

**Words that Speak, Literature that Acts:
Diamela Eltit's Narrative Performances**

By
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Thesis

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Performance: Performance in the Americas ★ Gender performances ★ Visual culture and identity ★ Performing transitions (from dictatorship to democracy) ★ Performances: Latin American women on stage

Film: Film in transatlantic dialogue ★ Urban reels: Latin American cities in film ★ Almodóvar and Buñuel ★ Co-productions, neocolonialism, and the transatlantic film dialogue

Literature: Women's writing in the Americas ★ El microcuento: contemporary flash fiction ★ Pícaros and sicarios across the Atlantic ★ Contemporary Latin American literature and culture ★ Violent states, violent words: twentieth century literature from the Southern Cone ★ Digi-lit: new media, flash fiction, and other forms ★ Contemporary Latina writing and readership

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PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Articles

"Re-escribir la ciudad letrada: *El padre mío y Zona de dolor, o las performances urbanas de Diamela Eltit*." Actas del Congreso IILI-Georgetown 2010. *Independencias: memoria y futuro*. Ed. Gwen Kirkpatrick. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University. 2012. E-book.

"Carlos Fuentes y Luis Buñuel: los diálogos cinematográficos de Artemio Cruz." Actas de *La región más transparente: 50 años después*. Ed. Georgina García Gutiérrez. México D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Forthcoming in 2012. Print.

"Performing to Survive: A Theater of Memory in Diamela Eltit's *Por la patria*." *INTI: Revista de literatura hispánica*. Número dedicado a letras chilenas. 69-70 (Spring-Fall 2009): 311-320. Print.

"Siguiendo las huellas de una picaresca colombiana: un paseo por *La virgen de los sicarios*." *Cine-Lit VI. Essays on Hispanic Film and Fiction*. Ed. Guy H. Wood. Corvallis, Oregon: Cine-Lit Publications, 2008. 212-223. Print.

Editorial Work

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"La imagen ausente de la historia: (des)aparición de la Virgen de Guadalupe en *Glorias de Querétaro*." Session titled, "Silencio y ausencia." Boston College Graduate Student Conference in Romance Studies: "For the Record: Historical Fiction and Fictionalized History." Boston College, MA. (April 2009)

"La presencia ausente: fragmentos de un ¿ensayo? buñueliano." Session titled, "Visual Spain." 17th Annual Columbia/NYU Graduate Student Conference on Hispanic and Lusophone Literatures and Cultures: "Zonas de contacto/Contact Zones." Columbia University, NY. (April 2008)

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Spanish Language/Culture Teacher, Putney International Student Travel. (Summers 2007-2008)

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archives. Finally, to Arturo Márquez and his welcoming family, who hosted me during my stay in Chile, orienting me to Santiago.

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To my husband, Joe: I love you, and thank you so much for your support.

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Introduction

Diamela Eltit and the Essential Contestations of Performance

I.1 Indignant and Kissing: The Political Performance of Zombies, Lovers, and Other Occupations

On June 24th, 2011, a large crowd¹ gathered across from Chile's Presidential Palace, *La Moneda*, to protest the inequalities of the country's system of higher education. This was not the first public outcry of the new movement for education reform -- indeed, students and teachers alike had begun organizing as early as April 4th, 2011,² when the Universidad Central de Chile was forced to cease all academic activities as its community rejected a "strategic partnership" that would effectively sell the private university to the Norte Sur group, and firmly move the institution into the for-profit sector of higher education. Nor was the June 24th protest the first to garner national support: on May 12th, 15,000 students held a march in Santiago to demand that the

¹ Reports of the event disagree on exactly how many students participated, variously citing hundreds or thousands of participants in the flash mob. The online Chilean newspaper *La nación* reported the number as 3,000 students.

² Likewise, in 2006 Chilean students united in the *Revolución de los pingüinos* -- a movement named for the uniform students wore at most schools -- to protest the *Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza*, a law that had been signed into effect in 1990 by General Augusto Pinochet making the State the regulator of education, while allowing for private corporations to become the principal providers of education.

country focus on renewing the possibilities of public education.³ Yet the protest on the 24th of June was different from all of its antecedents. That day, the students walking down the streets of Central Santiago were wearing white makeup with deep, black circles under their eyes, while signs hung from their chests announcing how much debt they had accumulated in student loans. A few recognizable notes could be heard above the rumble of everyday traffic in the area, when suddenly the student 'passerby' broke out into a choreographed zombie dance to Michael Jackson's 1983 hit single, "Thriller."



Symbolically alluding to public education as a living dead concept in Chile, the message had not changed from the earlier 2011 protests, but the form certainly had: the "*Thriller por la educación*" had begun.

Figure I.1: "Thriller por la educación" in the Plaza de la Ciudadanía, facing the Southern facade of the Presidential Palace La Moneda in Santiago, Chile, on June 24, 2011. Photo courtesy of the Federación de Estudiantes Universidad de Chile.

³ The march of May 12th was timed to allow President Sebastian Piñera to respond to the students' demands by making education a priority for the next year in his May 21st State of the Nation address.

Seeking to provoke public dialogue about education yet avoid the isolated acts of violence or vandalism that have accompanied traditional demonstrations such as marches, rallies, and occupations or *tomas* of schools, leading to confrontations with the *Carabineros* (the Chilean police force), the Chilean student movement began to turn to more creative modes of expression. The "Thriller" flash mob was only the tip of the iceberg for these alternative forms of protest, followed just days later by the staging of a collective "suicide" for education organized in cities such as Santiago, Valparaíso, Concepción, and Valdivia. Other protest variations have included, for example, a kiss-in or *besatón por la educación* in which participants gathered to kiss (or hug) for 1800 seconds in front of *La Moneda*, some bearing the words "Enamorado pero endeudado" stamped upon their faces; a Dragon Ball spirit bomb battle and dialogue for education; the uniting of super heroes and super villains in the name of saving education; and an 1800 hour run around *La Moneda*. What all of these alternatives have in common is a mode of protest that is based on embodiment and presence. In other words, they are all articulations of political and social dissent that are, in essence, expressed through *performance*.

While the Chilean students have turned to performance as an alternative form of political mobilization, in the words of student leader Camila Vallejo, "para que nosotros podamos mantener este movimiento en el largo plazo" ("Camila"), other alternative demonstrations have sprung up in different sites around the globe. To name just a few examples, the 15-M movement or the *indignados de España* set up encampments in more than 58 cities beginning on May 15th, 2011, with an estimated peak of 6.5-8 million participants, in an effort to demand real change in the local and regional elections held on

May 22nd. In Colombia, students echoed their Chilean counterparts with kiss-ins for education and a *toma* or occupation of Bogotá, while staging their own "Marcha de antorchas," a nocturnal carnival in the streets for education in October and November of 2011. In the United States, Occupy Wall Street took inspiration from the Arab Spring's use of a symbolic, central plaza (Tahrir Square) and the Spanish *indignados*' employment of collective decision making to form a democratic tent city in Zuccotti Park in New York City on September 17th, 2011. Focusing on the ever-increasing income gap between the wealthiest 1% and the other 99% of the population, by October 9th similar occupations had spread to more than 70 major cities, including Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Atlanta, Austin, Oakland, and Seattle (Walters). Days later, the Occupy movement was no longer confined to the United States, with connected yet unique occupations appearing all across Europe, Mexico, China, and Japan (Thompson).



Figure I.2: Spanish *indignados* camped out in the Puerta de Sol, Madrid, on May 19, 2011. Photo from Reuters, as it appeared in the Spiegel Online Photo Gallery.

Although perhaps less overtly theatrical than the Lady Gaga and Michael Jackson flash mobs staged by the Chilean students, or the kiss-ins and carnivals in the streets organized by the Colombian students, the Occupy movement shares an interesting recuperation of public space with the Chilean and Colombian protests which, at essence, contains a strongly performatic element that remains tied to the principles of embodiment and presence -- and, to an extent, visual spectacle. In tracing the history of previous occupation protests in the United States, law professors Sonia K. Katyal and Eduardo M. Peñalver note the importance of this element of spectacle. "Occupations employ physical possession to communicate intense dissent," they report, a dissent that is communicated by crafting, "visible signs of the reality protesters hope to create, thereby spurring legal change." In the case of the tent cities of the various Occupy sites, encampments visibly alter the texture of the city for passersby. In this way, the occupations *perform* or act upon the city, changing the city's fundamental structure and disguising its geography. In tensely zoned New York City, for example, the occupation dresses a privately owned park as a public living space and center for exchange and expression. Simultaneously, it also overwrites the zoning codes so that a strictly business district becomes residential. The inherently spectacular nature of the occupation is further illustrated in the original poster generated to promote the idea. Distributed by the Canadian anti-consumerism group Adbusters, the poster is an open invitation to the public to bring tents to Wall Street on September 17th to begin an occupation that will make a single (unspecified) demand. A thin, graceful dancer is depicted balancing upon the hefty back of a fiercely charging bull -- a clear reference to Wall Street's bull and bear markets. Vaguely visible in the background are the bodies of men apparently urging the bull on, betting that the

bull will win, while the lone dancer remains serene on top against all odds. The connotation created is inevitably strong: the poster leads the viewer to picture a circus -- and, perhaps more importantly, to picture him or herself as the star of the show that is to come. It invites the observer to participate, to show the courage of the lone dancer by bringing a tent to Wall Street on September 17th in order to end the charging of the bull.



Figure I.3: Adbusters' poster inviting protesters to join them in an occupation of Wall Street beginning September 17th, 2011. Image from Adbusters website on July 13th. The poster has since been removed from Adbusters' website due to permissions issues, although it is still in circulation on other websites.

This small sampling of the distinct kinds of political protest that have emerged around the world in 2011 reveals two fascinating (and, I believe, related) trends: on one hand, the move to recuperate public space -- whether virtual or physical -- as the center of

social dialogue; and, on the other, a turn towards performance and spectacular modes of articulation in the expression of political discontent. During the same period, there is a growing sense that political parties have become sources of stagnation, bureaucracy, and vapid promises. As a result, a new -- and global -- politics is emerging that seeks to bypass traditional political channels in order to affect change. Although this politics is being remade by the spontaneous organization permitted by digital communication, it is principally enacted beyond the virtual halls of Facebook, Twitter, and Blackberry Messenger. In public plazas, private parks, and city streets, this new politics stages protest as a performatic act, perhaps because protest framed as performance is better able to compete with the endless array of spectacle that constantly assaults the hurried, ever-distractable twenty-first century eye.

In spite of the close ties between these recent movements and the use of digital media, the performance inherent in the act of occupying public spaces to articulate political opinions harkens back to the very origin of the word 'politics.' In Greek, *polis* has three meanings: city or city-state; citizenship; and body of citizens. In an ideal *polis* or city-state, all citizens participated in the government. Thus, politics was something that was enacted by the body of citizens (and by citizens' bodies) as they gathered to articulate their opinions in the common, public spaces of the city. That common, public space was called the *agora* (ἀγορεύω), and served the twin purpose of a marketplace and social center. Interestingly, one of the main Greek verbs deriving from *agora* is *agoreuō* (ἀγορεύω), which means, "I speak in public." This is exactly what the *indignados* of Spain, the students of Chile and Argentina, and the Occupiers in countries around the world are doing once again: they are strategically using their bodies -- i.e., performing --

in public spaces to articulate messages to the rest of the populace about the ways in which their respective city-states, now nations, should govern *for* the best of the majority of their citizens. They are calling on us all to speak in public, rather than (passively) allow our elected officials to speak -- and decide -- for us. In essence, this new politics that is emerging is based on galvanizing dialogue and action through the tools of presence and visible, embodied messages.

I.2 Precursors of Performance: From *la escena de avanzada* to CADA and Diamela Eltit

A more recent antecedent in the genealogy of performance in public space to express social opinions and political dissent can be found in the art activism that emerged in Chile shortly after the *golpe de estado* on September 11, 1973, that led to the death of Socialist president Salvador Allende and the start of a brutal, seventeen-year military dictatorship under General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte which would systematically repress any and all political dissidence. In particular, the *obra* of contemporary Chilean author Diamela Eltit (b. 1949) offers a case study that articulates the ways in which performance allows artists and activists to create consciousness about the need for social change in the midst of crisis. While the current protest movements in Chile, Colombia, Spain, the United States, and elsewhere in the world respond to an on-going crisis of political representation and the increasing failure of traditional artistic forms to communicate meaningfully and effectively in a hyper-stimulated society, Eltit's work engages first with a crisis of state-induced violence and trauma during the Chilean dictatorship, and then with the ensuing promulgation of *olvido* created by the transition to democracy, as the

predominance of a neoliberal philosophy displaces memories of violence with the perpetual demands of ever-changing market trends. In this context, my dissertation will chart performance as an interdisciplinary discourse that permeates the work of Diamela Eltit, serving as an instrument that permits her to voice an alternate understanding of contemporary Chilean identity.

In 1979, Diamela Eltit embarked on a creative collaboration with a small group of Chilean intellectuals and artists: together with visual artists Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo, the poet Raúl Zurita, and the sociologist Fernando Balcells, Eltit was a founding member of the group *Colectivo Acciones de Arte*, or CADA. Between 1979 and 1985, CADA organized five *acciones de arte* -- 'art actions,' or, in today's terminology, performances⁴ -- to fuse *arte y vida*, making art once again a vehicle for commentary and change in social and political life. As Robert Neustadt succinctly summarizes, one of CADA's principal objectives was, "intervenir el espacio cotidiano de Santiago con imágenes insólitas para interrogar condiciones que se habían vuelto habituales en el ámbito reprimido del Chile dictatorial" (*CADA día* 15). Although CADA's interventions in the city of Santiago took the form of performance, their art actions differed from typical notions of performance in that they weren't limited to the particular framework of a stage or a fixed set length to intermission or the final curtain. Rather, they took place throughout Santiago -- or even, in the case of their penultimate art action, throughout the

⁴ Cultural critic Nelly Richard clarifies the concept of art actions in this way: "Se les llamó 'acciones de arte' a esas obras cuyas estructuras operacionales se mantienen abiertos y cuyos materiales (acontecimientos biográficos, transcurso comunitarios) permanecen inconclusos, garantizando así la *no-finitud* del mensaje artístico para que el espectador intervenga en la obra y complete su plural de significaciones heterogéneas y diseminadas" (*Márgenes* 17). In essence, an *acción de arte* is an artistic event that takes the body and/or the community as its materials, stage, and object of study, presenting an incomplete message that demands the spectator's participation to resolve.

entire territory of Chile --, and had varying durations that were more dependent on the participation of Chileans in the art action than on the artists or 'performers' of CADA themselves.

Eltit's participation in CADA and the ensuing exposure to genre-breaking, alternative modes of social and political expression would prove to be deeply influential in the development of her own narrative style and methodology. CADA's first performance, for example,⁵ was called "Para no morir del hambre en el arte," and was performed in three stages in 1979. On the third of October, the members of CADA gave out 100 half-liter bags of milk in La Granja, a low-income neighborhood in Santiago. In so doing, CADA echoed a social program from Salvador Allende's regime, which had attempted to do battle with the problem of malnutrition among the poor by guaranteeing that each Chilean child would receive sufficient milk every day. Once the milk from the art action had been consumed, CADA asked for the empty milk bags back. In turn, those empty bags were distributed to artists, who were instructed to use them to construct socially active art pieces. Meanwhile, CADA had hoped to publish a completely blank page that day in the Chilean serial *Hoy*, in accompaniment to the art action. While the group was granted a page in that day's issue, the magazine, however, required them to print something on it. Thus, the members of CADA wrote the following as its only official explanation or announcement of the day's art action: "Imaginar esta página completamente blanca. / Imaginar esta página blanca / accediendo a todos los rincones de Chile / como la leche

⁵ Given that my focus is on Diamela Eltit's performances and performative work, I will only briefly describe two of CADA's most emblematic performances here, in order to place Eltit's *obra* in context. For complete documentation of CADA's work, including interviews, photographs, and correspondences, please see Robert Neustadt's 2001 book, *CADA día: la creación de un arte social*.

diaria a consumir. / Imaginar cada rincón de Chile / privado del consumo diario de leche / como páginas blancas para llenar” (CADA día 137). Finally, the action concluded with a speech, “No es una aldea,” given in front of the United Nations building in Santiago, and repeated in the five official languages of the UN, which exhorted listeners to consider art as a political tool capable of 'correcting' the difficulties, such as hunger and pain, of life (128). All of three of these actions were filmed or recorded, and by October 5th were placed on display -- together with the page from the *Hoy*, the artists' sculptures created out of the empty half-liter milk bags, and the recording in front of the -- UN, in the art gallery Centro Imagen, “para permanecer hasta que nuestro pueblo acceda a sus consumos básicos de alimentos. Para permanecer como el negativo de un cuerpo carente, invertido y plural” (138).

"Para no morir del hambre en el arte" interrupted the daily routine of urban life, depending on the participation of the city's inhabitants and passersby, as well as other artists and the media, in order to create a performance that CADA directed but did not control, and whose meaning was the subject of much debate and interpretation. Likewise, in their penultimate art action, titled “No +” (“No más”), beginning in 1983 members of CADA convoked other like-minded artists to join them in going out in small groups to, in Eltit's words, “rayar las paredes” of Santiago with the slogan “No +” (*CADA día* 101). Performed clandestinely at night, this intervention differs from traditional notions of theatrical performance in that it occurred anonymously, without onlookers to observe the action itself. Nonetheless, “No +” became enormously successful, invoking the participation of the residents of Santiago who would, similarly under the cover of anonymity, fill in the blanks, thus graffiti-ing the streets with political messages. “No más

dictadura," they wrote. "No más desaparecidos." "No más armas." "No más muerte."

Others would complete the phrase not with words but rather with images, for instance, of soldiers carrying guns. "No +" would have lasting repercussions: towards the end of the military dictatorship, it became the slogan behind the movement to vote "No" in the 1988 plebiscite deciding whether or not Pinochet should continue on as president of Chile for another eight years. More recently, it has even reappeared in the protest signs carried by Chilean students in their current movement to reform the country's system of education.

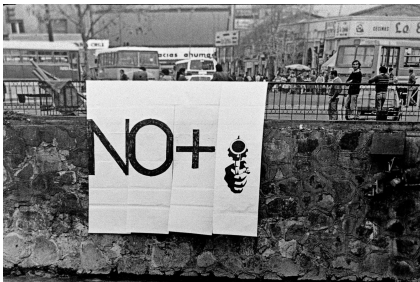


Figure I.4: Jorge Brantmayer's photo of the "No +" message as it appeared to protest state violence in 1983 over the Rio Mapocho (photo from CADA día p. 157). **Figure I.5:** Graffiti written on city walls as well as the bodies of a group of Chilean students adopts CADA's slogan to demand, "No + lucro," as in "No more for-profit education". (Photo taken from an August 9th article on the website *CNN México*, "Estudiantes chilenos ponen un ultimátum al gobierno de Piñera.") **Figure I.6:** A Chilean student readopts CADA's slogan to criticize the excessive violence Chilean police have used in response to student demonstrations. (Photo from Wikimedia Commons entry on the August 9th, 2011 protests.)

The art actions and performances organized by CADA did not speak out in overt terms to criticize Pinochet or the military dictatorship. Rather, they facilitated and provoked public dialogue reflecting on each action and the realm of possible meanings and associations it suggested. In the case of "Para no morir del hambre en el arte," the art action said nothing explicit about the current regime, although the half liter bags of milk

clearly referenced Allende's social and political agenda while articulating a stance about the role of art to discuss the issues of poverty and hunger. "No más," on the other hand, was a completely open-ended action, creating a space for public yet anonymous expression about anything in Santiago that its residents felt might need to change. Yet in spite of their openness to interpretation, it is clear that the type of art that CADA propagated refused to remain purely aesthetic. On the contrary, all of their performances centered on social and political issues, even at a time when political criticism could only be attempted through veiled references. At the same time, CADA made a conscious effort to transcend the cultural hegemony and exclusive access of the museum. Thus, the group located its art in the streets and invited the participation of the full extent of Chilean society -- going so far, even, as to base their first art action in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Santiago.

CADA, however, was not the only group turning to alternative forms of social protest with largely performative elements during the dictatorship.⁶ Indeed, their *acciones de arte* integrated into an artistic phenomenon that Chilean cultural critic Nelly Richard has denominated *la escena de avanzada*. Composed of visual artists as well as poets, novelists, philosophers, and cultural critics, *la escena de avanzada* articulated a great variety of endeavors that coalesced in the ways in which they pushed the limits of traditional artistic forms. In Richard's words,

Quienes integran dicha escena reformularon, desde fines de los años setenta, mecánicas de producción creativa que cruzan las fronteras entre los géneros (las artes visuales, la literatura, la poesía, el video, el cine, el texto crítico) y que amplían los soportes técnicos del arte a las dinámicas procesuales del cuerpo vivo y de la ciudad: el

⁶ For a history of Chilean art production from the 1970s on, see Milan Ivelic and Gaspar Galaz's *Chile, arte actual*. Nelly Richard's *Márgenes e instituciones. Arte en Chile desde 1973* offers a critical analysis of much of the artistic production from that same period.

cuerpo, en el arte de la *performance*, actuó como un eje transemiótico de energías pulsionales que, en tiempos de censura, liberaba márgenes de subjetivización rebelde, mientras que las intervenciones urbanas buscaron ellas alterar la sintaxis del orden ciudadano con su vibrante gesto de desacato al encuadre militarista que uniformaba las vidas cotidianas. (Richard *Márgenes* 15)

Laboring within the framework of repression established by the totalitarian state, the artists of the *avanzada* used their art to transgress against the established order of artistic *disciplines*, and therefore symbolically against the rigid codification of life imposed by a military regime. As a result, these artists insisted on re-linking art to politics,⁷ and, particularly in the case of CADA, art to the broader horizon of life.

The interpolation of the city, on one hand, and the body of the artist, on the other, are two of the defining characteristics of the socially motivated art produced by members of the *escena de avanzada* in general, and were fundamental to the projects undertaken by CADA and Eltit. Certainly, the city had already been incorporated into Chilean artwork well before the first works of the *avanzada* appeared, largely through the work of the *Brigadas Muralistas*. The *brigadas* had originally created propagandistic murals for Salvador Allende's presidential campaigns in 1958 and 1964, and later dedicated themselves to painting urban walls such that they, "traducía[n] en imágenes los contenidos revolucionarios del programa de la Unidad Popular" (*Márgenes* 63). Yet, as Nelly Richard points out, even the closest of antecedents for the *avanzada*'s use of urban space, the *Brigada Ramona Parra de las Juventudes Comunistas*, simply substituted city walls for the canvas, in projects that extended a given political program. It was not until

⁷ Richard takes pains to underscore the *escena de avanzada*'s commitment to artwork with a political message as a rupture from the general practices of Chilean art under dictatorship, in that it opposed itself, "tajantemente al idealismo de lo estético como esfera desvinculada de lo social y exenta de responsabilidad crítica en la denuncia de los poderes establecidos" (*Márgenes* 15).

the performative work of the artists of *avanzada* that the city would cease to be little more than a blank slate upon which artwork in the service of state ideology was articulated. "El arte del CADA no invita al transeúnte de la ciudad a contemplar imágenes que derivan de un repertorio político-ideológico ya trazado, sino que lo interpela como actor de un transcurso intercomunicativo destinado a soltar la red de condicionamientos sociales que lo mantienen prisionero" (64). In essence, the members of the *avanzada* re-sculpted the city as both a transgressive subject and an interactive object of art that asked urban residents to reconsider their preconceived notions of the uses of the space through which they moved, as well as the social conditions in which they lived.⁸

By contrast, the *avanzada*'s use of the body of the artist as the framework and substance for the work of art itself has no significant precursors in the history of Chilean art. Thus, it was the early work of two of the members of the *avanzada* that set the precedent for the body as canvas articulating social and political messages. In 1973, visual artist Carlos Leppe staged a live self-portrait photography event, *Happening de las Gallinas*, in Santiago's Galería Carmen Waugh. The happening consisted of Leppe entering a room filled with plaster chickens and plaster eggs, sitting on a chair, crowning himself with an enormous funeral crown made of feathers, and then swallowing a large number of eggs. Yet it was really with the 1975 piece titled *Perchero* that Leppe's body work found its full voice, as he photographed himself in various stages of drag and nudity, alternately exposing or bandaging his breasts and genitals. About the same time, the poet Raúl Zurita contributed the other antecedent for the *avanzada*'s bodywork,

⁸ For more on CADA's use of the city as subject and object of a transgressive art, see Nelly Richard's chapter entitled, "La exterioridad social como soporte de producción de arte," in *Márgenes e instituciones*, pages 63 to 74.

photographing himself after mutilating his own face with burns. Zurita would go on to write about his self-mutilation in the poems later published in his 1979 collection *Purgatorio*, the cover of which exhibited a close-up photograph of the scar left behind from burning his face, followed by the inscription, "mis amigos creen que / estoy muy mala [sic] / porque quemé mi mejilla" (Zurita 10). Zurita's self-mutilation and Leppe's self-exhibition would mark the two principal trends that would later emerge in the work of artists of the *avanzada*: "el cuerpo como zona mimética de camuflaje y simulacro (Leppe) y el cuerpo como zona sacrificial de práctica del dolor (Zurita-Eltit), bordeándose el primero con la teatralidad y el segundo con la literatura" (*Márgenes* 78). As we shall see, Eltit's own work will, in the end, combine both of these trends, building on the theatrical possibilities created by the body that imitates that which it is not, camouflaging itself as Other, as well as the linguistic and semiotic potential of the scarred body as it enunciates past pain.

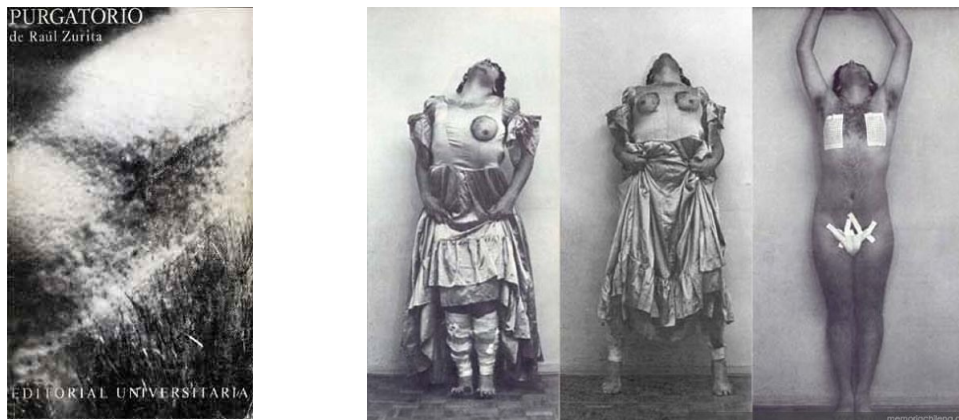


Figure I.7: Cover of *Purgatorio* from the original edition, featuring a close-up image of Zurita's scarred face, as published in 1979 by Editorial Universitaria. **Figure I.8:** Three stages of Carlos Leppe's 1975 self-portrait project, *Perchero*. Photo courtesy of *Memoria Chilena*.

I.3 Literary Acts

By expanding the realm of Chilean art to manipulate and sculpt the surrounding urban space as well as the body of the artist, the *escena de avanzada* effectively began to explore the possibilities offered by performance art. The *avanzada's* move out of more traditional art forms was spurred on by the abrupt rupture in everyday communication caused by the *golpe de estado*, which disintegrated not only the social and political program of the *Unidad Popular*, but also "sus pautas de significación y lenguaje" (*Márgenes* 16). Living in a perpetual state of fear, yet unable to remain entirely silent in the face of state repression, the artists of the *avanzada* were forced to choose between leaving Chile, risking disappearance, or finding a new way to communicate. Thus, performance art emerged as an uncoded discourse that permitted artists to subvert norms and question social policy in a language the dictatorship did not entirely understand, and certainly did not control. As Nelly Richard explains, the extension of, "el formato circunscrito del arte" into the realm of performance was a necessity for the members of the *avanzada* that, "expresó, primero, una rebeldía contra el sistema de restricciones y prohibiciones con que el autoritarismo militar acota y vigila la circulación de los signos" (17).

With her artistic production beginning in the late 1970s, it is unsurprising that Diamela Eltit's work -- particularly her earliest pieces -- would be defined by the impulse to cut across genres and modes of artistic expression in order to communicate in spite of the vigilance of state (and self) censorship. Nonetheless, ever since her first novel, *Lumpérica*, was published in 1983, literary scholars have principally engaged with her

written work rather than her performances.⁹ Certainly, since *Lumpérica* Eltit has gone on to write innumerable essays and critical articles, many of which have been published in the 2000 collection *Emergencias: escritos sobre literatura, arte y política* and, in 2008, *Signos vitales: escritos sobre literatura, arte y política*. She has also published nine novels spanning the majority of the Chilean dictatorship and the entirety of the transition to democracy, the most recent of which, *Impuesto a la carne*, was only just published in 2010. Fascinated by the unique voice, innovative narrative strategies, and political commentaries of her novels, critics quickly deemed her writing as forming, “one of the most risk-taking and consistent narrative projects to emerge in Chile in the last decades” (“Gendered” 3).

Although Eltit has indeed become one of Chile and Latin America's foremost contemporary authors, it is worth recalling that before she developed into the literary force she is today, Diamela Eltit was -- and, I maintain, continues to be -- a performance artist. Appearing only in 1983, *Lumpérica* was published four years *after* Eltit began her work in *acciones de arte* with CADA. Her credits, moreover, go beyond the literary essay and novel to include projects that defy all attempts to categorize them within a single genre. For example, in 1994 Eltit teamed up with the Chilean photographer Paz Errázuriz to create *Infarto del alma*, a photography/prose collaboration project that weaves together testimonial narrative, fiction, and poetry into a collection of portraits documenting the

⁹ The main exception to the overwhelming critical focus on Eltit's written production has been Robert Neustadt, whose book, *(Con)Fusing Signs and Postmodern Positions*, dedicates a chapter to the study of performance in relation to Eltit's first novel, *Lumpérica*, ending with a brief analysis of how performance might also be at play in her fifth novel, *Los vigilantes* (1994). Nelly Richard also engages with several of Eltit's performances in *Márgenes e instituciones*, as well as in several shorter essays, though most often as an example of the wider aesthetic emerging from *la escena de avanzada* rather than as a phenomenon worthy of detailed study in and of itself.

existence of love within the walls of the psychiatric hospital of Putaendo, Chile.

Likewise, Eltit's books *El Padre mío* (1989) and *Puño y letra: juicio oral* (2005) do not sit comfortably within traditional literary genres. *El padre mío* fuses the transcripts of an indigent madman's ramblings with an essay by Eltit that is part social and political commentary, part poetry, but also partially a treatise articulating her personal aesthetics. *Puño y letra*, on the other hand, compiles selected courtroom documentation from an oral trial held in Argentina in 2000, with a letter written by General Augusto Pinochet just days before the *golpe de estado*, and fragmented essays by Eltit reflecting on the trial, the crimes committed during the military dictatorship, and the trajectory that lead to the book itself.

None of these three books fits neatly into the concepts of novel, *testimonio*, or essay. Rather, they -- much like her novels, particularly in the cases of *Lumpérica* and *Por la patria* (1986) -- combine forms, offering an artistic and political collage of images, ideas, and provocations. Her writing, in other words, refuses to remain purely literature, simple words on a page that combine to communicate a message or relate a plot, according to the reader's preconceived notions of the genre. Instead, her literature *acts* or *performs* by asking the reader to work through the disparate and often fragmentary elements of her texts, in order to 'stage' his or her own version of the work through the process of reading. Eltit puts it this way: "sigo pensando lo literario más bien como una disyuntiva que como una zona de respuestas que dejen felices y contentos a los lectores" (*Emergencias* 174). Consequently, she tells us, "Siento al lector como una cifra cómplice del texto, como un operador de la tarea de desentrañamiento, quiero decir, el acto de leer no puedo imaginarla sino como una aventura en la que lo más importante es aventurar y aventurar

y aventurarse" (187). Eltit may indeed be a writer, then, but she is only a writer in very specific terms. Like Roland Barthes, she believes that, "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (Barthes 4). As a result, the only category broad enough to contain her literary production is Barthes' term of the 'writerly text': her literary work consists of texts that demand that the reader become an active participant in the creation of meaning.

While it is possible to call Eltit a writer in Barthes' sense of the term, to do so is also to ignore a significant element of her artistic production. For one thing, we have already seen that Eltit participated in *acciones de arte* or political performances over the course of seven years in her work with the group CADA. Yet her performance work was not limited to the five *acciones de arte* staged by CADA. She produced several solo performance pieces in cooperation with Chilean visual artists Lotty Rosenfeld (b. 1943) and Gloria Camiruaga (1941-2006) that ranged from cutting and bandaging her own arms before reading a novel-in-process in a brothel or kissing a vagabond on camera (in the *Zona de dolor* series, from 1980-1983), to staging the reading of a novel-in-process in an abandoned printing press (*Diamela Eltit*, 1986). Although the 1986 video piece *Diamela Eltit* marked Eltit's last physical appearance as performer, her work in visual and performative arts has shown no signs of dissipating. In 1988, she worked with Chilean film and video director Tatiana Gaviola (b. 1956) and actress Delfina Guzmán (b. 1928) to produce the script of the short film *Ángeles*. Likewise, Eltit wrote the script for *Tendida mirando las estrellas*, a 2004 film directed by Andrés Racz that was ten years in the making. On a longer scale, however, Eltit has continuously collaborated with Lotty Rosenfeld on a number of visual, video, and full-length film projects, beginning with the

1981 installation piece titled "Traspaso Cordillerano," and continuing with the scripts for Rosenfeld's 2001 documentary about the Chilean mining town of Chuquicamata, *Tajo abierto en la memoria*; the 2000 film *¿Quién viene con Nelson Torres?*, and the 2006 video-installation piece *Cuenta regresiva*. Eltit explains that her work with Rosenfeld, "Se trataba de una unión de prácticas: literatura y visualidad, frente a las cuales quisimos borrar las fronteras disciplinarias puesto que ambas asumimos la obra en su totalidad mediante la firma 'doble'" (*Signos* 266).

For the reader keeping count, then, Eltit's artistic production and collaborations include nine novels, two collections of essays, two published short stories, two testimonial/documentary works, a prose/photography project, work on five film and video projects, an art installation, five *acciones de arte* with the group CADA, and at least four solo performances. Consequently, while Eltit's novels have certainly become essential way posts marking the postmodern landscape of Latin American literature, her work consistently resists easy categorization, erasing disciplinary borders in order to push its way into the spheres of visual and performing arts. As a result, in this dissertation I will argue that Eltit's performance work, broadly defined, completes a broader narrative project that questions the boundaries and limitations of literature, art, and politics. In so doing, her narrative reveals a Chile that is still struggling to define itself in the wake of its authoritarian past. Here, I will explore her art actions and performances, as well as the performative subtext I see in Eltit's novels themselves – a subtext that helps to construct heterotopic or hybrid projects of image, voice, and prose. In a writer for whom the periphery has always constituted a major concern, it is dangerous to separate out her performance and performative work as side projects peripheral or irrelevant to her literary

endeavor -- especially when that work composes a substantial portion of her total artistic production.

