promis speaks of the "novela de la desacralización" referring to the violent rupture of the literary canons that coincided with the destruction of the social, cultural and political order of the Allende period. Critic Rodrigo Cánovas uses the figure of the orphan to characterize the writing of the "Generación de los huérfanos," or that corpus of authors born between 1950 and 1964 (which includes Díaz Eterovic) whose writings as a literary promotion evoke a collective sentiment of abandonment and the loss of cultural referents. This literary generation of orphans confronted the horrors of the dictatorship by evoking elements from the past as a central resistance against an atomized present circumstance. Guillermo García-Corales defines the rhetoric of this generation as a "poetics of disenchantment." Additionally Jaime Collyer, one of the principal novelists associated with this group, notes the affective attachment to the past that is reiterated through frameworks of melancholy, skepticism and denouncement. Collyer underscores the ideological uncertainty prevalent in this group and their critical investment in restitutive thinking. Finally, Nelly Richard sums up the melancholic rhetoric adopted by post-dictatorial thought. She

alludes to the challenge of envisioning a literary paradigm that pushes beyond melancholy, which the following reading of *La ciudad anterior* attempts to achieve:

Trauma, mourning and melancholy (the coup as trauma, mourning as the loss of the object and melancholy as the unresolved suspension of mourning) are figures that . . . lent their affective tone to the expression of post-dictatorship – an expression marked by the problematic character of a tension between *loss of knowledge* (of confidence in knowledge as a secure foundation) and *knowledge of loss* (the critical vindication of waste, of the *remainder*, as the condition of a thought of an ‘afterwards’ now irreconcilable with previous models of finitude and the totalization of truth). This theoretical tension, moreover, is inscribed into a present divided . . . on the one hand, by fixed memorization of the past . . . and on the other, by the complete dissolving of the traces of that historical past. (“The Reconfigurations,” Italics in original 273)

Urban Space and the Collective: Gonzalo Contreras’ *La ciudad anterior*

The police novel *La ciudad anterior* by Gonzalo Contreras (1958) suggests an ironic movement beyond the melancholic focus of the previous detective novel.⁴² Lauded by Chilean writers José Donoso and Jorge Edwards for its uncanny portrayal of the urban milieu following the dictatorship – the desolate city streets and the houses – the novel was awarded the Mercurio Novel Prize upon its publication in 1991. What Contreras does so well in this text is sensationalize the detective formula, fusing elements of a police thriller with a story of political intrigue. The novelty of this text is that it performs a transgressive operation of post-dictatorial memory politics to the degree that it

⁴² Besides *La ciudad anterior*, Contreras has authored the novels *El nadador* (1994) and *El gran mal* (1998).

does not anticipate a commensurate resolution to the past; nor does it warrant a nostalgic lament of its irreparable past-ness. Rather, the text's engagement with crime, which oscillates between investigative journalism and testimonial witness, engages – rather than attempts to resolve – the violence underlying neoliberal Chile. The novel takes on a thrilling approach to post-dictatorship by creating a sort of dystopic parody of consensual discourse.

La ciudad anterior suggests a challenge to memorialistic configurations of the past that tend to characterize post-dictatorial discourse. As inferred earlier, a fixation on the past lies at the heart of post-dictatorial memory politics and irrevocably leads to the stagnation of critical thought. Andreas Huyssen affirms that the classic-modern forms of memory such as the nostalgic recollection of a utopian locus of time and space, or as an alternate refuge within what Walter Benjamin calls “the void of the capitalist present,” become increasingly ineffective as a mode of examining the present experiences in contemporary society (Moreiras and Richard, *Pensar* 68). Along these same lines, Alberto Moreiras, in his seminal piece on mourning and the reform of post-dictatorial thought, describes the attempt to reconstitute the past as a debilitating endeavor, reducing thought to a depressed state such that it is incapable of envisaging its own possibility of transformation. Moreiras writes:

Marcado por la pérdida del objeto, el pensamiento en la post-dictadura piensa desde la depresión, o incluso piensa antes que nada la depresión misma. La reforma del pensamiento en la post-dictadura es siempre un duelo en trance de constituirse como tal: lo cual significa no sólo pensamiento de duelo, sino también duelo del pensamiento. El duelo, por supuesto, no sólo conmemora,

sino que también olvida, y en esa doble y contradictoria especificación está su más estricta determinación. ("Post-dictadura" 26-27)

What Contreras accomplishes in this novel is create a thrilling inversion of memory tropes, anticipating an altogether different mode for investigating post-dictatorship that is not reduced to melancholic denunciations or heroic rescue. If, in *La ciudad está triste*, the detective character exerts relative command over his investigation in order to reconstitute an explanation for the present, the detective-like figure of this novel is more approximate to the victim-position, as he is a powerless character bereft of any cohesive authority over his surroundings. He is a vagabond immersed in a desolate urban drama in which the possibility of conclusion or redemption is confounded. The protagonist encounters this "previous city" as though "llena de rumores" (28), with "casas todas oscuras, chatas y cabizbajas, sin señas de identificación" (139).

What pervades the novel is an overriding sentiment of inconclusion, ambivalence and incommunication as the detective-like figure, Carlos Feria, an ambulant gun salesman, journeys through a small town along the Pan-American Highway looking to sell his merchandise. To a certain degree, Feria's arrival to this "previous town" parodies Chile's entrance into a neoliberal market economy. Chile's transition is ironically exemplified through Feria's profession of traveling from town to town, advertising armed weaponry from a catalogue. The irony is clear as he describes his occupation of selling weapons as if they were somehow a highly commercialized product: "en esta profesión no es cuestión de

convencer a nadie . . . esa errática y aparentemente inútil exhibición es un paso indispensable, hasta que mi figura se determine en la ciudad, extraña a ella pero suficientemente conocida para que sepan que estoy ahí” (21).

A detour off the main Highway has landed this salesman in a “previous city” where, curiously, the inhabitants appear as though stripped of any attachment to a previous moment. As if from another time and place, the city acquires an almost virtual existence and its inhabitants appear subjected to the impositions of a totalizing power. Far from a diversified scene of social and cultural interactions, the city figures as the backdrop of a homogenizing force that violently marginalizes or covers over any signs of difference. For example, one of the first urban locales that Feria enters upon his arrival to the city is the bar Hercules. Upon entering, the clients survey him as if he were a criminal suspect. Absent from the bar are the remnants of the collective interaction that in the past characterized public meeting places. What permeates the bar instead is the aura of violence and alienation. Feria comments on the hostile experience with the pub’s occupants: “Parece que lo hubieran estado esperando a uno para burlar su propia soledad. Hay que conservar la mirada vivaz y nunca perpleja. Eso desalienta a cualquiera que decida ir por ese camino. No sonreír a nadie. Los imbéciles interpretan las sonrisas de cualquier modo. Todo está en los ojos, mantenerlos en un punto neutro hasta que nadie se quiera dar la molestia con uno” (12).

The inhabitants in this novel experience the urban milieu as an isolated space that is stripped of any cohesive relations. This is exemplified through a worker's strike, which figures as the constant backdrop to the novel. The strike evokes the kinds of popular rallies and strikes that took place during the Allende years, which, although the strikes themselves provoked social unrest among certain social sectors, they fostered a sense of unity among the laboring sectors. In this unnamed city, however, the strike appears as obsolete and stagnated, as if belonging to another time and place. Furthermore, the very notion of the collective populace appears as a mere specter of what it was previously, and as a result, incongruent with the present circumstance. The workers participating in the strike are regarded in almost ridiculous terms: "Los transeúntes apenas les hacían caso [a los huelguistas] y observaban la procesión con una mirada lastimera, como si se tratara de una extravagancia, un exabrupto lamentable, alguien que intentara resucitar una práctica caduca como la fiesta de la primavera o algo así" (23). With virtual indifference, Feria encounters the strikers as an antiquated distortion of their previous revolutionary version: "Eran los huelguistas que pasaban . . . un reducido pelotón que, seguro, se había perdido por ese lado de la ciudad, ya que nada tenían que hacer ahí. Ellos mismos miraban hacia las casas ciegas y sordas de este barrio residencial" (58).

Feria's purpose in this city is primarily to advertize his merchandise, but a number of criminal incidents over which he has no control hound him into a

political controversy and impede his departure. Early on in the narrative a young singer, Humberto Luengo, attempts to purchase a gun from Feria, confessing his intentions to murder his wife's lover. Although Feria refuses to sell him the weapon, Luengo carries out the murder anyway and Feria becomes the unsuspecting participant in a criminal investigation in which he is brought before the police and exhaustively interrogated. The police's overt interest in Feria's gun business, however, is ironically contrasted by their indifference toward the actual social violence and the murder. The police disregard the case and the true assassin escapes persecution, only to be shot by Mutis, the town lunatic while seeking refuge among the convoluted swarm of strikers. In a second murder that occurs later in the novel, Carlos does in fact sell the weapon to the criminal and when the police begin to incriminate him again, he flees the city, returning once again to his errant traversal along the highway: "más tarde o temprano, habría llegado a la Panamericana" (185). If, in the previous novel, the detective function desired the (even partial) restoration of justice, therefore transforming the act of investigation into a melancholic commentary on society's degeneration, the "top-down" detective narrative of this novel creates a parody of that type of investigation and makes visible the need to engage with new and more diffuse political powers. Confronted with the knowledge of the crime, Feria admits that, "mi expresión debía ser la de esa obtusa neutralidad que se impone ante la catástrofe" (65).

Feria's ambivalent reaction to the crime suggests that the premium placed on the detective's knowledge and his basic command of the investigation is transgressed, giving way to an emphasis on the immediacy and uncertainty of the narrative events. Joan Copjec has noted that, contrary to classic detective fiction, the mystery in the thriller does not unfold to the detective figure in a fixed, linear sequence that he can reassemble in some explicative or conclusive fashion. Rather, the thriller subject experiences his surrounding as an uncanny, disruptive terrain that reveals itself only in ambiguous and always nondescript fragments (Copjec 200). Just like his erratic journey along the Panamerican Highway, Ferias experiences the narrative events as scenes from an inverted melodrama, "una confusa coreografía de encuentros y desencuentros" (43), in which the uncertainty of events precludes any synthesis or resolution.

My thinking on this novel is that the detective figure's experience with the city space as emptied of communitarian or collective activity makes visible an ironic parallel between the collective drives that marked the Allende years and the violence of the neoliberal transition. The novel's uncanny portrayal of the collective and the city space as it transitions from dictatorship into neoliberal democracy reveals the similarities, rather than the divisions, within Chile's historical account. Emptied of the mobilizing power that it once may have previously deployed, the collective or the popular, which is depicted here in its fallen state through the workers' strike, ironically demonstrates the futility of restituting a previous notion of "the people" as a resistant force that can be

thrown up in the face of neoliberalism. The ineptness of the collective strike, described in the novel as a “reducido pelotón,” an “exabrupto lamentable,” suggests a transgression of post-dictatorial memory politics’ redemptive focus. The treatment of the strike thus demonstrates the reductive effects of attempts to nostalgically revitalize any unified or unproblematic conception of “the collective” or *lo popular*.

As Jon Beasley-Murray suggests, the very notion of the collective, even during the Allende period, functioned as a cover over the real violence and social polarization marking this period. Contrary to what is frequently emphasized, Allende’s Popular Unity project was, in reality, neither popular nor collective (*Posthegemony* 281). The Allende government had hoped that incorporating popular sectors through agrarian and literacy reforms would cover over the class and political polarizations threatening to destabilize the coalition, and also project a harmonious narrative of socialism’s success to the rest of the world. But the violent underside of this rhetoric revealed that the so-called government of “popular unity” was wrought with internal conflict. For one, the Popular Unity was unable to reconcile between its revolutionary and lawmaking inclinations, between revolution and counterrevolution (Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony* 281). On the other hand, a large part of Chilean elites, particularly of the right, held the popular sector (the revolutionary, the worker) in disdain. For them, these figures symbolized the failure of elites to advance the nation according to (the desired) “modern” standards and to resolve the divisions

of class that the Allende regime had desired to conceal. In this sense, the ambivalence towards the strike in the novel opens up a space for critically reflecting on notions of collectivity and *lo popular* from outside the nostalgic rhetoric it has many times acquired in literature.

In a similar fashion, the novel's ambivalent treatment of the past transgresses the very praxis from which post-dictatorial literature's melancholic and restitutive drives generate their resistance. Recalling Kristeva and Avelar, melancholy clings obsessively to a previous horizon, and this faithfulness to the past is meant to counteract the insidious push of "progress" and neoliberal modernization. Therefore, a truly thrilling engagement with the violence underlying the neoliberal transition – what Nelly Richard calls the "conspiracy of agreements" – requires first disarticulating the mantra of "transition" as an experience of change or revolutionary movement. That is, to undermine the notion of a definitive "before" and "after" that has been so intrinsic to post-dictatorial memory politics. This approach to transition avoids seeing the past as episodic discontinuities between a bygone era (the Allende years) and an after (the neoliberal period); rather, the past must be critically approached in terms of the continuities between these periods. One such engagement with this form of thinking is *Chile: The Great Transformation*. Authors Javier Martínez and Alvaro Díaz underscore the similarities rather than the ruptures between the administrations of Eduardo Frei (1964-1970), Salvador Allende (1970-1973) and Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). These critics underscore the fact that the three

successive governments imposed quite similar projects of modernization, and that one inevitably helped usher in the other: that is, the social democracy of Frei, which initiated nationalization programs during the 1960s, actually, in many ways paved the way for the widespread socialization programs of Allende's Popular Unity Coalition. Similarly, when the instability and social polarization of the UP reached unsustainability, the dictatorship intervened to suppress the disorder and to initiate the Constitution of 1980.⁴³ Albeit in a violent and heinously cruel manner, the dictatorship only continued the modernization process begun earlier, however this time in the name of free market capitalism rather than in the name of the national-popular State. Additionally, previous forms of anti-dictatorial resistance movements were demobilized and integrated into the new pact forged by the post-dictatorial *Concertación* administrations.⁴⁴

Martínez and Díaz's initial approach to Chile's historical narrative foregrounds a suggestive critique of post-dictatorial restitution. According to their interpretation, the neoliberal transition was not simply a movement from a

⁴³ The Constitution of 1980 was drafted by the military junta and put into effect in March of 1981. The Constitution called for a "transition period" of eight years in which Pinochet would continue to exercise his legislative and executive powers. Before the close of that eight-year period, the leaders of the Armed Forces would submit a candidate for President for the following eight years. The candidate would then be voted in a national plebiscite. Pinochet was declared the candidate for the 1988 national plebiscite. The "NO" Coalition won with 60% of the vote, signaling a democratic end to Pinochet's 17-year rule.

⁴⁴ The democratic *Concertación* (or the Concert of Parties for Democracy) refers to the coalition of center-left political parties that was established in 1988 as an attempt to overthrow General Pinochet. The coalition includes the Christian Democrat Party, the Socialist Party, the Social Democrat Radical Party and other socialist offshoot parties. Since the 1988 plebiscite that removed Pinochet from power, *Concertación* presidential candidates have won every election until the conservative right-wing candidate Sebastián Piñera won the presidential election in 2010.

“before” to an “after.” It was, rather, the result of a much longer process of modernization that confirmed and perpetuated the nation’s entrance into a transnational, globalized economy. In this way, their theorizations open up the possibility of a more immediate engagement with post-dictatorship that transgresses the epistemological grounds for searching out a better “before” moment for the sake of the present.

Willy Thayer has also suggestively problematized transition ideology by situating the transition itself not as an accelerated movement toward civil rule, but rather as a fixed and intransitive space. He says accordingly: “it is not the passage from Dictatorship to democracy to which we should give the name ‘transition’; rather, the transition was the transformation effectuated by the Dictatorship itself . . . “ (*El fragmento repetido* 124). Contrary to theorizations among the social sciences that define transition as an affirmative progression from one historical point to another – for example from the circumstance of dictatorship to post-dictatorship, from the power of the State to the dominance of the market –, Thayer develops the paradoxical notion of transition as an inconclusive, uncanny presence, without transformation. Thayer’s description highlights the inherent violence underlying transitional rhetoric:

Probably the mistrust that the word “transition” evokes in us comes from our – not innocent – usage, when we refer to a state of affairs that we know is not transitioning nor on the way to doing so; a state of affairs that we feel will not move in a positive direction, or that it has already moved, and from there, its last transit, won’t move anymore, threatening us with a definitive presence . . . The actual transition is not what goes away, it is a conservative state

that remains without anything happening to it. (*La crisis no moderna* 169)

For this critic, the only real rupture, the only real movement, was the dictatorship itself. He therefore posits the challenge of approaching transition as emptied of the experience of revolution or change, a transition that identifies the neoliberal present as the direct and immediate legacy of dictatorial politics. Thayer's theorizations speak to a parallel between the experience of transition and the experience of the city space portrayed in Contreras' *La ciudad anterior*. Feria's uncanny encounter with the "previous city," a space ambiguously suspended between a previous period and the present, articulates a critique of memory politics by illustrating that the same oppression of dictatorship persists within the post-dictatorship scene – albeit under the guise of democracy. Several narrative instances, in fact, refer to the story as if it were a melodrama whose fixed narrative certainties appear violently inverted. Ambiguity and inconclusion characterize the "patetismo de la escena" (59), when Feria admits that "no sabía que rol le cabía a él en el drama" (132) and subsequently that "de pronto la escena se me escabulló" (142). The Chilean documentary analyzed in the next section employs the detective narrative to engage with one of post-dictatorship's most developed discourses: forensic science. Silvio Caiozzi's documentary *Fernando ha vuelto* can be approached as a thriller narrative that introduces the victim's account as a powerful complement to the detective investigation narrative.

***Fernando ha vuelto* and the Transgression of Forensic Investigation**

No cultural medium seems a more effective employment of the detective narrative for exploring the effects of neoliberal consensus, institutional corruption and political injustice in post-dictatorship than documentary film. Similarly, no other cultural expression more poignantly opens up a space for the alternative voices affected by State violence. It is for this reason that the social documentary can be read as a thriller structure that engages with the discourses of reconciliation and neoliberal consensus.

The documentary in question, *Fernando ha vuelto* (1998), engages the two narrative strands proper to the thriller form. The documentary's primary structure follows a "top-down" investigative pattern that articulates the exploitation, injustice and State violence through the focalizing gaze of the documentalist or narrating forensic investigator. On the other hand, the film also captures the real experiences of "bottom-up" social movements and suppressed voices that have attempted to confront these issues from a powerless subaltern position. The decisive popularity of the documentary during the Allende years, the dictatorship, and the post-dictatorial administrations affirms the use of the detective formula to both search out injustice and, perhaps more importantly, to engage subjected and devalued realities in that search.

Kristen Sorensen points out that the most forceful outpour of documentaries emerged during the dictatorship: film and video assumed a fundamental mission both underground and in exile (344). Hundreds of

documentaries were produced inside and outside Chile, which brought to light in excruciating detail the numerous human rights violations that occurred under Pinochet's regime. Patricio Guzmán's 1975 documentary trilogy *La batalla de Chile* is one of the most widely discussed documentary films produced under dictatorship. The trilogy was a historical documentary of unprecedented success. During the 1970s and 80s, the films were distributed in 35 countries around the world. The novelty of Guzmán's work is that it captures live footage of life leading up to dictatorial rule and the period afterward. Its depiction of the popular rebellions and anti-dictatorial resistance manifestations construct a sensational image of the criminal as a centralized apparatus that imposes its rule and order.

Since the end of dictatorship in 1990, fewer documentaries have been released, since purportedly the exigency to denounce state repression has lessened. Still, recent documentaries insist more than ever before on the urgency of issues like memory politics, reparation of dictatorial crimes and restitution within Chile's current transnational market. In an era when the past has become just one more commodity for sale in a globalized market, and when the mechanisms of social oppression become increasingly diffuse, documentaries investigate questions that more acutely dialogue with present market realities: how can hegemonic structures legitimately be countered when disparate interpretations of the past are hastily subsumed beneath the mantra of "consensus" and "justice"? How can the victims' stories be recognized for the

horrific singularity of their experience when the “New Chile” capitalizes on the “testimonial subject” as the crutch of neoliberal reconciliation?

The social documentary *Fernando ha vuelto* challenges these questions by illustrating how the individual past(s) ceaselessly continue to intervene into the present, revealing the always-unfinished work of history and the reality that the past is never simply completed (*Untimely*, Avelar 5). The documentary’s critical edge aimed toward any melodramatic discourse promising complete retribution or justice targets forensic discourse in particular. On a basic level, forensic science has occupied a fundamental position in official post-dictatorial reparative efforts and memory politics. Forensic research helped identify the remains of thousands of disappeared prisoners whose bodies had been buried in collective graves such as Patio 29.⁴⁵ Forensics also provided a scientific knowledge base for generating evidence for the official truth commissions like the National Truth and Reconciliation Report and the Valech Report.

On a more complex level, however, forensic rhetoric covers over national trauma; that is, it forges resolutions to the past through the investigation and identification of dictatorial victims, whose families continue to search for their remains. By recuperating the whereabouts of disappeared prisoners, forensic science constructs a melodrama of closure that attempts to resolve the past so that the nation can confront its loss, heal its pain and move on.

⁴⁵ Patio 29 is a mass grave a mass grave in Santiago’s General Cemetery created during the dictatorship. After democracy resumed in Chile in 1990, forensic investigators located 126 bodies in the Patio’s unnamed graves. Some of the bodies were stacked two or three to a coffin and nearly all reamed with bullets.

What I seek to discover in this final analysis is how the detective component in *Fernando ha vuelto* moves toward the construction of a thriller form that transgresses the melodramatic certainties fomented by post-dictatorial forensic discourse. Of interest to me is how the documentary opens up an alternative space for reflection that recognizes the imperative to reconstitute the past, but at once acknowledges the impossibility of ever completing such an endeavor. Restitution must always necessarily be an impossible future act. In this way, *Fernando ha vuelto* symbolically points to a place from which the past can be approached without falling into melancholy: it can be approached as a continuously opened and moving, but always-irrecoverable archive. One of the women in the film affirms this impossibility. Referring to Fernando's physical body she says that although "now we have proof . . . we know that probably nothing will come out of this. But at least this can be used for history. If not for now, then in the future" (*Fernando ha vuelto*, my translation here and below).

Caiozzi's documentary, which is only 31 minutes in length and was shot in only three days, is a dynamic *mise en scène* of the forensic search to identify and return Fernando Olivares' cadaver to his family. The remains of Olivares, a dictatorial victim and member of the leftist MIR group who was disappeared in 1974, had been uncovered from Patio 29 of the National Cemetery in Santiago and had remained under forensic investigation since 1991 by a group of doctors and forensic specialists at the Legal Medical Institute. Caiozzi's pointed focus on the extensive search for this one man makes the film propelling, moving and

personal. The documentary captures the suspense of seven years later when the forensic scientists pronounce an official resolution to the case. The evidence consists of the physical cadaver itself and hundreds of photos that confirm Fernando's identity.

The film takes place in the Identification Unit of the medical institute where the two forensic doctors, Isabel Rebeco and Patricia Hernández, reconstitute Fernando's remains and inform his widow, Agave, in excruciating and graphic detail, as to the causes of her husband's death. It is in these agonizing scenes that the thriller narrative strands conjoin: the forensic technicians detail the precise scientific techniques they have employed to investigate Fernando's body. They demonstrate exactly what sort of official evidence they used to conclude that the skeleton indeed belonged to Fernando. They illustrate how family photos of Fernando's head could be juxtaposed with the skull through high-tech forensic software. The doctors also demonstrate how they were able to conclude Fernando's identity by matching his exact dental configuration.

The subsequent scenes interpolate the "bottom-up" perspective of the witness-position. Following the detailed explanation of the forensic technology used, Fernando's widow and her family are ushered into the room where the skeleton is. With scientific precision, the two doctors recapitulate slowly the number of blows delivered to the victim's rib cage, exactly how many ribs were fractured, and the precise trajectory of the three bullets that fractured his skull

and scapula. Meanwhile, the camera focuses on the emotional responses of the family members. It is an agonizing scene as the camera pans over the faces of Fernando's family members while they witness and process the evidence they have been presented by the doctors. Following the episode in the medical institute, the documentary follows the family through their personal commemorative practices: the funeral procession, the candle vigil and finally the lowering of the casket into the grave. These excruciating scenes lay bare the incommensurability of forensic discourse's data-laden conclusions with the horrors of past violence. For Francine Masiello, the material body of Fernando points to the indomitable chiasm that spans between past horror and the physical evidence of the cadaver presented to his family members:

The materiality of the body (and what greater density could give expression to the body than its weight in bone?) was thus unmistakably claimed; bone and personal identity, past history and current moment were linked in a single image, joining the visual presence of the skeleton to the highly unrepresentable aspects of physical and emotional pain. (1)

It is at this juncture, between the narrative strands of detective-investigation and testimonial witness, where the film transgresses the fixed certainties of forensic discourse. The individuals who gaze over the physical remains of the man they believe to be Fernando were not present during his torture and execution. While they can glean certain raw facts from the material evidence left by his skeleton, they can never reconstitute the events exactly as he experienced them during torture and execution. Despite the precision of the forensic investigation, and the surety with which Fernando's physical body was

ascertained, Caiozzi's documentary reveals a predicament commonly confronted in post-dictatorship: if, during the dictatorship, all evidence of disappeared prisoners was erased, now, regardless of the physical proof of dictatorial murder, still justice will not be done.⁴⁶ One of the forensic investigators concludes that, "We have all the fact, but still nothing can be done" (*Fernando ha vuelto*).

Levinson's notion of "radical injustice" can be associated with forensic investigation's melodramatic impulse. To repeat his claim, Levinson affirms that "radical injustice . . . emerges not when a crime is committed, and not when the law appears as insufficient and/or erroneous, but when every convention surfaces as obsolete – as pertaining to another time and place – and, therefore, every act of restitution as impossible (*The Ends of Literature* 34). Read as a post-dictatorial form, *Fernando ha vuelto* problematizes the melodramatic impulse of post-dictatorial forensic investigation, revealing that even in Fernando's case, where a "resolution" to the crime has been presented in material proof, still nothing can be done. Here there is no resolvable mystery

⁴⁶ The impossibility of real justice is reinforced in the way that supposedly fixed evidence about the past is undermined or called into question. An article published in 2006 reveals that families like Fernando's, along with other members of the AFDD (*Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos*) whose relatives were apparently identified from Patio 29, were misled. The AFDD was informed that all investigations carried out by the national institute, *Servicio Médico Legal* (SML), might have been false. The family members of many of the disappeared prisoners who had received physical proof of their loved ones' bodies were told that the remains might not have been those of their relatives at all. In fact, of the 96 bodies exhumed from Patio 29, half (48) were discovered to be misidentified (Osorio n/p). The AFDD commented on the implications of such large-scale deceit: "Mal identificados significa reabrir heridas, mal identificados significa reiniciar la búsqueda, mal identificados significa que nuestros seres queridos vuelven a desaparecer . . ." (Osorio n/p). This is but one example demonstrating the need for restitution, but the radical impossibility that accompanies it.

and no detective recourse, since the tragic fate of Fernando is known from the very beginning; there is no actual memory work to be documented in this documentary. There is only the phantasmagoric recapitulation of Fernando's brutal death now narrated in full to his family, which points not only to the incommensurability of any form of officially rendered justice, but also to the violence of any consensual discourse seeking to “resolve” past crimes through data-exacting justice. This is precisely the “radical injustice” underlying neoliberal melodrama and what the thriller form seeks to unveil.

What I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter by analyzing the uses of the detective narrative in *La ciudad está triste*, *La ciudad anterior* and *Fernando ha vuelto* are not only the stagnating effects of post-dictatorial melancholy (in the case of the first novel), but also the challenge of moving beyond this paradigm of reflection. Post-dictatorial melancholy has not only been a dominant response within literature and cultural production to melodramatic narratives attempting to smooth over the past – be that through neoliberal modernization, official truth commissions or forensic investigation –. Melancholy has also been a dominant source of oppositional resistance to the neoliberal, transnational realities. What is at stake for the future of Chile is not to articulate new methods for investigating or reflecting upon the traumas of the past, but rather methods for constructing a politics of the future. The challenge for the future requires opening up toward other possible perspectives of investigation capable of engaging with dominant narratives from “the bottom-up.”

It is to the obverse narrative component of the thriller to which I now turn. The following chapter will take up the testimonial roots of the thriller structure and will explore how it operates within the field of post-dictatorship.

CHAPTER III

THE TESTIMONIAL ROOTS OF THE THRILLER

What happens when the narrative text investigates the unknowable, the inexpressible, or the experience that refuses understanding? What are the implications of uncovering memories of violence so heinous that they escape or displace dominant forms of representation? For Jacques Lacan, the Real (*das Ding*) designates a traumatic moment of “otherness” that cannot be assimilated into language. The Real, in a sense, appears as the unlocalizable outside to forms of cultural expression that reveals the limits of dominant modes of understanding and reflection. What is at stake in the testimonio is not so much this concept of the Real, but rather what John Beverley calls the “reality effect . . . of imperialism, class rule, genocide, torture, oppression” (*Testimonio* 3). Testimonio narrates, in other words, an encounter with violence from the perspective of the victim who has suffered the event. This chapter proposes that what I am outlining as the post-dictatorial thriller form – as the conjoining of the detective investigation narrative and the witness account – finds its preeminent transgressive force in its testimonial component. In other words, the thriller structure garners its most powerful political engagement via the narrated experience of the victimized subject in pain or danger.

As mentioned earlier, the proliferation of fictional detective forms and non-fiction testimonial writings during and after the dictatorship speak to the urgent

call for investigating the continuing forms of violence in Chile. The detective narrative and testimonial account adhere to a similar narrative structure insofar as both follow an investigative pattern in search of justice for the victims of political crimes. The fact that both narrative strands mirror each other at every fundamental level has, in my opinion, not been sufficiently evaluated within the context of contemporary Chilean culture and politics. In the previous Chapter, I attempted to locate an emerging genealogy of the post-dictatorial thriller form through the framework of Chilean modernization, melodrama and contemporary detective texts. The three detective forms analyzed – the novels *La ciudad está triste* and *La ciudad anterior*, and the documentary film *Fernando ha vuelto* – underscore the implications of what I have described as the “top-down” structure of reflection, which investigates political violence from the perspective of a detective-like rhetorical figure (be that an actual detective character, the forensic scientist or a critic.) The implications of this “top-down” perspective present a viable challenge to neoliberal discourse, although oftentimes making visible the melancholic impasse of attempts to reconstitute a previous social horizon as a way to resolve historical violence.

This Chapter will pay particular attention to the “bottom-up” testimonial component of the post-dictatorial thriller form. The testimonial account interjects into the narrative of neoliberal modernization the marginal experience that remains always irreducible to what constitutes the nation and its concomitant narratives of modernity. Testimonio’s central preoccupation with uncovering

political violence exposes the limits of what the nation and its attendant cultural forms cannot comprehend. Insofar as testimonio investigates a crime from the stance of the repressed “other,” this form renders in narrative form the non-literary event that defies dominant modes of knowledge and analysis. In this way, the testimonial perspective opens up a (counter)space for the forms and experiences which do not fit into the narrative(s) of nationhood and modernity. It is the “bottom-up,” testimonial gesture of pointing to a space outside (the nation, neoliberal consensus) that makes possible a transgressive investigation of post-dictatorial society.

We can define the “bottom-up” testimonial component of the post-dictatorial thriller structure as the presence of a nonrepresentational dimension of experience that bears urgent witness to the totalizing effects of political violence. Far from the teleological pretensions of investigative journalism or detective inquiry, which in many cases lead to melancholic fixations on the victims of history, the testimonial account emerges from an indistinct zone of powerlessness and subalternity. Intrinsic to the understanding of testimonio is the figure of the subaltern, which is, according to the Founding Statement of the Latin American Subaltern Studies group, that non-registered or non-registerable historical figure who is incapable of hegemonic action. The Latin American Subaltern Studies group proposed to discover these subaltern voices and knowledges through and beyond official historiography. The group’s intent was to locate the subaltern experience “in unexpected structural dichotomies,

fissures in the forms of hierarchy and hegemony, and, in turn, in the constitution of the heroes of the national drama, writing, literature, education, institutions, and the administration of law and authority” (111).⁴⁷

Similar to Russian formalism’s conception of *ostranenie*, the testimonial voice references the “lived experience” – of the subaltern subject or the victim of political violence – that emerges from beneath the claims of neoliberal consensus to have finally reconciled history and society (which is precisely the claim of the iceberg metaphor referenced in the previous chapter) (“Founding Statement” 140). The very word *testimonio* in Spanish carries the implication of an act of truth telling in a religious or legal context. In this sense, the testimonial act implies a certain level of ethical transparency by which readers are to assume that the speaking subject has lived (directly or indirectly) the events that he or she now reconstructs in the form of testimony (Beverley, *Testimonio* 3). The opening passage from Luz Arce’s testimony titled *El infierno*, in which former MIR⁴⁸ activist Arce recalls the horrific experience of collaborating with the

⁴⁷ The Latin American Subaltern Studies Group was formed in 1992 as a projection of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group headed by Ranajit Guha. The project of subalternity originated in India as a political and epistemological critique of the way historical knowledge disavows marginal populations. Knowledge of the past, subalternists argued, organizes history in favor of official efforts of the modern State. Forms of resistance to the State were authorized only if articulated in rhetoric that the State could contest and eventually appropriate. The Latin American Subaltern collective was modeled after the South Asian group and was largely preoccupied with the different ways in which elite practices subject the originality and authenticity of subaltern activity. The group’s work geared toward examining the position of subalternism within the present conditions of neocolonialism and capitalist expansion. Although the group disbanded due to political and disciplinary disagreements, they did contribute a viable volume of essays on subalternity, *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (2001), which remains perhaps the most thorough collective examination of subalternity.

⁴⁸ The Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR, *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*) is a political party and previously left-wing Marxist-Leninist organization established a few years before

DINA, articulates the “bottom-up” vantage point of the individual who has experienced political violence.⁴⁹

My name is Luz Arce. It has been very difficult for me to recover that name. There is a kind of black legend about me, a vague story created out of a horrific, humiliating and violent reality . . . In the past, I didn't even think that one day I would take this step . . . For years I have had to overcome many fears in order to be able to write these pages . . . This narrative is neither beautiful nor entertaining . . . I collaborated with the DINA, under pressure. I was a member of that organization, and I resigned in 1979. My personal travails brought me before the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1990. Later, in January of 1991, I traveled to Europe. While there, I decided to appear before the courts again. I arrived in Chile on January 16, 1992. Today, twenty years after the military coup, I offer this book. (xix – xx)

What garners the disruptive force of this “narrative of urgency” – to use Hernán Vidal's term – is its reference to a singular moment of pain that lies beyond any possibility of representation or symbolization. Arce invokes the virtual impossibility of representing the memories of the events she endured which, in her case, include being tortured to the point of surrendering information about many of her MIR comrades over to the DINA: “There is a truth that hurts here, and I am trying my best not to turn it into a knife” (xix). The testimonial

Salvador Allende's presidency. Other leftist groups included the United Popular Action Movement (MAPU, *Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitaria*) and the Christian Left, although it was primarily the MIR that advocated the use of force to effectuate political change in Chile. The MIR became put pressure on the Popular Unity coalition to assume a more radical political platform, reason for which its members became targets for the dictatorship and the DINA. A large number of the political prisoners associated with the MIR.

⁴⁹ The DINA (Directorate of National Intelligence – *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*) was established in 1973 following Chile's military overthrow. This organization – nicknamed Pinochet's police squadron – was responsible for the investigation, interrogation and disappearance of opposition groups and resistance movements. In 1977, the CNI (National Information Center – *Centro Nacional de Información*) replaced the DINA and presumably adopted more democratic, less violent measures of dealing with opposition.

experience like this referenced by Arce contributes to the thriller narrative structure by virtue of investigating the harrowing effects of political violence via the unguarded testament of the victim. Arce herself claims in her opening statement that the motive behind her testimony is not necessarily political denouncement; it is, rather, to search out social and personal justice: “Unlike my actions in the past, these last decisions have been voluntary and part of a search for the path that could lead me away from the inferno” (xix – xx). Ironically, it is in these ostensibly apolitical moments, where the victim of State violence or the witness of a murder gives testament to his/her movement into the center of political crime, that the testimony executes its most political work. And by narrating detective-story conventions – such as State violence, torture or institutional conspiracy –, from the perspective of the victim of such experiences, the testimonio signals an altogether different mode of investigating post-dictatorial culture and politics: the testimonio signals the discursive eruption from a space beyond traditional registers of enunciation.

As mentioned already, it is my contention that the properly transgressive power of the post-dictatorial thriller structure lies in its testimonial component. Insofar as the testimonial narrative mirrors the fundamental structure of the detective investigation, the detective narrative requires be read or comprehended alongside the witness account. To a certain degree then, the detective form provides the formula and the investigative focus through which the testimonial account can articulate alternative modes of engaging with

political violence. The present chapter will flesh out this testimonial component of the thriller form, providing first an overview of the Latin American and Chilean testimonio. My arguments will necessarily dialogue with the theorizations of testimonio critics like John Beverley, Alberto Moreiras, Hernán Vidal, Elzbieta Sklodowska and Jaume Peris Blanes, as well as with the ideas of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben regarding victimized life and Chilean neoliberalism.

In order to rehearse the viability of the testimonial component as the preeminent political engagement of the thriller form, I will analyze a sample of real Chilean testimonies published during post-dictatorship: *Tejas Verdes: Diario de un campo de concentración* (1974/1996) by Hernán Valdés, *El infierno* (1993) by Luz Arce, and *Mi verdad* (1993) by Alejandra “La Flaca” Merino Vega.⁵⁰ The novelty of these testimonios is not only that they rehearse the incorporation of the victim’s experience into contemporary existence, but they also investigate the sinister conjunction between neoliberal modernity and victimized life.

The three testimonios mentioned above figure among a large host of testimonial narratives published during the decades following the military coup.⁵¹ Besides the hundreds of real witness narratives published by victims of

⁵⁰ Merino’s testimony was adapted into a movie in 1994 by Chilean film director Carmen Castillo. The film is titled *La flaca Alejandra*.

⁵¹ For a detailed historiography of the Chilean testimonio, as well as an extensive record of testimonios published during and after the dictatorship, see Jaume Peris Blanes’ *Historia del testimonio chileno: de las estrategias de denuncia a las políticas de memoria*, 2008.

dictatorial violence, the proliferation of semi-testimonios such as Diamela Eltit's *El padre mío* (1989) and *Tumbas de cristal* (1991) by Ruby Weitzel, filmic recreations of witness accounts such as Costa Gavras' *Missing* (1982) and Roman Polanski's adaptation of Ariel Dorfman's *Death of the Maiden* (1990), and testimonial poems such as those found in Guillermo Núñez's *Diario de viaje* (1993) and Guillermo Ross-Murray's *Animal desamparado* (1973-1990) speak to the preeminence of the witness account as a powerful weapon of cultural and political reflection following the dictatorship.

My belief is that the three testimonios in question narrate an unguarded engagement with the Real in a way that unconceals the violent effects of neoliberal consensus. The first testimonio analyzed, *Tejas Verdes*, investigates the mechanics of dictatorial violence from within the space of the political prisoner camp. More than denouncing political violence or forging networks of solidarity, the uniqueness of Valdes' witness account, and what merits its thriller impulse, is that it exposes the totalizing nature of dictatorial politics. In other words, *Tejas Verdes* makes visible the political process by which the dictatorial subject is reduced to bare life: the prisoner camp victim is deprived of every right to existence to the point that he/she comes to inhabit a liminal space between life and death. The latter two testimonios, both written by women, move beyond the conventional testimonial framework in order to reveal the similarities between the prisoner camp and the space of neoliberal modernity itself. Both texts outline the process by which neoliberal practices approximate a new form

of camp, stripping the victim of the immediacy and singularity of his/her experience. Similar to the de-individualization suffered by prisoners in the concentration camp, neoliberalism reduces the witness account to the uniform category of “victim,” to just one more mass-produced commodity among the thousands available for consumer consumption.

To this regard, Jaume Peris Blanes explains how the neoliberal mantra of consensus has affected the testimonial experience. For Peris Blanes, testimonio and its criticism have been caught up in affective renderings of the past that appeal to the dramatism of reconciliation rather than to the singularity of the testimonial voice. Following the dilution of the national borders and the triumph of global capitalism, critical reception of testimonio tends toward a certain automatization of political content. Consequently, critical readings of testimonio shift their focus to what Peris Blanes terms the “duty of memory,” which dramatizes the pain and suffering of the victims over the urgent character of the violence they experienced (*Historia* 251). The “duty of memory” places ethical primacy on remembering the past such that overemphasizing the affective registers of mourning, commiseration and solidarity has become a form of homogenizing violence characterizing contemporary Chile.⁵² The irony of the duty to remember is that it simultaneously executes a violent operation of

⁵² Describing the “mass marketing of suffering,” Peris Blanes describes how the cultural industry “mimics the emotional representation of repression by elaborating discourses of memory that shed little light on the historical processes; they focus instead on the more profitable dramatic aspects of the testimonies, which obscures to a certain degree their comprehension” (*Historia* 17; my translation).

forgetting: at the same time that it demands constant recollection of the testimonial subject, it essentially reduces the individual testimonial voice to the voice of every other victim. Peris Blanes explains that

the transition's standardization of memory inscribes individual testimonies of dictatorial violence into national projects of historical reflection and comprehension. The true violence of consensus is that it neutralizes the disruptive potency of the testimonial voice. In this sense, the possibility of a spectral trace of historical violence imbued with political impetus is now reduced to homogenizing representations of history that make the testimonial voices perfectly interchangeable. (*Historia* 252, my translation)

Huyssen's analysis of secular culture echoes Peris Blanes' claims by explaining how some contemporary memory debates recuperate the rhetoric of mourning and solidarity as a way to reconcile historical violence. His hypothesis is that our present secular culture feels such fear of forgetting that it attempts to counter these fears with strategies of survival, of commemoration. "[O]ur culture today," Huyssen writes, "obsessed with memory as it is, is also somehow in the grips of a fear, even a terror, of forgetting . . . the more we are required to remember in the wake of the information explosion and the marketing of memory, the more we seem to be in danger of forgetting and the stronger need to forget" (18). Trapped within this totalizing mandate to "reconcile," or to "resolve" the past, post-dictatorial reflection becomes reductive and melodramatic, exploiting more and more the dramatic potential that testimonio might invoke from its reading public.

The subject implicated in this paradigm is, of course, the figure of the victim who, recalling Lessie Jo Frazier, is divested of all individuality and

singularity: within the neoliberal political configuration he/she can only make a plea and be understood through the homogenizing category of the “victim” (*Salt in the Sand* 233). The very existence of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example, was justified in the necessity to create – to give official status to – the category of the dictatorial victim, and to put in place a system of economic reparations and symbolic commemorative measures. In this way, the creation of the “victim of human rights abuses” not only established the official category through which survivors of torture would be required to present their claim, but it also instated a definition for who would be included and excluded from this category.⁵³

El infierno and *Mi verdad* present interesting counternarratives to the reconciliation/solidarity paradigm. Notwithstanding the fact Arce’s and Marino’s are among the most widely read Chilean testimonios (*El infierno* has recently been translated into English and has incited significant critical attention in North American academic institutions), I believe that their witness accounts transgress the reconciliation/solidarity paradigm by projecting their testimonies from an indistinct site of enunciation that oscillates ambiguously between victim and criminal, innocent and conspirator. Although both narratives contain the characteristics normally associated with dictatorial testimony – that is, relating

⁵³ The category of “victim” established by the Commission did not include, for example, dictatorial agents killed in confrontations with armed leftist groups, and it excluded hundreds of incidences of human rights abuses in the prisoner camps. For an account of the incidences of torture or abuse excluded from the official category of “victim,” see the sections in the Truth and Reconciliation Report titled “Las Víctimas,” (sections 21-23) and “Personas que no calificaron como víctimas de prisión política y tortura” in The Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report.

what occurred, denouncing violence, accusing the dictatorial criminals – the implicit recourse of these texts is to complicate the established category of “victim.” It articulates instead a liminal zone that makes mourning or commiserating with the subject impossible. In this sense, I contend that these witness accounts demonstrate the impetus of the “bottom-up” component of the thriller structure: the texts transgress the limits of memory politics by *rehearsing*, rather than resisting, the totalizing nature of neoliberal consensus. To flesh out such a possibility requires first contextualizing the development of testimonio within the Latin American cultural and political context.

The Latin American Testimonio: A Voice from Below

What constitutes testimonio exactly, and why has it provoked such intense critical responses among Latin Americanist intellectuals? Critics remain at odds with a concise definition for this form. For example, Elzbieta Sklodowska attests that the bounds of testimonio are irreducible to a definition. Other critics like George Yúdice and John Beverley pay particular attention to issues like authenticity and representationality. According to Yúdice,

Testimonial writing may be defined as an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of the situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experiences as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history. (17)

John Beverley defines testimonio's composition as "a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also a real protagonist or witness of the event he or she recounts, and whose unit or narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience . . . The situation of narration in testimonio has to involve an urgency to communicate a problem of oppression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival . . ." (*Against Literature* 12-13). Despite the variance of established definitions, these approximations coincide in the fact that testimonio, perhaps more so than any other genre in the past, broaches the category of what is considered "(R)real." Described by René Jara as a "a trace of the Real" (*Testimonio y literatura* 2), testimonio represents the moment of an extra-literary experience that continues to throw an unsettling wrench into the hegemonic narratives that have informed Latin American modernity.

Testimonio, in other words, served to draw the subaltern experience into the center of dominant national narratives. Naturally, such an epic movement has radically called into question the limits and contours of what constitutes "nationhood" within capitalist modernity. If recent decades have witnessed the proliferation of Latin American testimonies, it is due to the fact that neoliberal modernization has itself allowed the conditions of development for forms of social difference and heterogeneity to emerge. That is to say that capitalist development, at the same time that it produces a totalizing narrative of

consensus that sutures over the violent episodes of the past, allows for spaces, or gaps of opposition to emerge. It is from these gaps and spaces that the testimonial voice appears, as the presence of something existing always external to the logic of the nation-state.

Beverley notes the disruptive force of testimonio: “If testimonio comes . . . from outside the limits of the state, it is also implicated in tracing the frontiers of the authority of the state and expanding the compass of what counts as expression in civil society” (*Testimonio* 18). Testimonio, therefore, references an indistinct zone of experience that modern national discourse cannot apprehend; it exists within a space of rebellion, opposition, desolation and non-resolution. Thus, if investigating the limits or exclusions of dominant systems of representation is what is at stake in testimonio writing, it is precisely this indistinct position beyond the limits of what is known, or knowable, that provides the post-dictatorial thriller structure its transgressive force.

The rise of the testimonio in Chile and Latin America – and what makes this form a source of contention and intrigue – can be linked with the concurrence of some momentous political and literary crossroads. Politically speaking, testimonio came into existence following the Cuban Revolution, and particularly due to Miguel Barnet’s transcription of the life experiences of Esteban Montejo, which was published under the title *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966). During the sixties and seventies, a number of testimonios were

published that gave testament to the liberation struggles and civil wars of Central America and elsewhere in the Third World.

The Chilean testimonio emerged somewhat later than in other Latin American countries, and more often did not require the collaboration between the testimonial subject and a writer/intellectual. Rather than presenting accounts of the Indian or subaltern figure, as did a number of testimonios common to the Central American regions (Menchú, for example), the Chilean testimonio variation often articulated the experiences of the survivors of dictatorial repression or prisoner camp violence. Drawing a link between Spivak's foundational testimonial question (Can the subaltern speak?) and Chile's survivor narratives, Peris Blanes asks, "Can the *survivor* speak?" (*La voz* 243). The voice of the survivor was heard particularly during the 1980s and 90s in close conjunction with the truth and reconciliation movements that defined the civilian administrations of the *Concertación Democrática*. Perhaps more so than any cultural form produced in post-dictatorship, survivor accounts helped contribute to the need for justice for victims of dictatorial violence. For example, the testimonios included in the National Commission on Political Detention and Torture officially brought into public dialogue the need for juridical and monetary reparations for the individuals and families affected by state violence.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ The commission recommended a life pension be distributed to every victim of torture. The pensions would total approximately \$112,000 Chilean pesos a month, around half the average income. The Valech commission also suggested a bill be sent to Congress seeking free education and healthcare for victims and their families (Burgis, n/p).

The presumption behind this flood of testimonio narratives was that rescuing narratives of truth, insofar as they were articulated by the victim of historical violence, would constitute a viable form of political agency within the neoliberal government's new policies. Not only did the proliferation of Chilean testimonios provide a significant outlet for "fighting back" against military impunity, but it also aided in forging a new political reality in which the victimized "other" could assume a participatory voice on the political playing field. An introductory quote from the Truth and Reconciliation Report underscores this belief that the proliferation of "truth" accounts would suffice as a form of justice for victims of political violence: "Solo sobre la base de la verdad será posible satisfacer las exigencias fundamentales de la justicia y crear las condiciones indispensables para alcanzar una efectiva reconciliación nacional" ("Exordio", *Informe de la Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación* xiv).⁵⁵

The political violence in Chile and elsewhere during the 1970s and 80s made the dissemination of witness accounts one of the most significant ways for those outside Latin America to communicate solidarity. In this sense, the testimonio not only helped foment the solidarity movements that spanned throughout North and South American cultural institutions during the 80s, but it

⁵⁵ This quote from the *Truth and Reconciliation Report* underscores the belief that social justice could be restored simply through the restitution of truth narratives. While the commission's reports brought to light the treatment of dictatorial victims hitherto concealed, they ultimately point to the somber realization that the proliferation of witness accounts can never compensate for the trauma suffered by dictatorial victims. More than revealing any form of truth that would effectuate judicial change, these reports propagate a state of general mourning and melancholy in contemporary Chile.

provoked critical dialogue surrounding literature's role in international political issues. Within the neoliberal model of development, testimonio became a powerful ideological channel through which marginal histories and heterogeneous identities found an outlet of expression that transcended national borders.

More specifically however, the testimonial account has profoundly impacted metropolitan centers of higher learning. The form provided intellectuals a critical platform from which to forge new forms of agency against the globalization of capitalist exploitation and violence. Many saw in testimonio a model for a new form of collective intervention, and consequently a model "for new ways of thinking and acting politically" ("Founding Statement" 110). In this sense, testimonio is intriguing not so much for its content – what it says and how it says it – but rather for how it entered the political and cultural debates as an organic source of opposition to dominant loci of knowledge. Beverley sums up the "bottom-up" political intervention testimonio was deemed to represent: "[Testimonio represented] the possibility of regional, national, and/or transnational coalitions of radicalized intellectuals and professionals with subaltern classes or social groups . . . a form of global 'alliance politics'" (*Against Literature* 90).

Testimonio also entered the scene at a crucial moment within international literary debates as well. At the same time that it drew the victim's experience into the political and institutional sphere, testimonio disrupted the

claim of “high-culture” writers and artists of the 1960s and 70s to epitomize the national reality. Testimonio’s appearance signaled a new position of discursive agency, which interrupted the authority of the great literary icons of the boom to speak on behalf of the Latin American cultural experience. Consequently, the increasing dissemination of testimonial narratives forced the literary enterprise, which has been deeply implicated in the processes of state formation that have defined Latin American modernity, into crisis. Literature was forced to reexamine its claims as a hegemonic cultural institution and as representative of national identity. As Georg M. Gugelberger notes in his introduction to the essay collection *The Real Thing*, testimonial writing is powerful because it expresses an “in-between” order of experience, and as such it occupies a liminal zone between several contemporary literary debates: literary versus oral, literature versus non-literature (or even against literature), “high” culture versus minority writing, center versus margin (10-11).

This “in-between” zone inherent to testimonio writing introduced an uncanny sense of not-belonging or unfixity into the Literary institution, such that the learning process itself within academia became an uncertain endeavor. As connotative of the silenced, the tortured, and the subaltern voice that can never truly speak in any way that we – the readers of testimonio – could understand, testimonio served to subvert the very limits of what is considered “Literary.” Alberto Moreiras’ theorizations explain the force of this non-literary element of testimonial literature: “Testimonio cannot exist outside the literary, but

the specificity of testimonio, and its particular position in the current cultural configuration, depends on an extraliterary stance or moment . . . testimonio is testimonio because it suspends the literary at the very same time that it constitutes itself as a literary act" (*Exhaustion* 212).

Simultaneously literary and non- or anti-literary then, the appearance of testimonio introduced new and sensational questions regarding how to approach cultural artifacts when the dominant frameworks from which to produce literary and cultural reflection began to enter into crisis. The founding statement of the Latin American Subaltern Studies group articulates in the following way this crisis of hegemonic models and the resulting cultural and political challenges facing contemporary intellectual work:

The present dismantling of authoritarian regimes in Latin America, the end of communism and the consequent displacement of revolutionary projects, the processes of redemocratization, and the new dynamics created by the effects of the mass media and transnational economic arrangements: these are all developments that call for new ways of thinking and acting politically. The redefinition of Latin American political and cultural space in recent years has, in turn, impelled scholars of the region to revise established and previously functional epistemologies in the social sciences and humanities. The general trend toward democratization prioritizes in particular the reexamination of the concepts of pluralistic societies and the conditions of subalternity within these societies. (110-111)

As this opening remark of the Subaltern Studies Group demonstrates, we have entered into an entirely new paradigm of political engagement in which the traditional relations of power, and the dialectic between culture and the nation, have forever been altered.

Gone is the paradigm of harmonious alliance (exemplified in the classic detective novel, for example, or early national allegories) between literature and the nation-state. Also exhausted is the paradigm of national (capitalist) development in which a dominant center (that is, the central economic world powers that assumed political leadership of the First and Second Worlds) integrates peripheral “developing” regions into their orb of authority. Rather, as Gareth Williams notes, since the 1980s we have been experiencing a sort of backlash effect of these “bottom-up” paradigms to the effect that previous forms of domination and resistance are rendered inoperative.

These cultural and geopolitical evolutions form the context for the emergence of the testimonio as a hotly debated object of study.⁵⁶ And yet, as Gugelberger asks, what happens when existing modes of transgression become legitimized, canonized or even auritized – to echo Moreiras’ approximation of Benjamin’s concept? What is the result when the margins are appropriated into the center of institutional study and political life such that they lose their disruptive impulse? Moreiras and Gugelberger suggest this to be the case with testimonio, especially since the political efficacy of the subaltern configurations

⁵⁶ Perhaps the most compelling example of the disruptive force of testimonio within institutional debate was Rigoberto Menchu’s 1981 *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchu, y así me nació la conciencia* and the subsequent institutional discussions around David Stoll’s 1999 book *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*. Stoll’s book broached the subject of the victim’s experience and truth. He claimed that the literary critics’ claims on Menchu’s text were based on the presumed truth of the narrative and not its literary value. He then demonstrated that the textual truth of the account was flawed. Stoll interpreted this to be a larger issue within institutional practice: “critical theory,” he writes, “can end up revolving around romantic conceptions of indigenous people, mythologies that can be used to sacrifice them for larger causes” (xv).

of yesteryear (such as the militant political hero, or the indigenous victim of First World imperialism) has almost waned, and since testimonio studies within university settings seems to have reached near exhaustion.

The result is that the appropriation of testimonio into mainstream intellectual practice poses dangerous implications for the extraliterary dimension of the testimonial text. What was previously the threat of radical otherness existing always outside dominant power/knowledge systems appears now as a disciplinary fetish and the object of a melancholic restitutive gesture by the metropolitan intellectual. Moreiras warns of the reductive effects of this appropriative tendency by contemporary intellectuals: “In the hands of testimonio critics, testimonio loses its extraliterary force, which now becomes merely the empowering mechanism for a recanonized reading strategy” (*Exhaustion* 226).

A reading of Diamela Eltit’s semi-testimonial novel *El padre mío* (1989) helps illustrate the implications of attempting to appropriate testimonio into dominant literary practices. The text, which transcribes the testimonial aberrations of a schizophrenic vagabond, captures the marginal voices of Chilean urban life. Lacking in narrative coherence and structure, the text attempts to transfer the unrepresentable dimension of trauma, “fragmentos de exterminio, sílabas de muerte, pausas de mentira, frases comerciales, nombres de difuntos” (Eltit, *El padre mío* 15) into the very materiality of the testimonio. Eltit’s introduction to the transcription describes the marginal subject, like el Padre Mío, as the abject victim of something like an institutional conspiracy

seeking his total elimination from society: “su presencia como sobreviviente y parlante lo transforma en un orador acosado, víctima marginal de una confabulación que, curiosamente, lo hace parecer ausente y presente a la vez de todos los tópicos institucionales” (16).

Interestingly, at the same time that *El padre mío* serves to rescue the most abject voices of Chilean urban life, the text seems to deconstruct everything that should constitute a written testimony. That is, if, abiding by the rules outlined by the Casa de las Américas prize, we look at testimony as “documenting some aspect of Latin American or Caribbean reality from a direct source,” in which “a direct source is understood as knowledge of the facts by the author of his or her compilation of narratives,” and where “reliable documentation, written or graphic, is indispensable,” then the erratic transcription of Eltit’s text makes visible the impossibility of capturing an unlivable experience and putting it into a narrative form. Eltit’s text claims to be, precisely, the direct and literal transcription of that experience which defies all possibility of “reliable documentation” from a “direct source.” Notwithstanding the text’s qualification as a semi-testimonial narrative,⁵⁷ I believe this novel is unique because it aestheticizes the essence of the testimonial experience. That

⁵⁷ *El padre mío* can be read less as a true testimonio than as the dramatization of testimonio production, carried out in two parts: the literary transcription performed by Eltit, and the visual component, produced by Chilean artist Lotty Rosenfield. The testimonial project was inspired by a set of recordings taken of El Padre Mío in 1983, 1984 and 1985. The result was a video, which was included among the artistic productions of CADA (*Colectivo de Acciones de Arte*) and the novel published by Eltit.

is, *El padre mío* rehearses the (failed) endeavor of rendering in literary form the pure and unmediated speech of the “voiceless” subject of history.

On a deeper level though, *El padre mío* brings to the fore another dilemma – which is an important dilemma within neoliberal Chilean society – regarding how it is possible to read testimonio while at the same time maintaining the singularity of an unrepresentable experience. If the idea behind the testimonial enunciation is to make known the real lived experiences of the marginal victim, then doesn't a text like this one – which is essentially the novelization of a testimony that has been mass-produced and analyzed in an overwhelming number of North and South American universities – merely capitalize on, and possibly relativize, the urgency of the victim experience?

This question points to unsettling fact that the testimonial experience – and especially that referenced in a text like Eltit's – always inhabits an ambiguous zone between acceptance and transgression, which necessarily calls into question how we can and should read testimonio as analytical practice. If we accept testimonio, integrate it into our dominant modes of interpretation, then do we become complicit with the neoliberal market apparatus and risk reducing the urgency of its claims? Yet, if we do not integrate testimonio, don't we then leave it relegated to the “outside,” so to speak, in the experience of violence and pain it references?

Given this dilemma, I differ from Beverley when he claims that the desire of testimonio is to constitute a new hegemonic bloc from the margins, and to

erect Guha's notion of a "politics of the people" (*Subalternity* 103). I find an assumption of this sort highly problematic in that it prescribes exactly how we should comprehend testimonio: it demands testimonio be interpreted as political opposition or collective representation. This claim is equally problematic because it fetishizes the victim-position and neutralizes the unresolved tensions at the heart of testimonio. Finally, it merely reverses the hierarchies of modernity that were responsible for creating subalternity in the first place: center/periphery, dominant/subaltern, criminal/victim, First World/Third World. I believe issues surrounding transgression and acceptance have something to do with the increasing appropriation of testimonio and its use as an affective fix by which post-dictatorial critics seeks to "resolve" the political injustices of the past. More than this, however, I believe these inquiries speak to the increasing totalization of contemporary life in which a possible encounter with the "Real" no longer constitutes a threatening "outside" to contemporary politics, but is rather neutralized and appropriated into the center of political existence.

Jon Beasley-Murray's interpretation of *El padrio mío* helps to problematize the viability of testimonio as a continuing source of transgressive power within the neoliberal market system. If, at some moment, the mad, the sick, or the victims of political violence constituted some unlivable zone outside of society that threatened to unhinge a fixed centralized power, this is perhaps no longer the case. "We are all marginal now," Beasley-Murray writes, "Marginality is no privileged position, around which a progressive politics could

construct a new hegemony” (*Posthegemony* 186). Speaking of the *El padre mío*’s characters, he remarks: “It is not that they inhabit some subaltern outside, at society’s margins; rather, they *are* the social, they condense and incarnate the whole of society” (186). Beasley-Murray’s reading of *El padre mío* thus not only reveals the totalizing, conspiratory impulse of neoliberalism to incorporate even the margins into itself. His interpretation also suggests a possible broadening of fixed categories like the “subaltern,” “marginal” and “victim” to encompass other dimensions of contemporary existence. In this sense, the testimonial experience, which during the national liberation movements reflected the struggles of the subaltern subject of history, now moves to the position of connoting any experience that does not fit into the paradigms and political categories of modernity.