It is my belief that Diamela Eltit's narrative cannot be studied, appreciated, and understood to the full extent of its creativity without careful examination of these performance pieces, and, more importantly, the ways in which performance itself pervades much of her writing. By re-reading the dialogue between writing and performance that crisscrosses the full spectrum of her work, I attain a fuller articulation and understanding of Eltit's narrative project. This plans to be a systematic reading of the text as palimpsest of layers of meaning, displayed as narrative action and performance.

I.4 Reading through a Performance Studies Lens

Since the 1970s, the study of 'performance' has become increasingly popular across a wide range of disciplines, from literature and the arts to sociology, anthropology, and psychology. Diana Taylor, one of the leading scholars in Latin American Performance Studies, explains that the concept of "performance" has a long history of manifestation in varying forms within the English language: "until the 1960s, performance referred to the representation or mise-en-scène of the dramatic text" (*Negotiating* 11), whereas it has now come to stand as a new area of crisscrossing art practices. As a result, "Performance has claimed its autonomy both from the dramatic text and its representations to constitute itself in various anti-theatrical forms – among them performance art, public art, and what we might call public performance" (11). In the Hispanic world, it has flourished even as a cross-linguistic act: "performance" has no

Spanish equivalent, yet it is widely used, albeit some call it *la performance*, others *el performance*, and others still *el arte performance* or *arte performativo*. In spite of the variations under which it is known, performance art has become a mode of expression, protest, and a catalyst for change throughout Latin America, as well as in the global aesthetics of art actions.

Yet how can we more clearly articulate what we mean by 'performance,' beyond the understanding that it represents the intersection of many different forms of art practices? Elusive in nature, performance has been called, "an *essentially contested concept*, meaning that its very existence is bound up in disagreement about what it is, and that the disagreement over its essence is itself part of that essence" (Strine 183, emphasis in the original).¹⁰ While there may not be a single widely agreed upon definition of the term, practioners of performance studies generally concur that with Diana Taylor when she explains that performance, "encompasses socialized and internalized roles (including those associated with gender, sexuality, and race)" (*Negotiating* 14), and, moreover, that, "...the term performance, and especially the verb performing, allow for agency, which opens the way for resistance and oppositional spectacles" (14).

In the present work, I am particularly interested in the potential of performance to open paths for agency, to turn the objects of study into acting subjects. This is an idea that builds upon performance theorist Richard Schechner's distinction between the study of something that *is* performance, and studying something *as* performance. "Any

¹⁰ This phrase, "essentially contested concept," was coined by W. B. Gallie in his *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding*, where he explains that the, "Recognition of a given concept as essentially contested implies recognition of rival uses of it (such as oneself repudiates) as not only logically possible and humanly 'likely,' but as of permanent potential critical value to one's own use or interpretation of the concept in question" (187).

behavior, event, action, or thing can be studied 'as' performance, can be analyzed in terms of doing, behaving, and showing" (32), Schechner affirms. Treating the object of study *as* performance allows us to "consider things provisionally, in process, and as they change over time" (42). Moreover, the study of something *as* performance makes it possible for us to ask a different set of questions about that object, to ask, as Schechner puts it, "performance questions of events: How is an event deployed in space and disclosed in time? What special clothes or objects are put to use? What roles are played and how are these different, if at all, from who the performers usually are? How are the events controlled, distributed, received, and evaluated?" (42). In the concrete case of Diamela Eltit's work, studying her novels, for example, *as* performance allows me to do two things: on one hand, it allows me to consider the novels in process, and therefore analyze the act of writing as a performance in and of itself. This path of study is particularly apt in the case of Eltit's first two novels, written under some of the most brutal periods of the Chilean dictatorship, leading Eltit to call her writing from that time, "Mi resistencia política secreta" (*Emergencias* 171). On the other hand, studying Eltit's novels *as* performance allows me to ask, what is it that her novels *do*? How do they *act* upon the reader? How do they participate in the on-going debate about what Chile is today?

Accordingly, my dissertation will both study Eltit's work *as performance*, as well as the concrete, physical performances (*is* performance) contained within the body of Eltit's work. In my study of her work that *is* performance, I will limit my use of the term to two of the most widely accepted definitions of performance. In the first sense, I will use performance to refer to aesthetic production that spans, "la compleja y heterogénea gama de arte vivo que enfatiza el proceso de creación y conceptualización frente al

producto. Arte experimental que cruza las fronteras disciplinarias en busca de nuevos lenguajes, nuevos espacios y nuevos materiales para generar experiencias inéditas" (Alcázar 10). Most often, this refers to physical, theatrical performances -- as in, for example, when Eltit appears with her scarred and bandaged arms to stage a reading of *Lumpérica* in a Santiago brothel. The second sense in which I will use performance takes up the concept of *restored behavior*, a concept elaborated by Schechner in his work bridging theater and anthropology. "Performances," he explains, "mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories. Performances – of art, rituals, or ordinary life – are made of ‘twice-behaved behaviors,’ ‘restored behaviors,’ performed actions that people train to do, that they practice and rehearse” (22). He continues: "Restored behavior is ‘out there,’ separate from ‘me.’ To put it in personal terms, restored behavior is ‘me behaving as if I were someone else,’ or ‘as I am told to do,’ or ‘as I have learned’” (28). For Schechner, then, performance consists of heightened actions or stylized behavior that most often imitates behavior or actions previously witnessed. This is a form of performance that applies to everyday life, which I will use, for instance, to examine how Eltit's *obra* makes her interlocutors conscious of the restored behavior inherent in our itineraries through the city of Santiago, thus interrupting the learned flow of urban circulation.

Building on these two understandings of performance, my dissertation seeks to answer the following questions: If Diamela Eltit has consistently chosen to work in multiple media, what has motivated her move beyond the literary? What is lost when critics and readers fail to recognize and incorporate her performances into her overall work? How does this particular genre-crossing *form* of her narrative project – as it moves

from physical performances or art actions performed in collaboration with other artists, to literary performances and performatic elements contained within, and often moving beyond, the confines of her writing – affect the reception and understanding of that project? How can literature move beyond the limits of the page and market – be that market the academy or the best-seller list – to make itself not only more accessible but also more effective and productive of meaning and change? Does performance afford literature a path to those objectives? Finally, how can a performance studies lens illuminate the coherence of Eltit's work, as well as the role that her narrative plays in the construction of Chilean identity today?

In the chapters that follow, I trace Eltit's physical and literary performances from 1980 through 2008,¹¹ as they map urban space, employ ritual to retreat from repression, construct alternate national narratives, and stage transitional politics and justice. Each chapter seeks to explore a distinct face of performance as it appears in the work of Diamela Eltit. I begin by examining what I have called "Eltit's spatial performances." In this first chapter, I study the urban design and resulting cultural mapping of Santiago, Chile, arguing that the city's geography has been constructed so as to create a lettered and cultural center. Through analysis of Eltit's documentary/testimonial text *El Padre mío* and her performances in the *Zona de dolor* series as well as *Diamela Eltit*, I posit that these works interrupt the societal flow of Santiago, re-mapping the city in order to articulate political, social, and cultural margins.

¹¹ My analysis will part from Eltit's solo performance work in the *Zona de dolor* series, performed between 1980 and 1983, and Eltit's first novel, *Lumpérica*, published in 1983. It will span her literary production through 2008, with the 2007 *Jamás el fuego nunca* as the most recent novel studied, while working with the essays collected in her 2008 *Signos vitales*. Eltit's most recent novel, *El impuesto de la carne* (2010) will not be discussed here.

Chapters two and three offer two different yet complementary takes on the role of performance in living under dictatorship. My second chapter reads Eltit's first novel, *Lumpérica*, as the staging of a series of transgressive rituals. These rituals, I suggest, act as transportations -- as temporary exits that permit the protagonist, L. Iluminada, to repeatedly escape the brutal repression in which she lives. The novel, however, is cyclical, and each nightly performance ends as the new day dawns, only to begin again in the same place at the next dusk. No matter how often L. Iluminada performs her rituals, then, the morning hours always find her sitting on the same bench in the public plaza, isolated from society, yet still subject to the actions of an oppressive regime. Consequently, in chapter three I propose that Eltit's second novel, *Por la patria*, demonstrates an evolution from the performance of ritual as an escape, to the performance of memory as a tool for survival. There, I reveal how the detained Coya turns to performance in order to keep officially undesirable memories alive, and eventually is able to use performance to invert the hierarchy of order and control within the prison camp where she is being held.

My fourth chapter parts from the restored behavior understanding of performance, in order to illuminate the workings of performance in the military takeover of Chile on September 11th, 1973, as well as the performances required of Chilean citizens from that point on. Eltit's emphasis on performance and theatricality in her own texts, I submit, is in direct response to the political performance of the *golpe*. Through a close reading of *Puño y letra*, I argue that Eltit uses this book to restage the 2000 trial held to delegate official responsibility and retribution for the 1974 assassination of General Carlos Prats González and his wife Sofía Cuthbert. Consequently, *Puño y letra* performs justice as

Eltit would have had it occur. At the same time, the book places the reader in the position of juror, making him or her responsible for deciding who is truly guilty for the crimes committed, and what should be done about that guilt. Finally, I conclude with a brief reading of Eltit's recent novel, *Jamás el fuego nunca* (2007), in which I show how the novel articulates a performance of political disillusionment.

Throughout this dissertation, I aim to demonstrate that performance is not a peripheral project for Eltit, but, rather, is present in all of her work. I will suggest that Eltit's *obra* is not just a series of novels so much as a series of performances, whose methods and goals have evolved with Chile's transition from dictatorship to democracy. While often political in nature, the performance latent in her novels also works to modify the way the reader interacts with her texts: rather than reading a novel as yet another fiction, Eltit convokes the reader to engage with her work as an act, an action, even as an occupation of public space. In so doing, Eltit moves toward a new critical and political function for "literature," while also pushing the very term "literature" itself to open up to the possibilities offered by the fusion of writing with other artistic practices.

I believe that a performance studies lens will allow us to more deeply engage with Diamela Eltit's narrative project, moving away from our societal focus on that which is written, and that which is marketable. Because, as Diana Taylor succinctly explains, "Western culture, wedded to the word, whether written or spoken, enables language to usurp epistemic and explanatory power. Performance Studies allow us to take seriously other forms of cultural expression as both praxis and episteme" (quoted in Schechner 7). In this work, I will explore the way performance allows Eltit to work *with* and *through* language to chip away at cultural epistemes. In the end, I suggest, the question is not just

if Eltit's texts perform – quite simply, they do perform and do so on many levels – but *what* do they perform, *how* do they perform it, to/with *whom*, and to what effect.

Chapter 1

Eltit's Spatial Performances: Literary Revisions of Urban and Cultural Peripheries

“Is it conceivable that the exercise of hegemony might leave space untouched? Could space be nothing more than the passive locus of social relations, the milieu in which their combinations take on body, or the aggregate of the procedures employed in their removal? The answer must be no.”

-Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*

“A whole history remains to be written of *spaces* – which would at the same time be the history of *powers* (both of these terms in the plural) – from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat.”

-Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*

1.1 Eltit's Urban Exploration

In 1980, Diamela Eltit (Santiago, Chile, 1949), along with friend and visual artist Lotty Rosenfeld (Santiago, 1943), initiated a series of what she later terms “salidas a la ciudad” in her book *El Padre Mío* (1989). These *salidas* consisted of outings in which the two women explored the city of Santiago, and in particular, its margins and peripheries, at a time when Chile -- and Santiago in particular -- were experiencing the economic swings inherent to Pinochet's neoliberal politics. Perhaps it is out of these *salidas*, or investigations of Santiago's fringe spaces, that Eltit developed a fascination and concern

for peripheries, both spatial and social, that would play out over and over again across the full spectrum of her work. From her novels to her genre-defying collaborations, in her essays, performances and art actions, the periphery and the marginal have always, ironically, been at the center of Eltit's narrative project.

Throughout this chapter, I trace Eltit's spatial practices – as evidenced in her performances as well as her writing – through Santiago and the greater Chilean landscape, to chart the ways in which Eltit's physical and literary itineraries perform and rewrite Chilean social and political geography. To define spatial practice, I follow Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*. There, he explains that our spatial practices are, in essence, the ways we move, consume, work, and produce – all as seen within the greater framework of social space (38). According to Lefebvre, there is a certain degree of 'cohesion' in our uses of social space. In other words, my exact spatial practices may differ from those of my neighbor, yet nonetheless each of our movements through social space will still bear some resemblances to each other, if only in that we leave our homes at the same time each morning to go to work. This cohesion then implies that our spatial practices are composed of two distinct elements: "a guaranteed level of *competence* and a specific level of *performance*" (33, emphasis in the original), terms Lefebvre borrows from Noam Chomsky's linguistic theory.¹² 'Performance,' in terms of spatial practice, then refers to our actual individual use of the codified system of space in which we live and move, a unique use of space that stands in opposition to the backdrop of our internalized knowledge of (and ingrained habits created by) the rules and workings of the

¹² Lefebvre notes that his use of Chomsky's terminology should not in any way imply a "subordination of the theory of space to linguistics" (33); nonetheless, by speaking of performance and competence Lefebvre sets up a parallel between spatial and linguistic practices that is useful and to which we will return later in this chapter.

greater spatial system (i.e., ‘competence’). In this chapter, I will track Eltit’s spatial practices and performances -- in both the physical and linguistic senses -- across three works, in order to explore how each offers a performance of space that challenges the spatial competence of Chilean society.

When I speak of Eltit’s ‘performance of space,’ I am also drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, in which he applies speech act theory to movement in an urban system. This allows him to conclude that, “The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered” (97), and that walking “enunciates” space at three different levels: it reflects the pedestrian’s ‘appropriation’ of the urban system in which he or she moves; it spatially ‘acts out’ (Certeau’s phrase) or ‘performs’ (my term) a given place; and it maps the differences as well as the relations between distinct positions.¹³ All three of these levels of enunciation are present and worthy of analysis in Eltit’s spatial practices, yet it is the second that will be most significant for the purposes of this chapter. To elucidate how walking can perform or enact space, Certeau starts from a single given premise: that the urban spatial system attempts to order a series of possible routes (i.e., streets, pedestrian walkways, public transportation lines, and so on) and obstacles (i.e., buildings, dead ends, gates, etc.) that make up a place’s topography. Within this system of routes, “the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements” (98). Though

¹³ Certeau offers a corresponding enunciative function from speech act theory to parallel each of these spatial enunciations created by walking. For more on how de Certeau fits speech act theory to the act of walking in an urban system, please see page 97 of the chapter “Walking in the City.”

his focus is on walking and pedestrian movement, Certeau's argument can extend to other uses of a spatial system. Thus, our spatial practices – pedestrian or otherwise – perform space, literally giving shape to or changing the shape of the cities in which we live.

The three pieces I examine in this chapter will each offer a glimpse of a different type of intervention in social space, tracking distinct ways in which Eltit performs Santiago's – and Chile's – urban geography. I will begin with her testimonial/documentary book *El Padre Mío*; then move into *Zona de dolor*, her performance in front of a brothel on Maipú Street as filmed by Lotty Rosenfeld; and conclude with her video collaboration with Gloria Camiruaga titled *Diamela Eltit*. By analyzing these mini-journeys within Eltit's greater critical and fictional trajectory, we shall see how she brings peripheries and centers into contact with each other, in a social project that is as much spatial as it is cultural. I will argue that Eltit's performances and writings fuse cultural elements to unexpected realms, and, in the process, create alternative spaces composed of cultural fluidity. In particular, these works focus the way fragments of (urban) space are socially associated with, or disassociated from, literature and other elements of 'high' culture. As Lefebvre insists, social space is a product of society, in that, "The spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space" (38). As a result, spatial practices permit individual subjects a form of agency that can influence the form of the surrounding social space. In Eltit's case, I will demonstrate how her spatial practices disrupt the hegemony of the written word by relocating it into spaces that have been left empty, in ruins, or otherwise limited to oral culture. Vice versa, this also means that Eltit recuperates spaces that have been typically forgotten or erased from high culture and renders them the political subject of her narratives.

Yet, before we can examine Eltit's spatial practices in each of these instances, we must first revisit the way today's urban Spanish American space was first conceived and structured.

1.2 How Spanish American Cities were (per-)Formed

In his final book, *La ciudad letrada* (1984), literary critic Ángel Rama (1926-1983) details the influence of an elite, lettered class in the formation of Latin American cities that began during the Spanish Conquest of the New World. “Desde la remodelación de Tenochtitlan, luego de su destrucción por Hernán Cortés en 1521, hasta la inauguración en 1960 del más fabuloso sueño de urbe de que han sido capaces los americanos, la Brasilia de Lucio Costa y Oscar Niemeyer,” he explains, “la ciudad latinoamericana ha venido siendo básicamente *un parto de la inteligencia*, ... en que la ciudad pasó a ser el sueño de un orden” (1, emphasis my own).¹⁴ By birth of intelligence, Rama means that before Spanish American cities were allowed to become physical, spatial realities of streets, homes, and businesses, they emerged in theories and plans designed to create a very specific and idealized New World order.

¹⁴ Although Rama clearly includes Brazil in his argument by mentioning Brasilia, many scholars have noted that Brazil's colonial cities have followed a different path of development from those of the Spanish colonies, both before and after independence. Consequently, my discussion here of the development of the “Latin American city” will necessarily limit itself to Spanish American cities, and will not delve into the distinct issues presented by Brazilian cities. The interested reader will find a good summary of the differences in the development of Spanish American and Brazilian cities, from the colonial period through the end of the twentieth century, in Brian G. Godfrey's article, “Modernizing Brazil,” p. 18-24.

In part, Rama argues, the physical and social structuring of these cities ‘born of intelligence’ was due to their status as colonial subjects. New and distant cities that were to form part of an extensive empire were meant to “facilitar la jerarquización y concentración del poder” and “cumplir [la] misión civilizadora” (23) of the Spanish Monarchy. The fervency of this mission was augmented by the commonly held view of the New World as a vast, empty space, inhabited by what were presumed to be savage peoples. As a result, cities in Spanish America were purposefully placed in strategic locations to distill the ‘barbarous’ surroundings with urban civility.¹⁵ Cities, therefore, were founded at the voracious speed with which the Spaniard’s permeated from the north to the south of the continent.

While combating what was seen as the barbarity of the New World’s countryside, the utopic Spanish American city was also designed to stand in direct contrast to the chaotic and sudden urbanization of Golden Age Spain, which had so recently experienced a transition from a feudalistic society to a mercantile economy. At the onset of the Conquest, Spain was reeling from an ever-increasing number of vagrants arriving in its cities, and a sharp rise in poverty, delinquency, and criminality of all kinds.¹⁶ Consequently, the King of Spain sent orders to the New World that specified that, “con anterioridad a toda realización, se debe pensar la ciudad, lo que permitiría evitar las

¹⁵ By contrast, Rama reminds us, European cities developed organically as natural market places and centers of communication sprang up between distinct agricultural regions (14).

¹⁶ For more on this transition in Spanish society and the phenomenon of delinquency that arose with Spain’s rapid urbanization, see historian J. H. Elliot’s *Imperial Spain 1469-1716*, cultural critic José Antonio Maravall’s, “Pobres y pobreza del medievo a la primera modernidad: Para un estudio histórico-social de la picaresca,” and literary critic Anne J. Cruz’s *Discourse of Poverty: Social Reform and the Picaresque Novel in Early Modern Spain*.

irrupciones circunstanciales ajenas a las normas establecidas, entorpeciénolas o destruyéndolas. El *orden* debe quedar estatuido antes de que la ciudad exista, para así impedir todo futuro *desorden*” (8, Rama’s emphasis). This marked insistence on the establishment and maintenance of order – meant to prevent both the type of social unrest that had recently emerged in Spain’s own cities, as well as the disorder the Monarchy presumed must characterize the native peoples of the New World – would define the development of the Spanish American city.

Yet, how was order to be accomplished, and who would be responsible for maintaining it? These issues necessitated the presence of what Rama referred to as “un grupo social especializado” (23) – a small group of literate inhabitants who would reside in the center of each city, and from there, would propagate the Monarchy’s highly desired order. In now famous words, Rama describes this group as follows:

En el centro de toda ciudad, ... hubo una *ciudad letrada* que componía el anillo protector del poder y el ejecutor de sus órdenes: Una pléyade de religiosos, administradores, educadores, profesionales, escritores, y múltiples servidores intelectuales, todos esos que manejaban la pluma, estaban estrechamente asociados a las funciones del poder.... (25, emphasis in the original.)

The extent of each *ciudad letrada* was determined by the degree of importance given to the capital viceroyalty, but in all cases, what it formed was nothing less than an official bureaucracy.

In control of the realm of signs, the 'lettered city' was not just located at the center of cultural and political ideology, but also at the geographical center of the new Spanish American municipalities. Although Philip II only issued his “Plan de ordenamiento urbano para las Indias” in 1573, a decree under which cities were to be built in concentric squares or rectangles in a grid pattern around a central plaza, in practice several cities

founded from the 1530s onwards – including Santiago de Chile – were already being constructed around what would soon become Philip II’s mandated urban model.¹⁷

Following this design, the central plaza of each city was to be bordered by buildings representing each of the institutional powers: the government, military, church, and, in the form of a main marketplace, finance. Lettered inhabitants worked at and ran each of these institutions, and lived with their families in homes that extended out from this urban core. As such, less desirable – and less educated – inhabitants (along with less desirable uses of land) were pushed out onto the peripheries of the newly founded cities (Godfrey 23-24). The result of this urban model was a concentrated class of the literate elite working in the center of the city to ‘maintain order’: to preserve a distinct social, financial, and political hierarchy.

Radiating out from the center of the newly founded cities, literacy, as one of the Monarchy’s primary tools in the effort to create and maintain ‘civilization’ and ‘order,’ would play a double role in the subjugation of Spanish America. On one hand, education would work in conjunction with religion to help dominate and domesticate the barbarous native peoples – and, therefore, the immense space of America.¹⁸ Yet, although the

¹⁷ Francisco Muñoz Espejo offers a good summary of the different models and stages of development of Spanish American colonial cities in his “Estudio sobre el urbanismo colonial y las fortificaciones hispanoamericanas con relación de los principales itinerarios culturales de comunicación (caminerías reales y rutas comerciales interoceánicas).” Godfrey’s “Modernizing Brazil” also provides an in-depth discussion of Philip II’s particular urban model, although for more in-depth study the full list of Phillip II’s decrees related to the foundation and settlement of new cities can be found in volumes II and IV of *Recopilación de leyes de los reynos de las Indias*.

¹⁸ The religious education of Spanish America’s indigenous population was considered to be so important that in 1580 Phillip II prohibited the ordainment of any clergy member, “que no Jepa la lengua general de los Indios de Ju Provincia, [...] aunque el Ordenante tenga habilidad y Juficiencia en la facultad, que la Santa Iglesia y Sagrados Canones mandan” (Paredes 119). This strategy came into effect due to the belief that knowledge of

dissemination of Christianity was one of the main justifications for the Conquest and a primary objective of the Colonies, as late as the mid-eighteenth century only members of the clergy were allowed to read the Bible. An exclusivity, therefore, surrounded the realm of letters, that “concluyó sacralizándola” (Rama 42), and lead to the other role that literacy would play in the power-dynamics of Spanish America: it created a cultural hegemony controlled by the very limited number of people who could read and write.

Curiously, although there was a clear preoccupation with education in the Spanish Colonies, this concern had a very narrow focus: that of promoting the university studies of the (already) cultural elite. Rama comments that the, “atención por la educación superior de los letrados [...] no tuvo ningún equivalente respecto a las escuelas de primeras letras, ” and, as a result, “No sólo la escritura, también la lectura quedó reservada al grupo letrado” (41).¹⁹ Scribes and lawyers particularly benefited from this situation, since all legitimate transmission of land and goods had to be documented, and where documents were lacking, they could be created to favor specific interests. A lack of access to literacy among the general population also meant that one privileged class was able to live off of the enormous bureaucracy installed in the newly founded cities, and would be kept busy creating or maintaining order, and sending reports on the state of that order back to the King.

the local native languages was the “medio mas necesario para la explicacion y enseñanza de la Doctrina Christiana” (117).

¹⁹ Rama continues on to explain how the sacred nature of writing consolidated what he terms “la diglosia característica de la sociedad latinoamericana, formada durante la Colonia y mantenida tesoneramente desde la Independencia. En el comportamiento lingüístico de los latinoamericanos quedaron nítidamente separadas dos lenguas” (43). Though less important for our current discussion of the formation of the Spanish American city, this point about the two separate languages spoken by Latin Americans that Rama traces back to the dividing lines created by literacy in the Colonies will resurface in our discussion of Eltit’s work in chapter three.

As such, the lettered class composed the entire clergy and bureaucracy. It therefore dominated property and financial transactions, while also maintaining a monopoly on the necessary chronicling of every day events in the New World, and in addition, of course, interpreted all laws, both earthly and spiritual. But while the writing involved in the creation and maintenance of account books, deeds, laws, chronicles, letters, and reports, all served official, bureaucratic purposes, *la ciudad letrada* also held sway over another, equally important, sphere of society: over aesthetic production. As a result, even poetry contributed to the ways in which a hegemony of the written word was being established in the center of colonial cities. Moreover, aesthetic production leads back to another form of economic domination, since much of the baroque literary production for which Spanish America would later become famous was founded, “Sobre ese trabajo [de los indios y esclavos de las colonias], sobre la rapaz apropiación de las riquezas” (27).²⁰

A portrait slowly crystallizes in which we can see that the colonial Spanish American city was structured – both physically and ideologically – around its lettered inhabitants. This created not only a geographic center of the cultural elite – that included, for example, poets and baroque authors whose works praised the establishment, but also a hegemonic center of power and influence composed of the official bureaucracy. In later chapters of *La ciudad letrada*, Rama discusses how this lettered center continued to function and evolve through the Independences -- even as the movements that lead to independence were shaped by the emergence of new classes and the participation of

²⁰ It is worth noting that Rama's discussion of aesthetic production to an extent simplifies the colonial cultural scene, as there was indeed a lettered, albeit small, indigenous class within Spanish America.

indigenous peoples --, and across various waves of democracy, socialism, and dictatorship, up until the last few decades of the twentieth century. Jean Franco has more recently written about a possible fall of the contemporary ‘lettered city,’²¹ though her work focused more specifically on the political weight held by writers in Latin America, rather than on the greater culture of the written word that ranges from realms of discourse so diverse as the law, scholarship, ‘light’ fiction, the daily newspaper, weekly gossip magazines, advertising, and the digital world of the internet. In spite of the evolution and even the fall of parts of the *ciudad letrada*, however, today in 2012 we cannot deny the continued cultural domination of the written word in contemporary Chile. It is, therefore, against this discursive backdrop of the cultural elite at the (geographic and ideological) center of Spanish American colonial cities, that I will foreground Diamela Eltit’s spatial practices in Santiago in the 1980s.

1.3 Santiago: City of Earthquakes

Santiago de Chile was officially founded by Pedro de Valdivia in 1541, 32 years before Phillip II’s urban ordinance was proclaimed. Valdivia asked Pedro de Gamboa to plan the newly founded city, which Gamboa positioned at the foot of the hill Santa Lucía, nestled between the Mapocho river²² and its tributary, the Cañada. Gamboa’s Santiago fit

²¹ Franco’s *Decline and Fall of the Lettered City. Latin America in the Cold War* also takes the period leading up to and including the Cold War as its principal frame of reference.

²² In a review of Alfredo Gómez Morel’s novel *El río*, Eltit describes the present-day importance of the Mapocho: “El río Mapocho [es el] antiguo refugio de niño delincuentes, espacio ciudadano que divide la ciudad de Santiago en norte y sur y la territorializa socialmente, jerarquizándola” (*Emergencias* 86).

what would soon become Phillip II's checkerboard city model: a central plaza, la Plaza de Armas, bordered by buildings representing the State and the Church, was framed by concentric and evenly spaced squares of streets radiating outwards to form a total of 126 blocks, with only the rivers and hills interrupting the regularity of the streets. The city's existence, however, was threatened by a series of Mapuche attacks, earthquakes, and floods, culminating in the 1647 earthquake that killed 600 residents and nearly devastated Santiago. In the aftermath of the earthquake, Santiago would be re-founded, and the city's tall, spacious homes would be replaced by more solid, shock-resistant residences of a single floor. Though the style of urban construction had changed, the rebuilt Santiago followed the same grid pattern of the city's first iteration, with the Cathedral and the seat of the Royal Audience still centrally housing the most important administrative and political institutions in what was also the city's social center: the Plaza de Armas (see figure 1.1).²³

²³ The municipality of Santiago's website, municipalidaddesantiago.cl, offers a brief summary of the Santiago's history, complemented by articles by historians Gonzalo Cáceres Quiero and Rafael Otano Garde from *Santiago Plaza Capital*. For greater detail, Armando de Ramón's *Santiago Chile (1541-1991): historia de una sociedad urbana* presents an excellent, in-depth discussion of the city's history up until the end of the twentieth century.

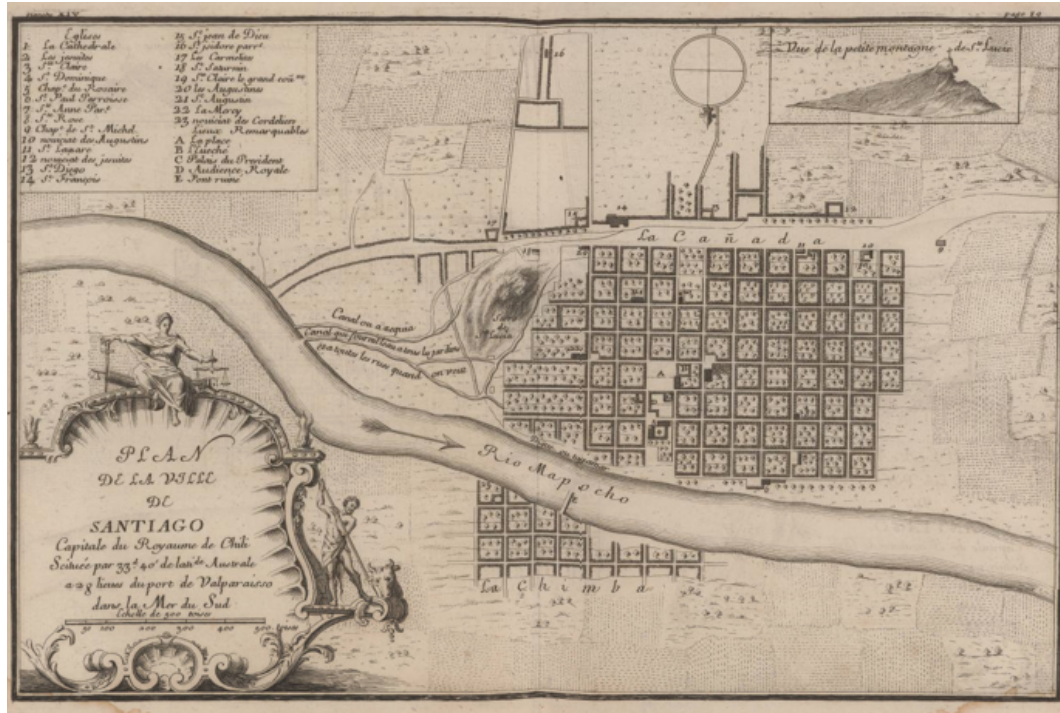


Figure 1.1: “Plan de la Ville de Santiago,” by Amédée-François Frezier. Engraving from 1716; image taken from the John Carter Brown Archive of Early American Images.

The shape of Santiago began to change after the Constitution of the Republic was signed in 1810, officially designating Santiago as the country’s capital. What had once been the city’s limits – the rivers and hills – became the borders of its center, with surrounding residential districts constituting Santiago’s peripheries. In the 1840s and 50s, the combination of government interests and the presence of foreign architects and engineers would further re-envision the city, canalizing the Mapocho, replacing the dried-up Cañada with the wide boulevard that is now known as the Alameda, creating other tree-lined avenues and public spaces, and expanding west and southward. Around this time, the bourgeoisie began to construct their mansion-like residences just to the west and south of the city center, and funded the building of symbols of cultural capital, such as

the National Library, the Parliament Building, the Municipal Theatre, and the commercial walkways in the Center.

During the twentieth century, however, a massive migration and urbanization movement had begun that would completely change the demographics of the city, and Chile as a whole: it would take a country that was, “more than 80 percent rural” at the turn of the century, and by 1982 transform it into, “one where over 80 percent of the population is urban” (Merrill 84). At the same time, and as happened in many of the colonial Spanish American cities, the upper classes began to abandon their palatial homes in the center of Santiago as early as the 1930s and 40s, moving towards the mountains in the east, “in search of a better climate and a more controlled contact with rural immigrants who were flooding the city” (84).²⁴ The middle classes soon followed, and though thanks to the positioning of the Moneda (Chile’s Presidential Palace and principal government building) Santiago Centro remained the city’s administrative and political center, it experienced a dramatic decline in residential population. Those who remained there were of generally lower economic means, and not only public spaces but formerly beautiful mansions and gardens were allowed to fall into decline, contributing to the bad reputation that the center of Santiago had begun to develop. Nonetheless, the city continued to grow, and the popular classes extended to the north and the west, and later to the south, as well. By 1982, “over 80 percent of all Chileans lived in cities, and nearly 75 percent of all urban-dwellers lived in Santiago” (82), which means that a full 44 percent of the Chilean population resided in Greater Santiago (83).

²⁴ This north and eastward movement of the wealthiest Santiaguinos would only accelerate during the dictatorship, with its focus on unrestrained market growth, until such neighborhoods as Las Condes, El Golf, and Vitacura hit up against the limits of the mountains and could expand no further.

Upon arriving in Santiago, many urban migrants were unable to afford permanent housing, such that by 1973, 272 *campamentos* had sprung up around Santiago. Though Salvador Allende brought forth a “Plano de emergencia” which would create 52,000 new homes each year, many Santiaguinos felt threatened by the presence of these transient residents. As a result of these camps, Chilean historian Gonzalo Cáceres Quiero affirms, urban security would be one of the issues that contributed to the justifications for the military intervention of 1973.

After the *golpe de estado* on the 11th of September, 1973, movement through and inhabitation of public space in Santiago experienced a sudden and drastic change that Eltit documents in her essay, “Las dos caras de la Moneda.” The change was immediate, she tells us, as Santiago was transformed from a city in which transit was free – albeit limited by one’s economic conditions (“Tanto ganas, tanto transitas,” Eltit commented to me about the workings of Santiago before the dictatorship²⁵), into a city in which transit came almost entirely to a halt:

En esas horas, se dictaminó Estado de Sitio. La ciudad quedaba así despoblada de cualquier cuerpo que no fuera el militar. Cualquier cuerpo que no correspondiera al cuerpo militar podía ser asesinado porque el tránsito por la ciudad ya estaba prohibido, la ciudad perdía así su carácter público para convertirse en un campo minado. El Estado de Sitio abría una nueva escisión que, a lo largo de 17 años, se iba a mantener con distintos rigores, dividiendo, territorializando los espacios al separar, de manera radical, la habitación de los cuerpos entre lo público y lo privado, entre el adentro y el afuera, entre la seguridad y el peligro. (*Emergencias* 21)

Marking this new division between the public and the private, security and danger, for example, was a strictly enforced curfew (especially from 1973 to 1980) that left city

²⁵ From a personal interview with Diamela Eltit, conducted in her office at New York University on October 15th, 2009.

streets vacant at night.²⁶ The graffiti that had once covered city walls was erased or painted over. Streets that had once been widened and tree-lined to create public promenades were no longer safe spaces for public discourse, or even for movement at certain times. The city had been ‘confiscated,’ in Diamela’s words, by repressive forces, leaving behind nothing more than the sham of a city.²⁷

Ironically, though the dictatorship in its repression had all but eliminated the existence of public space, one of its greatest accomplishments would nonetheless facilitate passage through the city. In 1965, before both Allende and Pinochet’s regimes, studies had already been undertaken to consider the possibility of a citywide subway system. Construction on the metro began in 1969, but it wasn’t until 1975 that the first line opened to public use, and the second line commenced service in 1978.²⁸ Public transportation options, in the forms of bus routes and extensions to metro lines, continued to expand, in spite of interruptions such as the flooding of the Mapocho in 1982 and 1986, and the 7.8 magnitude earthquake on March 3rd, 1985.

Nonetheless, greater ease of transit did not change the residential patterns, and from 1973 through the present day, Santiago has remained a city in which the wealthiest residents live to the northeast, where the financial district and so-called “Sanhattan” are also located, while the poorest residents live in the south and west. Santiago Centro,

²⁶ In the same essay, Eltit goes on to explain how the military intervention affected not only public space, but invaded the private space of the home, as well: “La imagen televisiva de los cuatro jefes de las ramas militares los introducía en el interior de las casas cuando esos mismo cuatro uniformados ya habían tomado el control de lo público mediante la inoculación programática del miedo ciudadano para reducir así la civilidad al espacio doméstico. Espacio doblemente domesticado luego que la implantación del Estado de sitio había dictaminado toque de queda total y la suspensión de todos los derechos civiles” (22).

²⁷ Personal interview, October 15th, 2009.

²⁸ A history of Santiago’s metro can be found at www.metrosantiago.cl.

meanwhile, has seen its population decrease, though it continues to be the city's transportation, administration, and political nucleus, as well as the home of many services, businesses, and other commercial activity. According to Cáceres Quiero, "se vive en la periferia, pero se trabaja, se toman decisiones, se negocia, se estudia, se compra y se recrea en el centro." It is this urban space as a whole that Eltit performs and re-forms in each of the pieces that will be examined in this chapter.

1.4 *El Padre Mío*: Locating the Baroque in the Wasteland

Never self-identified, the man Eltit calls *el Padre Mío* – literally, 'the one who is my father'²⁹ – was a homeless and schizophrenic vagabond who took up open-air residence in Conchalí: a municipality in northern Greater Santiago that at the time was what Eltit refers to as an 'eriazó,' a wasteland. Eltit encountered him for the first time in 1983, in one of her *salidas a la ciudad* with Lotty Rosenfeld. As she herself explains, there was no fixed goal to these wandering investigations that lead the two artists to visit shelters, brothels, and other scenes of *vagabundaje* of all types. Rather, they were motivated by a fixation with visible differences that reflected the cultural system of Chile.

In Eltit's understanding, a 'vital movement' occurred in these spaces that, "como una

²⁹ As been pointed out by so many critics, the use of the phrase 'el Padre Mío' in this book functions in myriad ways. *El padre mío* is a recurring character in the unnamed schizophrenic's delusions, representing an omnipresent father figure of malicious authority and the scapegoat for our protagonist's current situation. Beyond the schizophrenic's insanity, however, at an allegorical level it can refer to the patriarchal and unforgiving influence of Pinochet over the Chilean landscape, or work as a religious reference ("Padre nuestro, que estás en el cielo, santificado sea tu nombre...."). At the same time, Eltit uses it to name the otherwise nameless protagonist of her book. In so doing, she places herself as his 'daughter,' and thereby more intimately positions herself within the text.

suerte de negativo – como el negativo fotográfico –, [era] necesario para configurar un positivo – el resto de la ciudad –, a través de una fuerte exclusión territorial para así mantener intacto el sistema social tramado bajo fuertes y sostenidas jerarquizaciones” (*Padre* 11).

Although there is only one photograph – that of the cover image – in *El Padre Mio*, Eltit’s comparison of the social and physical peripheries of Santiago to a photographic negative of the city is essential to understanding this text, and it is therefore worth deconstructing the simile before moving on. In conventional (non-digital) photography, a negative is the image that results when photographic film is exposed to light. In this negative image, all elements of composition remain the same, yet the color scheme and lighting of the original are inverted (light areas appear dark, dark areas appear light).³⁰ To produce a print, the negative image is printed on photographic paper, and in so doing, the colors are reversed once again, this time returning to the lighting that had been originally seen through the camera at the time the photograph had been taken.

In other words, together with the original, a negative reveals the complete color scheme and lighting of the original scene, via inversion. Moreover, a photographic negative is considered to be more important than any single print made from it, because while negatives are irreplaceable, many different prints can be made from a single negative. Returning to Eltit’s comparison, then, a photographer could create thousands of different full-color prints of Santiago’s (cultural and physical) center spaces from the single negative that reveals the city’s margins and periphery. So, while the colorful

³⁰ In color photography, the negative of an image will also invert the color scheme, not just the lighting, so that reds appear cyan, greens as magenta, and blues as yellow – all filtered through the sepia tones of the film.

cultural, political, administrative, and financial centers of Santiago³¹ might not be interested in their own inverted, sepia-toned images created through the spatial practices of vagabonds on its northwestern outskirts, Diamela Eltit found it to be essential to her understanding of the city itself, and its entire system of social organization.

In an interview with Álvaro Matus in 2007, Eltit further clarified the necessity she felt to get to know Santiago's negative. There, she explains that, "La ciudad de cada uno, a fin de cuentas, es muy restringida, limitada por las calles que uno recorre, los amigos que visita, el lugar donde trabaja. ... La ciudad habla para cada uno de manera distinta y misteriosa." In other words, each city dweller 'performs' her own, distinct version of the city, and this performance is constituted by her daily interactions with and uses of that city. Eltit's *salidas*, then, worked to change the city she inhabited, to remove the limits artificially created by her own daily spatial practices, and to allow her to begin to grasp how the city spoke to others. Just as our understanding of the true color composition of a photograph expands by examining its negative, Eltit's image of Santiago expanded by including visits to new streets, neighborhoods, and people.³²

The product of Eltit's expanded understanding of Santiago that emerged from these *salidas* is *El Padre Mío*. Published six years after meeting the unnamed homeless schizophrenic who is the book's protagonist, it is composed of two sections: Eltit's

³¹ For the purposes of this chapter, I will include the wealthy neighborhoods and financial districts of northeastern Santiago in my references to the city's center. Although not located in the geographic center of the city, economic hegemony, cultural capital and power migrated there along with the wealthiest residents when they began their move eastward in the 1930s.

³² Eltit's wanderings have a double-affect on the city she inhabits: not only do they allow her to approach new neighborhoods, routes, and lifestyles, making her familiar with a previously ignored landscape that had nonetheless always existed in Santiago, but at the same time they turn the familiar world strange by allowing her to see the city from the perspective of the vagrant, the homeless, and in this case, the schizophrenic.

presentación or prologue, followed by three episodes of el Padre Mío's speech. Each of these fragments of speech, she tells us, is the transcription, "en forma fidedigna [de] sus tres hablas grabadas en el eriazó de Conchalí" (*Padre* 16), without any further commentary appended to his original words. Though its title seems to indicate that the book will focus on el Padre Mío himself, the text is profoundly marked by Eltit's prologue, which occupies a full quarter of its pages.³³ Without this prologue, in fact, the transcriptions of el Padre Mío's speech would be illegible: though his words succeed in documenting a world of delusion, their content is often nonsensical, and his discourse lacks coherence. Indeed, it dramatizes the physical desolation of language. Visually, within the book itself, even the transcriptions of his speech are difficult to read: Eltit graphically represents each of the three speeches as an endless monologue, without paragraph breaks or added transitions to help the reader process and order the spilling of speech on the page. We begin to see that the language is *material*, as it consistently presents us with signifiers that have detached from their signifieds. Form, therefore, reflects content, as the mere textual appearance of these three *hablas* gives the impression of disorder, misconnection, excess, and insanity.

In contrast to the lack of cogency in el Padre Mío's three speeches that follow, Eltit's prologue places a legible, narrative frame around the delirium of his words. Before discussing the specific case of el Padre Mío, though, Eltit details three significant observations from her journeys through the "mundo del vagabundaje urbano" (11) of Santiago. In the first place, she discovered that the inhabitants of Conchalí ('Santiago's

³³ This raises the issue of the text's genre, a question to which I will return later in this chapter. For now, however, I would like to concentrate on the structure of the text and some of its physical features, in order to then discuss the way the text itself performs the space of Santiago *against* societal convention or competence.

photographic negative') lived and moved outside of the economic system of useful production. While the spatial practices of the majority of Santiago's residents form a daily routine of leaving home in the morning to go to work, and hours later leaving work to return home once again, these marginal, homeless bodies exhibited, "físicamente la liberación apasionada del mundo del trabajo, adoptando, en cambio, la pasividad, concentrando en su cuerpo el único bien posible, [su ropa] como oferta a la mirada de los otros" (13). Certainly, living in the street does not always reflect a conscious choice to rebel against society's spatial practices, just as a lack of possessions does not necessarily reveal the volition to no longer acquire worldly goods.³⁴ However, what Eltit suggests here is that, conscious determination aside, the 'lumpen'³⁵ of Santiago have a way of existing in space that differs fundamentally from that of the majority of the city's inhabitants. Their 'liberation' from the economic system of production (whether that liberation is due to an illness, such as schizophrenia or alcoholism, to a disability, or to an active choice) permits a passive ambling through urban space, a wandering free of destination or purpose – or even the possibility to remain in a single place – that directly opposes itself to the aggressive, determined itineraries the rest of the city follows en route to and from work. The city these individuals 'perform' is not defined by the commute

³⁴ Although *El Padre Mio* can be viewed as a text that romanticizes the homeless, insane, and marginal peoples it documents, I do not believe that Eltit idealizes or fetishizes her subjects. Rather, I concur with Mary Beth Tierney-Tello's critical reading of the tension between aesthetics and ethics in *El Padre Mio* and *El infarto del alma*, in which she suggests that Eltit's approach in these texts is to use the aesthetic as a different, and perhaps more effective, way to listen to the voice of the subaltern (Tierney-Tello 85). Eltit's concern with cultural peripheries, Tierney-Tello concludes, "works to avoid divesting the marginal subject of the aesthetic, thus challenging the notion that the aesthetic is the exclusive privilege of elite culture" (92).

³⁵ *Lumpen* is a Spanish term derived from Marx and Engel's Lumpenproletariat, and refers to the lowest of social classes, that group which never achieves class consciousness.

between a system of production and individually owned or rented places of rest or leisure, but rather by a daily survival and a permanent *residence* in a space that for the rest of us immediately connotes transit: the street.

Additionally, Eltit notes, in this world of the 'homeless,' the division between public and private space ceases to exist. Every act becomes a spectacle in “la ocupación permanente del espacio público, de la vía pública a costa de una voluntaria intemperie existencial” (14). As a result, a fundamental division that organizes the lives and determines all of the spatial practices of the ‘visible’ majority of a city represents a profound rupture in the homeless’ performance of the city. The notion of a ‘private life’ ceases to exist, all actions become public, and the concept of private property blurs. Yet in spite of how different this mode of existence appears from that of the more privileged majority of society, Eltit suggests that, “En algún lugar era posible suponer que en sus cuerpos [de los vagabundos] estaban impresos los grafismos de todos los otros – lo institucional – que encarnaban en ellos un destino posible, al traspasar la frontera de la ley transitoria de la ciudad” (14). In other words, perhaps the greatest separation between these marginal lives and the rest of Santiago has to do with spatial practices. Although the residents of the *eriazos* in Conchalí no longer follow the city’s unspoken laws of street transit, having instead opted for or fallen into permanent street occupation, their bodies and lives nonetheless reflect the institutional performances of the city that their own actions negate.

Finally, as Eltit reiterates in her presentation, what most immediately marked the presence of the vagabonds of Conchalí was their physical appearance – so much so, that she even describes their appearance as ‘work’: “Su apariencia era el trabajo único que

incesantemente se repetía en cada una de las figuras [vagabundas]. Un trabajo solitario y excesivo que desde el jirón se recomponía en un barroco visual pesadamente latino por el orden de su pobreza” (13). This ‘visual baroque’ aesthetic that Eltit glimpses emerging from the appearance of the homeless, however, is not a romanticization, nor a sterilization, of their situation. Rather, it reflects another way of looking at the Other. Rather than allowing herself to be repulsed by their poverty, Eltit is able to see beyond the despair in order to read the exertion that has gone into clothing the residents of the *eriazos*. This effort consists of collecting and accumulating shreds and tatters of all kinds of materials, to later weave them into protective garments, into layers of clothing. The result is a crude juxtaposition of unexpected elements, repurposed into something new and grotesquely ornate. Creating an aesthetic was almost certainly not their intention, yet when Eltit observes the homeless in Conchalí, she sees inscribed on their bodies and in their appearances an echo of Latin America’s baroque. This is to become a key to Eltit’s own poetics: where others see only chaos and waste, Eltit’s gaze will make a distinct gesture that seeks to decipher order, poetry, codified meaning.

The grotesque baroque Eltit locates in the midst of the vagrants living in Conchalí serves as a mechanism of representation that allows the lumpen to emit specific messages to anyone who stops to observe them. Their appearances construct a visual façade that responds to, “un complejo y desgarrado orden cosmético,” in which their presences, “dejaban entrever significaciones múltiples, desde la multiplicidad de aditivos que componían la violenta exterioridad a la que se habían reducido” (12). Layers of ragged clothing saturated by dirt are a natural result of living in the street, yet they simultaneously ‘arm’ the lumpen against passersby who do not want to see poverty as

part of their urban landscape. Yet for the observer who does not immediately turn away at the sight of their squalid bodies, much more is communicated by the possessions they carry everywhere with them. As Eltit explains, “Esos bultos eran una apariencia más. El símil de la propiedad individual y, más aún, la copia de una historia personal marcada por la posesión de objetos testimoniadores de la existencia de un pasado. De esta manera, la elaboración de significaciones sólo era legible en la suma de síntomas externos que se ponían a operar” (12). In sum, their appearances and their possessions add up to an elaborate visual discourse, creating a *linguistic* system that operates on visible, outward signs, in which exterior manifestations serve as codes of signification.

I call this a ‘linguistic’ system in spite of its basis in appearances rather than language, granting that these ‘signs’ depend much more on an observer to interpret them than on a conscious emitter to enunciate a message, because it is virtually the only level of discourse Eltit observes in all of her time in the *eriazó*. Astonished, she writes that even after establishing herself in Conchalí, “Pude percibir que estaban prácticamente desposeídos, carentes de lenguaje oral. La gama de verbalizaciones posibles se había instalado en la energía que sus cuerpos acusaban, augurando el desastre de la palabra posible de nombrar y nombrarse” (14). So, while their spatial practices performed a three-part rupture with those of the rest of the city by declining to view streets only as spaces of transit, repudiating work, and erasing the divisions between private and public space, the linguistic practices of these urban vagrants paralleled their spatial practices by breaking along other lines: namely, through a nearly complete absence of speech. Yet, once again, Eltit searches for ways to construct meaning out of what might otherwise be construed as emptiness and lack.

When Eltit encounters in Conchalí a marginal urban space whose primary mode of communication is not written nor oral, but rather a visual code of appearance, the lack of language she finds there is not due to a lack of education. Indeed, in an interview with Walescka Pino-Ojeda, Eltit insists on the literacy of the inhabitants of Conchalí. “Pero si la gente marginal sabe leer” (181) she repeatedly asserts, persistently affirming that Chile has one of the lowest rates of illiteracy in the world.³⁶ Consequently, the absence of oral or written discourse no longer reflects a lack of access or ability, so much as a lack of desire, or even a refusal, to engage in verbal linguistic exchanges. Knowing that they are the object of more privileged residents’ judging gaze, the lumpen reduce their communication to the external projections worn on their bodies.

In her ongoing observations, however, Eltit begins to see these urban vagabonds as a different kind of object: not just an object to be dismissed by society, but to the contrary, as an object imbued with cultural value, and at the same time as a subject that produces cultural value. Reflecting on the role of appearance and exteriority in their public presence, Eltit re-reads the lumpen’s external projections in a new way: “Escultura” (*Padre* 13), she tells us, in a Spanish play on words that means “It is culture,” as well as “Sculpture.” Sculpture, of course, connotes high Culture with a capital ‘c’; calling the transient inhabitants of Conchalí ‘sculpture,’ therefore, explicitly associates them with the realm of art, and at the same time steeps them with high cultural value. Yet Eltit’s act of naming the lumpen of Conchalí ‘escultura’ also has larger ramifications as a spatial practice. With this new designation, Eltit effectively displaces the vagabond, homeless,

³⁶ Indeed, eight years of basic education were not only free but were obligatory in Chile in the 1970s and 80s (Merrill xii).

and miscreant from Santiago's cultural peripheries, in order to squarely locate them in the city's Cultural center. They are not simply vagrants, Eltit insists, but producers of art, and the resulting sculpture is therefore worthy of space in any of the city's galleries or museums, worthy even of the Museo de Bellas Artes. From her perspective, moreover, the lumpen-sculpture actually *gains* in significance and impact over traditional art by virtue of being found in the real world and in the mere streets, rather than being exclusively hidden away in a museum or gallery.³⁷

This play on words, "Es-cultura," creates a double-pull on the lumpen: while as sculpture they pertain to and even contribute to the production of the sphere of high Culture, they also form a sculpture that commemorates 'culture' with a lower case 'c.' In other words, the lumpen-sculpture reflects behaviors, beliefs, and a way of life common to Santiaguinos – if only through inversion, as an example of *el mundo al revés*. We have already seen this in the way Eltit reads the bodies of the lumpen, imprinted not only with the signs of their own individual pasts, but carrying also the graphic markings of the alternatives, of conventional city life. That is to say, the bodies of the vagrant offer a specific telling of the city's institutions and spatial practices, precisely by breaking with those practices. Here, then, we return to Eltit's notion of the lumpen as a photographic negative of Santiago: without these marginalized spatial practices, no image of the city's

³⁷ Here, Eltit's written gesture in *El Padre Mio* is reminiscent of her collaborations with CADA, and particularly of the group's October 1979 art action, "Inversión de escena." In the two-part performance, the members of CADA organized a parade of milk trucks to arrive in front of the Museo de Bellas Artes, the main façade of which the artists had covered with a blank cloth. Among the many possible interpretations of the action, "Inversión de escena" reminded the citizens of Santiago that art does not have to be located behind the closed doors of a museum -- indeed, that art *belongs* in the streets, where everyone can access and interact with it -- and encouraged them to see the city as a blank canvas in waiting.

culture could ever be complete; centers are self-imagined or constructed spaces that can only exist in relation to that which they exclude.

More concretely, however, Eltit understands the lumpen as 'sculpture' that negates any kind of interiority, that has been reduced to pure ornament or to mere façade, “después de un cataclismo” (13). This lumpen-sculpture, then, offers a perfectly transposed vision of Santiago, in that the ‘cataclysm’ of the dictatorship had reduced Chilean society to a state of total interiority. During this period, any thoughts that could be construed as subversive could not be publicly expressed; as such, all public displays could only be neutral or supportive of the government, and all other opinions had to remain internalized. The lumpen, therefore, could be viewed as an inverted monument to the culture of repression in Chile. On both accounts, the lumpen-sculpture mirrors the culture of Santiago, even though the reflection offers back the original image in reverse. Consequently, by designating the lumpen ‘cultura,’ Eltit draws them out of social exile, and firmly resituates them within the city. In other words, the poor are thus intrinsic to the new city.

While the lumpen Eltit observes in Conchalí remain virtually silent, allowing their outward projections to speak for them, el Padre Mío breaks with this linguistic competence of the *eriazos*: he never stops speaking. For three years, each time Eltit returned to this zone, she found el Padre Mío in the same place, in the midst of a delirious spilling of speech. She writes that his, “vertiginosa circular presencia lingüística no tenía principio ni fin. El barroco se había implantado en su lengua móvil haciéndola estallar” (15). Listening to this flood of language, and in spite of its lack of logical, coherent content, Eltit was reminded of the literary interior monologue, of its anguished search for

truth, of Beckett.³⁸ She was struck by the words that poured forth out of the mouth of this homeless schizophrenic, words that had been emptied of signification as they recycled or recombined names, places, and events, to create an endless soliloquy of paranoia. In spite of the emptiness of his enunciation, his flow of language seduced her, and listening to el Padre Mío, she thought: “es literatura, es como literatura” (17).

So what does el Padre Mío say in his three transcribed *hablas*? His very first words proceed to sweep up the reader/listener into a delirious blur of no longer recognizable names and references. A vague story emerges, in which certain powerful and corrupt male figures have conspired against el Padre Mío as well as his family, and continue to do so against all of us. The names of these men, however, blend into each other and become interchangeable in el Padre Mío’s words, with one name – ‘El Padre Mío’³⁹ – taking on a general representation of the malevolent male power structure that has destroyed his life:

El Padre Mío da las órdenes ilegales en el país. Hace muchos años que subsiste de ingresos bancarios ilegales, del dinero que le pertenece a la concesión del personal de la Administración. Él es cómplice con el Padre Mío en estos asuntos. Yo les quiero hacer un servicio a ustedes por las ventas de sus derechos. Porque yo fui solicitado para ocupar esos cargos y esas garantías, no el Padre Mío ni el señor Colvin que es el señor Luengo, que es diputado y senador. (23).

Several structural elements of el Padre Mío’s speech are worth noting. First, his discourse is clearly directed towards his interlocutors, even though he never gives them an opportunity to respond (“Yo les quiero hacer un servicio a ustedes. . .”). Although in the

³⁸ I concur with Michael J. Lazzara’s deduction that Eltit is particularly reminded of Beckett’s short 1963 play *Not I*, which is entirely composed of the incoherent monologue of a madwoman (Lazzara 114).

³⁹ To facilitate distinction between this composite authority figure and Eltit’s schizophrenic protagonist, I will set ‘El Padre Mío’ off by single quotation marks when referring to the generalized male power structure that dominates the discourse of the schizophrenic man Eltit has called el Padre Mío.

moment of enunciation el Padre Mío specifically addresses Diamela Eltit and Lotty Rosenfeld, his interpolation of the listener/reader is a rhetorical strategy that effectively draws us (Eltit, Rosenfeld, and the reader) into his story of persecution as yet another set of victims, thereby allying us with his interests and setting us against the corrupt forces of ‘El Padre Mío.’ After all, he is willing to offer us a ‘service’ that will in some way compensate for the ‘sale of our rights.’ He also, however, expects a favor from us in return: “Pero me tienen que conseguir un locutor y un periodista para que el hecho se dé a conocer” (58). Claiming to be privy to important information regarding certain powerful figures, el Padre Mío speaks to us in the hope that we will be able to get him a set of good, clean clothes; allow him to fix his documentation; and most importantly, put him in contact with a journalist so he can pass on his particular understanding of the current situation of violence.

Certain words and subjects recur throughout the three *hablas*,⁴⁰ lending a loose feeling of cohesion to el Padre Mío’s discourse, yet his rapid-fire change of subjects (‘El Padre Mío’ becomes a nameless yet complicit ‘él,’ el señor Colvin is somehow also el señor Luengo, and so on...) prevents the reader or listener from being able to make sense of or even follow his history. As the names of authority figures fuse, any hint of a concrete identity or direct connection to recent events fades away – even as the hazily familiar image of violence, corruption, and persecution lingers. As Mary Beth Tierney-Tello has eloquently observed, el Padre Mío, “urgently makes his case, denouncing his persecutors and their insidious power, demanding in a compelling tone to be heard. Yet

⁴⁰ Lazzara offers an illuminating list of the ‘keywords’ that repeat throughout El Padre Mío’s discourse, including, for example, *usurpación*, *complicidad*, *exterminio*, *asesinato*, *ilegal*, *silenciar*, and *dinero*. For his complete list, please see Lazzara page 112.

the precise nature of his struggle is impossible to comprehend” (Tierney-Tello 83). Tied only to a perpetually jumbled present, el Padre Mío is unable to effectively communicate with a society built upon the creation of logical narratives that explain the past.

The case that el Padre Mío makes seems to boil down to a contradictory story of self-implication and exculpation in a plot that is responsible for his current living situation, the disappearance of his family, and a plot to exterminate us all – because, as he tells us, “Si ustedes no se ponen de acuerdo, la mayoría, están todos planeados por el exterminio” (*Padre* 28). His story alternates between his persecution (“...por eso que a mí me planearon por asesinato y enfermo mental. Se pagó un dinero importante por lo mío” (23); “A mí me intentaron matar antes por él, cuando necesitó dinero él, ya que lo necesitó cuando mataron a mis familiares” (26)) and his alliance with the powerful men who are responsible for the country’s violence (“Así es que yo les hice un servicio como fuera hasta aquí” (25); “Yo soy un hombre de difusión de ayuda y el Padre Mío me eligió para despistar los compromisos que están relacionados con el señor Luengo, ya que subsiste de ingresos bancarios ilegales desde hace muchos años” (44)), only to proclaim his innocence once again: “Pero yo no soy cómplice” (64), he repeatedly insists.

In addition to a direct address of his listeners, constant self-contradictions, and the disconnect between names and identities, yet another structural element of el Padre Mío’s speech is significant: that is, the recurrence of literal and figurative silence. Of the many themes that recur in el Padre Mío’s three speeches, silence is the one that most frequently arises. He reminds us repeatedly that powerful men have wanted to silence him (“A mí me quería tener en un recinto recluso para silenciarme, para que yo quedara silenciado en el personal de la Administración . . .” (28, with other variations including 42, 49, and

so on)), and have been willing to go to great lengths to prevent him from spreading his knowledge. He tells us that they have invented stories about him, planning to have him put away for being an assassin, a drunk, and mentally-ill (30, 56, etc.) – and that they have even tried to kill him by running him over on three occasions, although he managed to escape death (56). As a result, el Padre Mío feels a desperate need to communicate, and to escape silence at all costs. In light of this past of forced and attempted silences, his constant variants of , “...por esto que le estoy conversando yo....” (25), and, “Lo que le estoy conversando no es mentira” (27), or “¿qué más claro que los [cuentos] que le estoy explicando?” (60), and “Más franco no puedo hablarle” (65) appear to reaffirm his will to speak out.

Beyond the literal, forced silences that el Padre Mío recounts in his *hablas*, Michael J. Lazzara points out another silence that functions at the narrative level in the transcription of his speech: the use of ellipsis. Each of el Padre Mío’s three speeches appears to begin *in media res*. Each speech also ends with an ellipsis, “a syntactical detail that signals both the endless nature of the vagabond’s testimony and the silences bound up within it. The reader gets the feeling that the madman will continue to speak *ad infinitum*, and wonders as much about what El Padre Mío has *not* said as about what he has” (Lazzara 112). While the ellipsis are a formal mark of silenced continuation, the fragmentary nature of el Padre Mío’s discourse also reveals thousands of nearly invisible silences which rupture the logic of his speech, allowing names to resignify without

informing the listener/reader. These silences recall the findings of holocaust trauma studies, and speak to the impossibility of communicating traumatic experience.⁴¹

Although what finally emerges from el Padre Mío's words and silences is an incoherent and fragmented vision of violence in which the perpetrators and victims continuously shift shape, Eltit explains in a later interview that his speech nonetheless reflected bits and pieces of Chilean actuality as it was portrayed in the newspapers. "Todos esos saberes los saca de los diarios, es un lector de retazos de periódicos Es que está chiflado. El [sic] es tres personas: Alessandri, Frei y Allende. El señor Luengo, el señor Colvin y el Padre Mío, son tres seres que va combinando a la par que va leyendo pedazos de diario" (Pino-Ojeda 180). Of course, the reader/listener cannot know how much of el Padre Mío's speech reflects on his own experience, and how much merely recycles words, names, and events he has read from the newspaper. Returning to Eltit's vision of the lumpen as culture, however, el Padre Mío has literally absorbed through his readings the dictatorship's culture of violence and repression, to recombine its antecedents into the 'baroque' flow of language that Eltit captures in her transcription.

Eltit's categorization of el Padre Mío's speech as 'baroque' inscribes his discourse with cultural value, and simultaneously invites the reader to move beyond a literal or historical understanding of his words – an understanding that can only be confounded as he blurs dates, names, events, and even the 'facts' of his own life – in

⁴¹ I will further discuss trauma in chapters two and three, and therefore will not go into great detail here. The principal texts to which I refer, however, include: Giorgio Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*; Jean Améry's *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor of Auschwitz and its Realities*; Sara Kofman's *Smothered Words*; and Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Lazzara uses many of these sources to read the role of trauma in creating the fragmentary discourse of *El Padre Mío*.

order to reconsider his transcribed speeches as literature.⁴² By suggesting that we read this urban vagabond's discourse not as 'testimony' but rather as 'literature,' Eltit significantly shifts the expectations under which the text must work. She thereby allows us to attend to what Lazzara refers to as "its metaphorical instructiveness" (112) rather than its faithfulness to historical fact. *El Padre Mío*, then, presents us with, "a testimony whose *pact of truth* with the reader exceeds the level of the factual and enters the realm of the figurative" (113).

Reading his words as literature, Eltit is also able to trace the paths of el Padre Mío's logic: as his words recycle names and events from newspaper clippings into a discourse devoid of a concrete context, lacking cohesion of content, his speech nonetheless maintains a logic of *sound*. As Eltit recounts in an interview, "él trabaja con puros significantes, no significados: él se mueve con rima" (Pino-Ojeda 179). In an echo of the way his spatial practices do not conform to the rules of society, then, el Padre Mío's performance of speech employs a system of codes whose primary logic (content) he does not follow. Read as testimony, his speech subverts our notions of coherence when we expect it to generate factual meaning. Yet it becomes understandable if we reframe it as a particular form of literature that must be followed at the level of rhythm and rhyme. In this, Eltit's publication of *El Padre Mío*'s discourse as literature based not

⁴² Although Eltit emphasizes her view of el Padre Mío's language as literary, it is worth noting that in interviews she has also repeatedly emphasized the 'popular' character of her schizophrenic subject. "Su entonación lingüística es absoluta, total e irremisiblemente popular" (Pino-Ojeda 181), she declares. Placing this popular tone into the cultural center of literature once more brings us back to the concept of the colonial lettered city, which for so long did all it could to impede the entry of the language of the popular class from entering into written discourse. In this, the Monarchy and the cultural elite completely succeeded until the publication of *El Periquillo Sarniento* in 1816, when as Rama recounts, the popular speech of the streets explodes onto the publicly written page, for the first time arriving at, "la honorable vía del papel de las gacetas o libros" (Rama 58).

on content but rather on sound has literary antecedents. In particular, the Futurists and Dadaist movements worked with the concept of sound poetry, a poetic form in which phonetics and/or sound are foregrounded over semantics and syntax.⁴³

If we reframe el Padre Mío's discourse as sound poetry, then, we re-emphasize the tension between el Padre Mío's original enunciation and the transcribed text: sound poetry is usually intended for performance more than for the written page, to be listened to rather than read – just as el Padre Mío's speech was enunciated specifically to Diamela Eltit and Lotty Rosenfeld in the context of the *eriazó* of Conchalí, without anticipating that it would later be transcribed word for word onto the written page. Nonetheless, sound poetry also appears and functions in print; famous examples include the beat poets Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, or more relevant to the Chilean literary scene, Vicente Huidobro's 1931 masterpiece *Altazor*. Implicitly, then, Eltit alludes to a structural connection between el Padre Mío's discourse and the work of established writers and artists of sound poetry such as Ginsberg, Kurt Schwitters, or Huidobro. This link further draws the homeless schizophrenic from the margins of Santiago into a culturally elite space of literature and art, beyond Eltit's earlier observations about the lumpen as culture, sculpture, and Culture.

El Padre Mío's language does not just recall sound poetry; it is also in many ways reminiscent of Eltit's own narrative practice. Bernardita Llanos Mardones and Juan

⁴³ A much closer precursor in terms of the content and context of El Padre Mío's enunciation, however, can be found in the work of the Chilean poet Nicanor Parra, whose 1977 collection of 'antipoetry,' *Los Sermones y Prédicas del Cristo de Elquí* and 1979 *Nuevos Sermones y Prédicas del Cristo de Elquí*, both published during the first decade of Pinochet's dictatorship, recovered the ranting sermons of a (real) vagabond preacher, Domingo Zárate, from the beginning of the 20th century. Parra builds the discourse of his mythical *Cristo de Elquí* based on the sermons of the real Zárate, making them apply to the situation of dictatorship through a metaphor of incoherence.

Andrés Piña have both argued that the schizophrenic's discourse echoes Eltit's literary aesthetic, suggesting that in both cases, language is not simply a vehicle whose purpose is to express a given content. Instead, they contend, both Eltit and el Padre Mío allow language itself to become the protagonist of the communication.⁴⁴ In Eltit's case, this argument breaks down to extent that even her most fragmented language works to convey a message, images, feelings, while her more recent novels clearly tell a story through a more straightforward plot structure. Yet certainly her linguistic performance in other works – her early novels *Lumpérica* and *Por la patria*, in particular – at times refutes the system's content-based logic to (at least temporarily) follow a logic of sound. This is not the case in *El Padre Mío*, however, where Eltit's language is concise, limited to a small presentation of eight pages in which she focuses on how to choose the exact words that will best help her frame this project.

So just what is this project titled *El Padre Mío*, anyway? I have carefully avoided calling it a novel; nor is it an essay, though it does begin with an essay-like introduction by Eltit. Indeed, after her last encounter with el Padre Mío, it took Eltit herself four years to figure out what form this project should take. “Desde dónde recoger esta habla era la pregunta que principalmente me problematizaba, especialmente, porque su decir toca múltiples límites abordables desde disciplinas formalizadas y ajenas para mí” (16), she

⁴⁴ Interestingly, Llanos Mardones notes in her reading of *El Padre Mío* that *vagabundaje* is not just a state but also a *linguistic* attribute of the lumpen. She describes the movement of their speech in terms of: “Los significantes de las hablas [que] deambulan y cambian de posiciones; recogen registros, diversos géneros sexuales y narrativos tanto populares como cultos. Sus significados chocan, colapsan y se multiplican traspasados por la diversidad cultural y social que forma el mundo de la exclusión.” Instinctively, then, Llanos Mardones also links the linguistic performance of the lumpen with alternative spatial practices that appear violent, fragmented, and illegible to those others who dwell within the codes of the social and spatial system of Santiago.

tells us in the book's presentation. The answer to which she eventually came was that she had to, "actuar desde la narrativa. Desde la literatura" (*Padre* 16). Yet the body of the work, Eltit tells us, will limit itself to a faithful transcription of el Padre Mío's speeches: recorded on three separate visits from 1983-1985, and only ending there because el Padre Mío had moved on by Eltit's next return to that zone of the city. As such, *El Padre Mío* could also be read in tension with the highly contested genre of Latin American testimonial.