As Beasley-Murray’s reading insinuates, the reason critical structures like memory politics or detective fiction oftentimes fall into melancholic fixations on some lost past is because they fetishize the marginal subject. They attempt to rescue the dictatorial victim always already *as victim*. That is to say that they force the fragments, the “cultural residues” (Richard) or the “small voices of history” (Guha), into the mold of militant political opposition or a counter to the totalizing effects of neoliberalism. Consequently, regardless of testimonio’s capacity to distill the truth of violence against neoliberal consensus, it seems that the disarticulation of the “grand narratives” of national history has provoked such an obsession with rescuing the small narratives that in the hands of the

testimonio critic, the singularity of testimonial experience becomes reduced to the melodramatic interplay between diametric forces: the victim versus the criminal, marginality versus totality, friend versus enemy, truth versus falsehood.

Within the scope of this dissertation project, I consider it less imperative to respond to Gugelberger's injunction at the beginning of *The Real Thing* to try to preserve the subaltern figure as "unheimlich' (unhomed) and threatening" (12). As I see it, the current intellectual challenge is not to reconstitute solidarity with the (dictatorial, revolutionary or indigenous) victim, and to help him/her maintain political and experiential distance from the center. Rather, of interest to this project is to critically analyze the politico-cultural conditions by which the victim's experience has been appropriated into the center of political life. Interest to me is to investigate how today the testimonial subject is stripped of his/her singularity and difference down to the homogenized category of the "victim."⁵⁸ The following readings of *Tejas Verdes*, *El infierno* and *Mi verdad* attempt to theorize a link between the "bottom-up" experience of the dictatorial victim and contemporary political life. While the three narratives give testament to the politization of life, what I seek to examine is the correspondence between the politization of life that occurs in the prisoner camp and that which occurs in neoliberal Chile. The theorizations of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben on the notion of bare life will help contextualize testimonio's "bottom-up"

⁵⁸ The notion of "anyone whomsoever" appears in Foucault's *Birth of Biopolitics*, as well as in his lectures on Psychiatric Power in 1973-74. I am grateful to the Political Thought Seminar Group and my mentor for insightful discussions on this topic that led me to this application of Foucault's term.

engagement with politics that I consider central to the post-dictatorial thriller structure.

Tejas Verdes: Biopolitics and the Story of Anyone Whomsoever

Michel Foucault's 1979 seminar titled *The Birth of Biopolitics* leaves much to develop around the notion of biopolitics. Using postwar Germany as his model, however, his analysis of neoliberal government provides theoretical insight into Chilean neoliberalism and bare life. Let us remember that the project of neoliberalism in Latin America, inaugurated by force through the military dictatorships, intended to expand the role of free-market competition and macro-economic stability. This was effectuated largely by putting into practice the Chicago School's economic policies, which entailed the liberalization of trade and capital flows, the privatization of companies, and labor reforms. The idea behind the Chicago School's model was to guarantee economic freedom by reducing state intervention.⁵⁹ What Foucault's analysis of post-war German and American economics foregrounds, however, is the disguised political intervention behind neoliberalism.

⁵⁹ The Chicago Boys were a group of young Chilean economists who during the early 1970s were sent to study economics at the University of Chicago. The exchange program was the result of the "Chile Project," established in the 1950s by the US State Department and the Ford Foundation, which was intended to combat developmentalism in Chile and elsewhere in Latin America. From 1957 – 1970 nearly 100 Chileans pursued advanced degrees at the University of Chicago. The Chicago Boys' economic principles remained uninfluential during Allende's Popular Unity, but were revisited after the military coup in 1973. *El Ladrillo*, the central publication of the Chicago Boys, became the foundation of the regime's economic policy.

Neoliberalism does not, Foucault argues, reduce State intervention, allowing for a naturally occurring economic reality; rather, neoliberalism delimits and controls the very mechanisms upon which the market is set to function. In other words, the market in neoliberal society becomes the general measure for defining all governmental action. Foucault writes, “Instead of accepting a free market defined by the state and kept as it were under state supervision . . . [neoliberalism] completely turn[s] the formula around and adopt[s] the free market as the organizing and regulating principle of the state . . . in other words: a state under the supervision of the market rather than a market supervised by the state” (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 116). Neoliberalism allows precisely for the expansion of market rationality to the point that it encompasses the totality of social experience, causing previously non-economic spheres of life to appear as economic. The conspiratory quality of neoliberalism, then, lies in its ability to incorporate non-economic aspects of social life such as history, memory forms and even experiences of political violence into modern economic practice.

Foucault theorizes the conjunction between biopolitics and modern economic life well before his 1979 seminar. At the end of *History of Sexuality*, he reviews the process by which, at the onset of the modern era, biological life begins to be incorporated into the operations and calculations of State power. Politics, in modern society, transforms into biopolitics. Re-quoting Giorgio Agamben’s citation of Foucault, he says, “For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for political

existence; modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question” (*Homo Sacer* 143). Taking from Foucault’s thesis, then, the preeminent function of the modern State is the incorporation of natural life into the center of economic and political life.

Agamben offers a counteractive reading of Foucault’s original thesis, underscoring the implicit connection between biopolitics and the society of mass consumerism. Arguing beyond Foucault, Agamben asserts that it is not simply that life as such has become the central object of the projections of State power. Rather, modern society is defined by the total integration of bare life – which was initially situated at the margins of the political order – into political activity. For Agamben, the crucial moment of politics transforming into biopolitics is the point at which previously distinguishable categories, such as exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *zoe* (natural life) and *bios* (qualified/political life) become indistinguishable. Speaking of the zone proper to biopolitical life, Agamben writes: “When its boundaries begin to be blurred, the bare life that dwelt there . . . becomes both subject and object of the conflicts of the political order, the one place for both the organization of State power and emancipation from it” (*Homo Sacer* 9). Thus, the creation of a liminal zone, an ambiguous territory in which naked life is captured and simultaneously excluded from the political order, is the hidden grounds on which the entire modern political system rests.

Agamben takes the site of the concentration camp – and particularly that of Auschwitz and Dachau – as the exemplary terrain for the production of

biopolitical life.⁶⁰ Unlike the prison, which adheres to the national laws applicable to it, the camp creates its own juridical normativity, thus transforming into its own enclosed microcosm where the only referent for prisoners is the camp itself (“Prólogo,” *Tejas Verdes* 7). In this sense, the concentration camp traces an in-between zone that exists outside the juridical domain, but that is not completely external from State power. It is this liminal zone where *homo sacer*, the figure of bare life who may be killed yet not sacrificed, dwells. For Agamben, this character is the protagonist and apogee figure of modern political life.

Homo sacer preserves the memory of a character of archaic Roman law in which the element of sacredness is associated for the first time with human life. According to ancient law, the sacred man was a contradictory figure who had been judged by the people on account of a crime. By juridical decree, the sacred man (the man deemed criminal, in other words) was banished from the social order by virtue of the crime committed. That same decree dictated that, “it is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide” (qtd. in Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 71). Therefore, the indistinct nature of the “sacred man” resides in his expulsion from society and his concurrent inclusion within juridical ordinance. Agamben locates the founding

⁶⁰ Agamben identifies the concentration camp, and any biopolitical zone that manifests in routine daily activities, as a “dislocating localization.” He writes, “the camp as dislocating localization is the hidden matrix of the politics in which we are still living, and it is this structure of the camp that we must learn to recognize in all its metamorphoses into the *zones d’attentes* of our airports and certain outskirts of our cities” (*Homo Sacer* 175). Agamben stops short of developing an analysis of other possible manifestations of biopolitical zones. Other contemporary thinkers such as Alberto Moreiras, Nelly Richard and Brett Levinson have begun to theorize biopolitics as an increasingly imposed dimension of human subjectivity.

principle of sovereign power in this ambivalent element of *homo sacer*. “The sovereign sphere,” he writes, “is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life – that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed – is the life that has been captured in this sphere” (83). The figure of *homo sacer* is the mark of the “living dead,” the life that can be killed with impunity. Thus, *homo sacer* traces the process by which individual life can be de-individualized and diminished to the status of bare life.

Hannah Arendt, in her analysis of totalitarianism, discusses in a similar way the implications of the total politization of life. In particular, she focuses on the arbitrary production of criminals by the State, or of what she describes as “criminals without a crime” (qtd. in *Totalitarianism* xv). Using Nazi Germany as her referent, Arendt summarizes the process by which the nondescript figure of anyone whomsoever – he who can be killed but not sacrificed – becomes both the exception and the arbitrary target within the totalitarian State. She describes the creation of enemies of the State within governments like Chile: “the people that the regime liquidated . . . the ‘objective enemies’ . . . knew that they were ‘criminals without a crime;’ that it was precisely this new category, as distinguished from the earlier true foes of the regime – assassins of government officials, arsonists, or bandits –“ (xv) whose members were now deemed criminal by the very fact that their political subjectivity is unregistrable within the spectrum of political representation. In this sense, *homo sacer*, by virtue of his

unrepresentable identity, is simultaneously the targeted nemesis and also the most immanent threat to State power.

Hernán Valdés' testimony *Tejas Verdes* is perhaps the most powerful witness account of Chilean politics transformed into biopolitics. With meticulous description, Valdés relates his experience of being transformed into a "criminal without a crime" held prisoner at Tejas Verdes, one of the dictatorship's clandestine and most violent concentration camps.⁶¹ It is useful to remember that the neoliberal project and the prisoner camp in Chile emerged roughly around the same time, and both share their origins in dictatorial violence. Immediately following the military coup of 1973 the dictatorship initiated a massive repressive operation against anyone who had participated in, or even sympathized with, the Popular Unity Coalition. This repressive system became increasingly organized and coordinated. One of its central expressions was the creation of the DINA (*Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*) headed by Manuel Contreras. Under Contreras' direction, the DINA retained the power to detain anyone considered a threat and to order him/her to a prisoner camp.

As one of the earliest functioning concentration camps, the operations at Tejas Verdes typify what is considered the first period of dictatorial repression, which is characterized by the violent fusion of military and political power. The new military/political conjunction required that dictator Augusto Pinochet add to

⁶¹ Tejas Verdes was one of the dictatorship's first operational prisoner camps. Among the other concentration camps, such as Isla Dawson, Tres Alamos, Colonia Dignidad, Cuatro Alamos, Ritoque, etc., Tejas Verdes was recognized as one of the most violent. Even more than a concentration camp, Tejas Verdes was known as a torture center.

his institutional title of Commander in Chief the role of absolute leader of the Government Coalition.⁶² The new state-military alliance acceded itself the sovereign power to reconfigure the economy and resolutely suppress political opposition. This new totalitarian apparatus thus functioned as a State of exception (or State of emergency), an absolutely sovereign bloc where individual life and death, rule and exception could be held in permanent suspension.

Since Tejas Verdes figured among the first torture centers, for many this prisoner camp symbolized the most violent and occult crimes carried out by the dictatorship. Valdés' testimonio, as the precise obverse of the detective story narrative, gives witness to concentration camp life in which human life is reduced to mere biological existence. His early impressions of the camp articulate how the dictatorship reduced the fellow political prisoners to a near non-human state: "Mis compañeros parecen un grupo de fusilados . . . Cabezas revueltos, a veces enterrados, ropas arrugadas, camisas salidas de los pantalones, cabezas caídas . . . Ningún color sanguíneo anima los pieles – lo que puede verse – las manos atadas, las barbillas" (34). Much of Valdés' narrative witnesses the camp's total domination of the prisoners' daily functions: hygiene habits, eating, defecating and sleeping patterns.

⁶² Chile's new government, headed by General Augusto Pinochet, was comprised of a military junta, which included select representatives of the three branches of service: the army, navy and air force. In theory, the members of the junta retained executive and legislative jurisdiction, but in practice Pinochet gradually came to dominate the other offices. Although he stated in 1973, "I am a man without ambitions; I do not want to appear as the only holder of power," his intentions proved to be quite the contrary since by December of 1974, Pinochet had consolidated enough power within the junta to be officially declared president of Chile (Hawkins, *International Human Rights* 52).

What is unusual about this narrative are not only the excruciating scenes of torture and the humiliation of being deprived of the most basic bodily necessities. What is unique about this testimony is the sense of utter subjection it articulates against the totalizing effects of dictatorial power. Far from the heroism of a detective figure, Valdés' testimonio seems to communicate that no recourse, and no resistance – psychological, affective or collective –, can withstand the penetrating effects of State terror. Curiously absent from this account are the denunciations and the expressions of prisoner solidarity that characterized other witness accounts. Valdés' testimony instead moves beyond denunciations of military violence in order to present an unguarded witness account to the production of bare life. He reflects upon his own status as bare existence: “No soy capaz de pensar en mí como posibilidad, como proyecto final. Sigo considerándome disponible para la flagelación y la abyección, y de hecho lo estoy” (67). In this way, the testimony witnesses the concentration camp as an indistinct zone that is both regulated and forbidden, existing somewhere between life and death. The following passage describes prisoner life as divested of even the most common human emotions:

De hecho, no hay nada vivo o real por lo que pueda sentir melancolía. Todo lo que yo puedo evocar es irrecuperable, aun si pudiera en algún momento salir de aquí. No podría recobrar casi nada, ni siquiera mis papeles, por nombrar algo. De hecho, mi conciencia no quiere todavía recibir esta información. Sería demasiado insoportable cargar con estas verdades, además, dentro de esta prisión intemporal. El temor, la constante inseguridad por la vida, no permiten, por lo demás, ningún instante propicio a la melancolía. (111)

Stripped of the capacity to even evoke human sensations, *Tejas Verdes* gives an unguarded witness account to the preeminent biopolitical operation of dictatorial camps: the reduction of individual life to the status of anyone whomsoever.

Describing the arbitrariness of State terror, Brett Levinson affirms that dictatorial power is terrible not only because it may direct its attacks at communists, blacks, Jews or leftist revolutionaries (“Dictatorship and Overexposure” 113). It is also not only terrible because it may detain anybody at any moment. State terror is terrible – I would further Levinson’s argument – because it dominates the processes by which political subjects may be transformed not into political subjects, but into political *objects*. Valdés’ testimonio can thus be read as part of a thrilling narrative experience because it aestheticizes the capacity of dictatorial power to criminalize absolutely, to transform “someone” into “anyone.” *Tejas Verdes* is significant in that it moves beyond the recognizable categories of marginal subjectivity (the political hero, the indigenous subaltern, the dictatorial victim) and instead articulates the testimonial experience of anyone whomsoever.

In this sense, anyone whomsoever, (or Agamben’s “the living dead . . . that can be killed but not sacrificed”) constitutes the unrepresentable zone of experience from which Valdés’ testimony emerges. In fact, this testimonio’s controversial reception and virtual lack of critical approval at the time of its publication confirms its proximity to a realm of experience beyond all

comprehension or representation. Shortly after his release from the camp Tejas Verdes, Valdés escaped to Barcelona, where in 1974 he wrote down his testimony. Knowing that censorship by the dictatorship would prohibit the distribution of his account in Chile, Valdés sought publication in Spain only at the invitation of his friend, Manuel Garretón.⁶³ Valdés' testimonio received a wide reception in Spain and was translated in several other European countries.⁶⁴ Despite years of Garretón's efforts in Chile to locate a publication outlet for *Tejas Verdes*, it was not until 1996 that the Chilean publishing house LOM Ediciones finally agreed to publish the account. In his "Nota Preliminar," Valdés writes that the text's distribution was not without reprisals. He notes that the vehement backlash to the text's final publication in Chile came less from the political right than from pressures he refers to as "el actual poder político": "la verdad es que ha habido débiles intentos y fuertes oposiciones. No de los militares o de la derecha, que hace tiempo han perdido todo miedo a las palabras, sino de

⁶³ Valdés admits that to publish a testimony about dictatorship during the Franco regime in Spain was no simple feat. Even though the text was prohibited originally, it was granted publication only through an ironic reprisal: the *Ministerio de Información y Turismo* allowed the publication of *Tejas Verdes* when the Chilean government canceled a contract with Spain for the purchase of buses, signing instead a contract with the United States.

⁶⁴ The introduction by Manuel Antonio Garretón ("Prólogo: Tejas Verdes y nuestra memoria cultural," 5-16) provides additional background on Tejas Verdes and the prisoner camps in Chile, as well as a striking account of Garretón's affiliations with Valdés before and following September 11th, 1973. Valdés, a writer, participated in the editing team of a social science journal published at the Catholic University by the *Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Nacional* (CEREN). Garretón was the director of the Center and maintained contact with Valdés after the dictatorship dissolved the CEREN. It was Garretón who originally requested that Valdés write an account of life under dictatorship. Whether this was the cause of Valdés' arrest is negligible, but it was Garretón who later located Valdés in Barcelona and urged him to complete his testimony.

grupos de presión (o de omisión) de lo que tímidamente me atrevería llamar el actual poder político” (3).

I believe the controversial history behind the publication of *Tejas Verdes*, and the “fuertes oposiciones” that Valdés describes as prohibiting the publication of his testimonio, were less a response to the account’s actual subject matter than to the unplaceable character of the account. The testimonial voice in *Tejas Verdes* does not claim any form of political militancy or collective representation. As his own preface indicates, Valdés belongs neither to the left nor the right. His testimony could, in a sense, be that of anyone fallen into the “mala suerte” of suffering violence at the hands of State power. The testimonio’s preface speaks to the indistinct zone from which Valdés articulates his witness account: “Cierto, el texto no tiene ninguna complacencia, ni con la unidad popular ni con los partidos cómplices del golpe. El autor no pertenece a ningún partido, no es miembro de ninguna institución, por lo tanto ‘no representa,’ dentro de la mentalidad política chilena, una experiencia corporativa o colectiva” (3). And later, he writes that his testimony “[e]s el testimonio de alguien que no quiere defender ninguna posición ni se ufana de ningún heroísmo, por el contrario. Tampoco pretende presentarse en autor como la mayor de las víctimas . . . No debe buscarse en este libro ningún análisis político propiamente tal” (14).

Valdés’ indistinct position as “anyone” thus unconceals an important element of domination that is not easily translatable into something to empathize

with or against. (For example, how does one establish solidarity with a victim whose identity remains unidentifiable? How does one mourn with a victim who admits that he has been divested of human emotion?). Valdés' nondescript position reveals that the figure of "whomever" who claims no recognizable political subjectivity within the political system is considered a danger to society. As Levinson describes, although this "whomever" can be killed with impunity, his indistinction simultaneously poses the biggest threat to totalizing power: "These [individuals like Valdés] represent the unidentifiable, untrackable, or unremarkable life: life without place or tag that, because of this (non)quality, can assume its place anywhere, subsume the everywhere . . . overtake not this or that people but the entire 'population'" (*Market and Thought* 54).

Given these reflections, what makes *Tejas Verdes* a thrilling narrative experience is its ostensibly apolitical engagement with politics. That is, Valdés' testimonio aestheticizes the political engagement of the thriller narrative structure: the total politicization of life. Valdés' account is controversial because it *reveals* rather than *resists* the transformation of Chilean politics into biopolitics. It is my contention that through witnessing the production of bare life within the concentration camp – as it is both captured and excluded, both present and absent, both alive and dead –, *Tejas Verdes* not only witnesses the limits of sovereign power, but it articulates a possible space of escape from totalizing systems of politics or knowledge. In other words, if Valdés' testimonio traces the politicization of life within the prisoner camp from a self-proclaimed zone of

indistinction, his narrative also opens up a possible space of escape by which the testimonial voice can move beyond the melodramatic or reconciliatory rhetoric in which it is commonly understood in post-dictatorship. The possibility of such a form of resistance will be taken up in the following readings of *El infierno* and *Mi verdad* as they investigate the connection between biopolitics and neoliberalism.

***El infierno* and *Mi verdad*: Biopolitics and Neoliberalism**

Arce's and Merino's testimonies *El infierno* and *Mi Verdad*, both published towards the beginning of the neoliberal transition, have arguably received more critical attention than other Chilean testimonios published during post-dictatorship. The popularity of Arce's and Merino's testimonial accounts stems less from the content of their experiences than from their controversial position as collaborators with the dictatorship. Since publication in 1993, both texts have provoked significant criticism for confounding the conventional tendency of testimonio to denounce dictatorial violence and to advocate the plight of the victim. These texts are significant in that they witness political crime not from the perspective of the victim, but from the perspective of the victim-turned-criminal, who now attempts to reconcile herself with post-dictatorial society. As such, these testimonios inhabit a liminal zone between victim and criminal, confession and truth, and innocence and guilt that continues to evoke unsettling responses from the reading public.

This zone of indecidability rehearsed in *El infierno* and *Mi verdad* not only unsettles the sanctioned categories of memory politics, which promotes distinguishable boundaries between memory and forgetting, victim and criminal, innocence and guilt. It also rehearses the inscription of bare life into contemporary political existence, revealing that the line separating such categories has, in post-dictatorial Chile, become a topic of vehement political debate. It is my contention that these texts rehearse the testimonial component of the thriller form by giving unguarded witness to the extension of biopolitics beyond the prisoner camp. Agamben affirms that the camp appears whenever power can reduce an individual to such a degree that committing any act against him/her no longer appears as a crime: “[i]f the essence of the camp consists in the materialization of the state of exception and in the consequent creation of a space for naked life as such, we will then have to admit to be facing a camp virtually every time that such a structure is created, regardless of the nature of the crimes committed in it and regardless of the denomination and specific topography it might have” (*Means Without End* 40.1). The possibility of neoliberal modernity as a new biopolitical space – I contend – has not been sufficiently investigated in post-dictatorial thought and reflection.

My reading draws again from Foucault’s lectures on biopolitics at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979. In his lectures Foucault originally proposed to put forth a genealogy of biopolitics, which many critics have described as diverting from its intended mark. Commentators of the lectures

conclude that Foucault instead focused on developing his analysis of liberalism and German and American neoliberalism. But as critics like Stephen Collier argue, this interpretation is not quite adequate as it fails to interrogate the perhaps implicit association between neoliberalism and biopolitics.⁶⁵ Foucault himself comments on this primordial link: “Only when we know what this governmental regime called liberalism was, will we be able to grasp what biopolitics is” (*Birth of Biopolitics* 22). If only in general terms, then, Foucault’s 1978-79 lectures on neoliberalism provide orientation for analyzing biopolitics. And reciprocally, biopolitics offers a framework for reflecting upon neoliberalism. From there it would be just one small step to interrogating Chilean neoliberalism and the association between the political prisoner camp and the space of neoliberal modernity.

Foucault located in liberalism a new paradigm of governmental logic that was wholly concerned with regulating bodies, be that biological bodies or the social body – the “population” –. Foucault’s conception of governmentality understood individual subjects not as legal subjects (of the law) or docile bodies (of disciplinary power) but as living, breathing beings (Collier 19). Since previous classical forms of power proved too invasive and too disruptive, liberal government – in France and Britain particularly –, concerned itself with carving out a less intrusive relationship between the legal domain of the State and the

⁶⁵ For an insightful application of Foucauldian biopolitics, see Collier’s *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics*, 2011, and also Levinson’s *Market and thought: meditations on the political and biopolitical*, 2004.

natural order of its living constituents. The onset of neoliberalism, then, streamlined a form of *laissez faire* government policies that sought to make the “autonomous” laws of the economy and social changes appear as naturally occurring events. In this sense, if, in his analysis of neoliberal society, Foucault traces a new figuration of modern man (defined at the juncture of life, economics and language) who emerges as the living subject of state regulation, then biopolitics refers to the total integration of this life into the “natural givens” of contemporary political practice. Biopolitics and neoliberalism thus conjoin at the point where government rationality virtually disappears; that is, where it assumes a natural, “taken-for-granted” role in defining the biological, economic and social life of its subjects.

In his analysis of globalized culture and biopolitics, Levinson draws the connection between bare life and Chilean neoliberalism. His analysis demonstrates how, for the case of Chile, even though the criminal treatment of bodies is no longer carried out in political prisoner camps as it was during the dictatorship, it has transformed in post-dictatorial democracy into an even fiercer form of terror: that of the market economy. The experience of having survived a political crime now actually promotes the market’s dominance; that is, the way the victim’s experience is marketed and reproduced as always already within the category of “testimonial victim” itself constitutes a form of totalizing power. Levinson’s argument thus associates the regulation of bare life in the prisoner camp through control of physical bodies with the regulation in neoliberal

modernity through control of subjectivity. Unlike in the concentration camps, where the biopolitical foundation lie in the right of sovereign power to physically kill the victim (the figure of *homo sacer*) within the confines of the camp, in the society of mass consumerism biopolitics works to regulate the behavior and categorization of every *living* subject within the population: “the biological ‘living on,’ not of the individual, but of . . . a humanity” (Levinson, *Market and Thought* 51).

In the wake of mass political murder, biopolitics strives to ensure that life will continue and that such catastrophic violence as dictatorship will never occur again. And the surest way to regulate the survival of the population is to eliminate the one thing it cannot reach: death. According to Levinson, to erase the violence of murder requires a totally different kind of violence: “Regulation’s power rests, not in the murder of the enemy, but in the murder of the *dying* that some ‘other’ embodies” (*Market and Thought* 51, italics are Levinson’s). In other words, to guarantee *life* means to regulate every aspect of it – to make the undefinable experiences, figures or histories easily recognizable and easily apprehensible. Specifically, this requires that the victim’s testimony and the horror of individual death be sublimated in such a way that the focus be placed on the heroism and survival of the collective victim.

The terror of the neoliberal market thus resides in the fact that it is actually not important that traumatic experiences are remembered or forgotten, but rather that they remain stripped of all singularity – that the individual subjects

be lumped into the homogenized category of “victim.”⁶⁶ For as long as past horrors can be de-individualized, the market can continue to legitimize itself as the natural, if not only, alternative to dictatorial violence, and can continue to cover over its origins *in* dictatorial violence. In the Chilean context, neoliberalism succeeds, and has succeeded, because it dramatizes the suffering endured by all victims as a selling point upon which the market justifies itself as the natural guarantor of life. Neoliberalism sets itself off against the horrors of dictatorship by marketing the testaments of political victims as dramatic tales of suffering, overcoming and eventual reconciliation. To this regard, Levinson notes that it is not surprising that the terror of dictatorship emerges particularly in its aftermath: “horror’s consolation, in this latter context [post-dictatorship], is the market, where . . . terror thereby operates as a commodity, as a selling point for the transitional government (whose highest value is to be ‘not terrible’)” (“Dictatorship and Overexposure” 110).

The link between victimized life and neoliberalism in post-dictatorship can also be visualized in the conflation of concepts like truth and justice. Immediately following the Chilean dictatorship, only few testimonial narratives emerged, which allowed for dictatorial officials to deny that political crimes ever

⁶⁶ Peris Blanes observes that the transitional government’s focus on the rhetoric of consensus and economic progress served to not only smooth over the individual victim accounts, but to disassociate the responsibility of dictatorial violence from any concrete actor. This gesture of disassociating culpability had the effect of shifting the attention from necessary guilt to the suffering of those affected, which blurred the contours of those implicated in violence, and even caused President Aylwin to beg forgiveness “in the name of all Chileans.” In Peris Blanes’ words, the idea behind the project of reconciliation was to create rhetoric attentive to the cases of death and disappearance, “but in no way [to] convict anyone or seek juridical responsibility for the crimes committed” (*Historia* 275; my translation).

took place. But as the number of testimonios denouncing political violence increased during the 1980s and 90s, and as mass graves like Lonquén and later Patio 29 were made public knowledge, people began to expect that the truth revealed through testimonios and the appearance of dead bodies would result in some direct judicial results. In other words, it was believed that the “truth” of the victims would produce justice. However, the government responded to these demands by delivering only a simulated form of justice to the implicated military figures. Levinson presents the example of the so-called “Contreras issue,” which involved the 1995 trial of DINA officials Manuel Contreras and Pedro Espinoza (“Dictatorship and Overexposure” 110).⁶⁷ Contreras and Espinoza were put on trial for human rights abuses and for orchestrating the murder of high Chilean official Orlando Letelier and his American associate Ronni Moffitt on September 21, 1976 in Washington DC. The trials held the public in high suspense as Chileans awaited the justice verdicts. Paradoxically, however, the trials did not reveal the exaction of justice, as the government seemed to claim. Contreras and Espinoza were tried and found guilty, receiving only lax prison sentences of seven and three years respectively.

In reality, the Contreras trial represented what Tomás Moulián calls a simulacrum of justice, a complex operation that shrouded the real terror of post-

⁶⁷ Contreras served as the director of the DINA from its initiation in 1973 to its replacement in 1977 by the CNI. From 1973 to 1977, Contreras directed the DINA in an international hunt to detain and eliminate political opponents of the dictatorship, especially members of the Communist and Socialist Parties and the MIR. This operation became known as Operation Condor, which expanded to include the participation of the military regimes in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. The assassination of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt in Washington DC was revealed as part of Operation Condor.

dictatorship (64-70). On the one hand, Contreras and Espinoza's indictment was presented to the Chilean public and the United States government as the "just" punishment for their crimes. On the other hand, however, the sentences of seven and three years proved totally disproportionate to the nature of the crimes committed by the DINA under Contreras' direction. Moulián asserts that through the trial, Contreras was exempted for the real responsibility of his crimes. The indictment served as a decisive scapegoat operation that diverted the nation's attention from the regime officials to Contreras. Thus, by proving Contreras' guilt, regime officials – many of whom occupied positions of power in the neoliberal administrations – appeared innocent. Furthermore, the case stood as a showcase trial: it served as a way for the Chilean government to prove its "just nature" and to stave off the international critiques accusing the military for murdering its own officials on foreign soil (Levinson, "Dictatorship and Overexposure" 110). In this sense, by allowing the incrimination of Contreras and Espinoza, the regime officials retained impunity. What the Contreras trial ultimately demonstrated is that testimonio's claims to reveal the "truth" of dictatorial violence would not result in any form of legitimate justice, but only its simulation.

Official investigations like the Valech Report (November 2004) beg to be analyzed in this light. On the one hand, these narratives produce a degree of "truth" by documenting the incidences and forms of torture endured by dictatorial victims. The report, however, merely simulates real justice, as it never reveals

the names of the military officers responsible for the torture. Furthermore, the sections that present real torture testimonies also remove the names of the actual victims. For example, Chapter V of the report, titled “Métodos de tortura: definiciones y testimonios,” lists the accounts of torture with such precision and repetition that each appears as virtually interchangeable with the next:

Mujer, detenida en noviembre de 1973. Relato de su reclusión en el Regimiento Tucapel, IX Región: Al llegar a estas dependencias me hicieron desnudar, acostarme en un escaño [...]

Hombre, detenido en diciembre de 1973. Relato de su reclusión en la 6ª Comisaría de Carabineros, Región Metropolitana: Fui amarrado a una tabla [...]