A type of text that surged in the 1960s and 1970s in conjunction with a widespread struggle against social injustice in Latin America, *testimonio* exploded into the spotlight with the 1983 publication of the nobel-prize winning *Yo, Rigoberta Menchú*.⁴⁵ Although debate continues around the requisite inclusion of many elements in the genre,⁴⁶ John Beverley offers what is probably the most commonly accepted definition: a *testimonio* is "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 of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience" (Beverley24). From Beverley's perspective, moreover, the key situation to *testimonio* must involve, "an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for

⁴⁵ Leonidas Morales suggests that the key features that will eventually define the genre of the *testimonio* are all present in Ricardo Pozas' 1952 *Juan Pérez Jolote. Biografía de un tzotzil*, and is the true initiator of the genre. He also argues that the most direct antecedent to the Latin American *testimonio* is the colonial *crónica*, and, before that, the medieval *exempla* ("Verdad").

⁴⁶ For the purposes of this dissertation, I will follow Beverley's understanding of the *testimonio*; Elzbieta Sklodowska's *Testimonio hispanoamericano: historia, teoría, poética* and Georg M. Gugelberger's *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* are two sources for further detail on the debate surrounding the genre and important critical work done on *testimonios*.

survival, and so on” (26). Yet, in the case at hand, I concur with Michael Lazzara in that a significant question remains to be asked: whose testimony speaks in *El Padre Mío*?

Lazzara suggests that *El Padre Mío*, “confronts the reader with a double act of witnessing. The vagabond, of course, is the text’s *primary witness*, but at the same time Eltit herself acts as *secondary witness*” (113, emphasis in the original). While there can be no doubt that the text does present the reader with a ‘double act of witnessing’ (composed of Eltit’s testimonial prologue and el Padre Mío’s three transcribed speeches), the issue of who is the primary witness is not so clear-cut. El Padre Mío, after all, is a subject without a name, identity, or even an awareness of offering us as readers his testimony. As Mary Beth Tierney-Tello points out, his speech, “seems to problematize a key element of testimonial practice: empathetic or sympathetic solidarity with the testimonial subject. Indeed, the bases of solidarity – rationality, identification, and comprehension – are thrown into question” (84). Even if there were a greater degree of coherence to his words, what value can be attached to the testimony of a schizophrenic? To what degree can he be taken seriously as a witness? Can his voice, alone, represent anything more than insanity? El Padre Mío himself raises similar doubts about his ability to testify when he tells us, “Pero debería servir de testimonio yo” (*Padre* 57). For these reasons, I argue that, in the end, the primary witness is Diamela Eltit. Certainly, the patient listener/reader will discover recurrent and familiar themes in el Padre Mío’s words in spite of their lack of coherence, but it is Eltit’s aesthetic frame and her insistence that we read his speech as literature that makes his discourse legible, thereby instilling him with sufficient cultural value to capture our interest and make us read/listen

to his testimony in the first place. With Eltit's framing, El Padre Mío's nonsensical spilling becomes a reenactment, through language, of a social disruption.

The *testimonio doble* of *El Padre Mío* brings into contact two linguistic practices – two distinct narratives normally locked into different cultural spaces – and as such, Eltit hints, the recuperation of his speech, “dot[a] así de equilibrio la polaridad entre sanidad e insania” (*Padre* 14). The text not only allows the subaltern to ‘speak’ in print,⁴⁷ but situates the madman’s seemingly disjointed oral discourse alongside the culturally legitimated words of the established (albeit marginal in her own way) writer. This juxtaposition creates a parallel between Eltit’s testimony and that of the vagabond, which not only corroborates el Padre Mío’s speech, but also posits it as literature tantamount to Eltit’s own writing. In this way, the text promotes, “a recognition that the subject [el Padre Mío] is a producer of culture, of a haunting, disturbingly powerful language that gestures at the psychopathology wreaked by the political violence of authoritarian culture” (Tierney-Tello 84). This recognition has two important implications: the madman is not just a cultural exile living in the *eriazó* on the periphery of Santiago; nor is he simply a consumer of culture, as he reads through remnants of newspapers; but he is also a *subject* who produces culture each time he speaks.

At the same time, the words he speaks reveal Chile, “Chile entero y a pedazos en la enfermedad de este hombre; jirones de diarios, fragmentos de exterminio, sílabas de

⁴⁷ This passage from el Padre Mío’s orality to the written word via Eltit’s transcriptions is particularly significant because, as Diana Taylor has eloquently outlined, in Western culture (particularly from the Conquest on within the Americas), “writing has become the guarantor of existence itself” (*Archive* xix). Our entire epistemic system values the printed or written word over all other forms of communication, knowledge, or history. Therefore, Eltit’s transcription of el Padre Mío’s spoken words guarantees that he existed, that his words were spoken, and that his memory, however incoherent it may be, was nonetheless real.

muerte, pausas de mentira, frases comerciales, nombres difuntos. Es una honda crisis del lenguaje, una infección en la memoria, una desarticulación de todas las ideologías” (*Padre* 17). In other words, *El Padre Mío*'s enunciation, rearticulated through Eltit, becomes collective language, symptomatic not just of his own difficulties but rather of Chile's afflictions as a whole. The incoherence of his discourse signals the limits of language, marking the impossibilities of representation.

As *el Padre Mío* cycles through fragments of current events, names, and places, he constructs a collage-image of the recent Chilean past and present. For Eltit, the scarce legibility of the patchwork he creates is even more pertinent to the Chilean identity under dictatorship than a clearer narrative could be -- his words are the form most fitting to embody the Chilean situation. Blurring subjects, his schizophrenic stream of language quite accurately mirrors the fractured reality after the *golpe de estado* of 1973, which had inverted the terms of Chilean daily life, re-writing the codes of public discourse such that it was no longer safe to state opinions or even memories clearly. *El Padre Mío*'s broken narrative, then, echoes the lapses created by the negation of personal memory when ideologically ‘undesirable’ individuals disappeared, their very existence denied, in order for the military government to propagate a straightforward, ‘unproblematic’, and ‘official’ history.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Eltit further comments on the official denial of disappearances in the script she wrote for the 1988 short film *Ángeles*. The film depicts a group of politically active university students who come of age during Allende's regime, some of whom will be among the first to disappear after the *golpe de estado*. It broaches the subject of the official inexistence of the disappeared when the first student of the group, Juan, is detained and tortured. When his friends try to find out where he is and what can be done to help him, however, they are simply told by officials, “No está detenido.” The penultimate image makes the official lie explicit, however, as yet another of the students lies dying, most likely after an extreme torture session, in an abandoned warehouse.

The spatial practice Eltit performs in *El Padre Mío*, then, is to intentionally unite such disparate social and cultural spaces – of sanity and insanity, of peripheries and centers – into a narrative that will be read not only as literature but also as an allegory for the national psyche. Spatially, while Eltit herself has the freedom to traverse Santiago at will, her book makes it possible for el Padre Mío to travel the city with her, to enter into regions and circles to which he would otherwise be denied entry. Indeed, it is worth noting that Eltit calls her introductory essay a ‘presentación’ rather than a forward or prologue. In an author who so carefully attends to her use of language, this word choice indicates that she intends to do more than simply preface her text. Rather than merely framing the written text that follows, I argue that Eltit’s *presentación* serves to introduce us to el Padre Mío before he begins to speak, as if we were meeting him face-to-face. By *presenting* el Padre Mío to us as though we were present to listen to him in person, Eltit metaphorically situates her reader at the moment of el Padre Mío’s enunciation in the *eriazó* of Conchalí, in 1983, 1984, and 1985. As such, the text moves beyond a spatial performance and becomes performance in its own right: it allows each reader to perform the role of el Padre Mío’s interlocutor.

By introducing el Padre Mío to her readers and making him and his speech the protagonist of a book, Eltit ensures that people who would otherwise either never pass through a desolate area of Santiago like Conchalí and, therefore, never encounter him, or who would immediately dismiss him as crazy and quickly walk away, instead dedicate time to ‘listening to’ or reading the spilling of his disjointed and vacuous overflow of

language – and the fragments of their own reality contained therein.⁴⁹ On this point Eltit insists in her presentation of el Padre Mío: the meaningfulness of his discourse, she asserts, “radica, precisamente, en su estrecha relación con el lugar” (*Padre* 18). This discourse that Eltit sees as inherently linked to the *eriazó* on the northern periphery of Santiago, will be published by Francisco Zegggers’ independent press located at Silvina Hurtado 1815, in Santiago, Chile. It is significant that Silvina Hurtado is right in the heart of Providencia, an upper-middle class neighborhood that is also home to much of Santiago’s commerce, a number of embassies, and many artists and performers. Consequently, Eltit’s text affects an impressive spatial performance by quite literally placing peripheral insanity and poverty in the cultural and financial center of Santiago. (See figure 5 at the end of this chapter).

Significantly, in this text Eltit disappears after the brief presentation that frames el Padre Mío’s speeches for the reader. We of course know that she visited Conchalí repeatedly, that she spent a great deal of time observing and listening to this sector in her *salidas a la ciudad*. Yet we don’t need to know any more of what she does there: what she allows us to see of her spatial practices in the region is limited, precisely so that el Padre Mío and his speech can become the protagonists of the book. In the following section, however, I will trace Eltit’s own actions and movements through the marginal spaces of Santiago in two video performances, *Maipú*, captured on video by Lotty Rosenfeld, and *Diamela Eltit*, filmed and directed by Gloria Camiruaga.

⁴⁹ Admittedly, one can debate the diffusion of *El Padre Mío* post-publication, as well as the legibility of Eltit’s own writing from the perspective of the general public; yet in spite of the small print run of the book, and regardless of the fact that the majority of Santiaguinos still will not have read it, she nonetheless succeeds in making the voice of a man who later disappeared heard by many who otherwise either never would have had the opportunity to hear him, or else never bothered to stop and listen.

1.5 Eltit as *performancera*: Conflating Literature and Sex

Briefly, in the video *Maipú* (1980),⁵⁰ a camera records Diamela Eltit as she performs with scarred arms in a brothel on Maipú Street in Santiago.⁵¹ The final, edited video shows us several photographs of her face and arms; it then brings us into the brothel where a reading of her then in-process novel *Lumpérica* is on-going; next, it moves on to show us Eltit as she washes the sidewalk in front of the brothel while we still hear her voice reading; and closes with yet another photograph of the artist's body, leaning against the wall of the brothel with the bucket of water in front of her.⁵² A second, similar performance was staged at a brothel in Valparaíso about one year later,

⁵⁰ *Maipú* is also known as *Zona de dolor I*, the first of a three-part video series documenting Eltit's performances exploring marginal spaces in the early 1980s. Lotty Rosenfeld accompanied Diamela in each of these performances and did the camera work for her, though it was Eltit herself who put together the final videos. None of these videos are commercially available or in distribution; I therefore deeply thank Lotty Rosenfeld for her generosity in allowing me to view the footage from *Zona de dolor I, II*, and *III* – among other materials – during my research stay in Santiago.

⁵¹ It is unclear who did the camera work for the first video in the *Zona de dolor* series, and the video itself does not acknowledge anyone other than Diamela Eltit. In an interview with Leonidas Morales, Eltit suggests that Nacho Agüero filmed *Maipú*, while affirming that Lotty Rosenfeld filmed the other two performances in the *Zona de dolor* series (*Conversaciones* 165). Nonetheless, in most other texts I have been able to find about *Maipú* – including Robert Neustadt's work, which constitutes the most extensive criticism to date on the piece, as well as Alice A. Nelson's, among others – Rosenfeld has been credited with the camera work for that performance, as well. Magda Sepúlveda acknowledges yet a third source for the camera in the first *Zona de dolor*: Ignacio Agüero. We do know, however, that Eltit did the editing for all three of the videos in the series, and that it was only Lotty Rosenfeld who kept copies of these materials.

⁵² It is important to note the differences between the live (and ephemeral) performance, and the video that captures only one view of that performance, modifying the archival representation of the performance even further through editing. While I will discuss this issue in greater detail shortly, for now suffice it to point out that the chronological order of events in the video is not the same as the order in which they were performed live.

the filming of which was turned into the video titled *Zona de dolor II*.⁵³ In contrast to *Maipú*, *Zona de dolor II* for the first time incorporates music (in an operatic style) with the final moments of footage, and simultaneously begins to play with more of the possibilities afforded to the medium by the process of editing: the film is slowed down to such an extent that dark gaps eventually appear between each individual frame, and then continues to slow until the image finally does not reappear. “Trabajo de amor con los asilados de las hospederías,” commonly known as “El beso al vagabundo,” was the third performance and completes the *Zona de dolor* series. The video montage created from “El beso” returns to the original performance on Maipú street, repeating the voice of Diamela reading from *Lumpérica* and the photograph of her mutilated arms. It also echoes *Zona de dolor II*, by again imposing music over the performances (this time the music chosen is a strident rock song from Argentina).⁵⁴ Yet there is a new element to the performance: in the brief video, we watch as Eltit stands next to an indigent man, who unevenly supports himself with a non-matching crutch and cane, in front of the *hospedería*, and also see them as they walk along a street, to then be brought in to a

⁵³ There is debate as to whether or not this second performance ever really occurred: Auli Leskinen, in a 2007 dissertation, claims to have clarified via personal interview that Eltit only did one performance in a brothel. (“Sobre la base de una entrevista a Diamela Eltit, hemos constatado que hubo solamente una acción realizada en un prostíbulo, la que se hizo en la calle Maipú” (29).) However, in my own interviews with Lotty Rosenfeld and Diamela Eltit, each artist mentioned the performances in both Maipú and Valparaíso (although neither could recall the specific street name for the location of the brothel in Valparaíso). Lotty also showed me the video that was made from the second performance in Valparaíso, thus exhausting all claims that the performance never happened.

⁵⁴ In a later interview, Eltit refers to *Zona de dolor III* as the first Chilean music video, explaining that, “Le puse música bien estridente, porque es el primer video-clip que se hace en Chile... Le puse música de una argentina bien chillona, sobre esa imagen” (*Conversaciones* 167).

close-up image as Diamela leans in to kiss him. The video closes with Eltit moving away again, while the vagabond smiles at the camera through his broken teeth.

Although the *Zona de dolor* series represents a very distinct kind of project, I view it as connected to *El Padre Mío* by one of Eltit's metaphors that links the lumpen to the rest of the city of Santiago. Returning to her notion of the photographic negative, I read these works as the negative and resulting positive of the same spatial practice. In *El Padre Mío*, Eltit is able to convert the unidentified voice of a schizophrenic into literature, thereby taking his words and carrying them out of the *eriazó* and into the center of Santiago, allowing them to wander throughout the city – and beyond – via the published text. By contrast, in *Zona de dolor I* and *II*, it is Eltit's own voice that travels from the city's cultural center to a marginal zone, in order to *there* read -- and embody or perform -- literature-in-process. *Zona de dolor III* moves into another realm of culture, the filmic kiss, and offers Eltit's mouth (rather than her words) to an indigent man for free, in the name of art. In this next section, I will analyze how the *Zona de dolor* videos-- particularly *Maipú*⁵⁵ -- work as a 'spatially-inverted' performance of the spatial practices contained within *El Padre Mío*.

Eltit describes the videos of her performances as “ni siquiera...piezas audiovisuales formales, más bien ensayos en los que deposité parte de mi locura” (quoted by Neustadt in *(Con)fusing* 73), and in other interviews has emphasized the fact that she has never shown them to anyone (*Conversaciones* 171). Therefore, as Neustadt suggests, “*Maipu* is not a carefully crafted work of art but rather is a videographic document that

⁵⁵ My analysis will focus on *Maipú* over *Zona de dolor II* largely due to questions of access to materials. Although I was able to view *Zona de dolor II* while in Chile, I do not feel that notes from one short viewing session and the narratives retold in two interviews are sufficient for a thorough analysis of the performance.

registers a key episode in Eltit's political and literary performance" (*(Con)fusing* 73). Yet, unfortunately, due to the ephemeral nature of performance, it is only through these video registers – and also from documents of the period, as well as memories recounted in personal interviews – that it is possible to study Eltit's performances today. Although performance scholar Peggy Phelan argues that, "Performance's only life is in the present" (*Unmarked* 146),⁵⁶ performance theorist Rebecca Schneider counters by asking whether, "in privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently?" (101). This dissertation enters the debate about the remains of performance by recognizing that performance – indeed, all art – exists, "only in the moments of [its] reception in different contexts," and therefore, "change[s] as [it] moves through time and space" (Carlson 153). As such, it must be noted that the objects of study in this chapter are not the performances themselves but rather versions of those performances that have been mediated by video, photographs, articles, and interviews; and all of these mediated versions are now being interpreted from a distinct time and space that no longer matches that of the original performances. This does not render the analysis of performance any less legitimate; however, it must be observed that these circumstances do condition all later readings of that performance.

Maipú, then, is the video representation of what was originally a three-part performance – only two parts of which occurred before an 'audience' or were directly

⁵⁶ Indeed, Phelan claims that, "performance art cannot be documented (when it is, it turns into that document – a photograph, a stage design, a video tape – and ceases to be performance art)" (31), and insists that performance is defined by loss, by disappearance.

witnessed. The first part of the performance, by contrast, was in fact a private action, of which a video register does not exist: several days before her *intervención* in the brothel, Eltit burned and cut her arms. In a personal interview, Lotty Rosenfeld explained to me that in spite of the secluded nature of this act, the scarring of Eltit's arms was still clearly meant to form part of the complete *acción de arte* or performance. "Eso lo hizo ella muy solitariamente en su casa. Y me llamó por teléfono para que yo le fuera a sacar la foto."⁵⁷ The photograph that Rosenfeld took that day (see figure 2) appears at the beginning of the video *Maipú*: the camera focuses in on the shadowed view of Eltit's face, then slowly pans down the scars of her arms to finally rest on her hands as they loosely clasp her knees. The same photograph then reappears within the pages of *Lumpérica* at the start of the chapter titled, "Ensayo general," in which the narrator comments on each of the cuts within the image.⁵⁸ Consequently, in this first (private) moment of the performance, we have Eltit alone, cutting and burning her arms, only to then intentionally document the

⁵⁷ Personal interview conducted at Lotty Rosenfeld's house on February 2nd, 2010. Similarly, Eltit's former partner, Raúl Zurita, incorporated a photograph of the scars from a self-inflicted wound in one of his books: in that case, however, the image appeared on the cover of the book, rather than being incorporated into the text itself. As Zurita explained to Robert Neustadt, when he was burning his face with a red-hot iron in his own bathroom, at that moment he had not yet been conscious of how the act might pertain to his art. "Después entendí un poco que allí había comenzado algo nuevo," Zurita continues, and it wasn't until several years later that the photograph was taken which would eventually appear on the cover of *Purgatorio*. Later still, the scars from this burn were incorporated into *una acción de arte* in front of a painting by Juan Dávila that involved rubbing semen into a cut on his face; in hindsight Zurita describes this latter performance to Neustadt as, "un acto radicalmente fallido que no debí realizar" (CADA 82).

⁵⁸ Robert Neustadt offers a thorough discussion of how this photograph and the chapter "Ensayo general" constitute a linking nexus that connects the novel *Lumpérica* to Eltit's physical performance in the brothel on Maipú street, to the video *Maipú* itself. His reading largely focuses on the analysis of corporal, narrative, and linguistic cutting in the "Ensayo general." See the chapter, "Diamela Eltit: Clearing Space for a Critical Performance" in his book, *(Con)Fusing Signs and Postmodern Positions*.

result of her act in a photograph that would convert her self-mutilation into both spectacle and fiction, as it would be placed in both the video register of Eltit's later performance as well as within the pages of the novel she was then in the process of writing.

It is worth pausing to consider the pose and focus of the photograph that documents Eltit's burned and cut arms before moving on to discuss some of the different ways in which her scarring signifies for the performance itself. The image falls loosely into the genre of portrait photography. Against the portrait viewer's expectations, however, Eltit's face is partially lost in shadow, and the top of her head is even cut out of the picture. Instead, the camera and lighting both focus on her arms, and although one sleeve is pushed up over her shoulder, the viewer's eye is drawn to the cuts and burns that line her forearms. Nonetheless, our view is doubly obscured. The photograph doesn't allow us to process the sharp detail of the cuts, nor does Eltit herself: she poses for the photograph with semi-bandaged arms. As Raquel Olea observes, "Las vendas que cubren los cortes nos obligan a imaginar(los), a suponer su abertura, sus bordes, su color; sus extremos y los pliegues de lo ancho y largo de su extensión" (184). That is to say, the presence of the bandages obligates a more active viewing of the photograph: the image does not allow us to simply withdraw from, nor fully absorb, the shocking image of Eltit's mutilated arms, but rather, since the full extent of mutilation is unknown to us, forces us to question what lies below the bandages. In this now-public image documenting the private action that precedes the public performance, we wonder: what is it that still remains unseen?⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Sandra Lorenzano answers this question by suggesting that what remains to be seen is the text that will be revealed by the publication of *Lumpérica*: "Eltit había 'escrito' sobre su cuerpo, pero esta escritura permanecía oculta por las vendas que le cubrían los brazos,



Figure 1.2: Diamela Eltit with scarred arms. Photograph taken by Lotty Rosenfeld several days before the performance on Maipú Street.

At the same time, Eltit's half-shadowed face pulls our eyes again upward, because, as Olea succinctly perceives, "el *punctum* está en el rostro que desdice lo dramático de la imagen de los brazos heridos y cortados. El rostro de la mujer (Diamela Eltit) mira impasible, sin dirección" (184). Indeed, the blank look on Eltit's face, along

y se ubicaba así como origen 'secreto' de la escritura en el papel." (154). Yet, it isn't until her later discussion of *Vaca sagrada* that Lorenzano makes the key connection for *Maipú* and *Lumpérica*: the two elements Eltit is linking are, "Cuerpo y ficción; sangre y escritura" (156).

with the wounds that mark her arms, constitute a distanced hardness that clashes with the other elements that compose the photograph: the feminine details around the neck of her short-sleeved blouse, the skirt that carefully falls just below her knees, the arms delicately placed in front of her body. Eltit, in other words, will not help us to know how to read her wounds by providing us with a guiding facial expression. Instead, we will have to decipher her corporal message, because, as Peter Brooks elaborates in his book *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, “The bodily mark is in some manner a ‘character,’ a hieroglyph, a sign that can eventually, at the right moment of the narrative, be read” (22).

What, then, do Eltit’s self-induced bodily markings tell us, the readers of her bodily image? What does it mean to inflict cuts and burns onto one’s own body in the first place? As we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, self-cutting for Eltit is tied up with language as it moves beyond the limits of representation. Scarring the body, for Eltit, will be a form of naming: a naming through a baptism of pain. Yet the same question can be phrased in yet another way, as Robert Neustadt has it: “What does it mean to mutilate one’s own body while living under a military dictatorship?” (“Clearing” 221). Given that Pinochet’s authoritarian regime specifically set out to discipline bodies, regulating everything from acceptable hair lengths to the proper image of femininity in service to *la patria*,⁶⁰ Eltit’s scarring of her arms reclaims the body as a space of

⁶⁰ The performance of gender is a theme that runs throughout Eltit’s entire narrative, and is worthy of a book unto itself. I will not address Eltit’s performances of gender directly in this dissertation, but recommend that the reader see Mary Green’s 2007 book, *Diamela Eltit: Writing the Mother*. There, although not working through the lens of performance studies, Green offers a thorough discussion of gender roles and alternative or transgressive gender identities through the concept of the maternal in Eltit’s first six novels. For the purpose of this dissertation, it will be sufficient to note that female

expression that will not submit to regulation. Moreover, her act of self-cutting cannot help but correlate to the violence inflicted upon so many others by the military government. Indeed, psychiatrists studying the phenomena of self-injury have noted that, "Self-mutilation cannot be totally divorced from the more general concept of mutilation directed against others: the perceptions and practices of the one are intimately linked to the other" (Favazza 4). Thus, as Alice A. Nelson observes, Eltit's scars make, "visible and horribly explicit the invisible marks and violations of the feminized social body inflicted by the dominant regime" (Nelson 155). We can understand Nelson's comment on two levels: on the first, Eltit's wounds reflect marks and violations that are only 'invisible' because the victims on whose bodies those marks have been written have 'disappeared.' On the second level, Eltit's arms can be read as a text, as linguistic code that speaks out in order to make visible the silence that has been forced upon the social body of Chile by the dictatorship. In literary critic Sandra Lorenzano's words, "Los *graffiti* que está prohibido escribir sobre las paredes se escribirán sobre la piel" (154).

Although in her essays and interviews Eltit has time and again refused to affix meaning to her art (writing or performance), given her belief that a work only belongs to an artist until the moment it enters the public sphere, she does at one point address a possible significance of her scars as seen from her own perspective – and at a temporal distance from the original action – in an article published by CADA in August of 1982.

behavior was of such importance to the regime that just eight months after the *golpe de estado*, Pinochet felt it necessary to deliver a specific "Mensaje a la mujer chilena" in a speech at the conference organized by the Secretaría Nacional de la Mujer on April 24, 1974, in order to, "exponeros [a las mujeres chilenas] el pensamiento de las autoridades, con respecto al papel que le corresponde a la mujer en los planes del Gobierno que presido, y en el nuevo estado que éste se propone instaurar en el futuro" (5). These opening words clearly express a rigid vision of what women should 'be,' defined, of course, in strict relation to the ways in which they can support the new State.

There, she writes in the present tense, as though the performance in the brothel were still on-going, and tells us: “Yo poso con mis cicatrices; como síntoma de exclusión, como ruptura del modelo” (“Socavada” 6). Eltit, then, positions her scarred, then photographed, body as aesthetic and psychological subversion, as a rupture in a societally accepted model. To be sure, there is little so unsettling to most of us as the notion of self-injury: “It is as if the presence of a self-mutilator threatens the mental and physical integrity of those around him or her” (Favazza xiv). As though Eltit’s bandaged arms articulate a possibility that simply has not yet been expressed in ourselves, the viewer of the image almost instinctively rubs her own wrists, needing to reassure herself that her own body is still whole, uncut.

To emphasize the aesthetic break inherent in her portrait, Eltit also superimposes, “al mismo cuerpo dañado, los signos propiciados por el sistema: ropa, maquillaje, etc., que puestos en contradicción, no resuelven sino evidencian la dicotomía que, para hablar en términos de identidad, articulan el cuerpo como irreverencia frente a la apariencia y a la sumisión al modelo” (6). The body damaged becomes an anti-economy, calling our attention to the societal norms that link consumerism to bodily adornment, while breaking with our preconceptions of both. Consequently, in our reading of Eltit’s scarred body, we return to the notion of rebellious femininity, a femininity that refuses to be controlled, whether that control be in terms of a social role dictated by an authoritarian regime, or a pre-defined concept of feminine beauty that, as Nelly Richard points out, only fetishizes the woman.⁶¹

⁶¹ Richard insists on this point in her various writings on Eltit’s performance in *Maipú*, reiterating that, “lo mortificador de sus trazos corporales testimonia su insumisión al modelo de belleza que fetichiza a la mujer” (*Margenes* 85).

In a reading that is perhaps incomplete, Richard further suggests that Eltit's scars function as 'cosmetic artifice' or theatrical adornment that 'overdraws' the self to transgress femininity ("La palabra y la cicatriz ambas recurren a la *pose* para teatralizar los sobregiros del 'yo' que una femineidad transgresiva modela como su anti-convención" ("Fugas" 12)). Following this interpretation, although Eltit herself tells us that she poses for the photograph bearing all the outward signs of female beauty – in terms of her dress, makeup, posture, etc. – in order to contrast her bodily markings with convention, the scars she bears already reference – albeit by subversion – the model of beauty that requires women to adorn their skin with makeup, piercings, and jewelry of all kinds, to 'overdraw' their bodies in order to aesthetically please.

While Eltit's scars both make the social body's invisible markings visible and offer an alternate aesthetic model for femininity, they serve another purpose, as well. Her arms mark her body as damaged goods, as a marginal object. As such, her scars become an opening into the brothel on Maipú Street, permitting her to approach women who would otherwise be suspicious of an artist's presence. Recalling the name given to the entire video series of Eltit's performances, *Zonas de dolor*, Richard frames Eltit's scars – the visible traces of self-inflicted pain – as 'legitimizing': "El dolor es el umbral que autoriza el ingreso del sujeto mutilado a zonas de identificación colectiva donde comparte con los marginados los mismo signos de desmedro social que evidencia en carne propia" (*Márgenes* 83). Whether or not an un-scarred Eltit would have been unable to enter and then perform in the brothel, as Richard suggests, is unclear. What we do know with certainty is that when Eltit with her scars approached the woman who ran the brothel, she agreed to the performance with only one condition: that each attendee consume at least

one drink – and even that drink was offered to the guests without charge (*Conversaciones* 165).

As a door opener or as an aesthetic and political frame to the *intervención* that followed, however, there is no doubt that this first, private action serves as a pre-staging or pre-performance. Indeed, as Rosenfeld related to me in a personal interview, Eltit's arms had not yet completely scarred over when, several days later, she performed at the bordello on Maipú Street.

The next stage of Eltit's performance is a dual action that moves the *intervención* fully into the public sphere. It begins with CADA lighting the street while simultaneously projecting the image of Eltit's face along the walls outside of the brothel (see figure 3), thereby alerting the neighborhood that something out of the ordinary is about to happen.⁶² Sometime later, Eltit herself appears, dressed in a short-sleeved black top, long black skirt, and black sandals. Carrying a large tin bucket and a brush, she kneels down outside the brothel door and begins to wash the stone sidewalk that leads up to the entryway. These, then, are the two principal elements of the second stage of the performance: Eltit first illuminates, and then cleans, Maipú Street. Magda Sepúlveda has stressed the illumination of the event, explaining how this element correlates to Eltit's desire, "de mostrar las zonas oscurecidas por la sociedad" (73). Indeed, Eltit herself has commented in yet another CADA publication that, "Lo que a mí me importa es iluminar esas zonas,

⁶² This photograph was continuously projected on the walls outside of the brothel during and following the performance, thereby functionally becoming the final image of the entire *acción de arte*. Consequently, I will return to this image, to offer a more detailed discussion of its effects and connotations, when analyzing the conclusion of Eltit's performance in Maipú.

hacerme una con ellas a través de la comparecencia física. No tiene un carácter moral hacer que esas zonas cambien, sino solo evidenciarlas como existencia” (“Cómo matar”).



Figure 1.3: Eltit's face was projected along the walls of the brothel before, during, and after her performance on Maipú Street.

While the cultural elite of Santiago would not acknowledge the existence of this dark blot within the city, Eltit illuminates it, making it extremely visible, if only for a single night. She further adds to this new visibility with her own presence as an artist performing in that space. Moreover, she has the now illuminated Maipú Street filmed. Although the footage of *Maipú* might never have officially circulated or been commercially distributed, the video has been carefully preserved by Lotty Rosenfeld. As a result, this documentation effectively incorporates Maipú Street into the realm of the official archive: whether or not Eltit's performance changes anything else about the

neighborhood, at the very least it becomes a space whose existence within the city has been documented, and therefore can no longer be overlooked or ignored.⁶³

Yet Eltit does not just light and film the street, but in the illumination she then proceeds to wash it (see figure 4). Alice Nelson connects this washing back to *Lumpérica* in order to read the act of cleaning as a show of penitence reminiscent of the ‘submissive deference’ *Lumpérica*’s protagonist, L. Iluminada, shows toward the *pálidos* who watch her perform in the plaza (166).⁶⁴ Following this reading, however, we must ask: for what might Eltit be repenting? Nelson’s suggestion appears to go along with Richard’s interpretation of Eltit’s scars as an outward manifestation of pain that allows the artist to assume the *dolor colectivo*: in this case, Eltit washes the street in order to repent for the way society has treated the officially invisible women who live there.

Perhaps, however, Eltit’s washing of the street outside is more intimately linked to her performance inside the brothel: to the act of *reading*. If we imagine the body of the city as a book-in-process, continually filling with narratives of, by, and about its

⁶³ Eltit’s performance on Maipú Street took place in 1980. The neighborhood has indeed changed a great deal since then, especially since most of the brothels are no longer in business. However, it remains a marginal neighborhood, though it now has a single police booth installed halfway down the street (the police officer warned me that things there hadn’t changed that much and that I shouldn’t be walking there alone with a camera). When in January of 2010 I tried to inquire about the street’s history and evolution, I was told to go speak to the oldest still living residents. Unfortunately, the elderly couple I spoke to does not remember when or how the street began to change, or when the brothels began to close. When I described Eltit’s performance to them, they thought it sounded familiar, but couldn’t describe it any greater detail.

⁶⁴ Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic also read this as an act of penitence: in their words, Eltit, “lava la calle, purificándola, en un acto simbólico de penitencia y arrepentimiento colectivos” (217). Nonetheless, in interviews, Eltit has vehemently denied any sort of penitent intention in this act: indeed, when Juan Andrés Piña specifically asks her about the meaning of this action, Eltit responds, “Bueno, actualmente es lo que menos me gusta del asunto, porque se podía entender en el sentido cristiano de lavar los pecados que había allí, cosa que está totalmente lejana de mis intenciones” (234).

inhabitants, then Eltit's washing of the street could also be seen as a scrubbing away of the readings society has imposed on this place. With her bucket and brush, Eltit rinses away Greater Santiago's preconceptions of the women who work there and of the space in which they work, in order to allow Maipú Street to begin writing a new narrative for itself upon the blank of page of unsoiled stone and cement. In this case, the subject of the performance is not Eltit, the artist, but rather the street itself in dialogue with the city. Eltit becomes the operator in an act of dis-representation: her action is limited to opening a space for what has previously been represented by the city's predominant discourses to be erased, so that a new subject can articulate itself.

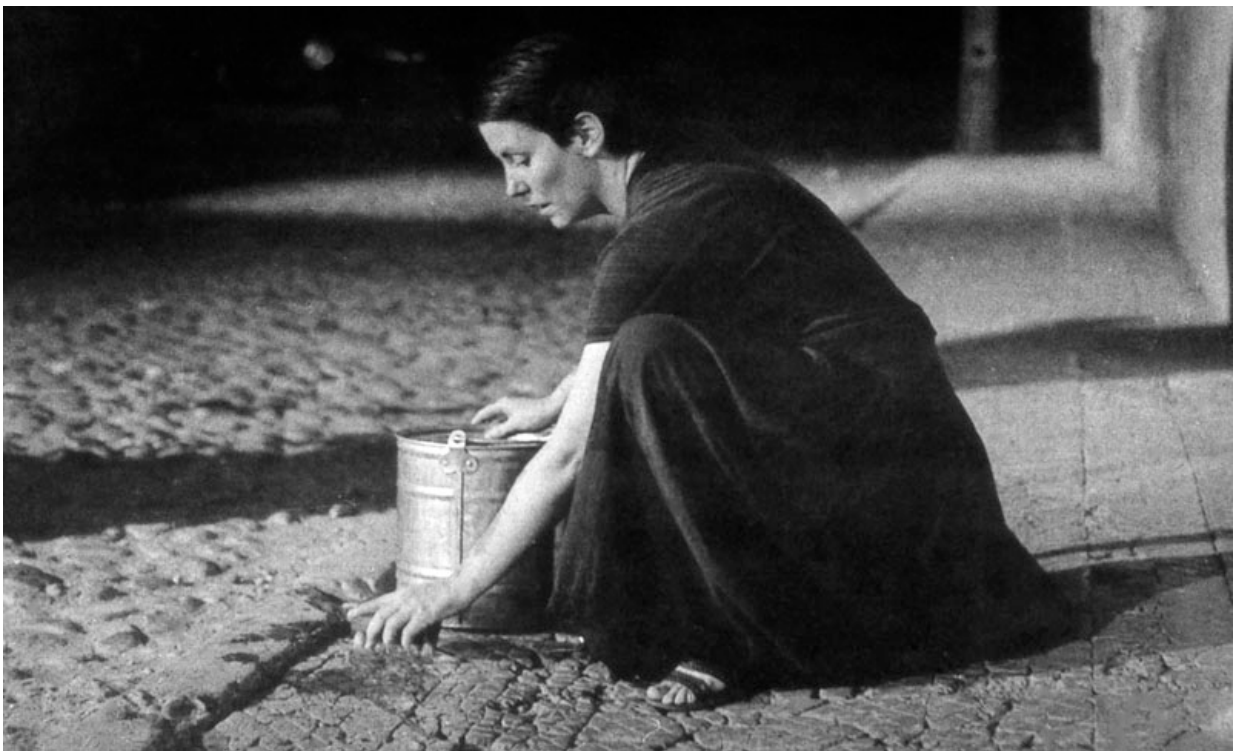


Figure 1.4: Eltit washes the stone sidewalk just outside of the brothel on Maipú Street.