Hombre, detenido en febrero de 1974. Relato de su reclusión en la Academia Naval de Guerra (Cuartel Silva Palma), V Región: Se me hizo desnudar y ponerme bajo la ducha, mientras caía el agua me propinaban descargas eléctricas [...]⁶⁸

The testimonies appear as the repetitive sequence of anonymous torture descriptions, which reduce the victims’ experiences to mere numbers and statistics. In this sense, by reproducing over and over testimonial fragments, the official truth narratives incorporate the victim’s experience into the center of their claims to truth. Yet, they do actually very little to produce any real legal justice. The impunity that was granted to regime officials – as revealed in the Contreras case – had already annulled the possibility of using accounts of violence to incriminate the perpetrators of State terror. In fact, the real testimonial material used in the Valech Report will remain classified for the next fifty years, and can

⁶⁸ *Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura* (Comisión Valech), Chapter V, p 267-268. For the full report, see <http://www.purochile.rrojasdatbank.info/ddhh001.htm>.

therefore not be used in trials concerning human rights violations (*Commission of Inquiry* n/p). The testimonial experience, even in democracy, thus remains symbolically confined within the space of the camp: It remains included in national truth narratives, but simultaneously excluded from any real judicial action. In this sense, the victimized life presented in the truth reports demonstrates the continuation of Agamben's notion of the camp within the space of post-dictatorship.

The testimonies of Luz Arce and Alejandra Merino epitomize the “bottom-up” political engagement of the thriller structure by giving witness to this link between life in the prisoner camp and life within neoliberal Chile. I read in these two testimonies a thriller logic that reveals neoliberal modernity as the possible continuation of prisoner camp violence, and as the contemporary biopolitical space that Agamben began to theorize in *Homo Sacer*.⁶⁹ These witness accounts are unique in that they reveal the nuances of the position of “anyone whomsoever.” Their testimonies reveal the figure of “anyone whomsoever” as, on the one hand, the victim of the process by which neoliberalism reduces the testimonial subject to just one more account available for consumer consumption, and on the other hand, as a fluid and mobile figure through which a subject of terror can escape the category of “subject” altogether.

⁶⁹ Toward the end of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben mentions airports, certain outskirts of the great post-industrial cities and also the gated communities of the United States as possible biopolitical spaces. His point is that these zones share close resemblance to the camp as naked life and political life – if only in certain moments – enters a space of complete indeterminacy.

Arce and Merino's accounts tell of the respective experiences of two MIR affiliates who were taken prisoner by the dictatorship and who, after undergoing torture in the political prisoner camps, eventually collaborated with the DINA. More than investigating the effects of totalizing power, Arce and Merino's testimonies are confessional narratives of betrayal and conversion: betrayal of their MIR comrades, their Christian conversion and their desired reincorporation back into post-dictatorial society. Both Arce and Merino open their confessions self-identifying as criminals: Arce names herself "Luz Arce, la delatora, la triadora," and Merino begins her account calling herself "la flaca Alejandra colaboradora" for surrendering the names of her comrades over to the DINA. Merino recalls the moment of her betrayal: "No pude soportar más la tortura . . . entre la desnudez, los enstertores producidos por la electricidad, la vejación, los golpes, grité el primer nombre: María Angélica Andreoli. Sentí que todo había terminado para mí. Había traicionado lo que más amaba en ese entonces" (*Mi Verdad* 6).

The rest of Merino's confessional recounts sixteen years of the unspeakable pain and guilt of colluding with the enemy and giving many of her friends over to their death. In her opening chapter she expresses her hopes that the publication of her "truth" will appease her guilt and allow her to reintegrate back into post-dictatorial society: "si entrego este testimonio es porque más allá de mi deseo de volver a la vida, está la aspiración de alcanzar justicia . . . Me anima la convicción que sólo la Verdad hará posible la Justicia y la

Reconciliación en Chile” (7-8). She reiterates her desire to uncover the truth by boldfacing every name she mentions and by sealing her testimonio with an addendum of names. This list, which records the names of DINA functionaries, serves to expose the individuals with whom she collaborated and to reveal the conspiracy of dictatorship.

Luz Arce’s testimony shares similarity with Merino’s, since their roles as DINA collaborators associated them with many of the same officials. However, lacking in the denunciatory rhetoric and the listing-out of dictatorial criminals, Arce’s testimonio focuses more on her inner journey toward Christianity. Through her associations with a Catholic priest, Arce undergoes a moral transformation, which, she describes, compelled her to investigate her wrongdoings and to seek reconciliation. Arce’s testament of her conversion can be read as an attempt to legitimize her reincorporation back into post-dictatorial society.

There are two notable elements of Merino’s and Arce’s texts that I believe reveal the conjunction between biopolitics and neoliberal modernity, and that illustrate the testimonial roots of the thriller structure: Merino’s addendum to her testimony and Arce’s discussion of her conversion. Nelly Richard, along with Diamela Eltit and Francesca Lombardo, who have presented perhaps one of the most adroit analyses of Merino’s and Arce’s testimonies, highlight the indeterminate zone that both women occupy between victim and criminal. Moreover, their reading anticipates the theoretical transaction between

Agamben's notion of biopolitical life and neoliberal Chile. Eltit, Richard and Lombardo's analysis of post-dictatorial Chile dialogues closely with Agamben's thoughts on the indeterminate terrains of Western politics, in which "[e]very attempt to rethink the political space of the West must begin with the clear awareness that we no longer know anything of the classical distinction between *zoe* and *bios*, between private life and political existence, between man as a simple living being at home in the house and man's political existence in the city" (*Homo Sacer* 187).

Regarding the addendum to Merino's confession, Eltit, Richard and Lombardo argue that the list identifying the dictatorial criminals pushes her testimony into an indeterminate space of enunciation between disloyalty-confession-accusation ("Lo que brilla" 30). This unlocalizable zone from which Merino narrates her testimony dialogues closely with present-day Chile as it reiterates suspicion and the reduction of human life as the preeminent effects of neoliberalism (Richard, *Cultural Residues* 36). Suspicion and the homogenization of the testimonial victim create the effect of living under the sign of a conspiracy as well as of the increasing politicization of life. If it is indeed true – returning to the iceberg metaphor referenced in the previous chapter – that the transitional governments have promised political authenticity, and that all of the official investigations, rhetoric and actions of post-dictatorship advocate for truth and justice for the victims of dictatorial violence, there is also a growing awareness of hidden conspiracies and ambiguities within the current matrices of

power. Richard, echoing Agamben, describes present-day Chile as if it were the context of a thriller mystery novel: “There is a growing feeling that the division between private (what is secret) and public (what can be confessed) has shifted its bearings to continue functioning from within democratic officialdom, filling its corridors with secret orders, with classified materials, of clandestine deals, or indirect orders” (*Cultural Residues* 36).

I believe that Merino’s list of names points to the reductive nature of neoliberal politics. Yet, if Merino’s list positions her as neither victim nor criminal, neither innocent nor guilty, but rather something in between, then how, if at all, are we to comprehend this part of her confession? For example, if this naming act intends to help Merino free herself from her criminal past and arrive at “truth,” does it not also mechanically rehearse the duplicitous act of surrendering the names of her comrades over to the enemy? How are we, as readers of testimonio, to regard her if her experience is neither that of a criminal nor properly a victim (Eltit, Richard and Lombardo, “Lo que brilla” 30)? And how can we trust the validity of this “truth” narrative when its author betrayed everything she knew as truth, she herself even claiming to have occasionally confessed “la verdad a medias” (Merino, *Mi Verdad* 137) to the justice tribunals?

These questions are significant in that they point to the way in which Merino’s testimony is positioned within an indeterminate zone between categories of criminal and victim, truth and confession. That is, by virtue of her betrayal, first of her comrades and then of the DINA officials, Merino’s testimony

rehearses both the process by which neoliberal market practices strip her witness account of its singularity, and also how she herself might escape such a process. By virtue of the zone of indistinction it occupies, I believe Merino's testimony transgresses market practices that would reduce her account to either that of a victim or a criminal for the purpose of allying with or against her. On the other hand, Merino's testimony evokes back to Lacan's notion of the Real: it points to an unidentifiable moment of "otherness" that remains irreducible to dominant systems of interpretation and understanding.

Merino's list of criminals also, however, points to the danger faced by women like Merino and Arce who, as neither victim nor criminal, do not easily fit into recognizable categories of subjectivity. What the list of DINA functionaries ultimately does is reiterate Merino's indistinction. In other words, it does not point to any form of singular truth that might redeem her from her past; rather, it exemplifies the process by which her testimonial experience becomes relativized by the neoliberal market. Since many of the names identified in her list, including that of Manuel Contreras and other members of the military junta, had by 1993 already been revealed to the Chilean public, her testimony serves to dramatize truth as an empty simulation. Merino's endless repetition of names rehearses the market's endless reproduction of the victim's experience. It gives witness to the way in which the testimonial victim is reduced to bare life: stripped of all political urgency, the victim's narrative becomes homogenized as just one more commodity through which the market can exert its dominance.

Recalling the characteristics proper to the thriller, Ralph Harper reminds us that at the center of the thriller structure is a deep-seated concern at exposing the forms of death and dying that remain unidentifiable.⁷⁰ The thriller desires to unconceal what Richard calls the “strange bodies,” the residual experiences and the fragmented voices that remain irreducible to sanctioned modes of interpretation (*Insubordination* 6). And Copjec writes that the thriller exposes an uncanny, totalizing terrain that appears to its subjects in always indistinct fragments: “nothing remains veiled in its [the thriller’s] universe only to be given meaning in some future moment” (ix). The thriller hero is painfully aware of the exposure he/she carries around, “like an excess body for which he[/she] can find no resting place” (Copjec ix).

I locate in Merino’s witness account the roots of the post-dictatorial thriller structure: her narrative gives an unguarded testament to the totalizing nature of biopolitical power that, in the words of Levinson, erases that which it cannot regulate. Her testimony witnesses neoliberalism as the modern biopolitical space in which no one can remain hidden; anyone and everyone can become a victim. Levinson associates biopolitical power precisely with the violence of neoliberal consensus:

It [consensus] operates by overexposing, over and over, the already identified, accepted, and seen. This overexposure, because difficult to comprehend (like an overexposed photo),

⁷⁰ To recall Harper’s quote, he says that “All thrillers are basically concerned with two things: *death* and *responsibility* . . . Few of us talk about death or guilt, or seem much concerned about either. But we read about them in thriller literature. What we do not acknowledge openly and directly, we at least read about. (60-1)

generates the illusion that there is a hidden truth underneath publication, a missing space that the oppressed or voiceless might come to occupy, and that certain testimony might reveal. But overexposure, in fact, places all before the eye; there is no "underneath" of the overexposed. It does not hide but blurs the scene as it relates over and over, upon a single plane without depth, the Same. ("Dictatorship and Overexposure" 117)

Neoliberal consensus, then, is violent in that it hides nothing but renders everything as always easily reproducible. Stripped of the immediacy and singularity of the experience she references, Merino's list rehearses the power of the market to infinitely reduce human existence to the status of bare life.

Returning to Agamben's analysis of the concentration camp, he has affirmed that the production of bare life extends beyond the physical localization of the prisoner camp. He writes, "To an order without localization . . . corresponds now a localization without order (that is, the camp as permanent space of exception).

The political system no longer orders forms of life and juridical norms in a determinate space; rather, it contains within itself a dislocating localization that exceeds it and in which virtually every form of life and every norm can be captured" (*Means Without End* 44).

The second notable aspect I will draw from these two testimonies is Luz Arce's discussion of her "conversion" to Christianity, which she claims provided her a sense of resolution to her fragmented past. According to Arce, she discovered the error of her ways suddenly and unexpectedly following three days of illness-induced delirium. For Arce, conversion to Christianity would

surely bring forgiveness for her crimes and successful incorporation back into society:

I saw a new light that would help me make a greater difference and start a new life with the knowledge that human justice, as given by the world, is radically different from the justice granted by God . . . I started to dream the beautiful dream of reconciliation, reconciliation rooted in truth. I knew that those who can look from the perspective of the marginalized, whose of us who are discriminated against . . . who can put themselves in the shoes of an outcast like me, all of them would be on my side.
(337-38)

Yet, the conversion to Christianity implied in this passage actually reiterates Arce's liminal position between the figures of criminal and victim. As Levinson affirms, the transformation like that depicted in Arce's testimonio is not a tangible shift from criminal to victim, or victim back to criminal; rather, she attests to overcome both associations through a spiritual transformation:

Transformation is from immorality – she posits both her betrayal and the dictatorship as immoral – to good. Now a pious Christian, a good mother, and a devoted wife, Merino claims to have located the right path: in God, Church, and country. Ostracized by the left as a "squealer," and never accepted by the right, she now asks for absolution for her past ways so as to reinsert herself back into "the community." ("Dictatorship and Overexposure" 112)

In other words, rejected by both the left and the right, purification through the figure of the Church constitutes a line of escape from partisan denunciations and the only outlet through which Arce might reintegrate herself back into society.

But similar to Merino's case, how are we to read the authenticity of Arce's conversion from collaborator to devout Christian? Her spiritual transformation is perhaps no less disturbing than her previous transformation into a DINA

collaborator. In fact, there exists something uncanny and undecidable about the truth of Arce's religious conversion, which is revealed by the prologue. Written by a Catholic priest, the prologue is intended to resolve the undecidability of Arce's transition to Christianity and to cover over her betrayal with the mark of the Church. The religious stamp of authenticity anticipates our acceptance of her conversion: "the undecidability of the truth that generally characterizes confession narratives has here been decided by a prologue that excuses us – as readers – from exercising our capacity to judge" (Eltit, Richard and Lombardo, "Lo que brilla" 31, my translation).

It is not difficult to see, however, that the confession's authentication by a priest underscores the very reconciliation that the act of testimonio seeks to criticize. Taken as the religious stamp of approval on Arce's conversion, the prologue serves to market Arce's discovery of the church as the "natural" and only acceptable alternative for her. Not only that, but it labels Arce as the model example of the traitor-turned-obedient Christian. To be sure, her testimony, which would otherwise read as a harrowing account of betrayal and conspiracy, is presented in the prologue as a story of harmonious reconciliation with society via the Church. Arce herself attests submission to the social values condoned by the Church – Christian piety, devout motherhood and good citizenry – as the "natural" resolution to her violent past: "Father Gerardo . . . introduced me to God. I owe him for having taught me to value family, being a mother, my promises" (*El infierno*).

Yet, Arce's testimony paradoxically underscores "conversion" not as freedom or escape, but as a return to the most traditional practices of contemporary Chilean society: those of the Catholic Church. The irony of such an "escape" is that it is not an escape at all, since Arce's transformation only reinforces her association with some of the forms and institutions that were at the foundation of the Pinochet regime (especially as they pertained to women): Church, austerity, family traditionalism.⁷¹ As Levinson notes, for Arce the place for escape is the in-between, and because this position presents "a counter to communism (Allende), dictatorship, and the aggression between the two, [it] is 'good for all'" ("Dictatorship and Overexposure" 112). As such, her conversion suspends her within a space of indeterminacy between forms of subjectivizing power: between dictatorship and neoliberal democracy, military regimen and religious dogma, and between physical domination and adherence to moral codes. If, in the prisoner camp Arce faced reduction to mere biological existence, in post-dictatorship she experiences submission to subjectification; that is, conformity to a rigid set of social norms and prescriptions, outside of which her reintegration into society would be invalid.

⁷¹ This is not to propose that the Chilean Catholic Church itself supported dictatorship. In fact, the Catholic Church was recognized early on as one of most conspicuous defenders of human rights. The Church urged the formation of the ecumenical Social Foundation of Christian Churches, FASIC, (*Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianas*) and the Vicariate of Solidarity (*Vicaría de la Solidaridad*), both of which provided social relief to dictatorial victims and their families. The Catholic Church was, however, linked in many ways to the Chilean conservative right that supported the dictatorship. Prior to the military overthrow, a predominant belief among the right was that a change of mentality was absolutely necessary among Chileans, and that the only way to accomplish this was through a return to the values of conservative Catholicism and Chilean nationalism. In this sense, Catholicism among many of the Chilean conservative sectors became a stronghold of austerity and tradition and an expression of resistance against the Popular Unity socialist reforms.

I believe that *El infierno* rehearses the testimonial roots of the post-dictatorial thriller form: the preeminent political engagement of this confession is giving witness to how the market impetus seeks to reduce “other” experience that it cannot regulate. As Eltit, Richard and Lombardo affirm in their analysis, “[the narrative] of Luz Arce is converted into just one truth among many, all of which – as different as they might be – are easily recognizable because they share the same passive mark of a diversity that is applauded as the site of non-contradiction” (“Lo que brilla” 30, my translation). Arce’s testimony therefore not only bears witness to the politization of life, since what would seem as the most apolitical activity for a witness of dictatorial violence – spiritual conversion – is ultimately what strips her political history of its radical singularity. On the other hand, her confession simultaneously opens up to a space, perhaps a third space – between political subjectivities like victim and victimizer, and criminality and innocence – in which “anyone whomsoever” paradoxically emerges as the liminal figure through which an alternative space of political understanding can be theorized. It is to the political implications of the thriller structure that I now turn. The following chapter will attempt a political reading of the thriller structure.

CHAPTER IV

THE THRILLER AND GLOBAL WAR

In the previous chapters I have attempted to outline narrative components of the post-dictatorial thriller structure. By way of repetition, the thriller denotes a loose narrative structure evocative of the basic detective story. Unlike this latter form, however, in which the crime traditionally occurs in the past, the Latin American thriller form engages the conventional investigation formula with sensational criminal elements – such as political murder, institutional corruption and conspiracy –, understood as events ongoing in the present or always lurking on the narrative horizon. Following the exhaustion of national literatures and after their boom reconfigurations, detective fiction and testimonial accounts have arguably become the dominant literary forms of post-dictatorship. These forms constitute mirroring narrative strands of the post-dictatorial thriller structure. By conjoining the “top-down” detective perspective and the “bottom-up” witness account, the Latin American thriller structure makes a powerful exploration of the networks of violence underlying post-dictatorial society.

Chapters Two and Three outlined the structural components of the thriller form: Chapter Two made visible the development of the detective narrative through the framework of national modernization, the notion of melodrama and the melancholic detective. Narrated from the position of a rhetorical detective figure – be that an amateur detective, forensic scientist or a contemporary critic

– the detective narrative perspective performs a “top-down” investigation of post-dictatorial society, many times making visible the melancholic pitfalls of attempts to reconstitute marginal subjects and their political legacies as a strategy of resistance against neoliberal modernization. Chapter Three fleshed out the “bottom-up” testimonial component, locating in the witness account the preeminent political impetus of the post-dictatorial thriller structure. Through an analysis of three Chilean testimonios, I demonstrated how the account of the victimized “other” narrates an unguarded engagement with political violence that attempts to capture the unrepresentable – the Real – within the literary.

The following two chapters will examine the political implications of the post-dictatorial thriller form within a more global context. In light of the New York and Washington terrorist attacks and the recent global threat of terror, this chapter attempts to see the thriller form as the most apt narrative structure for today’s post-9/11 circumstance. According to Italian thinker Carlo Galli, the end of the Cold War ushered in a wave of globalization that, now especially after September 11th, marks our world as a world of war. And as John Beverley’s most recent book *Latinamericanism After 9/11* seems to suggest, any examination of national literary forms after the September 11th attacks must be measured against the threat of global violence that has now become so central to international politics.

For Galli, if globalization implies that every corner of the world today is in immediate contact with the world as a whole, then global war gives name to the

conflictual side of the fluid circuit established between the local and the global. In global war, local conflict becomes a global concern, and vice versa, global concerns turn to affect local situations. Perhaps more importantly, global war describes the mode of international association accompanying the decline of the modern and the late-modern State. For Galli, this means that the political dualities around which the modern nation-state was set to function – internal/external, friend/enemy, national/global – have been definitively ruptured.⁷² In the case of Chile, then, if the detective narrative of the 80s and 90s can be read as a melancholic trope in response to the demise of a previous form of nationalism and its political figures, a Latin American thriller form looks beyond the nation and its concomitant dualities in order to engage with the increasing globalization of violence.

This chapter understands the field of post-dictatorship as still largely influenced by the crisis of the late-modern State configuration, which, as will be subsequently discussed, maintains a firm dependence on concrete political oppositions and subjectivities. Memory politics in Chile, in fact, fits in with this oppositional paradigm, as it is suspended between the dualism of memory and forgetting: between the impulse to cover over the dictatorial past and the desire to retribute it. More specifically, post-dictatorial memory politics encompasses efforts to either cover over the past through narratives of consensus (such as the

⁷² Global war might not always manifest in openly violent acts, but gives name to the mode of polemicity in which “any point on earth is – in principle, if not in fact – immediately and directly exposed to the global flux of violence without the intervening mediation of the State” (Galli IXi).

iceberg narrative of neoliberal modernization and also the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report) and by opposite attempts to symbolically rescue the victim(s) of history as a form of resistance against neoliberalism (as demonstrated in the new detective novel *La ciudad está triste*, for example).⁷³ The oppositional nature of memory politics facilitates a (melancholic) dependence on fixed historical subjects: for at the same time that narratives of reconciliation strip the dictatorial victim of the singularity of his/her experience, they also paradoxically reproduce the victim, over and over, as *victim*. By the same token, the opposing reaction to counterpoise a collective figure from the past against neoliberalism seeks emancipation from political violence always and only through the restitution of a marginal subject.

This dualistic treatment the past not only demonstrates two sides of the same (exhausted) debate regarding how to deal with dictatorial victims after almost four decades since the military coup. It also reveals the context of post-dictatorial Chile as indebted to the Cold War – or late-modern – political configuration. Galli understands the Cold-War framework of the second half of the 20th century as the direct legacy of Cold War antagonisms. The “glacial” politics of this period left the world divided between two superpowers whose military, economic and ideological influence cut political space between

⁷³ Indeed, neoliberal projects of reconciliation attempting to relativize the dictatorial experience seek to cover over the past for the sake of economic stability and national progress. On the other hand, many post-dictatorial cultural forms take an (almost militant) oppositional strategy by rescuing a marginal subject (the victim, the peripheral figure) as a repository of cultural difference against rampant modernization.

oppositional fronts: between countries allied with liberal democracy and those with communist forces.

According to Galli, the “glacial” world dominated by the superpowers concluded, politically speaking, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The 1990s intensified a period of global integration, in which Chile and other Latin American countries like Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador were urged to continue drastic neoliberal reforms that opened their economies to the free flow of global capital. This event further helped usher in the so-called global age and a new modality of international associations in which concepts like the nation, the State, and the subject would no longer sustain political discourse in a primary manner. Yet, as has been discussed previously, post-dictatorial Chile and postwar Central America, among other Latin American countries, remain deeply divided between past and present, as well as traumatized by unresolved histories of violence, impunity and corruption. In this sense, the neoliberal ideologies that were violently introduced by the dictatorship carry from their very beginnings the crisis of Cold War dualities. This crisis has been carried through and symbolized in post-dictatorial literature and thought. I believe the post-dictatorial and postwar settings are viable contexts for an examination of global war, as it is in these contexts where the crisis of the late-modern State and the political dualities it engendered can be visualized.

Galli’s significant book is *Political Spaces and Global War* (2002), in which he puts forward a bold critique of German philosopher Carl Schmitt’s most

recognized political theory. Briefly summarized, Schmitt defined modern “politics” as the confrontation between friends and enemies.⁷⁴ For Schmitt, in modern conflicts, the internal friend and external foe greet one another as opponents, and this oppositional relationship has the purpose of bringing conflict to a peace resolution. For Galli, global modernity dissolves this clear-cut division. The friend/enemy figures are no longer easily distinguishable in conflict. Rather, global war implies a drastic reconfiguration of the nature of violence, as well as of the nature of the enemy. For Galli, in the age of global war, “anything can happen anywhere, at any moment” since the State can no longer protect its citizens from external turbulence” (162). Violence no longer constitutes a momentary conflict that ends in resolution; nor does the criminal appear as some recognizable Other who we can dialectically investigate and punish. The enemy, in the Schmittian sense, has disappeared; he now emerges only as “an alterity that is at the same time infinitely distant and monstrous, on the one hand, and internal and disquieting, on the other. However much we might want to distance him or place him at the exterior, the Enemy today presents himself as the Disturber, the specter of all that is internal and domestic – as our own wicked caricature, our Double, our Shadow” (141). For Galli, a narrativization of global war would play out like an international suspense thriller, in which there is no resolution and no peace, and in which the threat of violence

⁷⁴ According to Schmitt, the edifice of contemporary politics rests on the division between these two figures. He says, “The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy . . . [this distinction] denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union, or separation, of an association or dissociation” (*Concept* 26).

is an immediate and ongoing event, “without frontiers, [and] without advances or retreats” (162).

Of interest to these next two chapters is to theorize the extent to which the post-dictatorial thriller structure can be analyzed within Galli’s framework of global war. These sections propose that the thriller structure not only makes visible the crisis of the nation-State and the dualities it sustained. It also seeks to move beyond this crisis by revealing the subjectivities and zones of testimonial experience that emerge from the dissolution of the friend/enemy distinction. Galli has affirmed that today the State is increasingly constituted by subjects who are “escaping,” that is, by subjects who break with previous categories of subjectivity – like victim or criminal, friend or enemy –. It should be displaced by figures that escape into a privacy difficult to register, who occupy instead a mobile and anonymous life drastically lacking in any relationship to institutional (State) politics.⁷⁵ We could define the protagonist of global war as a non-subject, who is not only without the State, but is also without a concrete and stable identity. The subject of global modernity is only and always immediately a body – he is *anybody*.

I believe that the ambiguous figure of “anybody whomsoever” provides the theoretical grounds for a more critical exploration of post-dictatorship: this figure not only emerges from the crisis of Cold War politics, but also rehearses

⁷⁵ For a more detailed description of “escaping” subjects, see Galli p. 159 and Sandro Mezzadra’s “The Right to Escape.”

the process by which the onset of global war leaves behind liminal spaces of subjectivity that can no longer be defined by the State, but that have not yet acquired resonance within a globalized world system. In Chile, this includes predominantly dictatorial survivors, whose experiences of heinous violence cannot be justified by national legal efforts, but can neither be resolved by a global human rights culture. It is useful to recall that this Foucauldian character of “anyone whomsoever” establishes a theoretical link with Agamben’s *homo sacer* from the previous chapter: both describe a powerless figure hounded into the center of politics due to forces beyond his/her control and comprehension. Agamben used the concentration camp as his referent in order to illustrate how an individual – *homo sacer* – can be reduced to bare life, or de-individualized to the point of mere existence. Agamben reminds us, however, that the camp can exist wherever the conditions for bare life are created, regardless of the nature of the crimes committed in it and of the specific topography it might have.⁷⁶ In this sense, if *homo sacer* is the non-subject who witnesses bare life within the space of the prisoner camp, the figure of “anyone whomsoever” gives witness to the production of bare life within global modernity.

The significance of “anyone whomsoever” is therefore two-fold: this figure not only gives witness to how capitalist globality might be understood as a

⁷⁶ Describing the formulation of *homo sacer* within the camp, Agamben writes that “Inasmuch as its inhabitants have been stripped of every political status and reduced completely to naked life, the camp is also the most absolute biopolitical space that has ever been realized – a space in which power confronts nothing other than pure biological life without any mediation. The camp is the paradigm itself of political space at the point in which politics become biopolitics and the *homo sacer* become indistinguishable from the citizen” (*Means Without Ends* 40.1).

different kind of camp, where in the absence of the State the individual can, at any moment, be reduced to bare life by forms of power. It also articulates possible forms of escape. By virtue of his anonymity and mobility, “anyone whomsoever,” the non-subject, carves out “escaping” modes of subjectivity that no longer need the State to exist politically and socially. I believe that the figure of “anyone whomsoever” – the figure who can be killed but not sacrificed – offers the starting point for a third political space, which is, precisely, the space the thriller form seeks to articulate. Recalling the ambiguous positions of figures like Luz Arce and Alejandra “la Flaca” Merino from the previous section, “anyone whomsoever” represents the trace of that which remains excluded from, and always irreducible to, subjectification.⁷⁷ As neither the victim nor criminal, neither national nor properly global, this figure inhabits a liminal space that emerges today as a third space of political thought. Taking from Alberto Moreiras and Homi Bhabha, we can loosely define the third space as an in-between space of articulation that is useful for overcoming dualist categories of thought and identity.⁷⁸ It is a space of indeterminacy that, in the words of Gareth

⁷⁷ Recalling Althusser’s well-known essay on ideology, the “category of the subject” has always constituted a form of domination. As the grounding principle of ideology, “the category of the subject is only constitutive of such ideology to the degree that all ideology has the function to constitute concrete individuals into subjects” (*Lenin* 171). Thus, a political practice that attempts to break with subjectivity is one that attempts to think beyond the subject as the foundation of political thought. This kind of practice is not only possible, but it is an essential step toward moving beyond the impasse of post-dictatorial melancholy. (Agamben reminds us of the stalemate and paradoxical notion of attempts to cling to the past and its political subjects: one is fervently attached to something/someone irreparably lost, and consequently “there is no escape because one cannot flee from what cannot even be reached” (*Stanzas* 6)).

⁷⁸ For Bhabha, it is the indeterminate spaces in-between dominant subject positions that are heralded as the locale of the transgression and displacement of dominant cultural structures and

Williams, functions as “an interrupted and interrupting narrative rendered possible because of denarrativation and exhaustion” (154). This space offers a powerful alternative to memory politics and exhausted modes of reflection, as it “strives neither to lament nor to reconstitute the contours of its lost objects (collective identities, identifications, cultural objects and practices, tools and forms of interpretation, etc.)” (Williams 154).

The possibility of a politics of “anyone whomsoever” will be examined in these next chapters using, in particular, Galli’s critique of Schmitt’s concept of the *nomos* of the earth, which is based on the division between friends and enemies, and Moreiras’ conception of the third space. Through a reading of Patricio Guzmán’s documentary film *El Caso Pinochet* (2001) and Alejandra Costamagna’s story “Boca abierta” (2000), which will be taken up in the subsequent chapter, this study suggests that the critical possibility offered by the post-dictatorial thriller structure is an exploration of politics that moves beyond fixed categories of subjectivity (such as victim, or criminal) by drawing the non-subject, the figure of “anyone whomsoever,” into the center of the narration. A thriller logic in these texts demonstrates that if a culture of violence and oppression persists in Chile in the era of globalization, it demands to be examined beyond the framework of dictatorial or Cold War politics. Rather, it begs to be analyzed within the context of global war, in which the presence of

practices. The third space is thus a productive space where dominant forms of thought and oppositional positioning can be overcome, giving way to the possibility of “new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (Bhabha 1).

forms of violence existing beyond the order of the State demand new concepts for understanding politics. I read the 1998 Pinochet case as a thriller of global war, not only because it conjoins the detective narrative and testimonial component, but because it makes visible a liminal space between the national and global legal order.

The Pinochet Case: A Legal Thriller

Patricio Guzmán's documentary film of the 1998 Pinochet case, titled *El caso Pinochet*, can be watched as a legal thriller. His film documents the Pinochet legal proceedings as a suspenseful investigation of a national leader that was witnessed globally, in which Chile was forced to open up its violent political history to an investigation by international juridical powers. The Pinochet investigation was significant because it helped globalize the question of human rights and transform justice for dictatorial victims from a national into a global concern.⁷⁹ In another words, the case strengthened an international political culture that converted the dictatorial victim into a sort of global figure,

⁷⁹ It must be mentioned that while the Pinochet case inscribed a new conception of "universal jurisdiction" into international law that would curtail the limits of national sovereignty, the question of human rights abuses had begun to attract international concern much earlier, during the Chilean dictatorship itself. Virtually the only means for the protection of dictatorial victims was through the Catholic Church. The human rights programs initiated by the church facilitated not only a network of specialized organizations, but also helped to carve out channels for dictatorial victims that would have international impact. International organizations in the United States, in Europe and elsewhere, were additionally formed that helped bring the dictatorial victim into the global discussion with regard to Chile. In the United States for example, the atrocities committed by the military junta led to the creation of several important organizations such as the Council for Hemispheric Affairs (COHA), founded in 1975, the Chile Committee for Human Rights, and the Human Rights Working Group, established in 1976.

with a global support community. Although an important milestone in combating State terror all over the world, the case is traditionally not analyzed for how it reveals a weakened nation against an increasingly strengthened global system. If the case indeed fomented a global human rights culture that, in the case of Chile, centered on defending the victim against State terror, then where does this situate the real victims and their families? Where does this leave the harrowing accounts of victims, whose experiences cannot be explained according to national (dictatorial) schemata, but can neither be reduced to some globalized culture of victimhood?⁸⁰ I believe *El caso Pinochet* demonstrates how the victims of dictatorial violence, like those that participated in Guzmán's documentary, inhabit a liminal space – a third space – between the national and the global.

El caso Pinochet conjoins the “top-down” international legal investigations with “bottom-up” testimonies of a group of dictatorial victims in what becomes a thrilling narrative of perhaps the most sensationalized trial of contemporary Chilean history. The documentary underscores the failure of national legal investigations to deliver a measure of commensurate justice to dictatorial victims, a failure which subsequently provoked an intervention by a network of

⁸⁰ Despite the importance played by human rights organizations such like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, which offered invaluable assistance to Chilean exile groups in Europe during and after the dictatorship, and which also helped foment global support for dictatorial survival victims, the major human rights initiatives were fomented by the UN and the United States. It was, after all, through the efforts of Spanish lawyers that the exiled Chilean victims' testimonies were given participation in the legal proceedings. In this sense, while the testimonies of exiled survivors, which were recorded and analyzed by Spanish authorities during the Pinochet case, mobilized a global culture of support for victims, they also simultaneously excluded the thousands of victims in Chile whose testimonies would never receive the same legal attention.

international powers. In highlighting the State's legal shortcomings, Guzmán's film demonstrates the short circuit established between the testimonies of the survivors and global human rights investigations.

The documentary provides background to the Pinochet trial by opening in the northern part of Chile. In the Atacama Desert, family members observe as a team of forensic investigators, accompanied by Chilean Judge Guzmán, uncover what they believe to be the buried remains of the victims of the dictatorship's "Caravan of Death."⁸¹ The irony within the documentary is overt as the Judge reassures the gathered families that the disappeared prisoners will be reconciled, that "cada cuerpo que se encuentra es un paso más hacia la justicia social" (*El caso Pinochet*). One of the women present, who comments about the discoveries of unidentified victims, exposes the exhaustion of such reconciliatory promises. Speaking of her son, she says that "la verdad siento mucha rabia, mucha pena, porque este era mi hijo cuando yo lo vi por la última vez (she holds up a photo that she wears around her neck). Y ahora he visto . . . no he visto nada, yo creo que ni siquiera voy a ver nada, solamente me va a quedar el recuerdo de que vine y de que a lo mejor aquí quedó mi hijo" (*El caso Pinochet*). The incommensurability between the official investigations and any real justice for disappeared victims reveals the nation's incapacity to resolve such a heinous

⁸¹ The Caravan of Death (*Caravana de la Muerte*) was a Chilean army death squad organized by Pinochet that, after the military coup in 1973, carried out summary executions of military detainees or political opponents of the dictatorship. The squad was comprised of several Army officers, who traveled from prison to prison and carrying out the execution of the detainees. The victims of the death squad were then buried in unmarked graves, many like the one portrayed in Guzmán's documentary.

criminal history. Indeed, the film makes blatant the call for a form of justice that extends beyond the borders of the nation, wherein lies the political impetus of Guzmán's documentary.

As the film explains, Pinochet's 1998 extradition appeal was the first time in Latin American history that a Head of State came under official legal investigation in another country for human rights violations committed in Chile. And for the first time, the witness accounts of hundreds of Chileans and foreign nationals were given global resonance in the indictment. The proceedings against Pinochet in the British and Spanish courts in 1998 signaled an attempt to establish the precedent that acts of State terrorism are a breach of human rights everywhere, and as such, are open to universal jurisdiction. Therefore, at stake was the consolidation of a global juridical order that could curtail the sovereignty of another nation's Head of State in the name of a universal concept of "humanity." It is helpful to recall that following the dictatorship, Pinochet remained as Commander-in-Chief until March of 1998. He was subsequently sworn in as Senator for Life, a privilege granted by the 1980 Constitution to former Heads of State with at least six years in office. His senatorship granted him immunity from prosecution and protected him from legal action. In this sense, Pinochet's detention in London on October 16th, 1998 underscored the crucial question of whether, in the case of grave crimes against humanity, sovereign immunity can be upheld outside the borders of the State.

The investigation revolved around the extradition of Pinochet from Britain (where he was undergoing an operation on his spine) to Spain. In November of 1998 the Spanish government, following the urging of Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzón, filed a formal request with British authorities for Pinochet to be extradited and tried in the international court for genocide, terrorism, torture, enforced disappearances, and for conspiracy to commit these crimes. Based on the testimonies of Chilean survivor victims and also those of foreign nationals, which were carefully recorded by Spanish investigators, the Swiss, Belgian and French governments subsequently followed suit by filing similar extradition requests with British authorities. The case marks a watershed case in international humanitarian law in that it conjoined a network of global powers, both legal and non-governmental, advocating not only for the eradication of State terror in Chile but of State terror anywhere it emerged.⁸²

The case played out like an international legal thriller as it followed the development of a global investigation of terror that surpassed national jurisdictions. At stake was the activation of human rights networks that extended beyond Chile and the Southern Cone – such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the United Nations Human Rights Commission, and Amnesty International. And on the obverse side of these human rights networks were the “bottom-up” associations constructed from the victim’s experience. The public

⁸² Following the extradition request for Pinochet, other national leaders who had supported state-sponsored political crimes were investigated and some indicted. Judge Garzón also ordered the arrest of Argentine military officials who had participated in the murder and disappearance of more than 30,000 civilians in the ‘dirty war’ that lasted from 1976-1983.

space opened up to the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina (and its Chilean counterpart) and to the dictatorial survivors that took part in documentaries like Guzmán's.

Never before had a former Head of State, accused of committing violent crimes in one state, been detained in another for possible extradition to a third. The trial's leading Spanish attorney Joan Garcés had, in fact, identified a loophole in Spanish law, which allowed for the conviction for international crimes within national jurisdiction.⁸³ His case confronted the claims of Pinochet's defense team, who had based their argument on the absolute rights of the sovereign. They claimed that

[t]he general's defense was that "he was entitled to lifelong immunity for torture and murder committed for reasons of state rather than for private gratification." Pinochet's legal team had, then, to argue for the inherent connection between torture and sovereignty, for the function of cruelty as part of "a procedure ordered around the formidable rights of the sovereign"; rights that, once established, retrospectively ensured the sovereign's immunity from prosecution. ("Constitution," Beasley-Murray 16)

Garcés upheld that certain crimes amount to crimes against all of humanity and therefore cannot be protected by sovereign immunity. According to Garcés, crimes like genocide and State terror deserve prosecution in any court in the world. Both the British House of Lords and Spain's *Audiencia Nacional* affirmed the attorney's position. Considerations of sovereign immunity should no longer

⁸³ The distinctive character of Spain's national superior court exemplifies significant modifications in international law. David Sugarman, in his article "From Unimaginable to Possible: Spain, Pinochet and the Judicialization of Power," analyzes the application of Spanish jurisdiction to the Pinochet case. The Spanish *Audiencia Nacional*, Spain's superior court, has authority to investigate and prosecute certain grave crimes committed outside Spain, such as terrorism and genocide.

be determinant in instances like Chile: Pinochet held no right to protection as a former Head of State.

The conjunction of international legal powers and the testimonies of thousands of Chilean victims dispersed all over the world presents a global investigation of violence. The significance of the Pinochet case was that it not only confronted the crimes committed against dictatorial victims in Chile, but it established a precedent against the threat of terror as it occurred (and continues to occur) in multiple regions across the globe: in the Balkans and Rwanda, in previous decades in Ethiopia and Cambodia, and today in Iraq and the United States.

After nearly two years of suspenseful juridical dispute, the official investigations concluded, somewhat appropriately, as would a suspense thriller: no resolution was achieved and no official justice was rendered. Based on a hasty and convoluted request from the Chilean government that Pinochet should be tried in national courts, and following acquiescence from the British authorities to Chile's petition, Pinochet was exempted from facing trial in Spain based on claims of his deteriorating health. In March of 2000 he was returned peacefully to Chile, only to be greeted by another indictment, this time proposed on native soil by Chilean Judge Guzmán. Just three days after his return, a petition was delivered to the Santiago Court of Appeals to strip Pinochet of his sovereign immunity, and on August 8th, 2000, the Supreme Court voted to grant the petition. Although stripped of his immunity, in the end, Pinochet, who still

garnered the highest protection from the Chilean military, evaded trial and imprisonment by manipulating claims of deteriorating health and advanced age. The dictator was ultimately never convicted in court for a single crime.

Even well after his death in 2006, the Pinochet case is still recognized for setting an historical example in that it allowed for the construction of an international network of judges and courts able to strip national leaders of their power in order to combat terror. In this sense, the Pinochet investigation sensationalized the eclipse of national sovereignty as well as the historical and political dualisms on which it rested: the trial not only made visible the blurred division between national jurisdiction and a new principle of “universal jurisdiction” that was officially encoded into international law. It also emphasized a new paradigm of global politics, in which conflicts would no longer function according to an “interstate system” with concretely distinguishable or interdependent actors. A British Law Lord states it well when he asserts that the Pinochet case illuminated the shift from a war between distinct sovereign parties into a war of humanity: “The trend was clear. War crimes had been replaced by crimes against humanity. The way in which a state treats its own citizens within its own borders had become a matter of legitimate concern to the international community” (qtd. in Jones 547).

Following this assessment, the Pinochet investigation revealed the possibility of a type of international relations in which the State relinquished its supreme power to new globalized human rights concerns. Therefore, at stake in

the juridical process was not simply the confrontation between an Enemy, Pinochet, and the victims of dictatorial violence. At stake was the convergence of different dimensions of a new globalized system centered around the mobilization of international legal and economic powers and their war on violence. It is for this reason that the Pinochet case can be said to play out like a thriller narrative of global war: it helped set the stage for the contemporary war on terror and transformed the question of human rights abuses into an immediate and ongoing global concern.

Perhaps more significantly, following the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon, the case surfaced, perhaps symbolically, in today's global "war on terror," since it is only an uncanny historical coincidence that the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11th, 2001 took place exactly 28 years after Pinochet's coup d'état overthrew Socialist president Allende in Chile. Both September 11th events are significant in that they made visible a dramatic shift in politics that is of critical importance to how we might understand the present-day context. If the first September 11th (Chile, 1973) would later lead to the dissolution of State sovereignty and the transition into a globalized market economy, the second September 11th (US, 2001) did not so much interrupt globalization as it did reveal its conflictual, violent side.

The terrorist attacks demonstrated that the end of the Cold War in 1989 – which coincided with Pinochet's removal as dictator and Chile's "return to democracy" – did not bring democratic peace as was hoped. It reveals that the

global world in which we live is much more violent and dynamic than the "glacial" world divided between the superpowers and their respective allies. According to Galli, global war creates the sensation of the increasing globalization of violence that seems to have no limits, as it "involves the confrontation of economic powers, the clash of criminal economies among themselves . . . It is the conflict for oil or water, diamonds or narcotics that involves States, para-State agencies, private gangs, semi State Mafias, drug lords and arms dealers . . . [it also includes] civil conflicts stemming from the impoverishment of large population segments . . ." (174).⁸⁴

If, since the Pinochet episode we have been witnessing the consolidation of a sort of global political order destined to protect "humanity" from threats that the State can no longer mitigate, it begs to be questioned what sort of "humanity" is being forged and defended here? Where does the constitution of a universal figure of humanity leave the marginal subjects that do not fit within this category, and who are thereby excluded from the protection that a global legal

⁸⁴ Galli observes that global war is not necessarily experienced through explicit violence, but can also be manifested through indirect, immaterial and often unnoticed ways. For example, in her study of Chile's post-dictatorial "street children," Guadalupe Salazar claims that the effects of globalization play out in social society in different forms, benefiting some classes and inflicting damage on other sectors. According to Salazar, groups like the street children are the targets of what she defines as structural violence. Structural violence harms individuals through already existing social systems that create deep inequalities, which are reflected, for instance, in class and gender relations, access to economic resources, and discrimination. She observes that although Chile has fared better than most of Latin America as a result of neoliberal economic reform – Chile was, in fact, heralded the "free market miracle" following the dictatorship –, these very reforms have been overlooked for producing and promoting structural violence in the form of greater unemployment, underemployment, poverty and less education. See "Politics of Street Children in Chile," in *Lost in the Long Transition: Struggles for Social Justice in Neoliberal Chile*, Ed. William L. Alexander.

order might provide?⁸⁵ And how does the configuration of a subject of humanity alter Schmitt's conception of politics as the confrontation between friends and enemies? We can investigate these questions as they relate to post-dictatorial Chile through a theoretical overview of Schmitt. His conceptions of the *nomos* of the earth and the political have been heralded as two fundamental theories for understanding the politics of the modern State.

Friends, Enemies and the *Nomos* of the Earth

Political reflection has recently demonstrated a return to the theories of German thinker Carl Schmitt, whose *Concept of the Political* (1927) and the later *Nomos of the Earth* (1950), written at the height of the World War period, constitute the dominant theoretical treatises for understanding modern politics.⁸⁶ In fact, Schmitt's writings about politics and war would seem the perfect fit for the post-September 11th moment and the new wave of global terror this event instigated. Carlo Galli's book *Political Spaces and Global War* (2002) calls this "turn to Schmitt" into question, however, suggesting that, on the contrary, it is in

⁸⁵ Ariel Dorfman points to an answer to these questions by linking the configuration of a globalized political order to the lack of justice in post-dictatorial Chile: "At a time when everything has been globalized, from capital to communications to production, what about justice, what about its globalization? In an age when humanity is being redefined and unified across frontiers, who speaks in humanity's name, who judges and punishes in the name of that humanity" (*Exorcising Terror* 39)?

⁸⁶ Schmitt was a philosopher, political theorist and professor of law. His ideas on political philosophy remain both influential and controversial today. Besides the *Nomos of the Earth* and *Concept of the Political*, his other influential works include *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1923), *Constitutional Theory* (1928), *Theory of the Partisan* (1963), among others. His ideas on politics influenced numerous philosophers and political theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Leo Strauss, Étienne Balibar, Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Antonio Negri, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, Carlo Galli and Chantal Mouffe.

fact only through the *exhaustion* of Schmitt's theories that a truly accurate assessment of contemporary politics can be established.

As mentioned, the conjunction of the “bottom-up” testimonial accounts and the “top-down” legal examination processes involved in the Pinochet investigation provides the narrative framework for a legal thriller, in which the State can no longer protect its citizens from external turbulences (such as the movement of capital or terrorism). The Pinochet verdict stripping the Head of State of his immunity thus attests both to the weakening of State sovereignty and to the possibility of a new world order – a new *nomos* of the earth – in which globalization and large-scale terrorist threats require new political concepts for explaining global violence. The purpose of the political is no longer, as Schmitt argues it in his book *The Concept of the Political*, to distinguish concretely between political dualities – between peace and war, and friend and enemy. Since for Schmitt, the State is what determines politics, and politics is limited to the confrontation between friends and enemies, the dissolution of the State therefore signals the collapse of these political distinctions, as well as the concrete subjectivities they sustain.

For Schmitt the *nomos* of the earth describes the community of political powers united by common rules.⁸⁷ The *nomos* is not necessarily, as Michael

⁸⁷ In ancient Greek, the concept of *nomos* had a broader meaning than “law,” which is how the word is commonly translated. *Nomos* referred to the “objectification of the polis,” and its progress was a fundamental stage in acquiring education (*Nomos*, “Introduction” 10). For Plato, education was more significant than written law, and it was the established traditions of Greek education that were referred to as *nomos*.

Hardt and Antonio Negri claim in their book *Empire*, “a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (xii-xiii), as if its ordering function emanated from nowhere and everywhere at once.⁸⁸ Rather, the *nomos* of the world denotes a concrete territorialization of power; it refers to the spatial, political and juridical system understood to be mutually binding in the conduct of international affairs. For Schmitt, the *nomos* of the earth produces its own political determinations and divides out its own political spaces.⁸⁹ Essentially, the *nomos* of the earth regulates the political order of the earth.

In his book *The Nomos of the Earth*, Schmitt affirms that “[t]here has always been some kind of *nomos* of the earth. In all ages of mankind, the earth

⁸⁸ For Hardt and Negri, the concept of Empire names the theoretical conception of this new form of global power that seeks to regulate everywhere but whose ontological presence remains immeasurable and elusive: “Empire is an ou-topia, or really a non-place” (*Empire* 190). These theorists’ empirical claims are that globalization has brought the end of the nation state and US imperialism. The subsequent demise has, they claim, ushered in a passage toward Empire, whose only viable opposition is through a triumphal proletarian internationalism. The fallacy of the emerging dichotomy, Empire/multitude, is that it does not challenge existing political categories. In fact, it *maintains* them. Empire subsumes current political confrontations to the confrontation between nebulous and immeasurable forces. To be sure, “Empire posits a regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality, or really that rules over the entire ‘civilized’ world. No territorial boundaries limit its reign . . . Empire presents itself not as a historical regime originating in conquest, but rather as an order that effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity” (*Empire* xiv). This, of course, as Alberto Moreiras has noted, “is only the perspective of *Empire* on *Empire* itself” (*Exhaustion* 35), and for this reason, the paradigm of Empire fails to see beyond its own vagueness.

⁸⁹ With Empire, Hardt and Negri describe a world without borders in which directionless forces of power order political life. They map the rise of a global form of sovereignty that subsumes all differences. On the other side of this all-encompassing network of power arises a (equally diffuse) struggle for liberation on behalf of the “multitude,” a global revolutionary subject on the brink of a radical self-actualization. Empire assumes an abstract interpretation of Schmitt’s conception of the *nomos*, and for that reason I find the *nomos* a more critically compelling framework to construct a theory of the thriller. Schmitt couches his theory of the *nomos* in a concrete legal praxis derived from Western world history, in which he believes European public law is what founds the international legal order.

has been appropriated, divided and cultivated” (*Nomos* 351). Western history, as Schmitt would have it, records the presence of three concrete *nomoi*; that is, three fundamental principles of ordering in the world. The first *nomos*, according to Schmitt, is pre-modern and was consolidated around the idea of the Roman Empire and the medieval paradigms of imperial rule. The second *nomos* began with the “Age of Discovery” and lasted until the end of the 19th century. This system of ordering was embodied in European international law, and included what we refer to as the modern period. It was during this period (roughly from the mid-1600s to the mid 1900s) that the concepts associated with modern politics – the nation, civil society, the European subject – became definitive of the interstate system as a whole. Schmitt writes that “these concepts . . . were exclusively Eurocentric: “civilization” meant *European* civilization. Non-European space was considered to be either uncivilized or half-civilized, leaderless, even empty. The belief in ‘European civilization’ was essential to the whole structure” and thus became fundamental to modern consciousness (*Nomos*, “Introduction” 11).

This second *nomos* of European rule entered into crisis in the early part of the 20th century, a crisis which started at the onset of World War I in 1914 and lasted until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.⁹⁰ During this period, Schmitt explains, and particularly towards the end of World War II, the concept of

⁹⁰ Schmitt identifies in particular the 1885 Congo Conference as the precise moment when the international law given by the *jus publicum Europaeum* began a shift, being subsequently replaced by a “general universalism” led by the United States. At the time of the Congo Conference in Berlin, the United States had already in 1884 recognized the flag of the Congo Society.

national sovereignty became porous, as did the climate of international politics. For the first time, the territoriality of national law, as it had been mandated by the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648, entered into crisis. The Treaties of Westphalia had marked the end of the Church's political authority, initiating a new system of political order in central Europe that focused on the concept of a sovereign State ruled by a sovereign. The new system conceded to the modern State supreme authority over the entire population within its territorial boundaries. Schmitt describes the Westphalian order as the moment following which a plurality of joint sovereign personalities began to develop: "Now the state was conceived of juridically as the vehicle of a new spatial order, as the legal subject of a new international law" (*Nomos* 145).

Perhaps more significantly, Schmitt proposes that after 1648 the development of the modern legal state became the motivating factor in the construction of a national legal subject – the *magnum homo* [the great man], who could experience equal rights that were mutually acknowledged as such. For Schmitt, the modern Subject is what made politics of the modern sovereign State possible: "Only with the clear definition and division of territorial states was a balanced spatial order, based on the coexistence of sovereign persons, possible" (*Nomos* 145).

The Westphalian order (characterized by mutual equal sovereignties) played out very much like a classic police novel, in which it was possible to view political crime – war or violence – as safely contained within State politics. The

police, or detective figure, remained strictly an administrative instrument internal to the space of the State, a means of ensuring the resolution to the crime and restoration of peace. By the same token, the tool of war remained a military device at the service of the State, implemented in external space against other sovereign “enemy” States as an explicit reiteration of the friend/enemy distinction. Just like the measured oppositions within the classic detective novel, modern war abided by clear-cut distinctions between combatants and non-combatants, between combat and non-combat areas. Similarly, as in a classic police novel, the end of hostilities was usually followed by a peace resolution. War, in other words, was fought between “just” enemies who recognized each other as equals.⁹¹

It is notably toward the end of World War II that the Westphalian legacy of sovereignty is seen as in decline. The Nuremberg Trials at the close of WWII, which were in many ways a precursor to the Pinochet trial, recognized the curtailment of national sovereignty in cases of “crimes against humanity.” That is to say that in extreme cases of genocide or brutal totalitarianism, the legal authority to investigate the criminal (ie. the dictator, the tyrant), a responsibility previously maintained by the nation-state, transferred to international legal

⁹¹ Within the framework of “just” enemies, enmity -- or the criminal -- can never truly precede the *nomos*; rather, the configuration of the criminal is produced within the *nomos*. That is to say that the very principle of the friend/enemy distinction is constructed within the *nomos* itself and is largely determined by the presence of an antithesis threatening the continued existence of the *nomos*. As Schmitt notes, the enemy must always be constructed as “the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, something existentially different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible” (*Concept 27*).

forces. Nonetheless, the total World War period still preserved a sense of the political friend/enemy dualities upheld by the European interstate system. Total World War still adhered to the notion of the “just enemy,” the enemy internal to *nomos* territoriality who abided by the rules of war and whose purpose was not to threaten the given *nomos* order. Galli asserts that during the World War period the enemy, even when criminalized, still had an image and a face; literal and ideological fronts existed. Most importantly, the significance of total World War was that, similar to a well-sequenced detective novel, combat was brought to a formal resolution. War ultimately led to peace and reiterated the distinction between the external political space and the internal space of the State. In sum, even though the World War period cannot be understood exactly as it was in the 1648 Westphalian scenario, it still upheld a concrete political order between distinguishable friends and enemies.

After the first two *nomos* orders – the imperial and the modern interstate *nomos* led by the European model – Schmitt announces the possibility of a third *nomos* that would begin to emerge, only tenuously, around the time of the Cold War. For Schmitt, the Cold War political horizon remained within the framework of late-modern politics, as it was constituted by the mutual opposition between two military, economic and ideological superpowers: ultimately, the United States and Russia divided global space between the friends and enemies of communism. The turbulence of the Cold War provoked the fear that communist regimes like the Soviet Union – considered the ultimate “enemy” – would,

beginning with Cuba, infiltrate the West and ultimately come to threaten US hegemony in the region. Understood in the context of Cold War enmity lines, then, the Allende regime was of particular US concern due to the fact that prior to Allende's election in 1970, Chile was revered for having one of the more stable and long-running constitutional traditions in the Western hemisphere. Along with a well-institutionalized party system, Chile was recognized as having relatively high levels of economic development, urbanization and industrialization. For the United States, Chile represented a crucial ally in helping to maintain a liberal democratic model within Latin America.⁹²

That a country so heavily financed by the United States could be potentially converted into a Marxist-led nation alarmed policy makers and US government officials. Thus, the defeat of Allende's socialist government in 1973 represented an unmistakable victory for the "friends" of anti-communism, who were concerned that Chile's promotion of a socialist administration might curtail US influence in Latin America. In this sense, not only was the coup on September 11th – staged with the help of the United States military and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger – part of a US imperialist strategy in the hemispheric battle against Communism, but the aggressive neoliberal reforms

⁹² In fact, prior to 1970 the United States had issued more than \$1.2 billion to Christian Democratic Party in first attempts to stave off socialism. For an insightful historical evaluation of US involvement in the Chilean political scene during and prior to the dictatorship, see Andrew Kirkendall's article "Kennedy Men and the Fate of the Alliance for Progress in LBJ Era Brazil and Chile," 747.

violently enacted by the Pinochet regime and the US-trained Chicago Boys can be seen as a fundamental part of this strategy.

The Chicago Boys referred to a group of young Chilean economists who, during the early 1970s, were sent to study economics at the University of Chicago (along with other US universities) under the teachings of economist Milton Friedman. The exchange program was the result of the “Chile Project,” established in the 1950s by the US State Department and the Ford Foundation, and was intended to regulate developmentalism in Chile and elsewhere in Latin America.⁹³ The Chicago Boys’ practices not only advocated that American economic practices be disseminated into peripheral countries like Chile, but also that these policies come to dominate the sphere of international political relations.⁹⁴ Although the Chicago Boys’ ideas remained uninfluential in Allende’s Popular Unity Coalition, they were heavily revisited after the military coup in 1973. In fact, *El Ladrillo*, the central publication of the Chicago Boys,

⁹³ From 1957–1970 nearly 100 Chileans pursued advanced degrees at the University of Chicago. The Ford Foundation was the principal funder of the University of Chicago’s Program of Latin American Economic Research and Training, which was responsible for educating the Chicago Boys. The Foundation also financed a similar program at the Catholic University in Santaigo, designed to appeal to undergraduate economics students from neighboring countries to come study under the Chicago Boys (Klein 122). As Klein notes, the Ford Foundation’s contributions to the Chicago Boys made the foundation one of the leading sources of funding for the dissemination of the Chicago School’s ideology throughout Latin America (122). The Chicago Boys had been funded as part of the foundation’s mission statement to “improve economic institutions for the better realization of democratic goals” (qtd. in Klein 122). Ironically, after the dictatorship the economic teachings that the Ford Foundation had helped finance in Chicago and Santiago were playing a major role in the violent overthrow of Chile’s government.

⁹⁴ The Chairman of the Economics department at University of Chicago, Theodore Shultz, makes visible the order of the *nomos* led by American liberalism that desires to extend its friend/enemy distinction over the earth. Peripheral countries like Chile, he claims, should “work out their economic salvation by relating to us and by using our way of achieving their economic development” (Klein 59-60).

became the foundation of the dictatorship's neoliberal economic platform. In this sense, given their significant influence on dictatorial politics, the foundations of Chilean neoliberalism cannot easily be disassociated from US Cold War political strategies to convert Chile into a democratic "friend" against revolutionary "enemy" Marxism. Klein affirms this notion by locating the Chicago School philosophy "squarely within the Cold War tensions by attempting to foster an alternative to revolutionary Marxism." She continues, "Latin American students were sent to a wide range of US universities, and funding for graduate departments was provided to diverse Latin American universities including large public ones with left-leaning reputations" (122). In this sense, according to Klein any in-depth investigation of the repression in Chile would unavoidably lead back to Chicago School ideology and the central role it played in influencing the country's main economic leaders (153).

The end of the dictatorship and the "transition to democracy" must therefore be observed in conjunction with a third *nomos* order, marked by the triumph of Western-style liberal capitalism as it desires to extend its friend/enemy distinction across the globe. Subsequently, the removal from office of Pinochet and the end of national liberation movements like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua helped usher in an era in which market-driven liberal democracies – as the dominant and most promoted form of government – would confirm the triumph of global capitalism. Reading Schmitt, Galli asserts that the decline of the modern (Westphalian) and late-modern (Cold War) political

frameworks has been accompanied by the decline of the conceptual distinctions they engendered, which today, especially now after September 11th, have diminished into a liminal gray zone with no recognizable limits. In other words, modern and late-modern political form has today fallen into crisis, and the manifestation of this crisis – globalization – according to Galli, is perhaps the defining characteristic of a third *nomos* of the earth.