Another reading might relate this act of washing the street outside of a brothel to the actions of the authoritarian regime. In the days immediately following the *golpe de estado*, the military government enacted a profound cleaning of both the city and the

social body. Magda Sepúlveda recounts that from her window she was able to observe, “cómo militares limpiaban la propaganda política de los muros, mientras los vecinos hacían funcionar el incinerador del edificio a toda prisa. Ellos también limpiaban sus casas. Cuando retornamos a clase, nos revisaban las uñas y el cabello; y a los chicos el largo del pelo, que no debía exceder el cuello de sus camisas” (68). Sepúlveda understands the new regime’s preoccupation with hygiene as, “una forma de violencia epistémica que permitió llevar a cabo un programa consistente en erradicar lo sucio” (68). Eltit’s action, then, recalls the government’s obsession with hygiene, and similarly responds to a need to clean up what is seen as being dirty. A brothel, of course, is a place marked by bodily fluids: it is always metaphorically, if not at any given moment physically, stained by urine, alcohol, saliva, and semen. Consequently, if, as Eltit tells us, one of her motivations for the entire performance was to make a marginal zone visible to the rest of the city in the midst of the dictatorship, it logically follows that the area would also have to be cleaned before it could ever be officially recognized.

By washing the street, however, does Eltit force a defiantly ‘dirty’ space to conform to the State’s imposed notions of hygiene? Or does her action demonstrate a specific form of deference to and respect for this ‘invisible’ region of the city? To this dilemma, I would add that it is significant that the arms that wield Eltit’s brush bear the still-fresh marks of her self-inflicted wounds. Thus, while her washing of the sidewalk recalls and in some ways echoes the military’s erasure of the graffiti from city walls just after the *golpe*, Eltit’s scarred arms attest to a will to communicate that cannot be silenced, regardless of mandated standards of hygiene, sterility, or appearance.

An alternate reading is still possible: on a much more literal level, Eltit may simply be putting on display the act of cleaning itself, the process of cleaning, and the woman who is responsible for that cleaning. Sepúlveda confesses to being unsure of Eltit's motivation in this washing of the sidewalk.

¿Busca higienizar la urbe? Por momentos, Eltit se me asemeja al artista naturalista en su deseo de iluminar y limpiar los márgenes oscuros de la ciudad. En otros momentos, la veo interesada en mostrar quién ejecuta los procedimientos de limpieza; tal como Berenguer destaca la cocinera, Eltit pone en escena a la lavandera (y todo lo que esta figura nos recuerda...). (73)

The video register of *Maipú* may, indeed, support this argument – at least to an extent: in the footage in which Eltit is washing the sidewalk outside of the brothel, she appears absolutely alone, with only the bucket and brush in her hand. In other scenes of the video, we see her scarred arms, or the manuscript in her hands. Both of these props remit to her identity as artist and writer, yet while she washes the street, the instruments that accompany her place Eltit only as *lavandera*.⁶⁵ Alternately, they mark her as performing the role of an ordinary woman in a *barrio popular*, participating in the routine behavior of washing the front stoop before her own house. In this way, perhaps, Eltit's action of the cleaning the sidewalk in front of the brothel serves to identify her, as an outsider, with this particular place, thereby connecting her more deeply with the people of Maipú Street.

Indeed, the words with which Eltit begins her reading within the brothel only further reinforce the link between the author as artist and the space of the brothel. “Desde los prostíbulos más viles, sórdidos, y desamparados de Chile, yo nombro a mi arte como

⁶⁵ The *lavandera* or washer, of course, is a figure that remits to folk and literary traditions from medieval times on. Within a contemporary Chilean cultural scene, however, perhaps the *lavandera* who first comes to mind is that of folk singer Violeta Parra: “Soy la triste lavandera/ que va a lavar su ilusión / el amor es una mancha / que no sale sin dolor.”

arte de la intención,” she commences (Ivelic 217). In other words, her art is intentionally social, emerging from and linking back to the spaces that have been forsaken by society. Eltit enters this forsaken space of the brothel dressed in feminine sexuality: although her hair is cropped to a boyishly short length and her arms are adorned not by bracelets but by scars, she wears a long, dark skirt, a short-sleeved shirt that plunges at her chest, and strappy heeled sandals. In her 1982 declaration about the performance, she states: “Erizada de sexualidad, en la misma disolución yo poso de otro modo entre hombres y mujeres que posan más allá de galerías” (“Socavada” 6). Within the brothel, Eltit sits alone on a bright red chair that at once separates her from, and draws the attention of, the prostitutes, clients, and a small group of artists present for the performance. Her attire constitutes a system of bodily signs that works to constantly recall the space of the reading itself: she has not chosen a café or a bar for her reading; nor does her performance occur in an art gallery. Rather, she reads in a *bordello*: a space in which bodies (not books, paintings, or sculptures) are the goods on display. Yet her intervention works to interrupt the dynamic of this space: Eltit places her own, defiantly sexed, body on display -- and then begins to perform for the public gathered there. Yet her performance does not involve the exchange of money – it is free –, nor does it require the exchange of sex, but rather consists of a flow of words. Eltit begins to read.

Listening to Eltit’s reading as documented in the video register of *Maipú* makes the viewer acutely aware of a sense of urgency to the communication. She reads quickly, in an exaggeratedly elevated pitch, and with a distressing intensity that recalls the recitation of a litany or a desperate supplication. Nelly Richard reads Eltit’s fierce vocalization as a tool that, much like her scarred arms, exceeds, “el código de la

verbalidad,” and displaces, “la función comunicativa del signo a texturas no lingüísticas, llevando la palabra a su desolución fonética y gramatical.” She suggests that the intention of such extra-linguistic strategies is to break, “la linealidad del discurso,” and, “resomatiza la palabra” (*Márgenes* 85). Following Richard’s logic, the words Eltit reads cease to be mere linguistic signs in the fervency of her intonation. In turn, her vocal excess serves to more immediately (re)link the word-signs to psychological and emotional meaning.

The emotional force of her performance manifests itself not only through her voice but also through her body language. She rarely looks up from the manuscript shakily held in one hand; her body rocks as she reads at an increasing rhythm, her fingers clenching and unclenching into a fist, then touching her chest and face. When she makes eye contact with the clusters of clients and prostitutes watching, however, her gaze is piercing in its intentionality. The sheer intensity of her vocal and corporal performance mesmerizes, seducing in a way previously unseen in that space. The video register reveals that no one is able to look away, nor dares to interrupt.

What Eltit reads in this very personal performance is, as has already been mentioned, a fragment from her then still unfinished novel *Lumpérica*. Seemingly plotless, *Lumpérica* presents us with a series of scenes and *mise-en-scenes* in which the protagonist, L. Illuminata, sits in a public square illuminated by the light of a neon sign, *el luminoso*, and in this setting performs before *los pálidos* (other marginal subjects who have come to observe her), a camera and film crew (the whole scene is being rehearsed and filmed), and by extension, also performs for the reader. During the course of a single night in the square, L. Illuminata will convulse, hit her head, burn and cut her arms,

interrogate the meaning of each of her cuts, compare each inch of her body to someone else who is her twin, masturbate, and finally collapse – only to begin the cycle again with the next nightfall.

During her performance in Maipú, of course, Eltit only reads a small fragment of *Lumpérica*: Robert Neustadt has correctly identified the section Eltit performs as chapter 4.4 of the novel, titled “De su proyecto de olvido” ((*Con*)*Fusing* 56). Appropriately, then, Eltit reads from her protagonist’s ‘project of forgetfulness,’ in a space that the cultural elite of society would also prefer to forget: the brothel. Yet, although Eltit’s words frequently coincide with this chapter of the novel, it is significant that her performed reading in Maipú greatly exceeds the boundaries of the chapter as it was later published in the final literary product. Indeed, in *Maipú*, the camera circles in, focusing over Eltit’s shoulder to reveal that she is reading from a manuscript with errors, erasures, and cross-outs of all kinds.

Chapter 4.4 of the finished product, i.e., the published version of *Lumpérica*, begins by comparing the body of an unnamed yet twin-like Other to that of the chapter’s narrator: “Las uñas de sus pies son a mis uñas gemelas irregulares con manchas rosáceas veteadas por líneas blancas” (101).⁶⁶ Though a nearly identical version of this line can be heard in the video register of *Maipú*, there is a full minute of video and audio that

⁶⁶ Within the novel itself, there are several possible ways of reading this section: it is unclear precisely who narrates, nor is it explicitly stated to whom the unidentified narrator is comparing herself. One immediate possibility is that the implied author, named at the very end of the chapter (“Su alma es no llamarse diamela eltit” (105)), is comparing her own body to that of her protagonist, L. Iluminata. Alternatively, the last sentence of the preceding chapter parenthetically reads, “(componente de una de sus poses)” (100). Therefore, this entire chapter could also be read as one of L. Iluminata’s poses, as the protagonist compares her body to one of the *pálidos*, or even to her filmic/photographed self. Here, we shall see how this ambiguity increases in Eltit’s performance on Maipú Street.

precedes the sentence that commences the published version of chapter 4.4. Curiously, however, this first minute of the performance is not an extension of the same chapter, nor does it emerge from any of the material that precedes it. Rather than comparing the artist/narrator's body to that of another woman, the words which mark the beginning of *Maipú* make reference to judges and laws that are willing to dislocate the poor and the young in order to 'better' society, while by contrast, Diamela in her performance proclaims, "Pero por ti yo puedo vivir." We understand that the space and people that the law is willing to 'dislocate' or forget in the name of progress is indeed the marginal space of the brothel, a space to which Eltit has voluntarily linked herself and her art. When she then begins to read, "Las uñas de sus pies son a mis uñas gemelas irregulares," she extends the novel's original comparison between the narrator's body and that of the protagonist, to Eltit herself as performer and the prostitutes witnessing her performance. "Su alma es a la mía gemela" (*Lumpérica* 105, *Maipú*), Eltit concludes.

Before *Maipú* itself ends, however, there are two more moments in which Eltit reads extensive texts that do not appear in the novel. The first of these two moments occurs almost seven minutes into the video. Eltit quotes from *Lumpérica*: "Desnudas, [sus palmas] entreabren los dedos como los rayos del sol cuando la luz eléctrica no ilumina el oscurecer precoz de la plaza pública" (103). Then she breaks from the novel to begin a tangent that commences, "Me asomo como el sujeto de la producción" (*Maipú*). Here she ceases to compare bodies in order to take up the 'subject of production' within a system, "el sistema real socializado, el sistema textual mostrando los mecanismos y la arqueología del espacio." Eltit's words prior to this tangent have had the effect of linking herself to her audience: your body is my body's double, our souls are twins. Once she has

established this association between herself and her audience within her performance, her discourse becomes more overtly political, questioning (albeit still in ambiguous terms) the neoliberal economic system imposed by the dictatorship, in which anything that is produced must be put up for sale, purchased, and consumed. From within the brothel, then, Eltit appears as a subject of production, as the agent who produces, and yet whose performance is not for sale. At the same time, her intervention has caused her ‘twin souls,’ the prostitutes of Maipú, to (temporarily) cease the sale of their own goods while her words encourage them to think of themselves not as objects but as subjects of production.

In the same digression, Eltit implies that this market system allows them all to live, “bajo una concepción del mundo que es como la concepción de un texto” (*Maipú*). Here again she uses metaphor to link herself to the women who work in the bordello, as Robert Neustadt has so astutely perceived: for Eltit, “marketing a novel corresponds to selling one’s body,” just as prostitutes, “create fantasy for payment, sell fiction” (“Clearing” 229). Yet in both cases, the writer and the prostitutes simply echo what the dictatorship had also done already: it created a fiction to justify the military intervention that ended Allende’s presidency – and life. After the *golpe*, the government’s use of violence and censorship created an atmosphere of distrust that only served to further the sensation of living in a fictitious world, one in which public discourse did not necessarily match up to personal memories or beliefs. The neoliberal system, of course, beautifully complimented the fictitious official history: by keeping Chileans focused on the new (the market ensures that there is always a new product to buy), who would have time to remember, or care about, the old?

When Eltit returns to, “De su proyecto de olvido,” she builds on this image of a false or fictitious world, but now repeatedly includes a new detail that does not appear in the published text. In *Lumpérica*, we read, “Su alma es establecerse en un banco de la plaza y elegir como único paisaje verdadero el falsificado de esa misma plaza” (104). In *Maipú*, however, this ‘falsified’ plaza that constitutes the only ‘true landscape’ in which the artist’s *alma gemela* establishes herself is repeatedly named: it is not just any plaza, but specifically the Plaza de Brasil, situated within the greater landscape of Santiago de Chile. The Plaza de Brasil, of course, is only located eight blocks east of Maipú street, in an once opulent neighborhood that had gone into decline by the 1950s only to become known for its less than glamorous car-servicing garages (see figure 5 at the end of this chapter). By specifically mentioning the Plaza de Brasil, then, Eltit invokes a once prestigious but now marginal public space within a close proximity to Maipú. She thereby makes her performance of a fragment of what has repeatedly been referred to as a hermetic novel more concrete for her public, while simultaneously qualifying their region of the city as the only ‘true landscape’ left in Chile, given that the nation has fallen under the shadow of an omnipresent fiction imposed by the dictatorship.

The other moment of extensive departure from the published novel follows Eltit’s pronouncement of the final words of chapter 4.4: “Su alma es a la mía gemela” (*Lumpérica* 105). Although the published version of 4.4 ends there, the video *Maipú* contains two more minutes of audio material. In these final moments of the performance documented by the video, Eltit raises two new themes: the presence of a public, thereby invoking the notion of spectacle and performance, and the issue of pleasure. She continues to speak in the third person: it is therefore “su público, su bello público” rather

than ‘mi’ *público* that she invokes. Since Eltit has previously constructed a metaphor by which we can understand the prostitutes as her *alma gemela*, and by extension, also as the subject of the majority of the intervention, she consequently inverts the terms of the entire performance when she now refers to the public watching the spectacle as not her own public but rather pertaining to her *alma gemela*. In other words, the witnesses of this performance are reconstituted as the performers; the public is not hers but rather is theirs. Neustadt briefly touches on the fluid and indeed interchangeable nature of the relationship between spectator and performer which surfaces in Eltit’s repetition of *su bello público* towards the end of *Maipú*. In his words, “The performance dynamic, constituting a dialogue between spectator and performer, instates an active process of communication that exceeds monological pronouncement” (“Clearing” 231). Although Neustadt only means to imply that the dialogic nature of performance always requires an active participation on the part of the spectators, as we have just seen, in this case the performance dynamic has been turned on its head such that the communication that originally appeared to be coming from the performer now belongs to the presumed ‘spectator.’ In short, it is Diamela Eltit’s *alma gemela*, the prostitutes themselves, who must continue to perform when the artist’s intervention on Maipú Street ends.

However, the second theme that arises in the final moments of Eltit’s performance reiterates the persistence of a problem: her *alma gemela*, she states, “No logré el placer” (*Maipú*). Repeatedly stressing this point, Eltit begins to enumerate a seemingly endless list of reasons that prevented the achievement of *placer*. Variations on fear predominate the list. Following our reading of the performance in which the roles of performer and spectator have been inverted, so that the spectacle is now real life in Pinochet’s Chile in

the 1980s, and the performers are the prostitutes and other marginal peoples who live on Maipú Street or in other peripheral neighborhoods, it is easy to understand how fear could displace the possibility of true pleasure. Moreover, within the performance itself, Eltit's reiteration of the impossibility of complete enjoyment draws us back to her understanding of art, an understanding that emerged from her collaborations with CADA: art should not simply be a matter of aesthetics, but should reflect and intervene with the social reality, as well. In a personal interview, Eltit explained to me that she would define performance, or at least the variant of performance that she personally has practiced, as an *intervención de arte* or *acción de arte*, as an intervention of the body in the city as an openly political sign.⁶⁷

Returning to *Maipú*, then, a performance that closes by disallowing the achievement of pleasure, echoes Eltit's belief that performance should not simply be an aesthetically pleasing diversion, but rather should create an interruption in the space of the city that has political meaning. While her performance on Maipú Street may not have caused pleasure – indeed, watching the video *Maipú* is a distressing experience, as Eltit's emotion and tone pierce the listener's ears, the scars on her arms wounding the viewer's eyes –, it succeeds in intervening in the space in a political way that causes the inhabitants of the brothel to pause in their daily routines and think. Consequently, both of these new elements that, unrelated to the published version of *Lumpérica*, appear in the final moments of Eltit's performance, draw attention to and question the nature of spectacle versus reality, as well as the role of the spectator, witness, and performer.

⁶⁷ From a personal interview with Diamela Eltit, held in her office at New York University on October 15th, 2009.

Eltit's performance in the brothel is not fully documented in the video *Maipú*. The viewer of the video register does not even know how much longer Eltit continues to read, since the video fades her voice out, concluding with two different views of a photograph of the artist as she sits resting against the brothel wall, with her bucket and brush in front of her, along the sidewalk she had previously washed. Similarly, the performance itself closes in silence, once again projecting a still image of Eltit's face along the street walls (as seen above in figure 3). This photograph, a close-up yet austere portrait of Eltit's unsmiling face, offers several possible routes of interpretation. Magda Sepúlveda, for example, sees the projection of Eltit's face along the street walls as a "gesto publicitario," a perhaps vain attempt, "de inscribir su rostro y su cuerpo en la ciudad" (74). Sepúlveda connects this 'publicity move' to both the art market and the dictatorship: by performing within a brothel, she suggests, Eltit, "se torna otra prostituta más," just as, "todo artista moderno se encuentra en una situación prostibularia, él mismo es su propia mercancía que ponen en venta." Although the idea of art as yet another form of prostitution is not new, Sepúlveda suggests that the novelty in Eltit's performance consists of adding in the new medium of video.

Eltit comprende que los vínculos sociales en la ciudad dictatorial están atravesados por los medios de comunicación que transmiten imágenes, principalmente, la televisión. [...] Entonces situó como de máxima importancia la secuencia de la proyección de su rostro, ella como aviso publicitario de sí misma. Ella iluminada iluminándose. (74)

This reading is not without foundation; indeed, Eltit herself has commented in her essays about the use of television to make Pinochet's face an omnipresent image in the national

imagination.⁶⁸ One can easily, therefore, understand this gesture of projecting her own face on the walls of the space of her performance as an echo of the projection of the dictator's face within the walls of each Chilean's home. By both opening and closing with this same image, then, Eltit ensures that if nothing else about her performance will be remembered, the illuminated image of her face will remain.

Convincing as it is, Sepúlveda's reading is not the only possible, nor even necessarily the best, interpretation of the image that both opens and closes Eltit's performance on Maipú Street. Raquel Olea suggests an alternative understanding, in which, "el rostro encuadrado de Diamela Eltit sobre una pared, podría leerse como proyección de una foto de carnet, reproducción del tradicional llamado *se busca*, apelación a una identidad sospechosa y requerida por el poder" (181). Certainly, the image Eltit chooses to project meets all of the requirements of an identification photograph: it shows us just Eltit's face from the chin up, with her short hair pushed back, and no clothes, jewelry, or makeup to distract from the identifying features of her face. This is precisely the type of photograph that Susan Sontag refers to when she states that at a certain point, "Photographs were enrolled in the service of important institutions of control, notably the family and the police, as symbolic objects and as pieces of

⁶⁸ In particular, I am referring to Eltit's essay, "Las dos caras de la Moneda." Two short excerpts illustrate my point: "Al atardecer, en medio de una cronología afiebrada, irrumpió en las pantallas de la televisión la solemnidad del himno nacional. [...] Por primera vez, para algunos de nosotros, aparecía públicamente el rostro [de Pinochet] que no iba a cesar" (*Emergencias* 21); and, "La imagen televisiva de los cuatro jefes de las ramas militares los introducía en el interior de las casas cuando esos mismos cuatro uniformados ya habían tomado el control de lo público mediante la inoculación programática del miedo ciudadano para reducir así la civilidad al espacio doméstico" (22).

information” (Sontag 21); it is the type of photograph that participates in a “bureaucratic cataloguing” of the citizenry of a country.

Yet this same type of photograph used to control the citizenry was, under dictatorship, reclaimed by a specific group of citizens: by the relatives of the disappeared.⁶⁹ Consequently, the *se busca* mentioned by Olea does not have to remit to a ‘suspicious identity’ wanted by the State. Indeed, it was used against the State to make claims about the existence of individuals who had disappeared, and to make an absence present. Eltit’s photograph participates of both associations: the image she projects recalls the identificatory photograph used in the service of the State just as much as the photo ID reclaimed by the relatives of the disappeared. Only here, it marks the walls of Maipú, a space inhabited by people who in their marginality are invisible to the cultural center of the city, with a highly visible, illuminated face which stakes a claim to their existence with its own presence. As Eltit writes in one of CADA’s publications, “Como espectáculo, asumida en la vida, en la concreción de un pensamiento, más allá de los textos o de mis propias palabras, de cualquier verbalización posible; me abro al público permanentemente, desde el público que yo misma constituyo” (“Socavada” 6). The public to which she opens herself does not consist of wealthy theater-goers, but rather, of prostitutes; and just as the performance is about to end, she reverses the roles, turning

⁶⁹ In her article “‘You are here’: The DNA of Performance,” Diana Taylor details how the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* reappropriated the photographic identification in the fight for acknowledgement and information about their disappeared children. By wearing the passport sized photograph of their missing children around their necks, Taylor suggests, the *Madres* inverted the terms of the image: “Instead of the body in the archive associated with surveillance and police strategies, they staged the archive in/on the body, affirming that embodied performance could make visible that which had been purged from the archive” (160).

herself into the public, observing the daily, real-life performances of the inhabitants of Maipú.

So the question remains: what, exactly, did Eltit's performance in Maipú accomplish? What did her audience take away from, or if the dynamic of the event did indeed lead to dialogue, even contribute to, the performance? According to Eltit, the public's reaction evolved over the course of the performance. "Cuando llegué, al principio se reían, estaban nerviosos, estaban todos nerviosos," she tells Leonidas Morales in an interview, "pero después, fíjate, que empezaron a escuchar ese texto. Y después me fui" (*Conversaciones* 166). Although at first her intervention wasn't taken seriously, "[el sitio] se llenó, era mucha gente. Llegó todo Maipú. Llegaron todos y se sentaron, y otros asomaron por la ventana y escucharon" (166). In spite of truly listening, however, Eltit recognizes that most of the public present for her performance probably didn't understand what she was doing. When Morales asks her if any of the locals had commented on the intervention afterwards, she states simply, "las mujeres lo hallaban bonito, qué bonito todo. Es que es gente sencilla, pues" (166). Eltit's goal, of course, has never been to be completely or easily understood – whether in her *acciones de arte* or in her novels. Moreover, in *Maipú*, this lack of a clear-cut narrative reinforces her performance as an alternative to the official 'histories' of dictatorship. Robert Neustadt eloquently highlights why it is not important that the performance be understood, as long as it succeeds in creating a space for questioning:

By not attempting to reflect reality, Eltit modifies mimetic codes refracting the 'fiction' enveloped within the hegemonic image of 'reality.' She avoids a linear mode of narrative description, choosing rather to write, read, and perform inscription. The hermeticism of her performance, consequently, avoids and denies authoritarian predication. Instead of 'informing' her public, Eltit strives to provoke thought and action. ("Clearing" 231)

Moreover, in this particular performance, her objective was not to permanently affect a change in the space, but to temporarily, “cambiar la circulación sexual por una circulación literaria” (*Conversaciones* 168),⁷⁰ and, as we have already seen, illuminate the marginal spaces she calls *zonas de dolor* in order to affirm their existence.

In her essay “Cargas y descargas” (about the novel *Hasta ya no ir* by Beatriz García-Huidobro and the film *B-Happy* by Gonzalo Justiniano), Eltit touches on the marginal position of the prostitute in society, in relation to the workings of power, in a way that also ‘illuminates’ her choice of a brothel as the site of her performance. “El llamado ‘oficio más antiguo del mundo’ funciona como dispositivo de control y castigo que cerca a la mujer incluso más allá de su condición social” (*Signos* 33), Eltit explains. As a mechanism of control and punishment that writes itself on bodies, prostitution reflects the dictatorship’s relationship to Chile. Raquel Olea discusses the similarity between prostitution and a nation living under an authoritarian government in reference to *Lumpérica*, though her argument certainly applies to Eltit’s actions in Maipú. “En el contexto de escritura de la novela, la implantación neoliberal y la dictadura militar de Pinochet significan una alusión a la prostitución de todo el cuerpo social operada por el poder totalitario” (177). Intervening in a space of prostitution, then, not only momentarily interrupts the sale of flesh within the brothel, but also the sale of Chile to the neoliberal

⁷⁰ In some ways, this desire to interchange corporal and literary circulation becomes a more permanent reality later, when Elit publishes *Lumpérica*. As Robert Neustadt points out, “Publishing *Lumpérica*, Eltit sells a narrative body, L. Iluminada, and her own textual/sexual body” (“Clearing” 228). That is to say, she sells her own textual/sexual body in the form of the photograph contained within the book, and the novel itself is the narrative body of her protagonist, L. Iluminada. As such, the literary circulation that is inherent in selling a book is, particularly in the case of *Lumpérica*, simultaneously a corporal circulation.

market. (The work of art she offers up is free to be watched, but cannot be purchased, reproduced, or consumed.) Further, Eltit's intervention upsets the rules by which feminine bodies must play in a house of prostitution. Nelly Richard illustrates that what Eltit does during her performance, "es movilizar la imagen pasiva – convencional – de lo femenino en un devenir performativo del 'yo' que transforma lo *destructivo* en *autoconstructivo* y en *deconstructivo*" ("Fugas" 12). Simply by occupying the common room of the brothel for her performance, Eltit stands in contrast to the passive role that must be played by the prostitute, whose 'performances' are relegated to back rooms. At the same time, her performance directly opposes the conventional performance of the prostitute by denying the viewer pleasure (the spectator, "No logr[a] el placer"), when ensuring the achievement of *placer* is precisely what the prostitute is required to do. Moreover, as we have already seen, Eltit's actions aggressively and conspicuously call to mind and question the dictatorship's abuse of bodies – both of individual bodies and the greater social body. As such, in the words of Richard, Eltit's performance, "lleva la *sedición* a toparse con la *seducción*" (12).

I have already suggested that Eltit's performance in Maipú is the negative of her spatial practices in *El Padre Mío*. Whereas in *El Padre Mío* Eltit carries a marginal and insane voice into the cultural center of the city and deems his discourse literary, her performance in Maipú, "situates the brothel as a locus of narrative. She explicitly inserts herself (and her text) within the narrative/sexual market economy. Further, she addresses prostitutes – who are traditionally the 'goods' sold – not the sellers or critics" ("Clearing" 229). In other words, Eltit extends the boundaries of the lettered city of Santiago by bringing literature into the marginal space of the brothel. There, she offers her book-in-

process not to academics, nor publishers, nor newspapers or literary magazines for review, but to prostitutes and their clients. She affixes the image of her face and the intention of her art to this space, and not to the city's cultural center.

The inverse relationship between these two moments in what I have called Eltit's narrative performances does not end there, however. With *El Padre Mío*, Eltit also takes fragments of oral discourse, records them, and then transcribes them so that they may be preserved and circulated via the printed word. By contrast, Eltit's actions in Maipú begin with a printed manuscript, only to return its discourse to the sphere of orality. Listening to *el Padre Mío*, Eltit heard literature unwritten yet nonetheless flowing out of his mouth. In Maipú, Eltit speaks the literature she is in the process of writing. She turns to performance, she tells us, because, "Entonces yo pensaba que el libro no era suficiente, que era un objeto..., para ponerlo en términos simplistas..., medio burgués, me entiendes tú. Que tendría que haber una extensión de las posibilidades" (*Conversaciones* 168).

This extension of the possibilities beyond the pages of a book consisted of Eltit's performance in Maipú, and the multi-media creation later published as *Lumpérica*. But this work extended possibilities in other ways, as well. Eugenia Brito attests that *Lumpérica*, in all of its facets and including Eltit's performance, also managed to extend the possibilities of resistance to the military government: "No es casual que justamente fuera a partir de esta novela que la literatura de la Resistencia viera aparecer a la ciudad y sus habitantes en el espacio abierto por Eltit" (Brito 111). Indeed, Eltit has reiterated in interviews that she wrote *Lumpérica* during some of the most rigorous years of the dictatorship, and that the censorship office was in full swing when the novel was finally

published. *Lumpérica*, then, presented writers with a mode of expression that was capable of criticizing and yet could still be published, unchanged, in spite of censorship.

Finally, I argue, the possibilities were just as importantly extended by the way in which Eltit re-wrote the boundaries of what is literature (in the ramblings of a schizophrenic and homeless man) and where literature can or should be located (in a brothel in one of the most notorious and poor neighborhoods in Santiago).

1.6 The Lettered City in Ruins

By way of conclusion, I would like to briefly consider one more text/performance that continues Eltit's re/per-formance of the lettered city of Santiago. It is the 1986 video *Diamela Eltit*, filmed by Gloria Camiruaga.⁷¹ Unlike Eltit's actions in the *Zona de dolor* series, *Diamela Eltit* contains a performance that was meant to be video art. This is an immediate and significant difference in dynamic and intention: the *Zona de dolor* performances were live art interventions that took place before a public, and although they were captured on film, they were never intended to be circulated as video art but rather were filmed as a way of documenting the performances themselves. *Diamela Eltit*, on the other hand, was explicitly performed for the camera; the only witnesses present were involved in the staging or filming of the video. Yet this filmic

⁷¹ Access to *Diamela Eltit* was made possible through Julio Ortega's archive. This video falls into the category of the *doble firma* or unconventional authority mentioned by Eltit in her essay "Co-laborar" (re-published in *Signos vitales*). As Eltit told me in an interview, Camiruaga had the idea for the video, and asked Eltit if she would read something in it. Eltit agreed, choosing what she would read, as well as how she would perform the text, while Camiruaga was responsible for the filming, editing, and later circulation of the video. Consequently, the resulting project was simultaneously and equally authored by both artists.

performance contributes to and completes the cycle of Eltit's spatial practices that rewrites the *ciudad letrada* of Santiago, as we shall see here.

Diamela Eltit opens with a panning shot of an old, abandoned warehouse that has fallen into ruin. The camera catches the vast emptiness of the space, with its missing and broken windows and steel fixtures that clearly were once used for some kind of production. We hear wind whistling, then howling, through the warehouse. Dramatic music overwhelms the wind, then mixes with the sound of water. When we see Eltit's face, it is a distorted and doubled image, as though we were seeing her reflected through unquiet waters. The gurgling of water fades into the background as Eltit begins to speak: "ma ma ma ma ma ma ma ma." She reads from her novel *Por la patria*, a novel that would also be published in 1986. The video proceeds to follow Eltit through distinct spaces in the ruins of this warehouse; in each space, she reads from a different section of the novel.

It is not until the end of the video that the context of the space will become clear. As the film reaches its conclusion, the camera scans old photographs of the same building prior to its abandonment: we see workers running a series of machines, and then we see the machines more clearly. We begin to understand: the machines that are still operating in the photographs, but that are missing or in ruins in the present of the video, are printing presses. In the credits, all ambiguity is removed. Camiruaga states that the video was filmed in the ex-publishing house once known as Zig Zag, then later as Quimantú, and later still as Gabriela Mistral.

It is this space, full of so much history, that is the most significant aspect of the video and of Eltit's reading. Editorial Nacional Quimantú was formed on February 12th,

1971, when the publishing house Zig-Zag gave in to demands by its workers and was sold to the government of the Unidad Popular. Indeed, as Julio Ortega comments, Quimantú would soon become, “un emblema de la política cultural de los tiempos de la Unidad Popular” (58). Quimantú’s objective can be summed up in the description given for one of its collections of books: it intended to, “ofrecer lo mejor de la literatura chilena, latinoamericana y universal de todas las épocas a precios al alcance de nuestro pueblo, abriéndole así una ancha ventana hacia la vida” (Quimantú.cl).⁷² The space of this performance, then, recalls Allende’s noble if romanticized project of making the best national and international literature available to all Chileans. In addition to the eight distinct collections of books that Quimantú began to publish after opening in 1971, it also was responsible for the publication of five magazines aimed at distinct ages and interests, as well as a series of comics based on culturally and politically relevant themes, and a special collection of periodical publications intended to amplify the cultural and historical knowledge of every Chilean citizen. However, the doors of Quimantú were quickly closed following the *golpe de estado* on September 11th, 1973, and the majority of its stock was destroyed. A year later, the military government attempted to return the space to use, founding its own publishing house under the name of Editora Nacional Gabriela

⁷² Indeed, the emblematic nature of Quimantú has lead to a present-day resuscitation of the publishing project, albeit this time in a form that is independent of government backing. Their website declares, “Somos un grupo de personas que decidieron que los sueños no sirven de mucho si no intentamos concretarlos, pertenecemos a organizaciones sociales, culturales y políticas de diferentes sectores de Santiago de Chile. Hace algunos años iniciamos un proyecto cultural que pone hincapié en rescatar la cultura cotidiana y ponerla al alcance de todos; nos hicimos de la experiencia y el nombre de la Editora Nacional Quimantú de los años 70 y formamos la Quimantú como una editorial que quiere formar parte de la creación y rescate del pensamiento latinoamericano desde abajo, rescatando también nuestra memoria e identidad popular.” Like their antecessor, the new Quimantú believes that books are not simply merchandise, and attempts to keep prices as low as possible by using less traditional systems of distribution.

Mistral. Gabriela Mistral eventually failed, however, and nearly a decade later the building was permanently closed, the machinery dismantled.⁷³ Eltit's performance for Camiruaga's video occurs about two years after the building's final abandonment.

So what does Eltit choose to read within the decaying remains of this culturally resonant space? She reads various excerpts from her novel *Por la patria*. Even the title signifies differently within this space, because, of course, Quimantú was established in order to distribute literature to all corners of *la patria* that is Chile. Yet it is, perhaps, one particular fragment read by Eltit that is most politically pertinent. It begins with a low angle shot of Eltit's face and hands – holding, of course, the manuscript from which she is reading. She stands on what appears to be an internal balcony within the warehouse, a viewpoint from which the work of the printing press might once have been watched. From below, the camera gradually narrows its frame to focus in more closely on Eltit's face. Simultaneously, we hear her tell us, “Me presento como trabajadora” (*Diamela*), in a line that is directly out of the novel as it would soon be published (*Patria* 189). Yet in the performance this line serves to intimately link Eltit to the space of the three former publishing houses. Introducing herself as *una trabajadora*, a worker, she immediately recalls the fact that it was the ordinary workers of Zig-Zag who were responsible for the creation of Quimantú, by going on strike until the management of the publishing house agreed to integrate the company into the State-run social projects being sponsored by Allende. Eltit-as-worker then goes on to explain the *pequeños lujos* that can still be found in her “casa ya invadida y censada,” her, “antigua casa saqueada.” Once again, lines that

⁷³ A more complete history of the Editorial Nacional Quimantú, along with cover images and the texts of several of its publications, can be found on memoriachilena.cl. MICROhistoria(s) has also created an excellent mini-documentary about the publishing house in relation to Salvador Allende's cultural agenda.

work in a different way within the novel's own, separate narrative, here echo with the history of the building. The publishing house is the *casa invadida y censada* (invaded, closed, and censored simply by having its stock burned – all by the military regime), while Camiruaga's camera manages to reveal to us the 'small luxuries' (the whistle of wind, the gurgling of water, the glisten of tiles, the beauty of its windows) that remain there even after the building has been looted and abandoned. Eltit then proceeds to recount the scene of an interrogation as it reinitiates: "Me ofrece un trato. 'Hagamos un trato y te libras.' No me libro, pienso, cuando ya me conozco las trampas" (*Diamela, Patria* 190). Indeed, she isn't freed, and the interrogation quickly becomes a torture session that only ends when, "Me enterraron de la cintura para abajo" (*Diamela, Patria* 191). At this point, Eltit's performance is no longer content with subtle illusions, and now overtly invokes the dictatorship's tactics of violence – and it does so from within a space of cultural exchange that the regime presumes to have shut down. Indeed, as Ortega suggests, "Ese escenario residual [Quimantú]," is 'recuperated' and 'liberated' by Eltit's performance of dissidence within its ruins (58).

Consequently, Eltit's spatial practice in *Diamela Eltit* reclaims a closed space located within the physical and cultural center of the city (Quimantú was situated in Bellavista, a neighborhood populated by artists and home even to renowned writers such as Pablo Neruda; see figure 5 at the end of this chapter). The particular space she recovers was once a literary distribution center whose objective was to get literature – and cultural knowledge of all kinds – into the hands of the entire Chilean population; her performance in the ruins of Quimantú restores literature to that space once again.

In this chapter, we have seen how Eltit's spatial practices re/per-form the city of Santiago. By publishing *El Padre Mío*, Eltit brings the cultural margins into the city center, and allows a madman access to the homes of the cultural elite. Her action also redefines what literature may be: not limited to the refined writings of the highly educated, it may also consist of the ramblings of the homeless. By contrast, in *Maipú* and the *Zona de dolor* series, Eltit brings her literature to the marginal space of the brothel, in order to there bring her written words to life in an embodied performance that, in turn, will eventually be incorporated via photographs into the final, published novel. She consequently reinscribes the cultural and physical peripheries of Santiago as the locus of literature: worthy of being the subject of literature, but also as the source and even the destination of literature. Finally, in *Diamela Eltit*, she collaborates with Gloria Camiruaga to return literature to a space that, before being shut down, had once stood for the open access to literature and culture for all Chileans. As such, she completes her cycle of performances that rewrite the boundaries of the lettered city of Santiago – because Quimantú's project intended to open the gates of access and make literature accessible to all.

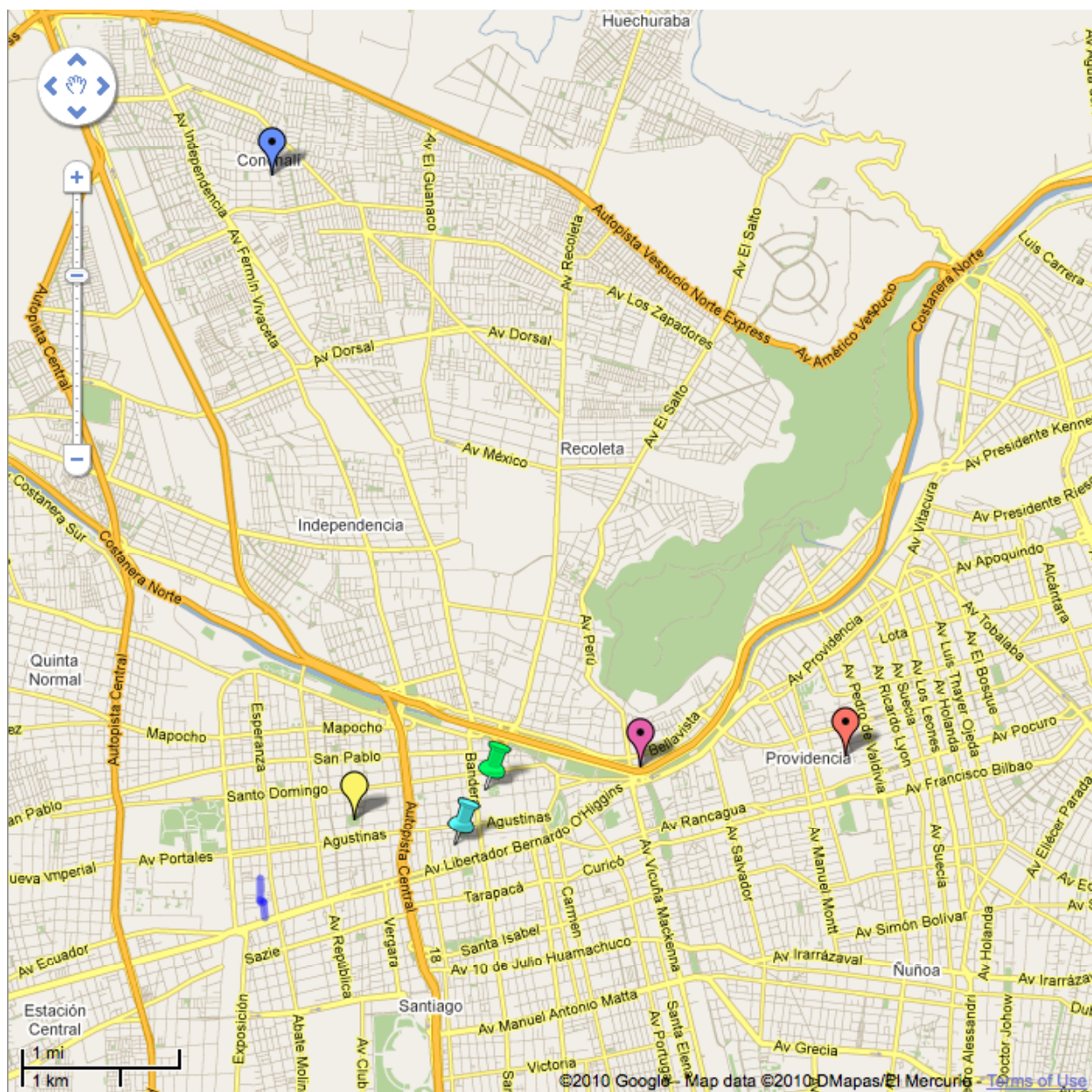


Figure I.5: Diamela Eltit's Lettered City. Present-day (2010) map of the city of Santiago doesn't reflect the city exactly as it was in the 1980s, but it does allow us to see how el Padre Mío's 'home' in the eriazó of Conchalí relates to Santiago Centro, and shows us just how far his influence extended when Eltit published the transcriptions of his speech with the address of his publisher, Silvina Hurtado 1815. The map also shows the location of Maipú Street, where Eltit performed in a brothel, as well as the address of the former publishing house Quimantú.

Map Legend:

 Silvina Hurtado 1815. Location of Francisco Zegger's independent press, which published the text *El Padre Mío* in 1989.

 Conchalí. Now a much more established though still marginal municipality, Conchalí was the wasteland 'neighborhood' where Diamela Eltit encountered el Padre Mío on three separate occasions in the 1980s.

 Plaza de Armas. This was the central plaza around which colonial Santiago was built, and to this day remains a social and cultural center for the city. To its east, the plaza is bordered by the Catedral Metropolitana de Santiago, with the Museo Histórico Nacional and the Municipalidad de Santiago both to its north, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes just a few blocks west, and the Museo de Arte Precolombino de Santiago de Chile a few blocks southeast. Also within a two block radius are the Ex-Congreso Nacional (the Chilean Congress moved to Valparaíso during Pinochet's regime), the Palacio de los Tribunales de Justicia de Santiago and the Supreme Court of Chile.

 Centro Cultural Palacio de la Moneda. Originally built as a colonial mint, coins were produced in La Moneda from 1814-1929. In 1845, the Moneda became the seat of government and presidential residence. During the *golpe de estado*, it was bombed by the Chilean air force and was the site of Salvador Allende's alleged suicide. It was restored by 1981, and has continued to serve as the seat of government since.

 Plaza de Brasil. La Plaza de Brasil is the Plaza that Eltit names repeatedly in her reading of the then in-process novel *Lumpérica* at the brothel on Maipú Street.

 Maipú Street. Eltit has repeatedly referred to Maipú Street as, "una zona histórica." She conducted the first of the performances in the *Zona de dolor* series in one of the brothels along this street. At the time, Maipú was the most marginal of red light districts.

 Avenida Santa María 076. Location of the former Editora Nacional Quimantú, and site of the performance recorded in Gloria Camiruaga's video *Diamela Eltit*.

Chapter 2

Ritual and the (Un)Writing of Identity: A *Lumpérica* Performance

2.1 Writing through Dictatorship

The first four of Diamela Eltit's novels were written under, and fiercely marked by, dictatorship. As she retells it, the act of writing became, "una forma de salvataje personal," a personal salvation from what she has described as the interminable and unspeakable experience of living in Pinochet's Chile. In the midst of censorship and oppression, writing provided Eltit with a sliver of social space in which to think, and in which to feel alive. In her words, "Escribir en ese espacio [de dictadura] fue algo pasional y personal. Mi resistencia política secreta. Cuando se vive en un entorno que se derrumba, construir un libro puede ser quizás uno de los escasos gestos de sobrevivencia" (*Emergencias* 171). The mere act of writing, in other words, is in this scenario a performance in and of itself. Departing from the societally dictated norms of total conformity, Eltit's writing reflected a stylized, heightened behavior that fit into a learned frame differing from the dictatorship's officially imposed comportment: the frame of quiet dissidence.

Yet how can writing -- especially when it is done in private -- perform? To understand this, we must remember that between the *desaparecidos* and the *exiliados*, the

survivors of torture and the families of political enemies, Pinochet's military regime inflicted a lasting trauma on Chilean society that has left behind scars both visible and invisible. We have already seen, for example, how the dictatorship inverted the use of public space: the public plaza, once the site of social gatherings and political demonstrations, becomes nothing more than a space of transit under dictatorship, reduced to a way to travel from one side of the city to the other. At the same time, Pinochet's government effectively silenced public debate around political, social, and economic issues. In this context, with the entire public sphere shrinking from a space of exchange to a space of repression, the otherwise private act of writing -- and, moreover, proceeding to publish that writing -- became a performance of opposition that was capable of creating an alternative space for limited -- yet nonetheless public -- dialogue. Further, as we shall see by the end of the chapter, the act of reading *Lumpérica* parallels its writing as performance, a performance that each reader must undertake for herself.

In the previous chapter, we explored the ways in which Eltit performs, and re-forms, the urban space of Santiago, both through her own actions as a performer in spectacles involving reading in brothels and kissing homeless men, as well as in a literary performance that stages the spoken discourse of a schizophrenic vagrant as the more 'Cultured' written word. Now, by contrast, I want to move on to the ways in which Eltit's own language, as it appears on the written page, performs, and to a study of the performances she builds into her fictional narratives. Over the next two chapters, I will work through the issues of state-imposed repression, trauma, memory, and identity that are at the heart of Eltit's first two novels, *Lumpérica* (1983) and *Por la patria* (1986). In so doing, I aim to reveal how distinct iterations of performance function in each novel as

coping mechanisms that permit the protagonists varying degrees of survival in the context of brutal state violence. Throughout the present chapter, I will argue that *Lumpérica*, written during a period of vicious military oppression and with no end to Pinochet's regime in sight, reveals a trauma so raw that it cannot yet be understood, named, represented clearly, remembered or retold. This ever-present, and therefore unknowable, trauma will show itself to be inextricably tied up with questions of identity and memory. Consequently, I will suggest that *Lumpérica's* nightly performances enact a series of rituals in an attempt to reappropriate the space of the city plaza, making it once again a point of public exchange. Turning this reclaimed space into a stage, I suggest, the protagonist of *Lumpérica* cycles through a sequence of rituals that attempt to dialogue with the few undesirables who are also present in the plaza at night. Before their demanding gazes, the protagonist will endeavor to employ these rituals to un/write her identity, as well as the trauma that cuts deeply into her body, her memory, and even into her very name.

2.2 What Happens Beneath the Light of the Sign? *Lumpérica*

The electric light of a neon sign illuminates a nearly abandoned plaza, a once public space now entirely closed in by walls of darkness. Directed by the light, our eyes are first drawn to the featureless face of L. Iluminada, *Lumpérica's* protagonist, before they adjust enough to focus in on the surrounding shadows of the *pálidos*, homeless and raggedly dressed figures who will also spend the night in the plaza. So begins Diamela Eltit's first novel, described by Idelber Avelar as a "night-long reverie" composed of a

"ten-step walk" which eventually reveals a nocturnal cycle structured by the concept of the 'eternal return' (176).⁷⁴ Not a gentle reverie, however, each of the novel's ten steps are sharply fragmented into shards of narrative that the reader must piece together, puzzling over how they might fit, and towards what larger image they might be leading.

More event (that is to say, connected yet disconnected actions) than narration (in the sense of a clear storyline), *Lumpérica* does not offer its readers a traditional plot onto which to grasp. Although it does not tell a story, however, each shred of action can eventually be stitched into the symmetrical patterning of a narrative quilt. The formal structure that the active reader eventually assembles follows a single, principal thread: the image of L. Iluminada performing in the plaza.⁷⁵ In his English-language translation of *Lumpérica*, Ronald Christ offers a skeletal yet illuminating breakdown of the narrative quilt. He suggests that the novel's ten narrative fragments could be described as follows:

1. Three Cinematic Scenes
2. Interrogation I / Fall of E. Luminata⁷⁶
3. Her Multiform Animal State
4. Images of the Protagonist: Patient/Victim, Reviewing, Second Litany, Indian Rite
5. Self-love/Writing + Printing

⁷⁴ Dianna Niebylski, by contrast, has suggestively argued that the way *Lumpérica*'s ends with, "resigned, monotone narration, [in addition to] its abandonment of both the excesses and the 'residues' of other parts of the novel, lead[s] me to read it as an epilogue that seals the rest of the novel with an air of defeat" (252). However, I disagree with her insistence that the narrative plot has come to its (defeated) conclusion at the end of the novel, following instead the reading of Avelar and others who see the novel's end as circular, signaling a return, if not to the start of the novel, at least to a repetition of the cycle as L. Iluminada awaits the next nightfall.

⁷⁵ I prefer to describe the central thread of *Lumpérica* as L. Iluminada "performing" in the plaza, thereby opening her performances to the ritual enactment of many different types of behavior. Sara Castro-Klarén, on the other hand, would limit this central thread to different variations on just one behavior. In her words, the novel, "repeats versions or takes of the one scene it attempts to enact: the taking (rape and or love making) of or by L. Iluminada" (43).

⁷⁶ E. Luminata is how Christ chose to translate the name *L. Iluminada* to English.

6. Proclamations of the City
7. Interrogation II
8. Rehearsing the Cut
9. Performance
10. Epiphany. (230)

While Christ's labeling system offers us a visual way into the structure of the novel, it does not reveal the extent of *Lumpérica's* symmetries.⁷⁷ In the first and fifth chapters, each of L. Iluminada's performances is filmed, commented, and even juxtaposed with outtakes.⁷⁸ Chapters two and seven cut away from L. Iluminada, flashing to the future interrogation of an anonymous man who had been present in the plaza during one of the filmings, thus happening to catch L. Iluminada at a point in the performance when she had been scripted to fall. Three and six present un-filmed variations on L. Iluminada's performances in the plaza, the first of which presents us with an animalesque L. Iluminada galloping around the plaza/corral as she attempts to avoid the taming spurs of the Lumpen who would ride her, while the second highlights the textuality of L. Iluminada's rituals through a performance of graffiti-writing in the plaza. Chapters four and eight probe the identity of the protagonist, presenting her in confusion with the author's own name or body, while alluding to torture and/or bodily mutilation. The ninth chapter completes the link between the filmed scenes in the plaza with the interrogations of the second and seventh chapters by presenting us with multiple takes of

⁷⁷ Indeed, the novel itself resists a true or full recounting of its action. Thus, the summary I offer here is the result of my own reading and subsequent construction of an understanding of *Lumpérica*, but does not pretend to be in any way complete, nor the only way of recounting the novel.

⁷⁸ Perhaps the most succinct discussion of the overlapping levels of narration in these chapters comes from Robert Neustadt, who explains that, "*Lumpérica*, from the first chapter, incorporates three narrative strata: *text*, presenting the image of L. Iluminada in the plaza; *textualization*, representing the process of filming L. Iluminada in the plaza; and *meta-text*, critiquing the performance and cinematography" ((*Con*)*Fusing* 36).

L. Iluminada falling, while the final chapter returns us to the plaza and allows us to observe a complete cycle of L. Iluminada's solitary sojourn in this abandoned space from dusk to dawn.

In spite of its fragmented 'plot,' yet complementing its formal structure, *Lumpérica* opens against a clearly enunciated setting. The place: Santiago de Chile, mentioned by name on the novel's very first page. The socio-political context: a group of homeless vagrants, Santiago's undesirables, spend the night in a plaza in a city run by an authoritarian regime (clearly evidenced by the interrogation scenes and the unconcealed references to a curfew that coincides with nightfall). As literary critic Anna Reid has suggested, then, although *Lumpérica* is performed in a public square, "the atmosphere is one of enclosure and surveillance. During the day everything gives the appearance of being very mundane . . . However at night the square changes, becoming devoid of warmth and colour" (82). The plaza itself, I concur with Reid, is not only threatening but becomes a physical prison that contains and observes all of L. Iluminada's actions. Explicitly unstated yet hardly veiled, L. Iluminada's performance unfolds in Pinochet's Chile. She, like the *pálidos*, has no home to go to when the city lights dim. The streets are not safe after dark -- indeed, it is illegal to walk them after curfew. Thus, L. Iluminada cannot leave the plaza. With this knowledge, our questions must now be: what happens in the plaza when the sun sets and the passersby retreat to their homes as the electric lights turn on? What is it that L. Iluminada performs? Moreover, why and for whom is she performing?

2.3 Societal Rites of Passage, or Individual Rituals of Identity?

Although some have been quick to dismiss Eltit's work, and her first novel in particular, as overly hermetic,⁷⁹ *Lumpérica* has nonetheless generated a great deal of dialogue in the form of literary criticism.⁸⁰ Out of this body of analysis, a trend emerges in which many critics have attempted to create a coherent, univocal reading that explains the novel in its totality. I believe, however, that *Lumpérica*'s power lies in the way that it works against this very possibility. Its fragmented glimpses of disjointed and often contradictory yet, nonetheless, overlapping actions resist resolution, while simultaneously opening new paths for possible readings.⁸¹ As a result, my goal in this chapter will not be to magically transform the complexities and contradictions of *Lumpérica* into a legible text, nor to suggest that I have stumbled across the best (or the correct) reading of the novel. Rather, I would simply like to offer a thus-far relatively unexplored, yet nonetheless possible entryway into *Lumpérica*.

My analysis follows an already developed line of critical thought in suggesting that what is performed in *Lumpérica* is a series of rituals. Yet while several critics have at least briefly noted distinct aspects of ritual in their readings of *Lumpérica*, the tendency is

⁷⁹ Even a reader who has deeply engaged with Eltit's texts as Gisela Norat offer this criticism of *Lumpérica*: "To elude state censorship she masked her politically compromising writing with a hermetic style. However, that likewise involved a 'dangerous decision' because if readers at the censor's office did not understand her novels, neither did the public at large" (200).

⁸⁰ More than forty books, chapters, articles, and dissertations on *Lumpérica* appear in the *MLA International Bibliography* alone.

⁸¹ Difficult indeed, though I believe well worth the effort required to read it, *Lumpérica* could not be a best seller precisely because its entanglement of actions without the consistency of a clear plot does not permit itself to be converted into a marketable commodity.

to acknowledge its presence as an inherent aspect of L. Iluminada's performance, rather than as an object worthy of serious study itself. Raquel Olea, for example, summarizes the action of the novel as the occupation of a square by a group of disinherited beings in order to, "cumplir un ritual de expresión pública" (*Lengua* 53). Provocatively, Olea proceeds to tell us that it will be L. Iluminada, "sujeto desasida de la ley, quien conduce el ritual de los desechados del derecho" (58), but then drops the subject of rituality altogether in order to frame Eltit's work in terms of the woman as a writing subject whose approach to language is Other. Likewise, Lucía Herrera fleetingly digresses from her discussion of how Eltit's scars can be juxtaposed with Walter Benjamin's ruins to note that the orgy-like dance of the first chapter, "se realiza en una dimensión ritual: la voz, el movimiento, la sensación erótica, el dolor, se conjugan para articular un rito-espectáculo que gira, en última instancia, en torno a la producción de un grito" (139). Similarly, Idelber Avelar suggestively refers to *Lumpérica* in passing as a "black mass [that] comes to represent a marginal, utopian space that nevertheless does not survive the morning light, although it is announced again for the following night" (18), yet does not delve into the structure of that 'black mass,' nor into its social or psychological functions. Sara Castro-Klarén takes the interpretation of Christian ritual further, suggesting that what is staged in the plaza is a baptism, followed by confirmation, and concluding with an offertory ritual of self-sacrifice, in what she reads as an "inescapable" parallel with Christ's passion (48).⁸² For his part, Ignacio López-Vicuña begins to crack the reading of ritual in *Lumpérica* open beyond the western discourse of a mass to consider the presence

⁸² Castro-Klarén is not alone in this interpretation: in an article for the *Revista Chilena de Literatura*, Olea similarly ties the rituals in the plaza to "la escena del bautizo -- rito inicial de la identidad cristiana" (Cuerpo-mujer 169), affirming that what we witness in the opening scenes is L. Iluminada as she is "crucificada por la luz" (168).

of indigenous and pagan rituality (127). Yet again, his focus is not on the nature of the rituals performed, so much as on the expression of other subjectivities in an oppressed urban space.

Whereas ritual appears as little more than an interesting digression in the work of so many, Sylvia Tafrá has taken it as the central element around which *Lumpérica* revolves. She interprets the novel as "la iniciación ritual de L. Iluminada -- que simboliza la novela, el país y América -- como búsqueda de identidad, la que, al igual que el texto, se encuentra fragmentada" (13). Tafrá, however, does not limit herself to an analysis of ritual within Eltit's first novel. Rather, she insists upon reading *Lumpérica* both as a complete rite of passage in itself, while also simultaneously functioning as only the first of a trilogy of rite-of-passage novels that includes Eltit's next two novels, *Por la patria* and *El cuarto mundo*, each of which she views as representing one of the primary phases of a single rite of passage. "En estos textos," she claims, "se despliega una estrategia intertextual que comienza con una posición anti-estructural en *Lumpérica*, continúa a una contra-estructural en *Por la patria* y culmina con un ingreso a la estructura en *El cuarto mundo*" (93).

In order to achieve this alternate reading in which each of Eltit's first three novels performs at least one, if not multiple, self-contained and complete rites of passage, while simultaneously working together to perform a single rite of passage broken into stages that moves across the three novels, Tafrá builds on the seminal work of the French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep and British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner in the study of rites of passage. Van Gennep views the rite of passage as composed of three stages: "the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*,

those executed during the transitional stage, *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world, *postliminal rites*" (van Gennep 21). Turner adds to van Gennep's division of the rite of passage into three stages by focusing more closely on the function of each stage. A neophyte, Turner explains, must move through a preliminal stage, in which she suffers a symbolic death or separation in such a way as to break with her previous state; she then enters a liminal stage, an ambiguous state of liminality or marginality in which the neophyte no longer fits into the social structure and is between social categories; before she can finally enter the postliminal stage, which is composed of her return or rebirth as the rite of passage is completed and she, as initiate, is now reincorporated into the social structure at a new level of social status (*Dramas, Fields* 273).

Thus, Richard Schechner summarizes, a rite of passage is, "a journey from one social self to another" (*Performance* 57), in which, "persons are inscribed with their new identities and initiated into their new powers" (58). Often, this passage from one social self to the other involves violence, scarring, or some form of sacrifice. However, the violence in a rite of passage is performed in a controlled ceremony, and, moreover, is inflicted by members of the community whose goal is to move an individual from one social standing to a new, higher standing.

In other words, as Turner affirms, societies are based on structure⁸³ and hierarchies that are punctuated and altered by rites of passage. In this sense, the liminal phase of the rite of passage is perhaps the most important, as it is "...betwixt and between

⁸³ In *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, Turner takes pains to define what he means by structure: "a more or less distinctive arrangement of mutually dependent institutions and the institutional organization of social positions and/or actors which they imply. Class structures are only one species of structures so defined" (272).

the categories of ordinary social life" (273). Upon entering the liminal state of a rite of passage, therefore, the initiate leaves behind all structure and enters a phase of 'anti-structure,' which Turner defines as:

the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group such as a family, lineage, clan, tribe, nation, etc., or of affiliation with some pervasive social category such as a class, caste, sex or age-division. (*Ritual to Theatre* 44)

It is important to note that Turner does not mean for the term 'anti-structure' to imply negativity but rather a positive alternative to structure that can also function as "a generative center" (*Dramas, Fields* 273). In this positive sense, the lifting of normally imposed social constraints in the midst of a rite of passage leads to a spontaneous, equalitarian camaraderie among those undergoing the ritual transition that Turner terms 'communitas.' Yet, Turner notes, although, "liminality often provides favorable conditions for communitas," it may also have the opposite effect, resulting in, "either a Hobbesian war of all against all, or an existentialist anarchy of individuals, each 'doing his or her own thing'" (285). In such cases, even after the rite of passage has been completed individuals may remain in opposition to the societal structure, forming what Turner calls a 'counter-structure.'

Thus, taking from both Turner and van Gennep's ideas and reading across Eltit's first three novels, Tafra argues that *Lumpérica* is the stagnation of the rite of passage: the protagonist begins the rite of passage but remains lost in the liminal or anti-structural phase, never reaching the conclusion of her initiation nor being reincorporated into society. *Por la patria*, on the other hand, portrays an initiate who does complete her rite of passage yet decides against returning to the structure, instead choosing to found a

counter-structure. The rite-of-passage trilogy then would conclude with *El cuarto mundo*, in which the sacrifices made as part of the rite of passage are finally great enough to allow the initiate to reincorporate herself into the societal structure.

Tafra would like to construe this three-novel progression as a single rite of passage, "efectuado por el sujeto de la enunciación" (93) -- the 'enunciating subject' identified as a woman who in each novel passes through one of the three structuring moments of her identity: "en el acceso al lenguaje (*Lumpérica*), en la fundación de lo social (*Por la patria*), y en la sexualidad (*El cuarto mundo*)" (88). In order to read rites of passage into each of the novels, however, Tafra stretches the concept of a rite of passage further and further. To give just one example of how her analysis breaks down across Eltit's second and third novels, in *Por la patria*⁸⁴ Tafra ends up categorizing delinquency and what she terms the "carnavalesque" atmosphere of the novel's setting as the anti-structural stage of a rite of passage.⁸⁵ This extension is problematic, however: as Turner has taken care to explicate, all rites of passage require a clearly delineated starting point which must separate the time, space, and action of the rite of passage as sacred and distinct from every day life.⁸⁶ While *Por la patria* paints us a portrait of a neighborhood

⁸⁴ I will examine the response to trauma in *Por la patria* in detail in the second half of this chapter, though, for reasons that will soon become clear, not through the lens of ritual.

⁸⁵ "Esta primera parte [de la novela] pertenece a la primera fase del rito, separación o muerte de un estado de ser, que corresponde a un estado de 'inferioridad estructural' por tratarse de delincuentes o de seres marginales, como es el caso de las mujeres en roles no tradicionales" (Tafra 54).

⁸⁶ Turner emphasizes the necessity of a break in 'normal' time as follows: "The first phase of *separation* clearly demarcates sacred space and time from profane or secular space and time (it is more than just a matter of entering a temple -- there must be in addition a rite which changes the quality of *time* also, or constructs a cultural realm which is defined as 'out of time,' i.e., beyond or outside the time which measures secular processes and routines)" (*Ritual to Theatre* 24).

that exists in a perpetual state of dereliction, it is also clear that the scenes of intoxication and miscellaneous other social transgressions reflect a way of life for the protagonist and her family, rather than a marked departure from their customary behavior.⁸⁷

While Tafrá must endlessly widen the limits of the rite of passage in order to make her metaphor work across Eltit's first three novels, the idea that motivates her reading provides us with a useful starting point for the analysis of *Lumpérica*. Each text, Tafrá argues, alludes to, "ritos de pasaje que implican un cambio, una violencia ('numinosa'), que debe ser asimilada" (87). Indeed, all three of Eltit's first novels are set in the context of a societal violence that will somehow be assimilated by the protagonists. Unlike *Por la patria* and *El cuarto mundo*, however, I would like to propose that *ritual* is in fact the specific form of assimilation of the surrounding violence in *Lumpérica*, making concrete and repeated appearances in the pages of the novel without the need to read between lines or distend definitions. My choice of the word 'ritual' here, and not 'rite of passage,' is significant. As we have seen, a rite of passage implies a transformation of the individual, specifically in the form of the acquisition of a new identity and/or new powers that result in a higher social status, and ends with the reincorporation of the initiate into society. However, as Tafrá herself admits, and as I will discuss in greater detail in this chapter, L. Iluminada is not reincorporated into the structure of society at the end of her performances in *Lumpérica*.⁸⁸ Rather, at the end of the novel, we leave her

⁸⁷ Tafrá will make a similar move in her reading of *El cuarto mundo*, distending the concept of the rite of passage in order to place the family's repeated transgressions -- and all other subversive acts -- within the framework of the liminal.

⁸⁸ "En *Lumpérica* no hay tal resolución," Tafrá tells us, "pues la protagonista, si bien adquiere una identidad de iniciada, en un grado superior de conciencia como L. Iluminada, no ingresa a la sociedad. Se mantiene en un estado de rebeldía anti-estructural con respeto a la estructura" (48). I would argue that even in this Tafrá stretches her

sitting alone on a bench in the same public plaza, still removed, on the fringe of society, observing the daytime bustle as people hurriedly cross through the square on their way to work. Moreover, L. Iluminada's actions do not form part of a one-time ordeal. Rather, they are cyclical in nature: it is clear that her performance will begin again as soon as the sun sets. For these reasons, then, I want to now move our analysis of *Lumpérica* away from the specific concept of the rite of passage so that we may return to the more general realm of ritual, and consider how and why ritual plays out when the lights in the plaza go off at night.

For the purposes of this chapter, I would like to combine two of the most commonly accepted definitions of ritual.⁸⁹ In the words of the renowned social anthropologist Stanley Tambiah,

Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degrees by formality (conventionality), stereotype (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition). Ritual is in its constitutive features performative. (119)

The key elements of this definition that will play out in significant ways in *Lumpérica* are his focus on symbolic communication or expression through words and acts that fall into a rigid -- or scripted -- sphere of communication, and that are imbued by repetition.

argument, because while L. Iluminada certainly remains an observer outside of the social structure at the end of the novel, there is no clear indication in the text that she has achieved a greater state of consciousness. Rather, the reader is left to understand the ritual performances will begin again the next night, continuing on in an endless cycle, precisely because neither her social status nor her psychological state have been permanently changed.

⁸⁹ As Jan A.M. Snoek has noted, "Defining the term 'rituals' is a notoriously problematic task," one that requires sifting through a seemingly endless number of proposed definitions (3). I take my two definitions from some of Snoek's "classical" definitions from the literature.

Anthropologist David Kertzer offers a few refinements to this definition of ritual. Ritual, for Kertzer, does not have to limit itself to symbolic communication, but also includes, "symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive" (9). This opening of ritual to include symbolic behavior will be essential to understanding L. Iluminada's wordless performances in *Lumpérica*. Indeed, while her performances will be heavily imbued by symbolic elements, much of what she does in the square boils down to pure gesture, moving to a realm of communication that goes beyond the limits of language.

Coinciding with Tambiah in his description of the characteristics of ritual, particularly in reference to ritual's formal nature, Kertzer goes on to add that, "It follows highly structured, standardized sequences and is often enacted at certain places and times that are themselves endowed with symbolic meaning. Ritual action is repetitive and, therefore, often redundant, but these very factors serve as important means of channeling emotion, guiding cognition, and organizing social groups" (9). This final sentence is of especial interest to the current study of *Lumpérica*. Fragmentation and repetition, as we shall see, are the defining characteristics of L. Iluminada's performance in the plaza. The repetitions within the ritual behaviors performed there, then, will work to allow the participants to bear the weight of strong emotions, while helping them to understand a world which has organized itself around their exclusion.

Kertzer's insistence on the necessity of performing ritual only in "certain places and times that are themselves endowed with symbolic meaning" helps explain why L. Iluminada's nighttime performance of a series of ritual behaviors must be enacted after nightfall in the middle of an abandoned public plaza.⁹⁰ As we have already seen, the

⁹⁰ Beyond the fact that L. Iluminada has nowhere else to go.

space of her performance is charged with symbolic meaning -- once a space of public gatherings of all kinds, it has been reduced to a crossing point, a channel of transit to be traversed on one's way somewhere else. Yet the plaza is not only the scene of L. Iluminada's performance, but it is also the subject of the entire interrogation that spans the second and seventh chapters of the novel. As the detained man admits under the questioning of the first scene of interrogation, "Siempre su [propia] permanencia en la plaza era más bien un intermedio entre una cosa y otra y como tal, ese lugar no llamaba su atención" (*Lumpérica* 55). In this city, we learn, even during the daytime few people ever occupy the square. It turns out that the only individuals who spend any time in the plaza are still in some way marginal members of society: mothers who anxiously watch their children play, lovers who briefly take refuge there in order to kiss or break up, the elderly who sit on benches and speak to each other slowly, the homeless who sprawl out on the grass, the insane who wander through, talking nonsense to themselves -- and all of them depart as soon as the sun sets. Choosing the plaza as the space in which to perform her ritual actions, then, L. Iluminada, "imprints on the crowd [of the homeless] another landscape, effacing others" (Sotomayor 24). That is to say, she reclaims the public plaza from its current state of disuse, 'effacing' the abandonment that has made it a symbol of repression. While returning the plaza to its once-common use as a space of public expression, L. Iluminada will also invert the city's centers and peripheries: she is, after all, a marginal subject performing within a location designed to be the center of the surrounding neighborhoods. Finally, as Sandra Lorenzano aptly notes, "Si a la plaza le es enajenada su condición pública, lo verdaderamente provocador será ocuparla a través de gestos considerados privados" (165). Thus, the subversive nature of L. Iluminada's

performance in the plaza is three-fold: she reclaims a forbidden public space for a public gathering, uses that once again public space to perform what, we shall see, is at many points an auto-erotic spectacle, and she occupies a central space of the city with marginal subjects.