The precise contours of a third *nomos* of the earth are indistinct, since at the time of his writing in the 1950s Schmitt could only speculate as to its specific configuration. However, what is certain is that if we can speak of a third *nomos*, it is one determined largely by North American hegemony, as its political rhetoric has arguably come to be accepted as universal truth.⁹⁵ In fact, Schmitt traces

⁹⁵ Schmitt outlines three concrete possibilities for this third *nomos*: the first possibility is the emergence of a “sole sovereign,” who “would appropriate the whole earth – land, sea, and air – and would divide and manage it in accord with his plans and ideas” (*Nomos* 354). The second possibility might be an attempt to maintain the balance of the previous *nomos*, retaining it in a way compatible with the contemporary context. This would mean a sort of joint domination between Europe and America, in which America would administer and guarantee the balance of the rest of the world. And the third possibility Schmitt mentions centers on the concept of balance, but not one controlled by a hegemonic power; rather, a combination of independent blocks of demarcated power (*Nomos* 354). The rise of a “New West”, the United States, with perhaps the most impressive military and economic apparatus perhaps the world has ever known, might seem to coincide with Schmitt’s first possibility, and therefore interact on the global scene much like a sole sovereign in the traditional sense. This is not the case, however. In short, the heightened war on terrorism after September 11th is only one way the US participates in global war; it is the confirmation of a politics of immediacy between economic rationality and the use of violence (Galli 178). United States military action is not a conventional manifestation of sovereignty, but rather the process of a continual substitution of an enemy (after the enemy of the Soviet Union and its Communist affiliates disappeared, the next villain was Afghanistan and Iraq). Galli’s description of US military presence as a “global policeman” correlates with that of global war: “Even if the American Empire is not in decline . . . it may truly be the Empire of Chaos, condemned to fight forever and to win, certainly, but never to reach peace or allow peace” (178). In effect, the war on terror plays out like a thriller novel, as it has put into effect not so much a unified attack as “a deterritorialized economics being chased by a deterritorialized politics, which, in turn brings war along with it like its own Shadow” (Galli 178-9).

the historical process by which international law ceased to have its center of gravity in old Europe. There is a “New West,” he writes, “America would supersede the old West, would reorient the old world historical order, would become the center of the earth” (*Nomos* 290). The American claim to become “the New West,” “the True West” (290), would necessitate the simultaneous demand that America expand a “spaceless, universalist international law” (*Nomos* 290). In reality, America as the “New West” confirms the decline of the modern European order and its substitution by a different principle of order and orientation: liberal globalization, led by the North American economic hegemony, appears to be the contemporary name for this phenomenon and the defining quality of the *nomos* of the earth in its third configuration.

The triumph of liberal globalization poses a drastic reconfiguration of the concept of politics based on the friend/enemy distinction. The most significant aspect Schmitt describes of a possible third *nomos* is a blurring of the friend/enemy division, which he predicted to occur at the moment when economic liberalism would become the ultimate horizon for politics. While during the modern period the State directed politics and, therefore, both encompassed and determined the friend/enemy distinction, the notion of liberalism attempts to abandon this distinction altogether. Liberalism presents itself as a universal ideology, and in principle its advocates seek to apply liberal-individualistic doctrines to the entire planet: “liberty and justice for all.” Warning of the triumph of a sort of liberal globalization, Schmitt anticipated that “if the different states . .

. and other human groupings on earth should become so unified that a conflict among them is impossible . . . and if civil war should forever be foreclosed in a realm which embraces the globe, then the distinction of friend and enemy would also cease” (*Concept 53*). Schmitt continues that in such a scenario, there would no longer exist nations in the form of political entities, no longer class struggles and no enemy groupings; there would only remain friends (*Concept 55*). Ultimately, under global liberalism, the State fades as the regulating principle, only to be replaced by a more “universal,” “humanitarian concept of humanity” (*Concept 55*).

Liberal globalization therefore implies a weakening of the concept of the enemy and triumph of the friend, who now takes the form of a universal subject of humanity. After all, what is liberal ideology but the belief that there are no conflicts among individuals that cannot be resolved to everyone’s advantage through the progress of civilization and social organization, or to be settled through agreeable compromise? For Schmitt, then, liberal politics attempts to domesticate the friend/enemy distinction in the name of individual freedom, but in reality, ends up reducing the identity markers of political opposition down to one pole, one unified subject of humanity. In this sense, a liberal subject of humanity – the subject of a third *nomos*, if it exists – must necessarily have resonance within “an international right without space” (*Nomos 290*). He must figure as the “friend” of all humanity.

At the time of his writing, Schmitt predicted that contemporary political confrontations would come to be carried out “in the name of,” and in absolute protection of, such a universal liberal subject. After all, it could only be on the basis of forging a universal subject of humanity who requires safeguard that nations could legitimize breaching the rules of war of another country under the claim of defending “individual freedom” or “the name of humanity.” It is not hard to see a parallel with the legal implications of the Pinochet case: at the same time that the proceedings wrote into international law the universal jurisdiction of crimes against humanity, it revealed the crisis of the national/global distinction that was so central to modern and late-modern politics. Schmitt notes that any war or conflict declared “in the name of” humanity turns the enemy into an outlaw: “It is not a war for the sake of humanity, but a war wherein a particular state seeks to usurp a universal concept against its military opponent . . . To confiscate the word humanity, to invoke and monopolize such a term probably has incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity” (*Concept 54*).

If, according to this passage from Schmitt’s *Concept of the Political*, a conflict waged in the name of a universal subject declares the enemy a criminal of humanity, then the criminal must necessarily be persecuted and eliminated indefinitely. For example, as a perpetrator of State crime, Pinochet was labeled a “criminal of humanity,” and during the court investigations his international image came to symbolize State terror everywhere. For the case proceedings,

labeling the former Head of State a “criminal of humanity” made Pinochet the necessary opponent that not only established a site for radical evil, but it also served as a sort of place-holder for enmity against which the defense of a universal subject – the dictatorial victim – could be constructed and justified.

The Pinochet episode demonstrates the dissolution of Schmitt’s order of the political due to its concurrence with some momentous international political conflicts, all claiming the protection of a subject of humanity. For example, the creation of a universal subject is made especially visible through the “humanitarian” interventions conducted by the military forces of dominant nation states following the spate of dictatorships, revolutions and civil wars that plagued Latin America during the 80s and 90s. Oftentimes executed under the mantra of UN peacekeeping missions, these “peaceful” interventions in the name of global human rights used the universal subject as the central justification for spreading liberal market policies to the latter parts of the globe (Burbach 158). Such interventions were rarely absent of violent military involvement. A recent episode concerning the United States is particularly telling of how global war intensifies the link link between the spreading of liberal economics and manifestations of violence.

During the Bush administration, the US had intervened in Haitian affairs by purportedly supporting a military coup against democratically elected leader

Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991.⁹⁶ Formerly a Catholic priest with a Liberation Theology background, Aristide was marked as a threat against humanity, was removed from power and subsequently replaced by the military regime. During the Clinton years, however, the Haitian military became an unmitigated threat to US interests. When thousands of terrorized Haitians began trickling illegally into the US, causing an unexpected influx of immigration, the US government – now with the support of international political players like the Organization of American States and the UN – demanded the restoration of Aristide. It was only after the threat of an outright invasion that the Haitian military agreed to step down.

In September of 1994, US troops peacefully occupied the country, reestablishing Aristide and helping to dismantle the FRAPH (Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti), a right-wing paramilitary organization that had terrorized supporters of Aristide. According to Peter Burbach, although the “humanitarian” interventions mitigated political crimes and helped restore peace to Haiti, they motivated a different form of violence – albeit a “violence” in the name of humanity. The Haiti invasion demonstrated the link between the aggressive spreading of American-style market liberalism and its defense through the construction of a universal subject of humanity. Once restored to power, Aristide was forced to agree to a global capitalist agenda, which included

⁹⁶ Many popular organizations in Haiti believed that the Bush administration and the CIA were behind the coup, although their collusion has never been proven (Burbach 153). It is, however, acknowledged that after the coup US officials were behind the leaders of the FRAPH, a paramilitary group that had slaughtered hundreds of supporters of Aristide.

the privatization of public enterprise and the acceptance of neoliberal policies. Referring to the United States' later intervention in Yugoslavia Burbach writes, "while the issue of human rights had become a major factor in international relations, 'humanitarian interventions' would be orchestrated primarily to advance the interests of the dominant nation-states" (154).

The Enemy and the End of the *Nomos*?

As the Haiti example suggests, war waged in the name of humanity ultimately knows no limits, and it disrupts Schmitt's concept of the political in a radical way. Schmitt had in his writings envisioned a reconfiguration of the enemy. Taking from Kant's notion of the "unjust enemy," Schmitt theorized the appearance of a dangerous foe that would not only come to replace the "just enemy," but could possibly bring about an end to the political altogether.⁹⁷ The just enemy is the adversary who does not attempt to threaten the given *nomos*, but is limited to forms of opposition always within the order of the *nomos*. (He can, in other words, only be titled "enemy" insofar as the construction of his enmity is comprehended and recognized as diametrically opposed by the order of the *nomos*.) Schmitt believed that with modern advances in war technology, the enemy would begin to transform from simple "opponents who have broken the rules of war" (*Nomos* 169) into irregular, unlocalizable characters. Schmitt,

⁹⁷ Kant describes the unjust enemy as one "whose publicly expressed will . . . reveals a maxim by which, if it were made a universal rule, any condition of peace among nations would be impossible and, instead, a state of nature would be perpetuated" (Schmitt, *Nomos* 169).

in fact, asserts that the possibility of an unjust enemy – the figure who cannot be regulated according to the rules of the *nomos* – would do away with the nature of the enemy as such.

Citing Kant, Schmitt acknowledges that the presence of an unjust enemy would signal the end of the friend/enemy opposition altogether, since “[a] just enemy would be one that I would be wrong by resisting, because then he would also not be my enemy” (*Nomos* 169). That is, if the enemy, by virtue of his justness, is always already a friend, then every enemy, to truly constitute enmity, must be absolutely unjust. Consequently however, if every enemy is unjust, then the enemy himself falls outside the order of the *nomos*. In the strict sense then, the unjust enemy is the enemy of the political, since his presence exposes the limits not only of a particular political order, but of every possibility of politics.⁹⁸ For Schmitt, as for Kant, an unlocalizable opponent is the enemy proper to global war, “because the law contains no limits for anyone threatened by him” (*Nomos* 169). There would be no limits, no political restrictions, to the war waged against this adversary, who could be transformed into nothing more than an object of evil. In other words, if the unjust enemy does away with the concrete, recognizable opponent – the human enemy –, then the enemy becomes targeted as an unrecognizable criminal force. Thus what is at stake in

⁹⁸ The possibility of “absolute enmity” signals the subversion of the *nomos* as a political concept. That is to say, if there is a political order based on the friend/enemy distinction, then there is no *nomos* able to contain it; similarly, if there does exist a *nomos*, the unjust enemy will always remain outside the political. For an in-depth analysis of the just and unjust enemy, see Moreiras, *Línea de sombra: el no sujeto de lo político*.

global war is not just to protect the innocent against an attack of the adversary, but rather to seek out the enemy and eliminate him before he manifests himself as such. For Schmitt, this requires ultimate and total war, no longer simply between friends and enemies, but a total war between humanity and that which threatens humanity.

Conflicts of this kind are especially perilous because if there remains no fixed conception of the enemy, no way to define and locate him as such, then essentially *anyone* who does not comply with the order of the *nomos* can become labeled an enemy. Conflicts can, in this sense, be driven “across the line” into the most extreme forms of inhumanity (*Concept 54*).⁹⁹ It is here where Schmitt’s conception of the political and the *nomos* of the earth, born at the close of modernity as they were, lose their validity. Indeed, the September 11th terrorist attacks were not a political conflict between two equal opponents: the *republica Christiana* against the *Muslim patria*. They were, rather, the manifestation of an ambiguous conflict that converged capitalist globality and its forces with a terrorist globality, a decentered and unlocalizable criminal system. The form of violence characterized by September 11th extends beyond the order of the *nomos*, revealing the notion of the *nomos* to be incapable of explaining

⁹⁹ Schmitt writes: “The war is then considered to constitute the absolute last war of humanity. Such a war is unusually intense and inhuman because, by transcending the limits of the political framework, it simultaneously degrades the enemy into moral and other categories and is forced to make of him a monster that must not only be defeated, but also utterly destroyed” (*Concept 36*). Insofar as this “unjust” adversary remains unregistrable according to existing categories of the political, war will necessarily be a global war, a total and ongoing confrontation without resolution between all of humanity and the threat of humanity’s outside.

the nature of violence today. In fact, the very idea of *nomos* denotes a process of appropriation and division that, according to Galli, was nothing more than a futile attempt to give structure to the tensions of modern politics. By creating a theoretical principle of division separating an inside from an outside, friend from enemy, the articulation of a *nomos* operates as a sort of overriding melodrama; it establishes an easily apprehensible framework for historically substantiating all of the political divisions and oppositions on which the modern and late-modern State – Chilean included – functioned.

Galli's radical assessment is that global war emerges at the very point where Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction exhausts, revealing that behind the supposed conflict between political oppositions stands a One – globality – which reconfigures all of our interpretative paradigms for approaching politics, culture and literature.¹⁰⁰ I find Galli's critique of Schmitt's concept of the political useful for an analysis of post-dictatorial Chile in that it provides a theory for a movement not only beyond the dualist logic of the friend and enemy, but possibly beyond *all* dualist thinking.

Galli's ideas make visible instead an alternative space – a third space – for approaching the forms and subjectivities that emerge in the dissolution of politics. For Galli, global war opens up a new political space – or a political third

¹⁰⁰ Galli notes: "We are seeing the end of the concrete and spatially determined concept of the enemy, brought about not (or at least not only) by technology, nor by a world wide revolution, but because of globalization. This is the force that despatializes both politics and war, removing them from the logic of the friend and enemy" (Galli 182).

space – unbound by any *nomos* order or orientation, in which categories of political subjectivity diffuse, and in which the liminal position “. . . the unthinkable, unplaceable in political space or modern political categories, [becomes] today the new figure of politics” (182). In this sense, the critical significance of Schmitt’s and Galli’s theorizations, and where they garner analytical force with regard to present-day Chile, is that they provide a political-theoretical framework for a more nuanced critique of neoliberalism and its origins in dictatorial politics.

Indeed, what is at stake is to interrogate how global war – the crisis and dissolution of modern political categories – manifests in a context like post-dictatorial Chile, whose entrance into capitalist modernity has been intermittent, deferred, and indelibly marked by the unresolved histories of unspeakable violence. I believe the post-dictatorial scene in Chile constitutes a viable framework for theorizing a third space of political understanding. Characterized neither as subaltern nor wholly immersed in the Western order of globality, as neither bound explicitly to dictatorial politics nor free from their legacy, and as subscribed neither to a national nor properly international juridical order, the context of post-dictatorship falls within a sort of lag-time of the in-between. Chile thus offers a possible zone in which a politics of the third space can be visualized. And I believe that the thriller structure – the juncture of the “top-down” detective investigation and the “bottom-up” witness account – allows a glimpse into this third space. The following chapter will flesh out a theory of the third space as well as of the subjects that emerge within this space.

CHAPTER V

THE THIRD SPACE AND MEMORY POLITICS

Despite its vagueness and limited critical possibilities, Hardt and Negri's conception of Empire provides an insightful perspective of the kinds of subjects that emerge in the wake of the political. In an introductory essay for his book *Empire*, Hardt takes a slightly different approach than Galli. He explains that contemporary society has recently experienced a fundamental transition from what he calls societies of discipline to societies of control. More than Foucault's disciplinary deployments (as would be seen in prisons, factories and perhaps even the institutions ratified by dictatorship), power today is experienced through networks of control. Hardt distinguishes the constitution of power within these two types of societies:

The panopticon, and disciplinary diagrammatics in general, functioned primarily in terms of positions, fixed points, and identities. Foucault saw the production of identities (even "oppositional" or "deviant" identities, such as the factory worker and the homosexual) as fundamental to the functions of rule in disciplinary societies. The diagram of control, however, is not oriented toward position and identity, but rather mobility and anonymity. It functions on the basis of "the whatever," the flexible and mobile performance of contingent identities . . . ("Withering" 32).

More than operating to regulate merely the "deviant" or "oppositional" identities, the society of control seeks to regulate the marginal zones of experience of

every subject. It demands to control the “mobile” and “anonymous” zones of life itself.¹⁰¹

Hardt and Negri’s society of control approximates Galli’s notion of global war: the so-called system of war trenches that Gramsci used to describe previous forms of dominations, which supported the “war of position,” of fixed friends and enemies, has evolved in global society into biopolitical techniques of conflict and control. Fixed identities and positions become useless in combat; and instead the flexible model of “the whatever” that demands a broader mobility has become the dominant characteristic (Hardt, “Withering” 31-32).

From a slightly different approach, Chantal Mouffe and Brett Levinson expand upon the concept of “the whatever” in order to theorize the radical political engagement that this position offers. On the one hand, for Mouffe, in global war the more forceful negation of “enemy” is preserved for those figures whose enmity cannot be articulated through established political categories like friend or foe. She states that “the category of the ‘enemy’ does not disappear, but is displaced; it remains pertinent with respect to those who do not accept . . . the ‘rules of the game’” and who are thereby excluded from the political community (*The Return of the Political* 4). According to this interpretation, the real threat of global war is that virtually anyone who poses a threat, or who does

¹⁰¹ Hardt concludes his essay with mention to the possibilities of critical practice that the transition from societies of discipline to societies of control inevitably opens: “The networks of sociality and forms of cooperation embedded in contemporary social practices constitute the germs of a new movement, with new forms of contestation and new conceptions of liberation. This alternative community of social practices . . . will be the most potent challenge to the control of postcivil society, and will point, perhaps, to the community of our future” (“Withering” 37).

not follow the “rules of the game,” can be transformed at any given moment into a criminal. Mouffe describes how anyone whomsoever who is removed – or who removes themselves – from established categories of political representation can be persecuted, taken “beyond the line,”¹⁰² after which point any form of violence committed against him/her becomes legitimate.¹⁰³

For Levinson, the real conflict of our world today lies precisely in the indistinction of the friend/enemy opposition. The real conflict lies “beyond the line” with what he calls “minimal life,” the Agambian figure who is not wholly inside or outside, not wholly victim or criminal, but is instead the “indecipherable pulsating interior . . . public but unreadable . . . “[S]uch life” he continues, “may well be imaginary. What is certain, though, is that its existence can be and has been displaced into real peoples, breathing bodies” (*Market and Thought* 54). I believe these minimal spaces offer a powerful exploration of politics today in that they emerge as simultaneously the most targeted object within global war and

¹⁰² Schmitt locates a place “beyond the line” after which point the “old law” governing the division between friends and enemies is suspended and after which, for lack of any legal limits to war, only the law of the strongest force applied. Schmitt applied this term to distinguish the bracketed struggles of old European opponents from unbounded war with those “beyond the line.” He writes that ruthless war, unlimited war occurs beyond the line: “everything beyond the line remained outside the legal, moral and political values recognized on this side of the line” (*Nomos* 94).

¹⁰³ The British House of Lords and Spain’s *Audencia Nacional*’s decision to strip Pinochet of his sovereign immunity left the former Head of State in the kind of position described by Mouffe. Even though Pinochet never stood trial due to claims of deteriorating health, after the trial the former Head of State remained stripped of all political identity that had endowed him sovereign protection in the first place. His position within the universal court system was taken, to a certain degree, “beyond the line.”

perhaps, paradoxically, the only escape from it.¹⁰⁴ It is thus at this double juncture that the figure of “anyone whomsoever” emerges: this figure marks a third space between political subjectivities, a place of neither friend nor enemy, neither victim nor criminal, but rather the space that emerges from in-between.

The possibility of a political third space lies at the core of the thriller narrative structure. As mentioned earlier, the narrative strands of the post-dictatorial thriller form mirror one another at every fundamental level such that, I believe, the one cannot be read without the other: the impetus given by any detective-story narrative is to investigate crime from a position of authority endowed by power and knowledge. The detective rhetorical figure – a detective character himself, forensic scientist or critic – effectuates a transgressive inquiry into the networks of violence underlying society by applying a “top-down” method of inquiry.

On the converse, the testimonial component searches for the answer to political violence from a position devoid of power and knowledge. Contrary to the rational detective figure, the witness position experiences totalizing power as domination. The witness account narrates an engagement with the Real, as it provides an unguarded testament to an experience of suffering or torture that resists all symbolization. The “bottom-up” testimonial account rests in the non-literary, in non-resolution. In this sense, testimonio offers the abyssal grounds of enunciation of an immediate and urgent experience with violence. The obverse

¹⁰⁴ Let us recall that Agamben would refer to these minimal spaces as the one place for both the organization of power and emancipation from it (*Homo Sacer* 9).

investigative positions of the detective narrative and testimonial account come together in the field of post-dictatorship as an investigation of, and a desired access to, the realm of the extraliterary, to a discursive space beyond the purview of established political categories and narrative forms.

In another sense, if the thriller structure can be understood as the junction of the detective narrative and the witness account, then this narrative form can also be understood as the juxtaposition of (investigative) knowledge and authority with that which knowledge and authority can never adequately articulate: the nonrepresentational experience and its silent history of exclusion. The plethora of detective stories and testimonial texts published following the dictatorship suggests a vehement preoccupation with articulating the unarticulable, and speaking the unspeakable. But this would perhaps be to misrecognize the secret truth of the post-dictatorial thriller structure. The thriller structure desires not to reconstitute a concrete subject of history (the friend) against the oblivion of market capitalism (the enemy). Rather, the thriller form seeks to articulate how dictatorial violence as it was once experienced by a concrete subject – such as that of a prisoner camp –, in the context of globalization can now be transformed into the experience of anyone whomsoever. In other words, the secret of the post-dictatorial thriller narrative structure is the search to capture the unarticulable experience(s) of anyone whomsoever.

Moreiras' theorizations of a third space provide the background for articulating a coming politics grounded on the liminal zones of humanity. In his

book *El Tercer Espacio: Literatura y duelo en América Latina* (1999), Moreiras interprets the third space as the privileged space of the Real, in which new critical perspectives and approaches can be theorized: “it [the third space] is the place where the reform of thought proceeds and is produced: a place that, insofar as it is a space of encounter, is also by definition and by necessity the privileged space of the Real” (119, my translation here and below). “It is not,” he writes, “a space where the Real is located, but rather the space where access to the Real abides . . . ultimately it is the locality of the in-between, the intermediary, what has been broken and what does attempt to serve as a conciliatory link between historically hegemonic forces” (119). Under this interpretation, the third space takes from the perspective of controversial figures like Luz Arce and Alejandra Merino discussed previously, as it anticipates

an enterprise of thinking that takes the subaltern perspective, formally defined as the perspective from the constitutive outside of hegemony, as the starting point for a critique of contemporary consciousness. Its goal is two-fold: on one hand, to continue the enterprise of deconstruction of melodramatic consciousness – whether local, regional, national or global – understood as the false consciousness of a real situation; and on the other, to move toward alternative, nonhegemonic local and regional histories that will seek to constitute themselves as the real consciousness of multiple and always false situations. (Moreiras, *Exhaustion* 53)

In the context of Chile, the third space denotes a conceptual zone that exists between political dualities and subjectivities. In this sense, the opening up to a third political space implies a forceful critique of memory politics, since memory politics remains one of the most persistent forms of politics today that is linked to, and has its roots in, the politics of dictatorship and the late-modern

State. What is at stake for the future of Chile, and by extension, of any Latin American country wrought by dictatorship, is determining how to think beyond a history of violence without falling into a politics of duality: that is, either subsuming to the impulse of neoliberalism and its homogenizing power, or to the opposite reaction that attempts to reconstitute a collective subject of history as an originary source of resistance. Nelly Richard suggests that the task of looking beyond memory politics necessarily implies looking beyond political oppositions. She says that

[p]art of the critical task incumbent on post-dictatorial thought is to overcome the rigid dichotomy of values and representations imprisoning "the standpoint of the vanquished" by exploring more oblique forms, together with resolving the conflict between assimilating (incorporating) or expelling (rejecting) the past. Critically resolving this conflict means as much avoiding the nostalgia of an anti-dictatorial Symbol, as it does resisting any enterprise of forgetfulness that seeks to reunify history by forcibly appealing to those forces disputing its meaning. (*Insubordination* 21)

For Richard, memory politics would not just include the political decisions and practices made in the immediate aftermath of the dictatorship directed toward the individuals on the basis of what they did or what was done to them under the dictatorship. It would also include a wider context of cultural and political narratives that use memories of the past as a tool to label individuals or experiences in the present. For example, as has been mentioned, in neoliberal Chile the reconciliatory projects – like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report – recall thousands of testimonial excerpts. Paradoxically, the report

effectuates an operation of forgetting whereby the incessant repetition of testimonial fragments reduces the singularity of the testimonial experience to the category of the victim.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, the opposite reaction attempts to symbolically reconstitute the marginal histories – like testimonio critics such as Beverley – as a platform for some sort of coming subaltern politics constituted “from below.” Beverley’s appeal to a more “authentic” or “true” past poses equally reductive results: it does not free itself from the dead-end binaries that demand a politics based on subjectivity, in which marginal or victimized figures are reconstituted always in formal reaction to the dominant power.

What is at stake in this conflict is the failure to see beyond the impasse of any politics based on opposition: If the reconstitution of marginal or victimized subjectivities occurs in the form of a friend/enemy opposition, out of resistance to a dominant power – as Beverley’s work seems to argue – then the very act of memory rehearses, if not reproduces, the same political oppositions that situate the victim as the victim in the first place. Memory, understood as the mere counter to forgetting, would negate the possibility of an outside to the order of the political since, according to this interpretation, memory forms could only recuperate (remember) the past and its subjects as a formal reaction to its

¹⁰⁵ The report established a precedent for who and who would not be officially categorized as a “dictatorial victim.” The category of “victim” established by the Commission did not include, for example, dictatorial agents killed in confrontations with armed opposition groups, and it excluded hundreds of incidences of human rights abuses in the prisoner camps. For an account of the incidences of torture or abuse excluded from the official category of “victim,” see the sections in the Truth and Reconciliation Report titled “Las Víctimas,” (sections 21-23) and “Personas que no calificaron como víctimas de prisión política y tortura” in The Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report.

opposite. In other words, post-dictatorial memory constitutes itself strictly as a place of contestation against the radical threat of forgetting. In reality, then, more than committing memory work to oblivion, the fallacy of memory politics, and the reason why I believe it risks curtailing the production of a consistent post-dictatorial thriller tradition as such, is that it can never see beyond itself: the past and its subjects are recalled and reconstituted only by virtue of what they are summoned to oppose in the present.¹⁰⁶

Post-dictatorial memory politics therefore finds resonance with the logic of Schmitt's friend/enemy political division. Arguably, the dangers of any politics based on the memory/forgetting opposition is that it places a moral imperative on memory that is problematic. Problematic in the sense that it transforms memory politics into a firmly subjectivizing endeavor in which the victim, or subaltern, who recalls an experience of violence does so always already within a pre-determined framework of opposition. Moralizing interpretations such as this fail because they ultimately exacerbate the division separating friends and enemies: that is, between "friendly" political practices committed to preserving

¹⁰⁶ Such a binary division between memory and forgetting in fact comes with a great paradox, since ever more frequently in post-dictatorial Chilean society critics blame neoliberalism and globalization for negating the past. The forgetting reproach is invariably couched in a moral critique that admonishes neoliberal capitalism and the media – such as print, television and the Internet—for propagating a culture of oblivion that is more concerned with economic growth and consensus than with how to properly remember the victims of political oppression. The obverse of this argument, however, highlights the violently reductive effects of the memory/forgetting dualism itself, since it is precisely the neoliberal market that makes ever more memory forms available in the first place. Within the framework of global modernity, then, it becomes just as insufficient to discriminate "proper" and "true" forms of memory from forgetting, as it is to pit the dictatorial victim against the criminal. (Levinson has already demonstrated that this oppositional trope will always make visible the radical injustice of post-dictatorship, and the radical impossibility of justice.)

the past, and “enemy” practices which purportedly disregard it. Not only that, but attempts to “resolve” historical injustice (such as Díaz Eterovic’s novel) through restitution end up abjecting the past always *as past* rather than extending to its subjects a pure and unmediated space for enunciation in the present. Post-dictatorial literature’s appeal to channel the forces of recollection into some strategic impulse of subversion against neoliberalism appears overly optimistic and cannot by itself engage with the forces of global modernity. Other critical approaches would be necessary.

Richard and Ariel Dorfman offer a critical approach that harkens back to Freud, bringing to light the need for a movement beyond memory politics. In his old 1914 essay “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through,” Freud describes how individuals who have suffered a traumatic event in the past may, in the present, repress any conscious memory of the experience. However, they may repeat it through actions or practices that “reenact” the experience. Freud calls this process “acting out,” in which the individual might appear to actually remember the traumatic event. What prevents the acting out from becoming a viable practice of remembering, however, is that he or she forgets the forces in the present that are suppressing the memory in the first place. Repetition, then, effectively enables an act of forgetting, and therefore does not break with the memory/forgetting binary in which the patient is entrapped. Freud asserts that the more fervent the attempts to repeat (or remember) the violent event, “the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering” (151).

In her book *Cultural Residues*, Richard follows Freud by tracing how the symbolic repetition of the past only induces forgetting and, consequently, ends up rehearsing the order of the political. The paradox of memory appears when relatives of disappeared prisoners struggle incessantly to (re)produce the social existence of the memory of the disappearance. Faced with the absence of the body, the remaining family members use memory to “give life to death,” to disappearance (Richard, *Cultural Residues* 25). In this sense, similar to the neoliberal market’s endless reproduction of the victim’s experience through the wide dissemination of testimonios, “memory can’t stop repeating itself” (25). The function of memory is compelled to constantly repeat over and over the event of disappearance because ceasing to remember would duplicate the violence caused by the disappearance itself. Memory must therefore consistently resuscitate the dead if it is not to become complicit with the impulse to forget. Yet, the inexhaustible duty to remember – to repeat the moment of violence – only reiterates the violence of forgetting. That is, it repeats the position of the vanquished, reiterating the victim’s subjectivity again and again as “victim.”

Dorfman, in his courtroom thriller *Exorcising Terror*, makes a similar critique of memory’s appeal to incessant repetition (forgetting) by closing his book, paradoxically, with an injunction to oblivion. Dorfman’s investigation of the Pinochet trial evokes Nietzsche’s piece “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History” by suggesting that for Chile, truly purging itself of Pinochet’s legacy of political violence and building peace necessarily implies a degree of forgetting.

The conclusion to his book narrates a scenario from a future unnamed society in which Dorfman imagines children playing in a meadow or a playground: “One of them does or says something that warrants a reproach, an insult, a hideous slur, from the other one, who shouts out: ‘Oh, don’t be a Pinochet.’” The other child replies, “Pinochet? Who in hell is Pinochet?” (207). Richard and Dorfman’s examples reveal that what Andreas Huyssen has called a boom of both memory and forgetting certainly applies to contemporary Chile. Similarly, it points to the possibility of a space in-between in which this dilemma can be critiqued.

The notion of a third space allows for a critique of both memory and forgetting, and it also allows an alternative zone in which the dualistic nature of memory politics gives way to an unguarded account of violence from the perspective of anyone whomsoever. According to Homi Bhabha, “it is the third space, although unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (*Location* 22). In this sense, the notion of a third space provides the conditions for dismantling the long-standing oppositions maintained in binaries like friend/enemy, victim/criminal and memory/forgetting.