So what are the rituals that L. Iluminada performs in this symbolically charged space? How do they manifest themselves, and what do they attempt to accomplish? *Lumpérica*, I suggest, narrates a series of five rituals: a 'baptism' or naming by light, a sequence of self-mutilations, a hallucinogenic spectacle that resembles a rodeo, the act of writing -- and erasing -- graffiti in the plaza, and the shearing of L. Iluminada's hair. Through a close reading of each of these rituals,⁹¹ I will demonstrate that they are all performances linked by one unifying thread: that of identity. Performed before the *lumpen*, in the center of the public plaza, each ritual works to either inscribe -- sometimes to quite literally carve -- identity in or onto the body of L. Iluminada, to erase identity from that body, or to both expunge and instill identity, simultaneously.

⁹¹ I concur with Scott Weintraub's observation in a 2006 *Ciberletras* article that *Lumpérica*, "is a novel that has not been 'read' much since its publication." Rather, "...a great deal of the academic work that engages it tends to conjecture thematically and/or allegorically about the textual elements and motifs with which *Lumpérica* is concerned, rather than approaching the text through a 'close reading.'" Although Weintraub does read (somewhat) closely two sections of *Lumpérica*, he does so through a heavily theoretical lens, which prevents him from more deeply engaging with the text itself. This chapter, by contrast, will attempt to perform a close reading of each of the primary rituals performed by L. Iluminada in the plaza, in order to gather clues from the text about what each of these rituals is meant to accomplish, and where that leaves our protagonist at the end of the text.

2.4 A Name of Her Own: Baptism Performed, Undone, and Repeated

Just how central of a role ritual will play in this novel becomes unequivocally apparent on the very first page, when we read that, "el frío en esta plaza es el tiempo que se ha marcado para suponerse un nombre propio, donado por el letrero que se encenderá y se apagará, rítmico y ritual, en el proceso que en definitiva les dará la vida" (*Lumpérica* 15). Although it is the rhythmic flickering of the light of the *letrero* or the sign post that the text here describes as ritual in nature, we also note that the cold in the abandoned plaza at night, after curfew, marks a time and a place that are isolated from ordinary life. *El frío en esta plaza* is, in a way, not only symbolic but also sacred in this society that forbids its citizens from moving about the city after dark. In this particular place and time, then, a 'process' will occur under the electric lights that is meant to give L. Iluminada and the *pálidos* 'life.' A page later, it becomes clear that this 'process' is itself a ritual: indeed, we are explicitly told that it is the familiar ritual of *bautizo* -- a baptism. However, this particular *bautizo* will part from the traditional notion of baptism as a ritual washing, a purification by means of immersion in water, that results in the initiation of the newly baptized individual in a church.⁹² No; in this case, L. Iluminada does not bathe in water but, rather, is 'washed' by the light of the signpost. As the light falls on her, "Le ratifica el nombre en dos colores paralelos, el luminoso ampliado sobre el cuerpo escribe L. Iluminada y rítmicamente va pasando la cantidad posible de apodos: le escribe tráfuga y la letra cae como toma filmica" (16). To put this ritual in Schechner's terms,

⁹² The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines baptism as, "The action or ceremony of baptizing; immersion of a person in water, or application of water by pouring or sprinkling, as a religious rite, symbolical of moral or spiritual purification or regeneration, and, as a Christian ordinance, betokening initiation into the Church."

in these first few pages a 'social journey' is begun in which the homeless and anonymous L. Iluminada -- and the even more anonymous group of *pálidos* who also occupy the plaza at night -- will be inscribed with new identities -- with names, and even with nicknames -- by the blinking electric light of the signpost.⁹³

While this baptism will certainly bestow names on the occupants of the plaza, it does not resemble a ritual of *purification* -- at least not in the conventional sense of purification as a cleansing of one's sins. To the contrary, this baptism appears to be dependent on the performance of transgressive acts. From the first page, L. Iluminada's body is described in raw, suggestive terms: we first see her lying beneath the light of the *luminoso* as her legs extend against the grass, "cruzándose o abriéndose -- rítmicas en el contraluz" (15). Then, she, "frenética, mueve las caderas bajo la luz" (16), and later, "se frota en su madera por el puro placer del espectáculo" (16). This *frote* or rubbing will be a constant element of the baptism, and will come to involve not just L. Iluminada but also the *pálidos*, who also attempt to reach "el placer a cualquier costo" (17). The only difference is that while L. Iluminada is the 'star' of an auto-erotic show in the center of the plaza, the *pálidos* will participate from the periphery: "Los pálidos se han tomado las

⁹³ Here I agree with Tafrá's conclusion that it is, "la luz del luminoso que hace las veces del agua bautismal; purifica y confiere los nombres, 'penetra y deslumbra.' Expresión desacralizada de trascendencia" (34). From this point on, however, my reading of ritual in *Lumpérica* will largely part from Tafrá's analysis, which is I believe is too heavily dependent on Lacanian psychoanalysis and often overreaches the textual evidence to place L. Iluminada's actions within a psychoanalytic framework. For instance, when L. Iluminada cuts her own hair in the middle of the abandoned plaza, Tafrá reads this as a symbolic castration. "La castración aquí es un símbolo ambivalente," she tells us, "Se trata más bien de una castración del género en el orden simbólico y no del sexo, como expresión del deseo en el reino de lo imaginario" (44). Yet the text itself makes no mention of any sort of symbolic rebellion against gender roles; indeed, when L. Iluminada finishes cutting her hair, she sits on a bench and takes a necklace out of her bag in order to drape it around her neck, thereby reaffirming her place within the symbolic order of femininity (*Lumpérica* 226).

esquinas de la plaza y acurrucan allí sus cuerpos protegidos unos contra otros, sus cuerpos frotados que, en el bautizo, intercambian apodos en sus poros famélicos" (18). As we can already begin to see in this allusion to the exchange of nicknames that results from the rubbing amongst the *pálidos*, self-caressing and fondling in the plaza illuminated by the *luminoso* never ceases to tie back in to the baptism. Indeed, we go on to read that, "Como bautizada [L. Iluminada] se celebra entre ellos, mientras sus propias manos se acarician en profundidad perdiéndose entre sus huecos" (19).

Although a connection between the rubbing and the baptism is firmly established in the first chapter, in the fifth chapter it becomes clear that the "coqueteo ritual de las piernas abiertas" (121) is, in fact, part and parcel of the ritual itself. In other words, the baptism can only accomplish its goal of naming through the combination of the light of the *luminoso* shining down on the participants' auto-erotic spectacle. As L. Iluminada recounts, "'Si yo misma presté mis piernas, púbicas, vellosas, mis pobres piernas lapidadas y así me saltó mi verdadero nombre propio al montar ese vello púbico en las nalgas, llamándome la luz...'" (121). Examining L. Iluminada's enunciation, we learn that in order to receive a new name, this baptism requires the aspirant to perform a particular kind of self-sacrifice. He or she must offer up her body, put it on display, and once on stage, seek pleasure before all who are present to witness this event. Only then, when these conditions have been met, will the *luminoso* bestow new names and identities on the homeless vagrants who have gathered there.

Finally, the established concept of baptism, even when removed from the discourse of religious purification, suggests a rite of admission -- if not into a church, then into a social group (in which case the initiate might be 'baptized' with a nickname),

or even into language itself (in Spanish perhaps more so than in English, *bautizar* is also to give a name to something). This begs the question, to what are L. Iluminada and the *pálidos* being admitted in this ritual baptism by light? The *bautizo* occurs in the public plaza, rather than in a church, and there is no priest, nor anyone else, present to officiate. The novel insists that this ritual will give them 'life' -- a particular form of 'life' that in *Lumpérica* is defined as a specific kind of identity: "su identificación ciudadana" (15). Yet how can these marginal (indeed, nameless and practically faceless) subjects gain any form of 'civil identification' or 'citizenship' when the government is decidedly absent for the baptism?

In this very first scene, *Lumpérica* suggests the existence of an alternative form of 'citizenship,' a citizenship that is not defined by the State so much as by the physical space of the city. As we have seen, "su identificación ciudadana" is bestowed on L. Iluminada and the *pálidos* by light. Yet we are told that the plaza is illuminated by two different forms of light: "en la plaza se conjugan dos tipos de engranajes eléctricos: por una parte el asignado al cuadrante y por otra, el que se desliza del luminoso; esa luz que se vende" (17). It is significant then, that it is not the light controlled by the government, the street lights that form part of the city's regulated illuminating grid, that baptizes L. Iluminada and the *pálidos*, but rather it is the flickering, commercial light of the signpost that will perform the baptism. The signpost represents a tiny space that no longer falls under government control: it is a space that has been sold to an anonymous company, which in turn attempts to use the space to sell a product.⁹⁴ We do not know what the

⁹⁴ While I believe that is important that it is the commercial light, and not the government-regulated light, that baptizes L. Iluminada in order to give her citizenship, I do not read this as a privileging of the market or a neoliberal order, so much as simply

luminoso advertises, however -- instead, our knowledge is limited to the effects of its lighting, as experienced by L. Iluminada through the course of a night spent in the plaza. "Se encendía y apagaba a intervalos. El color que primaba en su leyenda era el rojo filtrado desde los neones que, caligráficamente, formaban cada una de las letras, enmarcadas en otros neones de diversos tonos rojizos. Tenía dos leyendas y así, al apagarse una, en la encendida siguiente era otra la que aparecía" (219). Thus, we discover, the signpost does not have a single, stable message, but rather constantly blinks between two distinct messages. Dual in nature, the signpost is, moreover, imperfect. As L. Iluminada notes, "en verdad ese aviso tenía una falla: la altura del edificio sobre el cual descansaba. No era suficiente y por eso los neones no se diluían como debieran sino que, como los rayos del sol, pintaban su alrededor" (222).



one way in which a tiny space within the city could be removed from government control in Pinochet's Chile. In many of her essays, as well as in novels such as *El cuarto mundo* or *Mano de obra*, Eltit clearly articulates her distrust of the dominance of the market in Chilean society. Indeed, even here in *Lumpérica*, the commercial light is not entirely reliable because, as the narrator tells us and we will explore in greater detail shortly, the light the *luminoso* emits also sells itself (17). Many critics go so far as to read the *luminoso* itself as threatening, as an instrument of the state that in combination with the filmic camera works much like Foucault's panopticon to ceaselessly illuminate and record L. Iluminada's every action. Without taking such an extreme reading, I will argue that although the *luminoso* cannot be completely trusted, its commercial nature does allow for a tiny, liberating crack to form in the State's regulation of the city.

Figure 2.1: One of the most famous blinking neon signs in Santiago, this advertisement for socks by the company Monarch presides over the Parque Bustamante, and was declared a National Monument by President Sebastián Piñera in 2010. Photo courtesy of Camilo Silva, from the website, "UniDiseño."

Imperfect, flickering at its own will between two messages, the commercial signpost is a product of the city itself: it visually reminds us that the city, once planned and built, takes on a life of its own, and in spite of all (human or State) attempts to control the city, cracks, imperfections, and subversive zones will always sprout up in new places, just as weeds incessantly appear in the gaps of a sidewalk. Within the repressed space of Santiago, the signpost rebels against regulations. "Estaba programado para la noche," we are told, "y su programación no tenía la racionalidad de Chile que paraba su ritmo nocturno" (220). Therefore, although the State has declared a curfew over the city's population, causing the rest of the city to empty out and go dark each night at sunset, the *luminoso* subversively continues to shine its erratic light over the public plaza from dusk to dawn.

This act of rebellion is anti-grammatical, suggesting a new rationality for the city.⁹⁵ While the rest of the city shuts down each night, the *luminoso* assumes the power to illuminate, warm, and touch L. Iluminada and her homeless companions with its light. It instills them with 'life' by inscribing them with its rays, and this 'life' the signpost bestows upon them is somehow related to naming and to citizenship. As the light falls on

⁹⁵ In this, the content of *Lumpérica* matches its form. The French semiotician Algirdas Greimas theorized that narratives tend towards a, "fundamental semantics and grammar" in order to create meaning (Greimas 65). *Lumpérica*, however, is anti-grammatical on multiple levels: for instance, it ruptures the semantics of language within the text, in sentences such as, "Muger/r/apa y su mano se nutre final-mente el verde des-ata y maya y se erige y vac/a-nal su forma" (*Lumpérica* 171). At the level of narrative, the novel refuses to obey the grammar of plot by offering up contradictory, overlapping, juxtaposed, and misaligned fragments of action. Finally, here in the plaza, *Lumpérica* presents us with a place that exists outside of the grammar of the city, a syntax that requires night to be void of both activity and light.

L. Iluminada and the *pálidos*, the shadows of its letters inscribe their bodies with an endless series of names: "El luminoso no se detiene. Sigue tirando la suma de nombres que los va a confirmar como existencia" (15). Significantly, the *luminoso* does not just choose any name to bestow upon them, but rather, "en plena autonomía, los llama con nombres literarios" (17). Of course, the citizenship offered by the *luminoso* does not exist in the social reality of Santiago under dictatorship; it can only exist in fiction -- in the invisible space of the plaza at night, or the pages of the novel itself. Nonetheless, the signpost becomes a sovereign subject with the agency to name the homeless others who fall under its light as subjects of the city -- to name them as subjects of the city *of literature*. By giving L. Iluminada and the *pálidos* names that belong to the cultural sphere, it is able to give them an alternate, "identificación ciudadana" (15). Moreover, by giving them literary names -- names known to readers, names that conjure up a million different stories -- the *luminoso* also gives each of them a past, and therefore an identity. This alone is enough to affirm their existence beyond the immediate present of this set-apart moment of the baptism ritual, even if when the sun rises they will officially remain marginal (no)bodies who have slipped through the cracks and been disowned, ignored, or otherwise continue to go unrecognized by the State.

Yet this ritual renaming process is not so straightforward as a first reading might lead us to believe. Although I have suggested that the *luminoso* bestows identity upon each of the vagrants performing in the plaza, there is simultaneously something perverse and infinitely sad about this practice. To begin with, the *pálidos* are dependent on a commercial light for their existence: the *luminoso* is, "esa luz que se vende" (17). While this means that the light is a sovereign domain that does not (presently) belong to the

government, it will also continually sell itself to the highest bidder. Moreover, it turns those whom it baptizes into new products meant to be offered up for sale. We see this clearly in the wording that describes the protagonist in the moment of her baptism, when she is, "Sumida en el éxtasis de perder su costra personal para renacer lampiña acompañada por ellos que, *como productos comerciales, se van a ofertar en esta desolada ciudadanía*" (16, emphasis mine). *Desolada* is indeed the precise word that epitomizes the form of citizenship offered by the commercial light of the *luminoso*. This baptism does not just name the *pálidos* as citizens of the city, but more specifically, as citizens of the city as marketplace. As literary names are bestowed upon the homeless, they are made purchasable by other (legally named, State-acknowledged) citizens of the city -- just as their literary namesakes can be purchased, in the form of books, by readers. The baptism, therefore, is a ritual that will allow the vagrants to come into official, named existence, but to do so only as objects meant to be sold and subjugated to others.

If this alternative form of citizenship is such a dismal option, then we must ask why the *pálidos* nevertheless choose to participate in the *luminoso*'s baptism. Here a tension emerges that will not, or cannot, be fully resolved within the novel. L. Iluminada and the *pálidos* must ask themselves, just as the reader in her own turn must, if it is better to not exist at all, or to exist as a commercial product. As marginal subjects who have been cast out of society as undesirables, this baptism does have a strong enticement. Even if it means they will become nothing more than merchandise, once they have been baptized by the commercial light the *pálidos* will, for the first time, belong to a system: to the system of the marketplace. Moreover, as products for sale there is the implication that they will even be *wanted* by some member of the system. This sense of belonging and

desirableness, however marked by objectification, may be appealing to a group whose existence neither the government nor the rest of society will ever acknowledge in any other way -- who, indeed, are of such little import that the State does not even bother to clear them out of the public plaza or punish them for not obeying curfew.

This baptism, then, instills the anonymous group of homeless vagrants with identities that are at once literary and commercial. Yet, as we shall see, the naming continues to be complicated beyond its implication of a rebirth into the marketplace: after all, accepting a new identity as dictated by the *luminoso* necessarily means giving up another. This issue is only hinted at in the first scene of the novel, in the words, "Sumida en el éxtasis de *perder su costra personal* para renacer lampiña" (16, emphasis mine). As readers, we might wonder exactly what constitutes L. Iluminada's 'personal scab,' yet given that we see her in ecstasy in shedding it, we continue reading on without much further thought. Then, a page later, we are presented with the hypothetical image of L. Iluminada lying in the cold, "expuesta en forma horizontal *después de haber perdido el nombre propio*" (17, emphasis mine): like a corpse, she lies on the ground, her body now disconnected from her name. As the novel progresses and the setting becomes more and more clear -- L. Iluminada performs in a plaza located somewhere within the repressed city of Santiago de Chile, while elsewhere in the city someone is always being tortured, someone else interrogated⁹⁶ --, these two initially ambiguous descriptions of the baptism take on deeper connotations of the *death* of an identity, a death inexplicitly yet almost certainly related, or directly due, to State oppression.

⁹⁶ In the second chapter we read, "Es verdad, alguien a esa hora estaba siendo interrogado" (*Lumpérica* 64), affirming just how commonplace of an act interrogation had become in Santiago under dictatorship.

Later, in section 4.4, the issue of a lost name (read: lost identity) returns. Significantly, this section is titled, "De su proyecto de olvido." This 'project of forgetting' consists of the protagonist telling us that parts of her body are twins to the body parts of an enigmatic Other. "Las uñas de sus pies son a mis uñas gemelas irregulares con manchas rosáceas veteadas por líneas blancas" (101). Often interpreted as a mirror imaging between the protagonist, L. Iluminada, and the author, Diamela Eltit, this fragment ends, as we shall see, by implying an association with the author's (modified) name. In her reading of this episode, however, Sara Castro-Klarén recalls the images of the protagonist being tortured from the preceding section 4.2, "Para la formulación de una imagen." In so doing, she contends that what we see in fragment 4.4 are the two splinters of the protagonist's being after her mental, spiritual, and corporal unity has been shattered by torture: "In 'Su proyecto de olvido' *Lumpérica* writes of the odd familiarity with a body strangled from *oneself*. [...] Torture obliterates the unified subject. What is felt are splinters, remnants, ruins of a body which along with the debris of language floats up into the pages of this made, fictional body" (45). The text permits both of these interpretations -- the identification between protagonist and author, and the splitting of the protagonist's psyche -- without offering enough evidence to support one over the other.

Building on Castro-Klarén's understanding of this section, I would like to propose that "De su proyecto de olvido" can additionally be interpreted as an extension of the baptism ritual, a ritual that might be performed to move into a new identity as an attempt at escape from a traumatic past. As literary critic and trauma theorist Cathy Caruth explains, "The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or

they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (5). Here, then, *Lumpérica*'s protagonist looks over and catalogues her body -- her toenails, her toes, the soles of her feet, her arms, her palms, her hands, her waist -- only to see that each part of her is still identical to her old vision of herself, and is, therefore, a symptom of the impossible, traumatic history of her past. In an attempt to separate her sense of self from previous trauma, then, she endeavors to view herself through new eyes, to reassemble each of these parts into a body that she can make belong to a new name, to a new identity with no connection to her past.

Moreover, reading "De su proyecto de olvido" in the light of the initial baptism of the first scenes of the novel allows us to decode the enigmas of the fragment's final three sentences, in which we are told that, "Su alma es ser L. Iluminada y ofrecerse como otra" (105). Following this line of reasoning, these words now reminds us that deep within her soul this homeless woman has a name, as well as a past, i.e., a 'personal scab.' She is L. Iluminada, even if we are never given access to more than a sliver of her identity. After all, what does the 'L.' stand for? Is she "La Iluminada" ("The Illuminated," perhaps hinting at a connection to Christ), or as Dierdra Reber implicitly suggests, "Lumpen Iluminada" ("The Lumpen Illuminated")?⁹⁷ Perhaps she is "Libertad Iluminada" ("Liberty Illuminated"), in that she disobeys State orders and insists on her right to public expression, on the liberty to perform in the plaza throughout the nighttime hours of

⁹⁷ This formulation appears once within the text itself, in Scene 11 of chapter 9's "Escenas múltiples de caídas" (*Lumpérica* 203). In her analysis of this chapter, Reber casually employs this variation as another way of referring to the protagonist. In her words, this chapter returns, "temáticamente a la escena de la caída fílmica del primer capítulo en que L. Iluminada se hiere a sí misma. Esta vez, la 'lumpenluminada' (195) – nombre que recalca su marginalización ejemplar– tiene conciencia de poder resistir 'la convencional toma' (191) al proteger el espacio de su propia enunciación..." (Reber 460).

curfew. More likely, the 'L.' refers to some other personal mark that, much like her past, we cannot know. Regardless of her first name, then, we are told that this L. Iluminada, whomever she might be, must offer herself up as someone else. To complicate matters further, however, the following sentences go on to declare: "Su alma es no llamarse diamela eltit / sábanas blancas / cadáver. Su alma es a la mía gemela" (105).

How are we to make sense of this? Her true identity as reflected in her soul, we recall, is encapsulated by the name L. Iluminada. Yet the identity of her soul is equally defined by the name that she is not. In essence, her identity simultaneously lies in being L. Iluminada and in not being 'diamela eltit': in order to be L. Iluminada, she must give up any claim to being diamela eltit.⁹⁸ Being L. Iluminada and not being diamela eltit, however, in this sentence is intimately connected to the image of death: it means that her soul (or her identity) is also concealed (or, perhaps more accurately, buried) by the anonymous white sheets that cover up a (that is, her) dead, empty body (i.e., past). What is more, within this matryoshka of names forsaken in order to take on other names, we cannot know which (L. Iluminada? diamela eltit? if any) is the original name, "el nombre propio" of our protagonist.

⁹⁸ Curiously, while there is a forward movement in which L. Iluminada and the *pálidos* seek out naming, Eva Klein suggests that there is nonetheless a distinct power in the unnamed. Klein poses this possibility as she discusses the link between L. Iluminada and the author's name, where she views the lower case "diamela eltit" as transforming a proper name into a common noun: "Puesto que el nombre propio implica un lugar preciso en la sociedad y una pertenencia disciplinada a la cultura y es, además, la marca significativa de la inscripción en la ley del padre, su irrespeto, su transformación en nombre común, infinitamente repetible y copiable, es la celebración del anonimato y la posibilidad de perpetua transformación." In Klein's reading, then, by relinquishing her proper name, L. Iluminada/diamela eltit is able to escape the law of the father and therefore play in language without being restrained by the rules of the linguistic system.

If we understand this entire section as a continuation of her baptism under a new name, and with the insight of Castro-Klarén's reading, then the riddle of these final lines may begin to crack open for us. Having been victim to torture at some previous point, the protagonist now takes part in a nightly naming ritual or baptism in the public plaza. 'L. Iluminada' and 'diamela eltit,' then, are simply two of the possible names/identities our protagonist could have embodied previously, or has chosen to assume in the present. We cannot know if either of them might have been the original name, but only that taking on one name implies that she must abandon all that was associated with the previous name. Indeed, we see this clearly in the first chapter, in which we are told not only that the protagonist must give up her proper name and her past in order to be baptized, but also are also informed that the baptism itself is, "El sacramento en la plaza, la borradura del pasado" (33). Moreover, we are told that in her preparations for her participation in the ritual, L. Iluminada, "*Ha vaciado su mente de toda memoria y ahora construye y planifica sólo con los pálidos como referente: plasmados en su futuro*" (20, emphasis mine). Consequently, I contend that what L. Iluminada hopes to accomplish in the initial baptism ritual of the novel is not simply to take on a new name, nor a washing of her sins, nor even an initiation into an alternate citizenry. Rather, her goal is to discard her proper name as well as her personal history: to expunge her 'personal scab,' the scars of her traumatic past. In *Lumpérica*, therefore, naming rituals are meant, ironically, to perform a deep erasure of identity.

Even so, a traumatic past cannot easily be erased. As Caruth contends, "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (4). 'Possession' by trauma can manifest itself in many forms: following a traumatic experience or event, Caruth

reports, "there is a response, sometimes delayed, [...] which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors" (4). Accordingly, throughout the novel *L. Iluminada* will be repeatedly possessed by symptoms of her traumatic past, in spite of the baptism ritual she repeats night after night in the attempt to supplant her past by taking on new literary names and identities. Unable to shed her 'personal scab' of traumatic history, and in response to the constantly arising symptoms of her trauma, *L. Iluminada* will perform other rituals meant to inscribe her with alternate identities. Indeed, the baptism ritual itself is imbued by, and gives way to, behaviors that form part of yet another ritual performance: that of *L. Iluminada*'s self-mutilation.

2.5 Cutting = Writing the Body

A first hint of a violent edge to the baptism ritual gleams through in the description of *L. Iluminada*'s face in the first paragraph: we are told that the electric light of the *luminoso* fractures her face into angles, slowly enveloping her entire body, "pero el rostro a pedazos" (15). This sharp imagery triggers us to wonder why the light falls differently on her face, shining off of it obliquely as though it were a mirror broken into myriad pieces. This mystery is soon resolved, as we discover that during her baptism *L. Iluminada* convulses in the center of the plaza, and not only do her hips move frenetically in the light, but the ecstasy of the baptism also leads her to repeatedly slam her head into the ground: "su cabeza colgante se golpea por tantas sacudidas contra el pavimento" (16). For it turns out that the very act of naming is itself tinged by violence. When *L.*

Iluminada is presented with all of her possible identities, they have, "aflorado por desborde -- clavando sus puntos anatómicos" (17).

Names, then, do not simply fall from the *luminoso* onto L. Iluminada with the ethereality of a ray of light, but rather they *pierce* her body. Yet why should the naming be painful? Perhaps the answer can be found in the kinds of names offered by the *luminoso*: not only are they literary names -- they also reflect "los cánones de la identidad" (22), a 'canon' of identities which is meant to 'neutralize' the individual characteristics of each body. In other words, these canonical identities belong to an officially recognized (recognized by whom, we must ask -- by the authoritarian government?) list of lifestyles and characters, a mainstream of identities that will, of course, exclude peripheral and marginal subjects. Consequently, the imposition of any such identity onto the body of a homeless vagrant such as L. Iluminada or any of the *pálidos* will result in an inherent violence, as the very center of their being must be destroyed in order to assume this new identity.

Nonetheless, there is a side to this baptismal violence that is also self-imposed, and even desired by the participants. For instance, as the letters from the *luminoso* write themselves on the bodies below it, thereby 'piercing' them with new identities, L. Iluminada's fervor for the naming leads to self-induced, "Convulsiones con las uñas sobre la piel: el deseo [*su deseo*] abre surcos" (18). Likewise, in section 1.2's continuation of the baptism scene, self-injury is described as one of L. Iluminada's 'decisions' in the plaza.

Estrella su cabeza contra el árbol una y otra vez hasta que la sangre rebasa su piel, le baña la sangre su cara, se limpia con las manos, mira sus manos, las lame. Va hacia el centro de la plaza con la frente dañada -- sus pensamientos -- se muestra

en el goce de su propia herida, la indaga con sus uñas y si el dolor existe es obvio que su estado conduce al éxtasis. (25)

This act of brutal self-injury is described as preparation "para la posibilidad de rehacer la bautizada" (27). Consequently, it remains explicitly linked to the baptism into the *luminoso's* alternate *ciudadanía*, as if it were a test L. Iluminada must pass in order to prove herself worthy of obtaining its citizenship. Once created, L. Iluminada will reopen the head wound with her own fingers (26), then violently scrape her face on the ground to make it bleed anew (30). From these actions, we are told, she acquires another identity (26). Now, however, it is not merely the literary identity cast onto her by the light of the *luminoso*, but an identity that has been literally carved -- and thus written -- onto her body. L. Iluminada has been marked.

Not yet complete -- "No han terminado la ceremonia" (41) --, however, the baptism by injury forges ahead under new terms in section 1.4. The *pálidos* are now huddled into a corner of the plaza, where they have lit a small fire in an attempt to stay warm in the cold of the night. At first L. Iluminada stays away from the fire, observing the *pálidos* from the center of the plaza, where she remains beneath the light of the *luminoso* that has just bestowed its citizenship upon her. But when she eventually joins the group, she finds herself hypnotized by the flames of the fire, yet reluctant to go on with the ceremony. Whereas the blows to her head were inflicted of her own will, as her own decision as opposed to a scripted act required by either the ceremony or camera, now she is impelled by the other residents of this alternate city/state, the *pálidos* to push herself further. Hesitant, L. Iluminada feels that the fire -- indeed, the entire plaza -- has turned threatening.

Nevertheless, she goes on: "Solamente para otorgarse nueva identidad acude a la tradición y como una cita, frente a la fogata acerca su mano, adelanta su mano sobre las llamas y la deja caer encima" (42). Though it is the *pálidos* who this time have goaded her to this act, they do not look at her as the hand burns, changes color, and blisters. She announces that she is thirsty, but then, "Los apodos recaen sobre ellos con propiedad. Ya no hay rastros de sublevación: Vaya bautizada" (42). In this case, then, the injury L. Iluminada experiences in burning her hand is still, in the final instance, self-imposed: she chooses to follow through with this act in order to inscribe herself with a new identity. Yet here it appears that L. Iluminada's sacrifice primarily results in new names that fall upon the *pálidos*, rather than herself.

Although this segment of the baptism is mixed with terror, L. Iluminada is nonetheless reassured that, "así la quemada te dará nueva cicatriz que le forjará el cuerpo a voluntad" (43). Indeed, her body has been literally forged, the shape of her hand re-sculpted, her fingerprints melted away. Furthermore, the identity that has fallen on her after the burning of her hand has warped her speech. She opens her mouth to speak, but what comes out is unrecognizable. The burn, "Ha desorganizado el lenguaje" (44), and for the first time in the whole of this extended baptism ceremony, L. Iluminada truly appears to be different, "Parece más bien una muda [...] Enferma parece" (44).

I would like to suggest that behind all of the self-injury involved in the baptism ritual there is a deeply significant link between the desire to take on a new identity, and the need to unify body and voice. In point of fact, the commentary to the third scene declares that what is here being filmed is the coincidence of four instances, the first of

which is "El luminoso que va a regir esta nueva identidad," and the last is, "quemada y palabra como unidad" (45).

What does it mean for L. Iluminada's burned body and her words to become a single unit? A key to this question, I believe, can be found in the commentary of the second scene, just after L. Iluminada has opened a wound in her head. There it is affirmed that, "...no es la herida la que causa el grito, sino exactamente a la inversa; para herirse era preciso el grito, todo lo demás es un pretexto" (30). Perhaps we can understand this idea of it being the shout that causes the wound rather than the wound that causes the shout by falling back on Castro-Klarén's suggestion that L. Iluminada is indeed the victim of torture portrayed in section 4.2. As we have already seen, torture divides its victims. In point of fact, "The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it" (Scarry 49, emphasis in the original). Destruction of the voice in torture is accomplished through the inducement of physical pain: "Physical pain [...] is language-destroying" (19). Thus, as a survivor of torture now finding herself beneath the 'spotlight' of the public plaza, L. Iluminada performs self-injury in order to reunite her body and her voice. When she burns her hand and shouts, that *grito* may be an incomprehensible *balbuceo* or babble of sound, but it is nonetheless a speech act that gives voice to her pain, thereby reclaiming her body and recognizing it as hers.

As a result, these rituals of self-injury perform two polar effects on L. Iluminada's identity: they allow her to reclaim her past experience, to reunite her voice with her tortured body -- to solidify her own identity. Yet they simultaneously inscribe a new, other identity on her body as they carve 'identification marks' or scars, physically altering

her appearance. Not just affecting her body, however, these rituals of self-inflicted wounding also change her mental identity in a very fundamental way: they disrupt her linguistic system, making her attempts to speak emerge in an unfamiliar, incoherent language.

In essence, *Lumpérica's* rituals of self-injury work to both reinforce original identity and to instill new identity, in a reflection of the inherent paradox of L. Iluminada's position as marginal subject and victim of a trauma so raw she cannot yet express it. This paradox is reflected in a remark she makes just after smashing her head against the tree, but before burning her hand: "Si yo misma tuve una herida, pero hoy tengo y arrastro mi propia cicatriz. Ya no me acuerdo cuánto ni cómo me dolía, pero por la cicatriz sé que me dolía" (25). From these words we realize that, although her body already bore the scars of past trauma, those scars are the only part of L. Iluminada that are capable of bearing witness to the violence she has experienced. The rest of her cannot testify to how much or in what ways the inflicting of those wounds hurt, even if the resulting trauma does nonetheless manifest itself in behavioral symptoms. Consequently, through the self-injury rituals, L. Iluminada attempts to (re)write her body's narrative: by inflicting her own scars onto herself, she takes control of the story that her body tells, of the past it visually speaks without her ever saying a word to others.

Despite allowing L. Iluminada a sense of agency over the narrative written on her body, both reading and writing this scarified story is, nevertheless, quite complicated. Accordingly, this complexity is revealed in chapter 8 of the novel, titled the *Ensayo general* -- literally, 'the dress rehearsal.' Cyclical in nature, this chapter narrates a curious kind of rehearsal, only to indicate on its final page that the rehearsal itself has not yet

begun. I propose that what is rehearsed in the pages of the *Ensayo general* is, perhaps, a variation of the ritual of self-injury that L. Iluminada will perform throughout *Lumpérica*, making the 'dress rehearsal' a final run-through before assuming her next identity.

The chapter begins with a photograph of the author, her arms covered in bandages, and then proceeds with three short verse poems, E.G. 1, E.G. 2, and E.G. 3. Each of these segments employs no more than two lines of text, yet their importance is highlighted in the way each occupies an entire page. I argue that the E.G. verses prepare the reader to understand what follows in the rest of the "Ensayo General" by, as Robert Neustadt has eloquently put it, 'shredding' language (Neustadt 47). E.G. 1 opens, "Muger/r/apa y su mano se nutre final-mente el verde des-ata y maya se erige y vac/a-nal su forma" (171). While I will not list off all of the distinct meanings that emanate from this sentence here⁹⁹ -- indeed, I would suggest that it is not even possible to list *all* of them -- it is important to note the subtlety with which E.G. 1 hints at the subject of this chapter without making whom we are reading about explicitly clear. The only character who has been described as a "mujer rapada" in *Lumpérica* is, of course, L. Iluminada. Reading closely, then, we are presented with the image of L. Iluminada's hand, and the idea of cutting -- both literally, in terms of cutting one's hair (*rapar*), and figuratively, in the way words are being cut on the page by the unexpected punctuation of slash marks and hyphens.

⁹⁹ For a close reading of the *Ensayo general*, particularly of this first line, please refer to Neustadt's *(Con)Fusing Signs and Postmodern Positions*, pages 47-54.



Figure 2.2: The cover to Ronald Christ's English-language translation of *Lumpérica* featured the photograph of Eltit's scarred arms that prefaced the "Ensayo general" in the first edition.