To theorize a third space thus means to exhaust the notion of politics based on the division of friend/enemy in order to favor the experience of bare life, the subaltern perspective and the spaces of humanity that remain unfixed,

or “beyond the line,” so to speak, within the spectrum of political representation. It is my contention that the theoretical conception of “anyone whomsoever” marks this point of exclusion. As denotative for that which remains unlocalizable and unrepresentable, the testimonial position of “anyone whomsoever” offers the possibility of an account of political violence that remains always uncapturable by any category of the political. Indeed, the category of “anyone whomsoever” makes possible a transgressive critique against memory politics, as it reveals the existence of a liminal moment of experience that refuses to be restituted and exhaustively “remembered” for the formal purposes of the present.

I want to specify the particular configuration of “anyone whomsoever” that makes visible how this figure signals a movement beyond the impasse of memory politics. If, as already suggested, “anyone whomsoever” grounds a form of critical thought that takes on the perspective of the subaltern, then the position of the subaltern requires a reconceptualization. In order for the subaltern-position to move beyond the subjectivizing power of memory politics, it must configure itself as a sort of *flexible* position. The possibility of this sort of victim-position suspends the conception of “victim” as that which lies always in a subaltern-relation to power, and hence always contingent upon, a dominant power.

I would like to propose that the category of “anyone whomsoever” assumes a sort of relational subaltern-position that understands established categories of subjectivity – like the “victim”, the “subaltern” or the “political hero”

– not simply in terms of the vast asymmetry of power between the military apparatus and its legacy in neoliberalism and the identities it oppresses. Nor is it the subject who now narrates a defense of marginality against totalizing violence. Rather, a sort of flexible subaltern-position points to that which lies outside any given dominant paradigm at any given moment. By this I mean that the subaltern-position does not really constitute a position at all. It instead offers the potential for a relational zone that is characterized by broader motility, undecidability and anonymity. According to this theory, memory may then be reconceived not as a contingent or an oppositional practice, but as a suspended liminality capable of reformulating productive and dynamic ties between the past and present. Similarly, subalternity would move beyond the closed site for history’s marginalized or “victimized” identities and become a flexible zone – the zone of “anyone whomsoever” – through which an ongoing reconfiguration of subjectivities could take place.

What is significant about “anyone whomsoever” is that through its very unfixedness this figure appears simultaneously as the target of global war – as the figure stripped of all political identity and taken “beyond the line” – and also the ambiguous figure through which an escape can be theorized. In Foucault’s terms, a third space of flexible subalternity could provide the conditions of possibility for a sort of revolt of subjectivity against subjectivity, which, for Foucault is the basis for a line of escape: “it is through revolt that subjectivity (not that of great men but of *whomever*) introduces itself into history and gives it

the breath of life (Foucault qtd. in Bernauer 70; emphasis added). The goal of this revolt would then be to draw in the other “whomever” dimensions that constitute human experience in today’s global society.

The final texts analyzed in this dissertation are “Boca abierta” (2000) by Chilean writer Alejandra Costamagna, *Insensatez* (2004) by El Salvadoran writer Horacio Castellanos Moya and *Managua, Salsa City* (1999) by Nicaraguan author Franz Galich. The latter two will be taken up in the Conclusion. The first text, a short story, illustrates the kind of revolt of subjectivity against subjectivity outlined by Foucault. Costamagna’s story occupies what I have been outlining as a third political space by denying affiliation to any recognizable subjectivity whatsoever. The narrative oscillates between concrete subjectivities, carving out instead a third space of enunciation, in which the traditional categories of subjectivity expand to include not just those that might recall marginal experiences of torture or imprisonment during dictatorship, but to those figures who experienced, and continue to experience, violence residually, indirectly or by proxy in the present. The text thus puts into practice a flexible subalternism that fluctuates between multiple narrative perspectives and temporalities. In this sense, Costamagna’s text is not the narrative of a victim, nor does it seek to investigate a fixed liminality. This story *is* liminality itself, as it narrates an experience with violence from a zone of incomprehensibility and anonymity that frustrates every political identification or reflective projection.

The short story “Boca abierta” shares similarity with Diamela Eltit’s previously discussed semi-testimonial novel *El Padre Mío* in that it attempts to render in literary form the marginal voices that inhabit the peripheries of society. Eltit’s novel rehearses the repressive effects of power on the victims of society by capturing the incoherent ramblings of el Padre Mío, a disturbed Chilean vagrant. In a way similar to Eltit’s text, “Boca abierta” rehearses a space of liminality in which recognizable political subjectivities are suspended in favor of an investigation of bare life and the dimensions of experience that remain irreducible to any category of political subjectivity. What makes Costamagna’s story unique, however, is that it does not attempt to demonstrate how a narrative form might try to represent, or speak on behalf of, the perspective of the subaltern or the marginal figure, as Eltit’s narrative does. Eltit’s narrative incursion into society’s borders is markedly reactionary; it never escapes the impulse proper to memory politics to reconstitute, or simply repeat, the realms and forms of social marginality. In other words, in the name of resistance and difference, *El Padre Mío* merely mimics the principle of division of the political by which the victim experience remains firmly circumscribed under the sign of “victim.”

Different from the other texts analyzed in this dissertation, Costamagna’s short story gives witness to continuing forms of violence within the microcosm of the family structure. In this story we see the conjunction of the “top-down”/ “bottom-up” narrative strands proper to the thriller form through the interior

monologue of an unnamed autistic child in desperate search of her father who, we are presumed to believe, has abandoned her and her mother in a recent past. The girl's experience of violent exclusion causes her a mental disturbance and motivates a broken narrative account that attempts to investigate the originary moment of abandonment. She puts into practice a language that is crushed by abrupt incoherencies and disconnections, which reflects an oppressive, disorienting world where, as Thomas Narcejac describes, referring to the context of the thriller, "man [or the subject] is out of place" (in Lloyd 37). It is not difficult to observe a parallel between the oppressive presence of the absent father that haunts the girl, and forms of oppression that exist within post-dictatorship. It is also not hard to see a symbolic parallel between the anonymous girl and other peripheral or marginal figures in post-dictatorial Chile who experience only the dark, violent side of globalization.¹⁰⁷

Despite its fictional nature, Costamagna's story effectuates a powerful engagement with post-dictatorial memory politics that takes on a relational – or flexible – subaltern-position. Indeed, the story investigates the nature of

¹⁰⁷ Other peripheral figures symbolized by this young protagonist could be what Guadalupe Salazar calls Santiago's "street children." Salazar observes how a globalized economic agenda transforms socially vulnerable street children into marginal figures through routinized exclusion (170). Although imbedded in the daily routines of the Chilean general public and the police, the routine exclusion of street children remains unquestioned. These street children represent the targets of the darker, oppressive side of globalization. Salazar writes, "The lives of street children were steeped in multiple forms of violence. Violences scripted and manifest on their bodies, such as self-mutilation with razor blades, drug abuse, rape, beatings . . . [they are located] along a 'continuum of violence' that produces them, shapes their lived experience, and surreptitiously grooms them into second-class citizens" (170). See Salazar's study in *Lost in the Long Transition: Struggles for Social Justice in Neoliberal Chile*, Ed. William L. Alexander.

dominant power from the vantage point of a shifting subjectivity – in this case, of the unnamed autistic girl – as she fervently searches to recall and articulate the moment of exclusionary violence. The only recollection the young girl carries of her (also unnamed) father is a collection of photos and a few incoherent memories from her childhood. She recalls these memories sporadically and intersperses them with her own internal ruminations in what becomes an imagined dialogue with the absent father. She evokes his absence only through disjointed images of his “ojos negros de fantasma” and his “zapatos gastados,” which ironically constitute themselves in her mind as a fragmented yet simultaneously totalizing presence, much like the aura of conspiracy. The girl believes that by searching through her memories she will discover and make manifest the moment of her father’s separation. Ultimately, the girl’s desire to discover the originary violence speaks to the desire of the thriller structure: to discover within the literary the experience(s) of violence from the perspective of “anyone whomsoever.”

The story rehearses a political third space by shifting sporadically between narrative perspectives. As the young girl’s narrative progresses, the fragmented memories of her father intermingle with her own voice, with the voice of the mother, and with memories of her childhood to the point that the girl’s account appropriates the persona of both her father and her mother. The girl creates a fluid and winding narrative to the point that her testament refuses to situate itself in relation to any of the characters referenced in the story. This

flexible subalternism eventually annuls any hierarchical distinction between the narrative of her father – which represents the dominant power structure – and her own powerless perspective:

Lo imagino callado, casi mudo. En la foto sus labios están muy pegados uno con el otro . . . Quizá esta noche en la estación separe esos labios y provoque una risa apabullante. “Cállate, papá,” le diré. ‘No muestres tu felicidad a todo el mundo.’ Pero él seguirá con la boca muy abierta, como la de los muertos recién muertos, y que obligará a cerrársela. Cuando acerque mi mano hacia su cara repitiéndole que no reparta su felicidad a todo el mundo, él me mirará, casi me derribará con sus ojos negros de fantasma, y dirá: ‘¿Qué felicidad, hija?’ . . . Tienes razón, papá: ¿De qué felicidad hablo? Mamá dice que soy una infeliz. Y agrega que ella no es feliz. Sé que ser una infeliz no es lo mismo que no ser feliz, mamá. (47)

The text itself seems to emanate from a zone of indistinction as the story effectuates a continual displacement and appropriation of narrative positions. In one instance, the girl appropriates the dominant position occupied by her father: “Soy tan fantasma como la fantasma de papa. Soy un trapo empapado, retorcido en si mismo” (53). And in another instance, she displaces the persona of her mother onto that of her father at a moment when the girl believes, incorrectly, that she has finally discovered him in a train station: “Qué dices, papá? . . . ‘No soy tu papa.’ ¿Y quién eres, entonces? ¿Un mensajero? ‘No importa quién soy’, dice y ve cómo le vuelco el jugo encima para que se saque la máscara . . . Es que este hombre es mamá disfrazada de papá” (52). The erratic shifting between subjectivities, and between past and present, poses a transgressive investigation of memory politics in that it does not reference the past for any political purpose in the present. In other words, this narrative

engages the past not as something to be covered over, nor as something that can ever be rescued and strategically focalized in the present. Rather, a text like Costamagna's articulates the conditions and the abyssal grounds for simultaneous and equally relevant perspective(s) of the past. It allows their indecidability, their contradiction, their anonymity, and perhaps their *disremembrance*,

Additionally, the narrative's failure to distinguish between temporalities allows for the girl's memories to overwhelm the present in an undifferentiated sequence of recollections. In more ways than one, the text rehearses questions of memory posed by Charles Hatfield in his article on the work of memory regarding whether the past and its subjects can be recalled in non-hierarchical or non-subjectivizing terms.¹⁰⁸ According to Nelly Richard, the sort of flexible subalternism demonstrated in "Boca abierta" would necessitate a reconceptualization of post-dictatorial memory politics "capable of making recollection not a restitution of the past (a regression that buries history in the recesses of yesterday), but rather a coming and going along the winding turns of a memory that does not stop at fixed points, passing instead along a critical multidirectionality of nonpacted alternatives" (*Insubordination* 18).

The narrative strategy of this story, then, understands itself as one that rests in non-resolution and disremembrance. Similarly, the conjunction of the detective search component and the testimonial account denies melancholic

¹⁰⁸ See Hatfield's article "The Work of Memory."

attachments to the past by refusing to reconfigure the lost object (the father) for any resistive or formal purposes of the present. It is for this reason that I believe the text rehearses Foucault's idea of a revolt of subjectivity against subjectivity; the text denies the reconfiguration of a subject – a “friend,” a “subaltern,” a “victim” – and rehearses instead the figure of “whomever.” The end of the story exemplifies this notion of a transgression of subjectivity by advocating for the position of “the whomever,” which manifests itself as marked by silence and anonymity. Upon realizing that her father is gone forever, the girl asks, “Papá?, quiero preguntar. Pero la voz no me sale. Estoy muda, sorda, borracha. Mis labios se han cerrado tanto como los de papa . . . No hablamos . . . Temo enmudecer eternamente con papá” (51). The girl ultimately recognizes the necessity and simultaneous impossibility of restituting her father, and of discovering the secret of his abandonment. Just as she can never reconstitute his person in any comprehensible form, she can never articulate the motive for his abrupt departure. She can only remain suspended in the vacancy between the present and the original moment of separation.

The story succeeds in moving beyond the impasse of memory politics by the fact that following her investigation and the realization that her search has failed, she allows the recollections of her father to dissipate into oblivion: “Lo imagino tan distinto mientras voy desarmando sus gestos y convirtiendo su imagen en mil fragmentos. Lo imagino. Papá tiene la boca abierta ahora, por fin. Como un muerto” (53). What we witness through the symbolic dissolution of the

memory of her father is not only the girl's release from her position as (a) subject to memory (to her father's, her mother's). We also visualize her release as (a) subject to *anything*. We witness the moment at which her narrative breaks off into something beyond the purview of subjectivity and political categories; this movement is not so much a representation of the subaltern perspective as it is an opening up to the space of its originary exclusion. The transgressive force of Costamagna's story, then, I believe, lies in its ability to articulate a third space beyond any fixed subalternity and to construct an account of political violence from the vantage point of "anyone whomsoever."

It is here, at this abyssal juncture between the top-down and bottom-up investigation positions that I believe this story rehearses a thriller logic that visualizes an outside to memory politics. Memory in this story does not operate as a source of opposition against "criminal" forgetting, nor does it function as a refuge of resistance reserved to the "victim" of history. Rather, this story reveals that to critically examine the nature of violence today requires not only challenging, but moving beyond the political forms and subjectivities that have marked the field of post-dictatorship. "Boca abierta" reveals what Nelly Richard calls the "strange bodies," the shifting and ambiguous forms that remain irreducible to conclusive historical fictions (*Insubordination* 6). Costamagna's story conjoins the detective narrative and the witness account in a way that foregrounds a political third space of reflection, in which violent political history is approached as something that is to be neither forgotten nor restituted, but rather

as undifferentiated narrative material always suspended in-between the known and the unrepresentable. It is here, in the space of anyone whomsoever, where the real political work can begin.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION:

THE THRILLER AND THE THIRD SPACE IN CENTRAL AMERICA: HORACIO
CASTELLANOS MOYA AND FRANZ GALICH

Throughout the course of this dissertation, I have attempted a theoretical examination of the Latin American thriller structure, focusing on the Chilean case in particular. My intent was to flesh out the development of the detective narrative component through the process of Chilean modernization, the dictatorship and the post-dictatorship era. I attempted to underscore how narrations of violence or of unrepresentable experiences have been caught up within the debates of memory politics, covered over, on the one hand through narratives of democratic reconciliation and market-driven policies. My intent was also to demonstrate how, on the other hand, post-dictatorial literary forms and criticism have oftentimes taken an oppositional standpoint by clinging to the victims of history and their political legacies as a source of resistance. The ongoing dilemma between memory and forgetting within literature and criticism facilitates a melancholic focus on the past and its political legacies. I then examined a number of testimonios, suggesting that the thriller structure garners its most forceful political impetus through its testimonial component. By focusing on the testimonial experience, as it is presented by a powerless subaltern-subject, the thriller structure proposes an immediate and urgent narrative of violence that moves beyond the impasse of post-dictatorial memory politics.

Finally, I examined the political implications given by the post-dictatorial thriller structure through a reading of Galli's critique of Schmittian political theory. I argued that the thriller structure makes visible a third political space that emerges from the dissolution of the categories sustaining the modern and late-modern State. By investigating the subjectivities and experiences that cannot be reduced to any (State) politics, the thriller structure constitutes the most apt narrative form for exploring the forms of global violence today.

This concluding section examines the extent to which the thriller form can be situated as the dominant narrative structure of postwar Central America.¹⁰⁹ My choice for including an examination of the thriller construct in the Central American region is three-fold. First and simply, no comparison has been done between the post-dictatorial context and post civil war Central America. Secondly, while the Chilean and Central American contexts differ in the nature and course of the violence and oppression that traumatized these countries for nearly three decades, they are similar in that they now face the oftentimes-violent implications of incorporating brutal political histories into a "peaceful" constitutional democracy. And thirdly, an examination of Central America will demonstrate how other writers across Latin America are turning to the thriller

¹⁰⁹ What I refer to as "postwar" Central America focuses primarily on the period immediately following the civil wars of three countries in particular: Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. Analyzing specific countries does not mean to disregard the political or social unrest occurring in other Central American nations, but only to narrow the focus to the regions most heavily beset by civil war. In this sense, "postwar" begins roughly with the Peace Treaties that ended the conflicts in El Salvador, 1992, and Guatemala, 1996, and extends up until the present-day. However, more than analyzing postwar literature according to a specific set of dates, following critic Beatriz Cortez I prefer to use the term "postwar" to refer to a particular sensibility that has marked the recent literature in these countries.

structure to begin thinking beyond their national post-trauma circumstances.

This chapter will focus on El Salvadoran writer Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez* (2004) and *Managua, Salsa City* (1999) by Nicaraguan author Franz Galich. It is my belief that these texts make manifest a postwar thriller aesthetic that interpolates the narrative components of the detective narrative and the testimonial account in what becomes a sensational engagement with the forms of violence affecting Central America today.

Central America is perhaps best known for civil war testimonio forms, and less known for its crime or detective fiction (Kokotovic 15). However, in the aftermath of the Nicaraguan, El Salvadoran and Guatemalan civil wars of the 1970s and 80s something resembling a detective genre emerged. In this sense, the preeminence of the testimonio and the recent boom of the detective form make the Central American region an exemplary context for a concluding examination of the thriller structure. Although many of these postwar works do not correspond neatly within the generic boundaries prescribed by detective literature, they do employ conventions of the detective story – such as the presence of a violent crime, a detective figure and suspense. While later in coming than the detective forms in Chile, the recent surge of the detective narrative after the 1990s appears coupled with more sensational elements that engage with postwar political corruption, violence and impunity. The texts analyzed in this section employ the mirroring perspectives of the thriller form in order to reflect upon legacy of revolutionary violence as well as the effects of

neoliberalism and free market capitalism implemented in the region during the last two decades.

One of the major differences between the uses and variations of the Central American detective narrative is that Chilean works which employ the detective codes exhibit a degree of melancholic loyalty to the utopian projects of the revolutionary left. And if indeed a sentiment of melancholic sympathy persists in post-dictatorial Chilean detective texts, it is because there had actually existed a substantial leftist project that many believed was worth remaining loyal to. In this sense, Chilean detective literature that has spanned the transition from dictatorship to democracy not only tends to be aligned with a broadly leftist literary paradigm of social criticism, but also draws from a developed repertoire of detective literary tropes (Kokotovic 16). The two most popular regional detective series in Chile – Díaz Eterovic’s now thirteen-novel series and Roberto Ampuero’s six novel series – have, over the years, taken the form of a progressive social criticism. Despite their projected critique of dictatorial violence and the neoliberal transition, the detective figures – Heredia and Cayetano Brule, respectively – express a latent sympathy for past revolutionary struggles and the values of social justice and solidarity that they engendered.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ In his article on Chilean detective fiction, Clemens Franken Kurzen observes that “[a]l igual que muchos otros escritores chilenos, Díaz Eterovic, desde una posición política comprometida con la izquierda, quiere entregar en sus novelas ‘una radiografía de nuestra sociedad actual’ . . . Heredia . . . intenta ‘rescatar valores que mantienen en pie a las personas tales como el amor, la solidaridad y el jugarse por el otro’” (“El neopolicia” 82). And in his later article on Ampuero’s

Contrastingly, one of the principal sentiments characterizing the Central American texts analyzed in this section is a lack of any melancholic attachment to previous social or political projects. The texts in question speak directly to the violent historical and political changes that beset Central America during the 1970s and 80s. Different from Chile, which, prior to the *golpe de estado* and the seventeen-year military rule, was revered for its relative political and economic stability, Central American countries like Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador have never experienced comparable levels of stability. Even after the peace treaties of the 1990s, which implemented a constitutional democracy, the region continues to experience extremely high levels of explicit post-conflict violence.

A brief history of Central America provides background to the continuing and ongoing manifestations of violence that make the region an apt context for an examination of the thriller narrative structure. At the close of World War II, Central American economies were faced with stagnation, extreme poverty and wealth inequality. With fears of leftist takeovers at the onset of the Cold War, foreign powers – largely the United States with the help of the Alliance for Progress – encouraged the formation of political parties and reforms that would suppress the opposition.¹¹¹ As the local opposition groups organized and began

Cayetano Brule, Franken Kurzen refers to this detective as a “socialista renovado” (“Cayetano Brulé” 28).

¹¹¹ John F. Kennedy’s 1961 Alliance for Progress was a program designed to develop economic cooperation between the US and Latin America during the Cold War period. Over a period of ten years, \$100 billion was pumped into Latin America’s development. Despite the Kennedy administration’s pledge to help reform Latin America, the Alliance’s origins are tied to Castro’s rise to power in Cuba, and the Soviet leader Khrushchev’s announcement that third-world

to gain strength, so too did the official repression, leading to the radicalization of social movements and the outbreak of armed conflict in the 1960s, 70s and 80s (Guatemala in 1960, Nicaragua in 1979, and El Salvador in 1980). The revolutionary movements that formed around the political struggle attempted to not only topple the intransigent elite class and the long-standing military rule, but also attempted to establish socialism, a goal realized only in Nicaragua when in 1979 the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*) overthrew the Somoza dictatorial regime. The Sandinistas ruled Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990, a period during which the revolution waned, and US-supported and trained military groups – known as the “Contras” – exacted violent attacks on both guerilla and state affiliates.

Following the FSLN defeat in the Nicaraguan elections of 1990, El Salvador and Guatemala signed national peace accords in 1992 and 1996 respectively, a symbol of the achievement of a constitutional democracy and the Isthmus’ incorporation into a global market system. Despite the “Acuerdos de Paz,” however, which brought an end to the years of civil war, the transition into a globalized economy has been wrought with social tension. Indeed, as Kokotovic implies, despite its hopes to promote socialism, many now blame the revolutionary project of the 70s and 80s for possibly having helped usher in the hegemony of free market capitalism in Central America. Kokotovic explains that

revolutions were to be the hope of the future. In this sense, as much as its developmental focus, the Alliance was implemented to fight revolution in Latin America. The US administration believed that financing center-left forces in Latin America (such as the Christian Democrats in Chile) would curtail both dictators and the far left in order to allow the emergence of a stable middle element.

at the onset of the revolutionary struggles, one of the obstacles impeding both the social changes advocated by the revolutionary left and the modernization of capitalism in the Isthmus was the anachronistic land-owning elite (17). The United States interventionist schemes understood that they could neither defeat the left nor implement transnational market policies until the power-hold of the old elite was loosened. Therefore it could only be through the weakening of this class by the left's guerilla war – in conjunction with pressure from the US – that a new class of a more transnational elite could emerge that would embrace globalized economic policies.

Postwar violence continues to be an ongoing and immediate threat in Central America, which has caused critics like Beatriz Cortez, in her book *Estética del cinismo. Pasión y desencanto en la literatura centroamericana de posguerra*, to speak paradoxically about the continuation of war within the postwar setting. The Central American region continues to experience manifestations of violence at every level, only now those manifestations are in many places exacerbated by the pressures of a global economy. In Guatemala, for example, nearly 2,000 people were murdered in the early part of 2004 (Wade 151). Although the government and media sources ascribed the killings to street gangs, the roots of post-conflict violence clearly harkened back to the war: Underground security organizations that had been created during the war were never fully disbanded. To a similar degree, the US-trained anti-insurgency militia, who spent years immersed in military warfare-training and who, at the

end of the war faced the difficult task of reintegrating back into civil society, oftentimes carried the violent war-time aggression into their post-war occupations. These factors eventually led to organized crime associations and began to infiltrate the military, police and political parties, a process that not only confirmed that these entities would operate with impunity and corruption, but has also made it increasingly difficult to distinguish the source of the continuing violence.

Despite a long history of war opposition between leftist revolution and military counterrevolution, postwar violence in Guatemala approximates Galli's characterization of global war, in which the lines between the political friend and enemy, and victim and criminal, give way to a decentered conflict among political and economic forces. For instance, the democratic reforms accompanying the 1996 "Acuerdos de Paz" were destined to align Guatemala's economic development with a more globalized economic system. These new democratic reforms included changes such as privatization, tight fiscal reform, trade and foreign trade liberalization, and human rights commissions. In reality, however, the reforms, which tended to benefit a transnational capitalist class more than anyone, intensified the nation's already high income inequality and increased poverty. There also remained fears that occult forces with long-standing antagonisms against the democratic reforms would attempt to terrorize the new administration. Nothing more resolutely demonstrated the permanence of war within the new "democratic" Guatemala than the murder of Archbishop

Juan Gerardi in April of 1998. Just days after the Catholic Church's Human Rights Commission issued a report (the REMHI report - *Informe de la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica*) on civil war political violence, Bishop Gerardi – who was one of the report's authors and its central spokesman – was bludgeoned to death.

The manifestations of violence that persist in present-day Central America, like illegal drug trade, rape and street gangs, can no doubt be linked to civil war oppositions. Now, however, the war-time conflicts held between guerillas and government troops, between insurgency and counterinsurgency movements, appear as a war between virtually indistinguishable forces, persisting in the “democratic” era in new, more indistinct criminal forms affecting every level of society. Similarly, the global economic reforms implemented following the peace treaties have exacerbated postwar violence not only by deepening the region's unequal wealth distribution, but also by impressing on the region the pressures of a world economy with new rules that favor an elite capitalist class.

In this sense, although the end of the fighting brought reprieve from years of brutal war, the “democracy” era in Central America is marked by a widespread sentiment of disillusionment and cynicism, as it became obvious how little was actually achieved politically during the revolutions, both on the left and the right. Although leftist revolutionary groups gained recognition in the political process – such as the FSLN – their involvement in electoral democracy was faulted for

having helped very little to improve the conditions that motivated the civil unrest in the first place. The parties of the former leftist movements have proven ineffective in hampering the application of the neoliberal economic and social reforms promoted by the United States in Latin America and elsewhere in the world. In many ways, then, the democratic restructuring of the Isthmus, as well as the “Acuerdos de Paz,” function much like an ironic melodrama, a narrative of democratic stability that shrouds resurgences of war violence, and exacerbates sentiments of disillusionment and resentment toward the failures of the leftist projects.

Beatriz Cortez’s assessment of the postwar setting as characterized by an “aesthetic of cynicism” would, on the one hand, seem a somewhat debilitating model for approaching postwar works. For Cortez, postwar cynicism is expressed both toward the political left and the right, and both toward the revolutionary past and the neoliberal democratic present. In other words, it expresses not only a generalized loss of hope in the utopian dreams that drove the social movements of a previous moment, but also a pervasive mistrust in the current global market policies and the new elite classes that these policies tend to profit. On the other hand, however, an aesthetic of cynicism is a highly functional theoretical concept for examining the thriller form in postwar Central America, as it makes visible the possibility of a third space of political reflection from which to critique both the previous revolutionary projects and the neoliberal market policies of today’s Central American society. For Cortez, the aesthetic of

cynicism opens a space in which to articulate both a critique of collective action or hopes for social justice, and also of the official narratives promoted by the neoliberal administrations. Kokotovic describes the distinctive cynical sentiment of postwar literature in the following way: “Rather than addressing collective problems and social struggles or exalting the heroic sacrifices . . . to bring about a better, more egalitarian future for all, postwar works focus on individual desires, passions and struggles for survival in violent postwar societies with only a grim future” (18). An aesthetic of cynicism thus opens up a liminal zone, a space for survival for postwar subjectivities, who exist “en un contexto social minado por el legado de violencia de la guerra y por la pérdida de una forma concreta de liderazgo” (Cortez 27).

Different from melancholy, which constitutes one of the preeminent tropes of post-dictatorial Chilean literature and criticism, and that by virtue of its attachment to the lost object (the victims of history, or the past socialist horizon) can lead to immobility and in the worst case, to the stagnation of critical thought, an aesthetic of cynicism proposes a recourse to action. As Cortez explains, an aesthetic of cynicism does not claim to function as an alternative to the revolutionary utopias of yesteryear, nor as a mode of clinging to or restituting the revolutionary subjects. It is instead an active movement toward the articulation of new postwar subjectivities that by virtue of their powerlessness always occupy *a priori* a subaltern-position, and that configure themselves always already stripped down to bare life. For Cortez a practice of cynicism “se trata de una

subjetividad constituida como subalterno *a priori*, una subjetividad . . . que solamente se posibilita por medio de la esclavitud de ese sujeto que *a priori* se ha constituido como subalterno, de su destrucción” (25).

In other words, rather than looking upon the past and its political subjects as things to be restituted and incorporated into the present as resistance to the same, a practice of cynicism in postwar literature attempts to construct a space for alternative subjectivities that must always adapt themselves to the volatile conditions of the present according to what Castellanos Moya calls a “culture of survival, of the the immediate present . . . the uncertain and improbable tomorrow” (*Recuento de incertidumbres* 45, my translation). The characters that populate *Insensatez* and *Managua, Salsa City* are figures whose subjectivity is in a constant state of flux. The immediate and ongoing threat of violence that surrounds them at every point threatens to render them absolute criminals, and consequently, to destroy them at any given moment.

What is curious about an “aesthetic of cynicism,” however, is that it does not abandon the revolutionary past altogether. It recycles its forms and literatures in often disparaging fashions, stripping them to their limits, precisely, in order to give them renovated force in the present. One of the forms in which it does so is through the war-time genre of the testimonio. Kokotovic observes that testimonio, which was the form most closely associated with the leftist movements of the 1970s and 80s and perhaps the narrative catalyst of the

solidarity movements that accompanied the war, has, in the 1990s almost waned, being supplanted by a return to narrative fiction (18).

It is helpful to recall from Chapter Three that at its onset the Central American testimonio focused more on traditional categories of what is considered “the subaltern:” these figures include the illiterate, the exploited Indian, or the poor. John Beverley has defined testimonio as an account of violence or oppression recounted from the perspective of the victim who has witnessed the event. For this testimonio critic, the preeminent purpose of testimonio is to recuperate the “Real,” or that nonrepresentational experience of “otherness” that cannot be assimilated into language. The production of testimonios surged in Central America in the 1970s and 80s as a channel through which marginalized subjects – many times with collaboration of a transcriber or intellectual – could speak out against violence and oppression, and establish networks of solidarity that transcended national borders. As a politically committed form, testimonio presented itself as the authentic voice of the subaltern that sought to contribute to the struggle against authoritarianism or political violence. More importantly, testimonios produced during the war frequently expressed hope in the possibility of achieving social justice through collective action.¹¹²

¹¹² It must also be recalled that the Chilean testimonio emerged a bit later than the Central American testimonio (roughly during the 80s and 90s). Although still a collective form in a sense, the Chilean testimonio centered more on the narrative of the dictatorial survivor who recounted his/her individual experiences during and after the dictatorial period. In this regard, the Chilean testimonio is less associated with collective movements, and speaks more to the varying ways in which the authoritarian State exacted violence against its citizens.

By contrast, if the testimonial narrative component emerges at all in the postwar context, it does so stripped of its call to collective action. Recent postwar fiction, including the El Salvadoran text *Insensatez* that will be analyzed subsequently, recasts the traditional Central American testimonial subject in a cynical light, calling into question the very configuration of the testimonial victim as it was posited by this war-time genre. The testimonial figure who narrates Castellanos Moya's novel occupies a political third space, as he speaks from a liminal space oscillating ambiguously between the position of the testimonial victim and the criminal. In this sense, the critical relevance of Cortez's aesthetic of cynicism, and why I believe it to be fundamental to a theory of the post civil war thriller structure, is that it reveals testimonio's exhaustion as a form reserved to traditional marginal identities. Not only this, but an aesthetic of cynicism opens up the possibility of reconstituting a subject of history – the testimonial victim, the political hero – always and only through the very dissolution of these very figures.

Horacio Castellanos Moya's *Insensatez*: A Tale of the Victim

Castellanos Moya's novel seventh novel *Insensatez* makes visible why the thriller structure arguably constitutes the dominant narrative structure of the post civil war circumstance. Revered by Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño as one of the most important Central American writers of the twentieth century,

Castellanos Moya's works sensationalize the networks of violence that continue to plague Central America.¹¹³ Although from El Salvador, *Insensatez* focuses on postwar violence in Guatemala.¹¹⁴ As mentioned, Guatemala's history has been the violent and chaotic interplay between warring political groups to the degree that now, following the transition into an electoral democracy, the lines distinguishing political friends from enemies has virtually disappeared. What is left is excessive crime and violence that affects Guatemalan civilians through the sinister concurrence of the legacy of civil war violence and the pressure of global market forces.

I believe that *Insensatez* gives witness to the globalization of violence, in which an encounter with the Real – that which cannot be symbolized – no longer constitutes some threatening “outside” recounted predominately by war-time victims. The novel demonstrates not only the exhaustion of recognizable

¹¹³ According to Bolaño, Castellanos Moya “escribe como si viviera en el fondo de alguno de los muchos volcanes de su país. Esta frase suena a realismo mágico. Sin embargo no hay nada mágico en sus libros, salvo tal vez su voluntad de estilo. Es un sobreviviente pero no escribe como un sobreviviente” (n/p).

¹¹⁴ Between 1944 and 1954, Guatemala experienced a socialist revolution, during which period presidents Juan José Arévalo and Juan Arbenz Guzmán enacted a series of labor and land reforms that sought to abate the country's deep poverty and wealth inequality. Arbenz, who had legalized the Communist party and nationalized land belonging to the United Fruit Company, exacerbated the US's anti-Communist fears such that in 1954 a CIA engineered coup invaded Guatemala and forced Arbenz to resign. After his overthrow, the following government administrations executed a ferocious anti-Communist counterrevolution, which dismantled the land reforms and peasant worker organizations and murdered thousands of civilian sympathizers with the revolution. One decade of leftist reform and revolution, subsequently followed by years of counterrevolution and right-wing death squads left the Guatemalan society devastated. Many of the rights feared any mounting leftist opposition from newly formed student and labor unions, which accelerated the military's involvement in politics. Regular national security forces and right wing terrorist groups formed and commenced terrorizing anyone vaguely connected with the left and to reformist politics. The violence exacted against civilian, Indians and leftist sympathizers was brought to a head in the period from 1978 to 1980. For a detailed historical account of the Guatemalan revolution, see Wade, *Understanding Central America* p 135-158.

categories of testimonial identity – the “subaltern”, the “political hero” or the “victim,” – but it also demonstrates how, in the global age, totalizing violence is no longer an experience recounted solely by traditional testimonial subjectivities. Recalling Galli’s theorizations from the previous two chapters, global war has blurred the modern political conflict between friends and enemies. Equally, the Schmittian enemy, who could be identified and fought against, has disappeared and been replaced with the presence of an indistinct and unlocalizable criminal force. The disappearance of the enemy as such has therefore transformed the threat of violence into an experience that can be encountered at any given moment, precisely, by anyone whomsoever. By recasting conventional testimonial subjectivities in a cynical light, the novel articulates the protagonist of the Central American postwar thriller structure: Not properly a testimonial victim, nor a victimizer, *Insensatez* narrates the witness account from the perspective of “anyone whomsoever.”

About half-way into *Insensatez*, the narrator declares that “a nadie en su sano juicio le podría interesar ni escribir ni publicar otra novela más sobre indígenas asesinados” (74). And yet, Castellanos Moya’s novel is, precisely, a testimonial-type reflection upon the Mayan genocide at the hands of the Guatemalan State in the early 1980s. The narrator, who turns out to be an unforgiving cynic of his country’s violent history, might simply be incorrect, but his ironic statement reveals pressing questions that have to do with the validity of the testimonial experience in Central America’s postwar setting. Indeed

pressing is whether testimonio writings can still recuperate the Real in present-day society? Does the Real even matter, and if so, to whom? Is testimonio's account of violence and suffering reserved only to concrete marginal identities, as was the case in foundational narratives like that of Rigoberta Menchu, for example? And what even constitutes a marginal identity in today's globalized context?

Insensatez does not provide any concrete answers, but nonetheless proposes a sensational examination into these questions through the narrator, a cynical, ambiguous figure who remains anonymous throughout the novel. A writer from El Salvador, he has fled his own country after publishing reproachful comments about the President. He ends up in Guatemala, where a friend hires him to edit a thousand-page report on human rights violations during the war. The report consists of testimonial excerpts from the victims who suffered torture at the hands of the military. The novel thus takes the form of a testimonio in which the narrator recounts his experiences in Guatemala City while editing the report. What begins as a lucrative day-job for the narrator transforms into a near-destructive literary obsession. As he edits, the wording of the witness accounts impacts him so profoundly that he records testimonial fragments in a personal notebook, referring to them almost compulsively. One of the first passages he extracts is "Yo no estoy completo de la mente" (13), taken from a Mayan victim who witnessed his family's execution. The passage becomes a reoccurring theme throughout the novel, and is the phrase the narrator uses to cynically

describe his own mental state for having accepted the editing job. So immersed is the narrator in reading the testimonial events that he begins to hallucinate. His fear of persecution by the military provokes delusions where he perceives himself alternating between the roles of both victim and victimizer. In one instance he finds himself physically enacting a torture scene, he as the torturer. In another scenario, he believes himself the victim of a military conspiracy. He begins to envision torturers and assassins at every turn until ultimately losing the ability to distinguish himself between victim and perpetrator, delusion and reality. As the military hones in on him, or so he believes, he flees the compound where he had been editing the report, and finally the country, seeking refuge with a cousin in Germany.

The narrator's second-hand experience with State terror through the words of others makes for a sort of meta-testimonial encounter with the Real; that is, this witness account of one reading testimonies evokes not the experiences of the properly testimonial subject (the Indian, or the prisoner-camp victim, for example). It is, rather, a testimony giving witness to the *effects* of reading such accounts, which suggests the Real to be just as much an experience with political violence, as it is the terror provoked by its memory. The narrator, in fact, shares little in common with the civil-war testimonial subjects. His revulsion for postwar society can be seen almost as an inversion of testimonio's defense of marginal identities. As neither of the Right nor properly a Leftist, the narrator is a cynic and politically apathetic; his distaste for politics is

heightened by the corruption he sees infecting every level of postwar society. He expresses his disdain for the leftist “comunistas reciclados” upon entering a bar, “donde las paredes estaban ensuciadas con horribles versos de mediocres poetas izquierdistas vendedores de esperanza” (41). Again later, proclaiming himself “un ateo vicioso” (16), he voices his repugnance of the Catholic church which, despite endorsing the very report he edits, is for him, vile and corrupt.

His testimonial position thus shifts ambiguously between the poles of institutional politics, and between the role of victimizer and victim, rendering impossible testimonio’s traditional call to collective action and solidarity. For instance, the narrator, as editor of the report, identifies with the postwar government administrations in their tendency to relativize the victim’s experience. The democratic government’s efforts to collect thousands of testimonies and quote them in the REMHI report may in some respects be considered a validation of the victim’s experience. However, with its cold, clinical and merely repetitive listing of testimonial references, the report propagates a new kind of violence that strips the victim of the singularity of his/her experience. The narrator actually rehearses the violence implied in this process. Not only are his interests in the report purely to help his finances, but by altering its content for consistency and coherence, he risks reducing the testimonial subjects to bare life, that is, rendering each of the accounts as indistinguishable from the next. The narrator also rehearses the role of the victimizer by collecting fragments from the report. As he edits, he extracts

testimonial pieces from their original context, selecting quotes on the basis of their aesthetic quality and writing them in his notebook. He describes “esos testimonios que parecían cápsulas concentradas de dolor y cuyas frases tenían tal sonoridad, fuerza y profundidad” (31). He recites his selections to his compadre Toto as if they were poetry: “Escuchá su lindura: (and he quotes) *Las casas estaban tristes porque ya no había personas dentro*” (31).

By decontextualizing the horror evoked in the fragments and shifting attention instead to their poetic aspect, the novel demonstrates the violence exerted upon testimonio at the hands of the contemporary critic, whose exhaustive study of testimonial texts naturalizes the form’s ability to recall the Real. The novel also, by inscribing testimonial voices into a fictional narrative to be sold across the global market, illustrates the way in which unrepresentable experiences with violence no longer constitute some threatening “outside,” but are rather appropriated into the center of contemporary life.

At other points in the novel, we see the narrator shift into the position of victim, as he believes himself to be the target of a totalizing military conspiracy that will surely eliminate him for his involvement with the report. His delusions lead him to imagine the military as an all-encompassing force surrounding his compound at every point. As he attempts to flee, he finds himself repeating the testimonial fragments he had recorded: “estaba aterrorizado ante la posibilidad de que los criminales me detectaran y procedieran a eliminarme, como insensato era también que entonara con ardor la frase *herido sí es duro, pero*

muerto es tranquilo" (142). It is as if he were witnessing power's ability to reduce an individual to bare life, that is, to eliminate him with impunity. The narrator's own terror here evokes that of the indigenous victim, as he claims that "eso era propio del dolor de un indígena sobreviviente de la masacre y no de un corrector que ahora trotaba precisamente para no quedar muerto ni herido" (142).

Based on these examples, the narrator maintains an ambiguous identity that is neither fixedly marginal nor dominant. It is neither that of the victim nor the victimizer, but is instead suspended somewhere in-between. His testimony precisely opens up a third space of narration, as his own witness account cannot be limited to the traditional categories of testimonial subjectivity. The indistinction of the narrator as a testimonial voice not only suggests the need to problematize titles like "victim" or "marginal" in today's global society. It also questions whether an account of violence can mobilize readers in any way important to politics. The narrator, after all, even after reading the report, demonstrates no commitment to human rights or political causes, and no solidarity with the victim's plight. His agreement to edit the report is based on purely financial motives, and his association with the testimonies' content amounts to a near fetish with their literary quality. Thus, his own stagnant and ambivalent witness account rehearses the violence of stripping testimonio of its political impetus and reducing it to its literariness.

I believe that Castellanos Moya's novel rehearses the exhaustion of testimonio as a form reserved for war-time's marginal identities in order to demonstrate the increasing globalization of violence. Let us recall that Galli describes this type of ongoing violence in terms of global war, in which anyone whomsoever faces direct and immediate exposure to external turbulence. Just as globalization has no borders, so too global war lacks a clear telos and distinct contradictions. For Galli, the US government's justification of the so-called global "war on terror" did not instantiate globalization, but revealed its conflictual dark side, as well as unleashed new economies of violence in which the war-time distinctions (friend/enemy, revolution/counterrevolution) disappear.

For example, following the Guatemalan peace accords, the UN sponsored a widely published report called the *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico* (CEH) to combat acts of terror. Yet, the report prohibited the naming of individuals and military personnel responsible for the killing, which has thus allowed for corruption and impunity to continue in Guatemala, albeit under the guise of democracy. Ironically, reports such as this, designed to counter terror, end up propagating a new form of violence that transforms anyone whomsoever into the victim of a faceless, formless enemy. This might explain why at the end of the novel, the publication of the REMHI report, which did reveal the names of military officers, led directly to the murder of the Bishop Gerardi and probably would have to that of the narrator himself had he not escaped. In this sense, the novel demonstrates that violence in the era of global war is no longer a

momentary event, directed primarily against politically implicated subjects or victims of military oppression. Violence is, rather, an immediate and ongoing threat that can render anyone a criminal and eliminate them indefinitely.

The ultimate example of global war in the novel occurs toward the end, when the narrator – in a moment of sheer panic – realizes his inability to distinguish himself between the victim and the criminal. Having escaped Guatemala to Germany and desiring to rid himself of any association with the report, he observes his reflection in the mirror at a bar. He admits that “mi atención estaba fija en mi rostro que se reflejaba en el espejo . . . en mi expresión que de pronto se me hizo ajena, como si el que estaba ahí no hubiera sido yo, como si ese rostro por un instante hubiera sido de otro, de un desconocido, y no mi rostro de todos los días, un instante en que me fui irreconocible” (148-49).

His ensuing psychological breakdown upon seeing himself as indistinguishable – as both victim and criminal, or as neither – evokes once again fragments from the report’s testimonies: “pronto se instaló en mi mente la frase que decía *'eran personas como nosotros a las que teníamos miedo.'*” For Galli, this statement would be the ultimate description of the enemy in the global era, as “an alterity that is at the same time infinitely distant and monstrous, on the one hand, and internal and disquieting, on the other . . . the Enemy today presents himself as the Disturber, the specter of all that is internal and domestic -- as our own wicked caricature, our Double, our Shadow” (141).

In conclusión, *Insensatez* can be read as a postwar thriller as it both rehearses the dissolution of the categories of subjectivity that previously gave testimonio its political force, and it articulates a third space of enunciation that cannot be reduced to that of the victim or the criminal. If the testimonial subject as such in the global age is indeed revealed as exhausted, as this novel seems to illustrate, then a witness account of anyone whomsoever might just hold the answer for the future of testimonio. In this sense, *Insensatez* points to new spaces of subjectivity that by virtue of their ambiguity and motility imbue the testimonial position with a renovated sense of immediacy and urgency with which to confront the nature of violence in post civil war Central America.

Franz Galich's *Managua, Salsa City: A Tale of the Criminal*

The final text analyzed in this conclusion, *Managua, Salsa City*, will pay special attention to the detective component of the thriller structure. Returning to Misha Kokotovic's assessment of postwar fiction, many post-conflict works couple the detective narrative conventions with an aesthetic of cynicism as a way to criticize both the region's previous failed revolutionary projects as well as the corruption of the present democratic regimes. To recall from Chapter Two, during the 1980s and 90s the Chilean detective narrative became a popular narrative mode for investigating the crime, institutional corruption and impunity of the dictatorial regimes and their later institutionalization in neoliberal democracy. Post-dictatorial writers employed elements of the detective narrative to also

symbolically recuperate the marginal histories and victimized subjectivities covered over by the neoliberal administrations project of reconciliation. In this sense, the post-dictatorial detective novel emerged as innately reactionary; its impulse to recuperate the past and its subjects presupposes a relation of militant opposition against today's "criminal" neoliberal forces. *Managua, Salsa City*, however, recasts the detective form in a cynical light, calling into question the use of the detective narrative as an inherent source of resistance. Instead, *Managua, Salsa City* makes use of an aesthetic of cynicism in order to articulate a third space of political understanding that is indebted neither to past revolutionary projects nor to the present neoliberal regimes. Different from Castellanos Moya's novel, which utilized testimonial elements to recharacterize the victim within postwar society, *Managua, Salsa City* employs detective elements to problematize the figure of the criminal.

During the Nicaraguan revolutionary period, the figure of the criminal corresponded to Schmitt's characterization of the enemy. The criminal occupied a political "side" that could be identified and counteracted; he was a clearly demarcated nemesis who represented a force of opposition to be fought against (for example, for the Sandinistas, the criminals were the Contras guerillas, and similarly, the Contras targeted the Sandinistas as criminals). By contrast, the kinds of criminal figures that populate Galich's novel seem to emanate from everywhere and lack a concrete identity or objective. The criminals in *Managua, Salsa City* are depicted as both the elites who hoard the nation's wealth, and

those common street criminals who, after the “Acuerdos de Paz,” rechanneled the war-time aggression for which they were trained into criminal operations against society or themselves. In this sense, I believe this novel challenges previous war-time configurations of the criminal and articulates instead the sort of criminality that results from a world of war. Galich portrays figures who are indistinct and ambiguous, and who oscillate between the positions of criminal and victim. They are, on the one hand, labeled “criminals” for the sordid crimes they commit; yet, on the other hand, they approximate the victim-position by virtue of the scarce or impossible options for escape from a livelihood that demands violence as the only mode of survival.

Similar to the wars in El Salvador and Guatemala, the Nicaraguan civil war involved prolonged and violent conflict between a leftist revolutionary movement and US-trained anti-communist forces. Early on in Nicaragua’s conflict, the National Guard became a central source of political violence. It was the vehicle through which its first commander, Anastasio Somoza García, consolidated the Somoza family dictatorship, which terrorized Nicaragua’s civilians from 1936 until 1979. Somoza not only had the popular leftist guerilla leader Augusto Sandino assassinated, but the National Guard – always with a Somoza at the head – converted into a sort of mafia of sorts, dealing prostitution, gambling and terrorizing the population. In the early 1970s, wealth disparity and extreme poverty stimulated the formation of anti-Somoza political

parties, the most prominent among them, the FSLN, extended its support network to university students and labor groups.

In response, the Somoza regime declared a state of emergency and began a three- year reign of terror during which the National Guard murdered thousands of innocent people suspected as possible FSLN affiliates. By 1977, the war had intensified into an all-out war on the population, which drove thousands to join the revolutionary forces. By 1979, the FSLN had acquired wide popular support, military capacity and external backing. Following several anti-Somoza uprisings, Somoza fled the country. The National Guard collapsed days later, and the Sandinista-led rebel group took power. The years following the Sandinista victory in 1979 brought economic decline and social turbulence. Fearing that the Sandinista takeover in Nicaragua would encourage leftist groups elsewhere in Central and Latin America, the United States redoubled its endorsement of the Contras groups.

Despite the Sandinista's relatively successful efforts to improve the war-ravaged economy and curtail human rights abuses, the increased US support to the Contras demanded that government spending be put toward military defense expenditures. The heavy military expenses stifled the funding to other areas of social and economic reform. As a result, by the 1990 elections, the Contra War and economic strangulation had brought such economic hardship to Nicaragua that the Sandinistas were unable to win the majority in the elections. The democratic administrations that took over in 1990 enacted a series of broad

neoliberal economic reforms – such as reducing social services, privatization of state enterprise, and policies that favored export agriculture over production of domestic products -- which expanded the countries already high unemployment and causing drug addiction, crime and social violence to soar.

This post-Sandinista Nicaragua provides the narrative background for Galich's novel. *Managua, Salsa City* reads like thriller suspense film, with fast-moving language that creates the sensation of shifting through a rapid succession of cinematographic shots. The Managua street jargon used throughout the novel poignantly illustrates the narrative position from which the story is told: that of the figures left dispossessed by both sides of the Nicaraguan revolution, those excluded even from the sparse benefits that were instated following the nation's transition to democracy in 1990. Galich himself notes that the novel's attraction to the figures and subjectivities discarded from postwar democracy speaks to realities "that are not just those of Nicaragua but of Central America, and that mark a period of postwar, corruption and social decay" (Aguero n/p, my translation here and below). For Galich, postwar realities blur the distinction between criminal and victim, forcing postwar subjects into the liminal position of both "victim and criminal in the wake of violence and corruption" (Aguero n/p). We can therefore describe the subjects of postwar Nicaragua as located within a third space: between the impact of a revolution in ruins and a global system within which Nicaragua has yet to find its niche.

The novel narrates the story of two criminals who encounter each other at a night club: Pancho Rana, previously a Sandinista Army Special Forces officer who now works as the chauffeur and groundskeeper for an affluent Managua family, and La Guajira, a prostitute who directs a gang of former “Contra” militants who prey on the wealthy men she attracts at night clubs. The pair of delinquents get by in the only world they know, the nocturnal world of Managua, described like a kind of urban hell from which its inhabitants feel there is no escape. Galich describes how nightfall in Managua draws out all forms of violence, murder, rape and robbery, as well as the figures who depend on these activities as their mainstay:

Managua se oscurece y las tinieblas ganan la capital, ¡y cómo no!, si las luminarias no sirven del todo y las pocas que sirven, o se las roban los mismos ladrones de la Empresa Eléctrica o se las roban los del gobierno para iluminar la Carretera Norte cuando vienen personajes importantes, para que no piensen que estamos en la total desgracia. Es como si miles y miles de muertos resucitaran y empezaran a invadir el mundo de los vivos, como una venganza de ultratumba donde participan hombres, mujeres, viejos, jóvenes y niños. (1)

The narrator describes the city’s violence with corrosive cynicism. The corruption, moral decay and rampant criminality are portrayed as the result of both the overthrown Sandinista regime and the new corrupt democratic administrations. What the novel portrays as “criminal” is intended to denote the eventual state of anyone forced to contend in Managua. The narrator describes Managua’s nighttime criminals as if they were everywhere, as if they were undifferentiated from any other civilian:

But the worst part of it all was that after the earthquake [of 1972, which signaled the final decline of the Somoza regime] seemed that God could win but he lost again finally and that's how it will be until the end of time, when God might manage to beat the Devil, but in the meantime, here in hell, that is, Managua, everything remains the same: the glue-sniffing beggar children, the fags and the whores, the pimps and the politicians, the thieves and the police (who are the same as politicians whether Sandinistas or Liberals or Conservatives or whatever the fuck, son of a bitch partners of the Devil because they are all the same. (1-2)¹¹⁵

The fact that a former revolutionary and an affiliate with war-time Contra join forces as a criminal team in the postwar setting presents a cynical critique of the revolution's failure to exact any lasting change. Their association does not symbolize, however, some reconciliatory union made possible and promoted by the 1987 Central American Peace Accord.¹¹⁶ In fact, through Pancho Rana and La Guajira's encounter, Galich puts forth a corrosive examination of Nicaragua's ongoing crime problems, problems that cannot be separated from the US support of the Contras during and after the civil war. As Jeffrey Browitt comments, the thrilling aspect of the novel is the sensational tension it sustains between the use of the detective narrative – a crime, suspense and a violent

¹¹⁵ “[s]e creyó que Dios podía ganar y finalmente volvió a perder y así seguiría pasando hasta el final de los siglos, donde Dios tal vez logre vencer al Diablo, pero para mientras, aquí en el infierno, digo Managua, todo sigue igual: los cipotes piderreales y huelepega, los cochones y las putas, los chivos y los políticos, los ladrones y los policiaas (que son lo mismo que los políticos, sean sandináis o liberáis o conservadurías, cristianáis o cualquiermierdáis, jueputas socios del Diablo porque son la misma chocada)” (2). The English translation borrows from those of Misha Kokotovic and Allegra M. McLeod in their analyses of *Managua, Salsa City*.

¹¹⁶ The Central American Peace Treaty (1987) involved a series of regional peace measures to be carried out in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The accord calls for specific steps to promote greater political freedom, amnesty, cease-fires in guerilla wars, and a cutoff of foreign aid to finance rebel groups. In reality, the treaties did little to effectuate any real peace, and in fact in places like El Salvador the number of death squad murders spiked in the months directly following the treaty.

encounter – and the real underlying historical context – the failure of the Sandinista project at the hands of the US-trained Contras (1).

As the story opens, the former Sandinista officer Rana has just raided the rich family for whom he works as groundskeeper. Before escaping with his newly acquired loot he plans to spend one more night out in Managua. Under the impression that Pancho Rana is himself the wealthy estate owner, La Guajira plans to seduce him so that her once-Contra affiliates can rob him. The pair, however, end up spending several delirious hours together consuming drugs, alcohol and perusing the dark streets occupied by habitual Managua criminals: drug peddlers, thieves and crooked police.

As the night continues on, the narration's focus on Pancho and La Guajira's delinquent activity shifts, and the pair begins to appear as victims immersed in a powerful conspiracy from which there is no escape. La Guajira starts to envision a better life with Rana, and he too, considers revealing to her his true identity. He finally proposes that they escape Managua and run away together. The romantic get-away plan of the two criminals blurs the pair's previously described felonious activity, and at once readers encounter Rana and La Guajira's adventure as if it were the story of two bourgeois lovers instead of a pair of street criminals. For a brief moment Rana and La Guajira look like the star-crossed victims of a harsh underworld from which the only escape would seem to be through love. The pair's amorous union appears almost as an ironic reenactment of the national allegories of the Latin American nation-building

period, where social and political oppositions are symbolically reconciled through lovers destined to be together.

The division between criminal and victim blurs again as the novel continues in an extended detour through the lovers' saga. Pancho Rana narrates an encounter of amorous passion with La Guajira, and as he narrates, his description of a night of love-making begins to take on the form of a war account. The limits between love and war disappear in a vigorous encounter between these criminals:

La penetración fue brutal, la fortaleza cedió ante el empuje ariete sanguíneo en el muro de la retaguardia, pero se porta con gallardía y estoicismo, aguanta el embate . . . siente el caballo de Troya entre sus entrañas . . . [y] la visión de las dos hermosas colinas floridas le proporcionan inusitadas fuerzas al ejército invasor, ¡oh delicia del ejército enemigo que impera en la conquista de la ignota gruta! (64)

And later, Rana's account expresses the love-making/battle as a confusion of roles, where the victorious is vanquished and the vanquished ends victorious: "Paradoja del ejército invasor, cae prisionero de la inmensas paredes húmedas y estrechas. De pronto, la columna se retira, con el consabido asombro del foso defensivo . . . La fortaleza queda temblando . . . El vencedor es vencido y el vencido sale vencedor. Sobre el campo el cuerpo del vencedor, derrotado" (64-65).

The possibility for envisioned escape through love, however, is shattered when Rana and La Guajira return to the mansion. La Guajira's gangster associates have located the pair, and have been joined by more criminal side-

kicks plotting to rape La Guajira and kill Pancho Rana. A violent and bewildering gun battle ensues, in which the characters experience flashbacks to earlier days of fighting between the Contras and the Sandinistas in the Nicaraguan civil war. The gang of former Contras encircles the property, “[moviéndose] con bastante agilidad y cierta seguridad,” a tactic they had perfected due to “los años que estuv[ieron] en las filas de las contra [que] le[s] servía en el tipo de vida que llevaba[n] ahora” (72). The previous war-time oppositions blur, however, and Rana experiences the intrusion as an indistinct conspiracy force surrounding the mansion at every angle. Darkness shrouds the criminals’ identities to the point that Rana comments that “aunque estaba seguro de que eran solamente dos los invasores, no sabía la clase de enemigos que eran” (78).

Throughout the narration of the fight scenes, Rana shifts ambiguously between the role of the criminal and the victim. If before Rana functioned as a thief, robbing the wealthy mansion owner, it is only an ironic twist of events that he becomes the target in a criminal plot of murder of much larger proportions. His rapid transformation into the victim of conspiracy speaks to the more grave crime that underlies the course of the novel: the ultimate crime narrated in *Managua, Salsa City* is that no one is exempt from the excessive violence and corruption plaguing Managua, not even the very criminals themselves. The novel demonstrates that “anyone whomsoever” can become the target of violence at any given moment. Rana gradually realizes that the only way to truly

escape the crime network in which he is immersed would be through his death and possibly that of La Guajira.

In one final attempt to fight off the intruders, Rana fires aimlessly in one of their direction. Perrarenca, a former Contra, witnesses Rana's shot and is immediately taken back to his days fighting in the civil war: "se recordó las veces que hizo lo mismo con los heridos o prisioneros en la guerra y resignado pensó que por lo menos se acaba toda esta vaina, que a decir verdad, ya me estaba cansando" (85). The disillusionment with which Perrarenca regards the gunfight in which he now participates creates an ironic parallel between this battle and the previous civil war confrontations. The ironic comparison cynically recasts the gunfight as a pointless consequence of the civil war that has facilitated the kind of urban underworld where violence of this sort is not only possible and accepted, but virtually inescapable.

Postwar Managua is thus presented as a viable context of global war, where the line between friends and enemies becomes relative and ambiguous: Sandinistas continue to battle against Contras, but only as common street criminals rather than war combatants, and without a concrete purpose or clear direction. To be sure, in the final gunfight both groups appear as though the powerless victims in a larger and more vicious complex of injustice: global violence is focalized in Managua in the form of the crime-ridden individuals produced by the US-sponsored civil wars, which have rendered men like Pancho Rana and La Guajira's affiliates hopeless and unequipped for a life without

violence (McLeod 235). After a gripping sequence of shooting back and forth, the novel ends as though a tragic thriller: the gunfight achieves nothing but an ultimate show of violence, and all of the novel's characters, former Sandinistas and Contras alike, appear to have been killed in the war-like battle, with the exception of La Guajira and an onlooking stranger who happened upon the gunfight.

Managua, Salsa City recasts the image of the criminal in a cynical light, revealing that figures like Pancho Rana and La Guajira inhabit a third political space between the criminal and the victim. As both criminal and victim, Rana and La Guajira represent the kind of liminal postwar subjectivities that must adapt themselves according to an uncertain and fluctuating present in order to survive. For Galich, then, manifestations of "criminality" in postwar Managua are not simply the result of previous civil war violence and the current political policies that have promoted the social and wealth inequalities which sustain crime in the first place. Criminality is also, perhaps more significantly, one of the only forms of escape: Rana and La Guajira are examples of the kinds of figures in postwar Nicaragua forced to turn to violence as a mode of survival. Galich himself observed in an interview: "Unfortunately, the majority of postwar subjects were subjected to misery and neglect. They were left with one exit: either accept their fate or seek violence as an escape" (Aguero n/p, my translation).

Insensatez and *Managua, Salsa City* demonstrate that what is at stake for the future of Central America, and by extension, post-dictatorial Chile, is

determining how to narrativize a history of political crime and violence without falling into a politics of duality. More specifically, what is at stake for post-dictatorial Chilean and postwar Central American literature is to articulate a third space of political understanding that is predetermined neither by attempts to symbolically rescue a previous national horizon and its political subjectivities, nor by militant forms of denouncement against the political present. For Galich, as for Castellanos Moya, the thriller structure is the paradigmatic narrative form through which this notion of a third space of political understanding can be constructed. Castellanos Moya describes the third space of the thriller as something like “a way of seeing the world, of writing it, reading it; it is the fateful intersection between politics and fiction” (“Apuntes sobre lo político . . .” 11,12, my translation). The third space of the thriller thus approaches historical violence as something to be neither forgotten nor mourned, but rather as viable narrative material to be inscribed into the making of Latin America’s political future.

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