What follows the three E.G. passages is the analysis of a series of six incisions that have been cut by her own hands into the burned skin of L. Iluminada's arms.¹⁰⁰ We read that the first line has been cut horizontally across the left arm. This cut, however, is only, "marca, signo o escritura que va a separar la mano que se libera mediante la línea que la antecede [...] En cambio -- hacia arriba -- se vuelve barro, barrota, barroca la epidermis" (174). Immediately, then, it becomes clear that self-injury is equivalent to writing: each cut is a sign or mark to be read as it turns the skin into clay (*barro*), erases previous identity (the skin is also *barrota*, sculptible like clay, or *borrota*, blurrable), and

¹⁰⁰ To use Neustadt's turn-of-phrase, the text here consciously presents the reader with a "(con)fusion" between the protagonist, L. Iluminada, and the author, Diamela Eltit, as photographed with bandaged arms. Without losing sight of the importance of this tension, I will focus my interpretation of the *Ensayo general* as a reading in which L. Iluminada is the primary subject of the chapter, as suggested by the first words of E.G. 1. To read a thorough discussion of the interplay between text, photograph, video performance (*Maipú*), and Eltit's own live performance in a Santiago brothel, please see Neustadt's chapter, "Diamela Eltit: Clearing Space for a Critical Performance."

reframes the body as difficult and highly adorned -- yet potentially grotesque -- literature (*barroca*).

Although we have already been told that every cut is a 'mark' or 'sign' written on the body, we soon learn that each incision can only be read in conjunction with the others: "Definir aisladamente los diversos cortes resulta un subterfugio por cuanto ellos se articulan en la medida que cada uno va iluminando el recorrido de los otros" (183). Thus, when the third cut fails to follow the emerging pattern of horizontal lines inscribed on the arm by the first two cuts, it is interpreted as, "una errata o bien el intento por cambiar de recorrido" (176). Neustadt astutely observes that the 'error' of the third cut, "recapitulates the experience of reading *Lumpérica*. As soon as one begins to follow a narrative line (L. Iluminada in the plaza, a film of her, an interrogation, an evaluation of the film and so forth) the novel interrupts its progression and changes direction" (51). Like the plot of the novel itself, then, the cuts of the *Ensayo general* suggest meaning only to immediately call that meaning back into question. The reader thinks she begins to spy a plot, only to be confronted with an entirely new narrative mold that refuses to conform to the recently unraveled precedent. Chronologies can be worked out, yet none can be confirmed. Is the first cut the rehearsal, or is it the third cut? Does the *Ensayo general* begin after the sixth cut, when, in the plaza, the fingers of L. Iluminada's right hand, "sostienen la pequeña y afilada hoja. Sin mirarse la acerca hasta su cuero. Se va a iniciar el Ensayo General" (*Lumpérica* 186)? Or, more simply: upon looking at the three initial gashes imprinted on L. Iluminada's arm, how can the viewer know which wound came first? Which pattern are we to believe was the intentional one, which the erroneous? To quote Neustadt once again, "How does one read a cut body as text" (51)?

Before entering this labyrinth of corporal signs to be deciphered, E.G. 2 warns us, "Anal'iza la trama=dura de la piel; la mano prende y la fobia *d* es/garra" (*Lumpérica* 172). Though like E.G. 1 this sentence again can -- and, indeed, should -- be read in many ways, I suggest that perhaps the most significant meaning for the reader is quite literal: to analyze the plot (*trama*) of the skin is hard. So hard, in fact, that it can be tra(u)matic: "la mano prende y la fobia *d* es/garra." L. Iluminada's hand catches on fire (*prende*) during the baptism ritual, or grasps the blade with which she means to scarify her skin in the *Ensayo general*, and fear tears (*la fobia desgarra*) at our hearts. In this one line, *Lumpérica* poses a vital question to the reader: do we even want to be able to decode what is written on L. Iluminada's skin? Are we afraid of what we might learn, should we choose to fully understand the narrative told by the marks carved into her arms? The cutting ritual performed in the *Ensayo general* implicates the reader, calling the reader to action: "Se da una línea para que se actúe" (177). What remains to be seen, as I will argue at the end of this chapter, is exactly how it is expected that the reader will act.

Returning to the cuts themselves, to L. Iluminada's solo performance of a self-injury ritual in the center of the plaza, we have established that the lacerations turn her body into a text that is difficult -- if not impossible -- to decipher. If we cannot read the marks with any certainty, however, perhaps we can still attempt to understand how they work. Because it is clear that they do *work* on the body: the cut from the photograph that opens the *Ensayo general*, for example, is compared to a *surco*, and, "Como surco se vuelve trinchera o parapeto bajo el cual se protege o se esconde una actuación" (178). A *surco*, of course, can refer to a furrow in the earth -- an opening dug into the ground for the purpose of planting seeds, and out of which springs new life. It can also signify a

deep wrinkle in one's skin, which develops either as an emotional reaction to something ('She furrowed her brows with concern'), or simply as a result of a lifetime of living ('The elderly woman's face was creased with deep furrows'). In all three of these cases, the *surco* hides something past or future, "se protege o se esconde una actuación." Given the semantic fields in play in this description of the cut, what action or performance could the *corte* as *surco* protect or hide, and how could this *actuación* relate back to L. Iluminada's self-injury ritual?

I contend that the work performed by the incisions is twofold. In analyzing the first slash, we are told that, "El corte debiera verse como límite. El corte es el límite" (177). It is a limit that, "rompe una superficie dada" (177), which 'breaks' a certain surface, establishing itself as a border. Given that the surface broken by the cut is L. Iluminada's skin, and we already know that her skin is the blank page on which the lacerations work together to inscribe a personal narrative, then the cut as limit severs the story we are allowed to read from a past L. Iluminada does not want told. Thus, the first function of the *corte* is to block off (to hide, *esconder*, or bury in her skin) some part of L. Iluminada's history -- to not write, to leave blank, some of her identity.

On the other hand, the *corte*, whether it is the first or third or sixth, stands apart as it marks her skin, affirming its own presence as scarred record. It is "apenas un grafiti en la piel del brazo que entra en él oblicuamente a la manera de la firma sobre un cuadro" (179). Here we see that in this ritual, L. Iluminada's body becomes a canvas, a painting in progress, and while the incisions in her skin paint us only those parts of the narrative that she needs or wants to tell, they are also a tiny identifying feature meant to attribute authorship. As a result, the cuts do not simply limit our access to L. Iluminada's previous

story or identity, but they posit her as the sole composer of her personal narrative. By performing this cyclical and repetitive ritual of self-cutting in the *Ensayo general*, L. Iluminada razes her flesh to block off her past while simultaneously taking control of the way her story is told in the present.

While the ritual of self-injury is certainly the main action and image to emerge from the *Ensayo general*, there is one further element that is significant in the way it links this section to another category of ritual performed by L. Iluminada in the plaza. This emanates in the linguistic choices made in the very first three lines (of the chapter's text, as opposed to those in L. Iluminada's skin): there, we read: "Muger/r/apa y su mano se nutre final-mente el verde des-ata y maya se erige y vac/a-nal su forma" (171); "Anal'iza la trama=dura de la piel; la mano prende y la fobia *d* es/garra" (172); and, "Muger/r/onda corp-oral Brahma su ma la mano que la denuncia & brama" (173). In these cuts of language, Eltit connotes association between: the noun *mujer* (woman) and the verb *mugir* (to moo or bellow); *bacanal* (a wild, orgy-like party) and *vaca* (a cow); *mano* (hand) and *garra* (claw). Physical -- and sexual -- body is present in all three sentences: *mano*, *se erige*, *forma*, *piel*, *corp-oral*. Finally, the first and third of the E.G. verses conjugate alternate religions, from Maya to Hinduism (in the name of Brahma), while the second and third hint at the 'religion' of repression: fear (*fobia*) and denunciation (*denuncia*). As a result, these three sentences condense the four main ingredients of a much less studied yet nonetheless significant ritual that occurs between *Lumpérica's* sunset and dawn: ingredients that include the animal nature of the human being, sexuality and corporality, religious rituals that depart from the State's official discourse of Catholicism, and the possibility of some kind of alternate citizenship.

2.6 Of Rodeos, Graffiti, and Shearing

Chapters 3, 4.5, and 4.6 may well be the least commented sections of *Lumpérica*, perhaps in part because they appear to radically break from any sense of a plot the reader may construct as he or she pieces together the rest of the book. Whereas most of the novel seems to form non-concentric yet nonetheless perfect circles around a realistic (albeit subversive) frame story of a homeless woman performing in an abandoned plaza in the midst of a dictatorship, chapters 3, 4.5, and 4.6 push the boundaries of the real and move into the realm of the fantastic. They do so by portraying the same protagonist, L. Iluminada, who continues to create a spectacle in the public plaza, yet no longer appears to be fully -- or perhaps better put, simply -- human. Indeed, 3.1 begins with an ambiguous image of the protagonist complaining -- but her complaints emerge in guttural noises rather than in human words. "Se queja en tonos que cunden la rajadura de su aura" (69). For a moment, it is her voice and not her body that is the center of the spectacle, and she poses, "con la voz estirada hasta la plaza para erosionarla de auditivos toques" (69). The 'erosion' that her voice performs on the plaza at the start of this chapter has more to do with the borders and limits of reality and emotion than with the soil or the physical space of the square. Namely, the plaza ceases to be a connecting space in the city of Santiago and becomes a corral, the scene of a bizarre rodeo. Here, the lumpen observe and propel an aberrant ritual which will make a spectacle of L. Iluminada, revealing the animal facets of human nature.

As the first line of the chapter suggests and 3.2 reaffirms, something in L. Iluminada's aura, in her physical state or being, has been broken: "Raja su aura de nefasto augurio" (69). As her aura shatters, we continue to hear her voice, but that voice emerges in less and less human forms. Indeed, we hear her, "Mug[ir] en verdad como una vaca lo hace, muge y se arrastra como en serie de parto, pero se toma la garganta y todavía saca más de su sonido" (69). Her voice echoes as the bellow of a cow, yet when her body appears, we see it fall, "y no se levanta o tal vez reptar una vez más: se arrastra y deja su baba tendida a la par de los caminos de la plaza/ marca un recorrido" (69). Snake-like, we watch L. Iluminada salivate and drag herself around the plaza-turned-corrал, yet cow-like she moos only to then neigh and whinny, and later still, to roar. How is the reader to make sense of what is happening here, or to whom it is happening?

I interpret this chapter as presenting us with a new ritual, a ritual that begins with the dislocation of identity. No longer recognizable, L. Iluminada has become a hybrid being: she is part imprisoned woman (imprisoned within the four corners of the corral/plaza), part ever-changing animal. Her body will constantly molt, first casting off its human form to assume a snakeskin, then shedding the snakeskin to become a cow, next elongating its limbs and growing a mane to morph into a mare, and alternately condensing itself into the smaller bodies of a mule, a dog, a cat, even a frog, a bird, and an insect. "La cosa que ha llegado a ser" (69) is both sexual -- "enaltece el anca / se mama" (70) -- and animal -- "No ceja en su envanecimiento al traspasar a otra especie y a otro estado animal" (71). Beneath the plaza lights, this hybrid being gallops around the plaza-turned-corrал, acutely aware of being observed. "Crece el esfuerzo, adelanta el cuello, hace ímpetu -- mayor intenso seductor -- para el que la observa que se engancha

de otra manera" (69). Her spectacle now aims to seduce -- and upset -- the spectators, and she will push her body to its limits in her attempt to implicate them in her ritual.

While her voice pierces her listeners ("Perturba al que la oye en tan sonados trotes o tropelías que se condiciona" (69)), her body not only changes shape but also pierces itself. Beneath the plaza lights we see scratches that correspond to her own nails lining her haunches, leaving behind, "huellas rosadas [que] establecen marcas de fuego como propiedades" (70). She moos, then gallops around the plaza perilously, smashing her body into the stone benches, injuring her hooves, sweating and thirsty. Much as we saw before in the *Ensayo general*, this ritual beckons (the now multi-form) L. Iluminada to varying degrees of self-destruction. This time, however, the wounds she will inflict on herself revolve around the heedless velocity of her gallop and the spurs of the lumpen, whom she tempts to ride her. Indeed, the success of the ritual may depend on whether or not they mount her: "por el frío anhela fusión lumpérica [...] sin la montada su facha es incompleta" (72). Sooner or later she must give in to the spurs of the lumpen if she wishes to complete her animal state. Yet, rebellious, she contends that if mounted she would not follow their orders -- instead, "desobedecería siempre el mando de las otras piernas, para dejar que sus patas marcaran un camino distinto al que la montara. Hasta que por fin sintiera en sus costados la ira de las espuelas, el penetrar implacable del acero y sólo entonces pudiera relinchar, mugir, bramar, sentir la herida" (73). This, too, is familiar: she must be wounded in order to obtain her (now animal) voice. Only having articulated the pain of the wound will she be able to feel -- and perhaps work through -- the pain that haunts her.

Yet another leitmotif from the baptism and the very first pages of the novel resurfaces here: whether she takes on the shape of a cow, mare, snake, or mule, L. Iluminada appears under the light of the *luminoso* -- the commercial signpost -- "ofreciendo su producto" (74). Her product, of course, is herself: her own flesh is up for sale. As she runs full-throttle around the plaza, she is aware that she is preparing her flank and her ribs for the spurs, and, "anhela entonces su cabalgadura para entroncarla con la marca a fuego, dueño tiene de sí su propia marca, señas particulares su trazado. Por eso debe cumplir su rito cuando ha devenido, el pelambrera estado, a ser llamada para dejar el anca cruzada por esos animales arañazos" (78). In other words, the scars left by the spurs will serve a dual purpose: they will wound her, causing her to feel and articulate pain, but they will also brand her. In so doing, the markings created by her wounds denote identity in a very specific form: that of possession. Here, then, identity once again is tied to belonging -- and, in a sense, to citizenship, even if that citizenship must always consist of a state of subservience to another.

Moving forward, the problem becomes: who will get to mount her? L. Iluminada's decision will be critical, since it is not simply a question of a single ride but rather of the mark that her body will bear, of the powers to which she will allow herself to be domesticated. Believing the lumpen's desire will overwhelm them and they will drive her too far, she considers enticing the electric light instead. "Porque si la luz se condensara sobre su cuerpo, cualquier forma tomaría entonces, la más vil" (80). Although she would be willing to do anything in order to have the light be the one who mounts her, she is simultaneously jealous of the spell-casting powers of the *luminoso*, which, "ha robado su única presencia [la presencia de L. Iluminada] ante los pálidos escudados tras sus letras"

(81). As a result, although she is drawn to the light, she would nonetheless turn it off, stealing its energy for herself in order to, "llegar de pleno a la autonomía del refulgir sin impedimento, sin más luz que la de sus propios cueros" (81). Of all the shapes she can take on, however, each and every one of them is animal -- none of them are light. Thus, she must decide: who will ride her?

Regardless of the answer, she is aware that two distinct rides will take place: one belonging to, "el jinete propio y el otro que la apunta con la cámara" (83). Like the baptism, this ritual too is filmed -- indeed, from L. Iluminada's perspective, it is actually *repeated* as the camera becomes a second rider. This second rider's take, however, is unlike the first, who -- whether *lumpen* or *luminoso* -- will attempt to dominate her completely. By contrast, the (anonymous) cameraman will insist upon leaving L. Iluminada only in partial focus. He will refuse to complete her identity by zooming in on her flanks, rather than taking a wider shot that would allow her whole body into a single frame: the camera's lens devoted, "no a la bestia entera, [sino que] sí, a su ijar" (83).

Consequently, the ritual carries two underlying tensions. On one hand, L. Iluminada is confronted by a choice between the scars of the lumpen's spurs or the burning of the electric light as one or the other rides her. On the other hand, while the camera imposes dis-identity upon her, refusing to capture her face or her heart, either the *lumpen* or the *luminoso* will make her assume a mercantile identity in the form of her new owner's brand. Unable to choose between the *lumpen* and the *luminoso*, she stalls, wishing she could, "simplemente estar allí en la plaza como cualquiera [...], borrar la expectativa de la cámara, evitar el roce de la escena" (84).

Nonetheless, the ritual beckons her, demanding her participation -- and she herself feels that to go back without following through on the mounting would be to "fallar su empresa" (74). Her percussive gallop around the edges of the plaza/corral now competes with the metallic clanging of the lumpen as they kick their spurs, and the ritual momentarily becomes a dance. When the dance ends, L. Iluminada cedes, allowing herself to be branded: "cárcel y cordel bajado que el anca raja al punceteo de su febril marca, el fuego, el hierro que caliente va a trasponer su hegemonía" (86). Once marked, however, she doesn't resign herself to her identity, but rather renews her effort to continuously change shape! "Más se deforma el animal: la marcan de nuevo y es su intento de soltar las patas/ la esquilan en sus procedimientos, ruge la bestia" (87). A back-and-forth struggle ensues between the owners who would weigh, price, and sell the animal, and the beast herself, who refuses to let her flesh become goods, even if it is true that, "No tiene más nombre que el de su clase" (87). The chapter closes by telling us that the mare has fallen to her ankles, and reminding us that, "si la yegua se cae/ si el animal se quiebra es inservible" (87).

Throughout this chapter, then, we witness the performance of a ritual that attempts to balance a complicated tension. The multiple animal shapes taken on by L. Iluminada sequentially manifest her desire to be observed, sized up and priced, ridden, scarred by spurs, and branded by the iron mark of a new owner. Yet they also reveal a deep-seated need to be in control, to disobey orders, to decide whom -- if anyone -- will ride her, and even to hurt herself, thereby reducing any commercial value she might have at the moment of sale. The ritual alternates between imposing identity on L. Iluminada -- in the form of the brand -- , and escaping from identity as she changes again and again,

moving from one animal shape to another. To belong, or not to belong? This is the central question this ritual plays out. How far will L. Iluminada go to obtain an identity? At what cost will she accept citizenship? Will she willingly submit to someone else's rule in order to bear his name? Or will she insist on remaining free, even if that choice will force her to remain forever on the move, living only in the shadows and peripheries of society?

"Para la formulación de una imagen en la literatura," chapter 4, initially seems to drop these questions all together, returning instead to the image of L. Iluminada in her human form sitting on a bench in the plaza with her head in her hands, and circling through scenes of torture in a hospital room. Yet the narrative thread has been left incomplete, and the outcome of the ritual remains undecided -- until it is taken up once again in section 4.5. Here, L. Iluminada appears "cracked open" (106) once again, and morphs once more into 'animaloid' form. Immediately, she asks, "¿Qué raza más bien posee el animal? ¿Qué padre? ¿Qué nombre le inscribieron?" (106). It turns out that the mark previously branded onto her flank remits not only to her "carta ciudadana" (107) -- i.e., where and to whom she belongs --, but it also names (or decides?) her parentage and her race. Even before she can read her own mark, the hybrid L. Iluminada feels that what "ese potro indecente," her father, has inscribed upon her body is not simply a name but "su ciudadano lastre." Significantly, therefore, citizenship -- a state so highly sought out in the baptism ritual of the first chapter -- has now become a 'burden' or an 'anchor' that weighs on her, that has been imposed against her will. The specific form of this encumbrance has to do with the 'father' to whom she has been sold. It is, she tells us, "El padre [que] cuida la raza" (107), and he is so determined to maintain their breed that he will abuse his 'children' to promote the lineage: "L'incesta el apellido" (107).

Language breaks under the oppression of the discovery of incest as a requisite of citizenship: letters fall off words, nouns become verbs, while verbs disappear. Her initial reaction is to reject the name of the father as written on her flank: in 'spasms of revolt,' "Se yerra su primera escena del nombre, los alias de su padre se los echa probados/ el argentino /el otro" (107). She feels that she has been robbed of her previous "orfandad curiosa," indeed, that the incest was the "robo de su alias/" (108). In response, her body morphs again, this time from horse to dog. But she remains tied down: although she is no longer marked by the brand of her father's name burned into her flank, she has become a fine bred dog who finds herself fettered to a bench in the plaza by her own umbilical cord. When she tries to move, the cord threatens to choke her. The implication is clear: her so long desired birth into citizenship has become the very restraint that would kill her if she continues to assert her independence. She must choose between maintaining her identity as a direct link between her body and her lineage -- which has now manifested itself as a literal *lastre* or leash; or, should she wish to be free, she must break that link, recognizing that in doing so she may well be also choosing to give up her "carta ciudadana." She pauses to consider the possibility of being hung by her own umbilical cord, but in the end decides to cut it. As a result, section 4.5 closes with her, "sangra[ndo]/ la perra está en período" (108): she hemorrhages her identity as citizen of a fine breed.

Her action was so spontaneous, however, that L. Iluminada will be granted one more chance to be sure she hasn't made a mistake. Section 4.6 opens with the hybrid L. Iluminada no longer appearing as a mare, but now in the form of a dog of "fina raza." She wears a metal collar that opposes her to the anonymous street dogs that swarm the plaza,

announcing her affiliation with a breed and an owner. The pack of mutts is attracted to the scent of her (pure) blood; thus, while she is held back by a leash, "la perra fina es perseguida por los quiltros" (109). Soon she notes that whether she wants to roam the plaza or needs to run away from the attacking mutts, she is pulled back by the leash, her agility limited. She wonders, "¿Pa qué cosa la lleva la correa? ¿qué hermandá se establece" (109)? In the end, this leash so finely worked, "elaborada en talabartero oficio" (109), turns out to mean not protection so much as, simply put: "collar pa la perra/ señó pa ella/ amo/" (109). In other words, she is a marketing piece for her owner -- and the only relationship established by the leash, she realizes, is one of ownership rather than kinship. Her finely worked leash is not designed to adorn; rather, it subjugates her to her master.

Pondering this situation, she asks herself whether or not she herself could mix with the stray dogs. At the same time, the pack of mutts begins to circle her, singing to her in, "ladridos, ruidos que semejan / quena o trutruca" (110): in a bark/song that resembles Andean flutes and Mapuche trumpets. A new ritual has begun in which the song and movement of the stray dogs whirl around the well bred, leashed L. Iluminada, bidding her to participate in a shamanistic dancing performance, in the "danzante machitú." This dance summons a *machi*, a Mapuche witch doctor who appears clad in silver and leather and who, as a mother, "se encumbra pa los quiltros" in order to bring to all of the dogs, whether mutt or of a fine breed, "sonidos de reunión" (110). As the dogs all dance around her, yet another Mapuche figure is called in: the *toqui*, or the head of state during times of war. The ritual, then, is a war-dance in which L. Iluminada, *la perra fina*, battles between choosing the identifying marks of her silver collar and leash, or

relinquishing her claim to a distinguished identity -- to her citizenship in what has proven to be an abusive fatherland -- in order to mix in with the mutts and stray freely -- though unnoticed and uncared for -- through the streets. In the end,

la perra entrega su collar de plata:
el toqui al señó/ al amo al trompa
danza su trutruca en festival
la perra también amaestrada danza
la quiltra
sin collar de plata
¿pa qué vaga? (111)¹⁰¹

By learning the Mapuche dance, her decision is unambiguous: she has elected to intermingle with the mutts. She willingly gives up the silver collar that had marked her as special -- although, simultaneously, as someone else's property -- in order to become a simple *quiltra* herself. As just another anonymous stray, the mutt L. Iluminada begins to claim her own, alternative identity: an identity that may not be recognized in any official sense, that does not grant her citizenship into any state or lineage, but that does allow her to roam the streets as she pleases. The ritual, however, does not close with her choice, but with a question: *why* does she stray? I argue that this is a question posed to the reader who has observed the entire ritual, from L. Iluminada's shape changing to her branding as a horse and her leashing as a dog. It is a question, I suggest, that implicates the reader in the ritual process. On one hand, it reminds the reader that she has become a witness to L. Iluminada's choices and the circumstances that lead to them; on the other hand, it demands that the reader make sense of the dog's verdict. It asks of the reader, would you stray? Or would you choose to hold on to your name?

¹⁰¹ I maintain here the non-conventional yet poetic, almost dancing, layout of the words on the page, as they appear within the novel itself.

In sum, the rodeo ritual turns out to be both the inversion of and the parallel to the baptism at the start of the book. Whereas in the baptism L. Iluminada is a willing participant, opening herself to the names rained down on her by the light of the *luminoso*, in the rodeo she both craves and yet also attempts to flee from the names that would be imposed on her by the lumpen and the master-owner-father figure. In this case, rebellion against domestication (and domination, commercialization, even genetic pre-determination) eventually wins out over the desire for citizenship and identity. Yet we must remember that the dual-nature of the identity offered in the baptism itself is clear, as well: while L. Iluminada may come to 'exist' as a 'citizen' by taking on the names written on her by the *luminoso*, she is also aware that in so-doing she turns herself into a commodity that will be put up for sale. The main difference is that in the rodeo, she consciously rejects the name, preferring instead to take on poverty, marginality, and anonymity.

I submit that all of the rituals we have seen up until now are the performance of variations of a single act: that of writing identity on, or erasing identity from, the body. There are two other ritual acts in *Lumpérica*, both of which either continue or extend this trend. The first occurs in section three of chapter five, "Quo Vadis" (or, "Where Are You Going?"). This fifth chapter presents, "una imagen completamente distinta para el que la lee" (115) in a number of ways: in the first place, it begins to rain in the plaza, and slowly it becomes evident that on this night the *pálidos* will not appear to watch L. Iluminada perform. "Está sola y por eso su actuación es nada más que para el que la lee, que participa de su misma soledad" (117). Thus, the chapter begins by drawing the reader more deeply into the narrative. Up until now, the reader has only been a third party

spectator, a bird's eye observer of the larger scene in which L. Iluminada was observed by first, the *pálidos* and second, the camera. Here, by contrast, a direct connection is established that informs the reader that she can no longer pretend to be separate from the action. Indeed, L. Iluminada's performance in 5.1 is put on for the benefit of no one other than the reader herself. A second distinction, moreover, can be observed when the ritual performance of 5.3 begins two nights later: there, the body on which identity will be written will change. Now, the plaza becomes L. Iluminada's *página* (117), and as such, it is on the body of the city that she will attempt to inscribe identity. Finally, although L. Iluminada will initiate the ritual in 5.3, she will not be its principal performer: on the contrary, this time it will be the *pálidos* who will be the most important participants.

At the start of section three of chapter five, we encounter L. Iluminada still wet from the rain of the previous two nights, lacking in energy and appearing to be sick. We learn that, "Le restan pocas proyecciones lanzada al borde de la esterilidad" (128). If her performances are to go on, then, she must find a way to draw other participants into them -- she will have to convince others to take on some of her ritual actions in order to make them part of a greater narrative that will not disappear when she is no longer able to stage them herself. Yet, although the *pálidos* have shown up on this third rainy evening, "no se comprometen en sus miserias, como si sus historias particulares se desengancharan de esas imágenes" (128). Thus, when L. Iluminada begins the performance of this night's particular ritual, there is an aggressive quality to her actions: her gestures will demand the engagement of the *pálidos*.

Moving to the center of the plaza where her movements will be perfectly illuminated by one of the lampposts, she lifts her fingers and "caligráficamente escribe en

forma imaginaria -- como los niños -- 'dónde vas' con letras mayúsculas y con la mano completa borra lo escrito. Lo ensaya de nuevo en el centro de la plaza, curvada sobre el cemento ocupando para sus letras espacios. Ensaya sus palabras. Los otros la observan desde sus lugares" (130). In her carefully repeated rehearsal of the words she intends to write, her act becomes rigidly structured, the sacred nature of her communication revealed. Finally, she is ready, and one of the *pálidos* steps forward just long enough to offer her a piece of chalk. As she bends over once again, putting chalk to the ground, enormous letters materialize which simultaneously cover and interrogate the plaza with the phrase, "Where are you going?" This phrase, she thinks, "le permite una ordenación nueva" (130). Whereas David Kertzer has already told us that ritual actions often serve to organize social groups, here L. Iluminada's graffiti organizes or reorders not social groups but rather social *space* in the specific form of the plaza. Her interrogative graffiti now defines everything that composes the plaza -- its benches, lampposts, grass, dirt, trees -- by where it is in relation to everything else, by where it is going and what it is doing. The plaza's identity is changed, its space rewritten.

Instinctively, the *pálidos* feel this change, and, unable to resist, emerge from the shadows. They circle the writing, attempting to read, "desde todos los puntos posibles" (130). In so doing, the graffiti comes alive: the *pálidos*, "aplanan y elevan las letras por su ubicación. Ella se sienta en el banco de la plaza para contemplarlos. Lee sus lecturas aprobando todo" (130). The dynamics of this symbolic communication are worth pausing to examine: in the first place, the *pálidos* emerge from the plaza's periphery in order to walk around the words that have been written across the ground. As they move, the phrase changes -- thus, they become co-authors of the graffiti, in that they are responsible

for making the writing mean something by choosing a point from which to read it. Simultaneously, the graffiti's original author, L. Iluminada, now sits back to 'read' the readings that the *pálidos* give to the words she has written. Meanwhile, from the pages of the text itself *Lumpérica*'s reader reads about L. Iluminada 'reading' the readings-in-motion of the *pálidos* as they move about the page that is the plaza. In this way, not only the *pálidos*, but also the reader, have been drawn into her ritual of writing and reading the identity of the plaza.

Clearly, L. Iluminada has succeeded in eliciting the engagement of others in her ritual performance. For the *pálidos* in particular, her graffiti in the plaza has introduced, "un corte en sus actitudes" (131). Yet, is it the change in attitude she had hoped for when she began to write? Perhaps not: L. Iluminada's words completely occupy the center of the plaza, causing the *pálidos* to feel, "expulsados hasta los bordes de la plaza como notas al margen" (131). Once the initial magnetic pull of the letters on their bodies wears off, the *pálidos* stop moving, positioning themselves so that, collectively, their feet cover her entire message. Reclaiming the center of the plaza, however, is not enough: they desire to be more than simply co-authors of meaning in the newly defined plaza. Avoiding her eyes, the *pálidos* begin to rub their feet against the ground, wiping the letters away in yet another ritual: a "baile improvisado" (131) of erasure. L. Iluminada herself gets pulled into this dance, until only traces of smudged white chalk remain where the letters had been. Yet the *pálidos*' message has not been clearly communicated. Thinking that perhaps her writing had been too hasty, her penmanship too fragile, L. Iluminada begins her ritual again. She repeats even the rehearsal stages before writing her phrase a second time, "en

proporciones aún mayores, dejando grandes blancos entre letras" (131).¹⁰² Although the phrase now appears in perfect calligraphy, the *pálidos* remain in the peripheries, rejecting her writing. Understanding that they continue to renounce her newly mapped version of the plaza, she kneels down, using a corner of her dress to erase the writing once more. The roles reverse: where before the author approved and confirmed the readings of the *pálidos* from her observing post in the periphery, now the *pálidos* observe the author in order to "confirma[r] la borradura" (132) of L. Iluminada's writing on the plaza.

Only now does the performance of the true ritual begin. L. Iluminada solemnly approaches each of the *pálidos*: "a cada uno le pasa un trozo de tiza que va rompiendo entre sus dedos. Con la cabeza baja lo hace y ellos de la misma manera la reciben, pero cuidando de no rozarla" (132). The sacred nature of this passing of the writing instrument has been noted by many scholars: Weintraub, for example, speaks of the "sacral character of its delivery and reception by the *pálidos*"; Ronald Christ refers to this scene as "the eucharist of the chalk" (224). Fragments of lime in hand, the *pálidos* now repeat L. Iluminada's earlier actions, imitating her rehearsals of each word spelled into the air, erasing imaginary mistakes. Finally ready, the collective writing begins, and "como profesionales empiezan a tender su propio rayado en el centro" (*Lumpérica* 132).

Although the *pálidos* now author the words that are written on the plaza, the phrase does

¹⁰² For a reading of the white spaces and gaps in *Lumpérica* 5.3 (the "grandes blancos entre letras"), see Scott Weintraub's article "Beyond Allegory? Reading *Lumpérica*'s 'White' Theater of Linguistic Cruelty." Following Derrida's concept of quasi-transcendentality in his study of mimicry in Mallarmé, Weintraub suggests that, "A detailed analysis of section 5.3 of *Lumpérica* as 'exemplary' opens up the possibility of a close reading of the textual spaces and 'whitenesses' that postulate themselves as marks and re-marks upon the uninhabitable, written (and writing-) space of the plaza, in order to speak on the impossibility of representing empirical reality linguistically."

not change. Upon finishing, "le dejan el lugar de la lectura [a L. Iluminada] y por fin el 'dónde vas' es ella misma en el centro de la plaza" (133).

The ritual has nearly reached its end. In the handwriting of the *pálidos*, the plaza asks of L. Iluminada: "Where are you going?" By way of response, L. Iluminada lies down on the ground, rolling and rubbing her body over the letters. "Se imprime el humedecido traje, hasta la macilenta cara se imprime" (133) -- she imprints herself with the white of the chalk, covering her gray dress with the mirror image of the words, "dónde vas." Thus, now her body, too, bears the words collectively written in the plaza: she is baptized anew, along with the plaza itself. This writing-turned-baptism closes by repeating an element of further bodily writing in the form of self injury: as she rolls on the ground, impressing the chalked words onto herself, the uneven cement lacerates L. Iluminada's back.

As a result, this ritual of writing in the plaza ties together fragments of L. Iluminada's other ritual acts into a single performance, the goal of which is to extend the ritual beyond her own body. This is in keeping with the definition of ritual behavior itself, as anthropologist Terence Turner explains: "The distinctive attribute of ritual action is that it objectifies itself in a way intended to produce an effect beyond the limited frame of the ritual action as such" (Kreinath 235). Indeed, we soon learn that the effect L. Iluminada hoped to accomplish beyond the frame of the ritual action itself was to ensure that, "toda esa plaza al fin pudiera almacenar la tinta para repetir otros escritos" (*Lumpérica* 133). In essence, her action establishes the plaza as a space to be written, and in which other writings *will* happen in the future. Moreover, she assures that in these future writings, the *pálidos* will not simply look on from the margins but will emerge

from the shadows to take center stage as the authors. Finally, this initial writing also leaves behind a mark which will produce an effect beyond the ritual writing performed by L. Iluminada and the *pálidos*: much like the question that lingers at the end of the rodeo ritual at the end of 4.6, their first collective writing will remain until the rains wash it away, asking of the city and its inhabitants (and, more enduringly, of the reader): where are you going? As the busy residents emerge from their homes and cross the plaza on their way to work, the writing will ask them to question their destinations, their daily decisions, indeed, their identities. "Where are you going?", in this sense, functions as a seed question, leading to, "What will you do when you get there?" and to, "Who are you?"

This performance of collective writing that results in the questioning graffiti that greets plaza passersby is but one of the two other rituals in *Lumpérica* that continue L. Iluminada's experiments with ways to write and erase identity on/from her body. It is not until the last chapter of the novel that we witness the final ritual: to use Ronald Christ's terminology, this last ritual is a 'self-shearing' (*E. Luminata* 226), an act that holds the key to piecing together the chronology of the ritual behaviors contained within the novel. The chapter begins with L. Iluminada, in fully human form, sitting on a bench in the plaza, with only a paper bag for accompaniment. Night has not yet fallen and there are still a few people crossing the plaza as the vendors pack up their stands. She sits on her bench and watches as the sky darkens, the plaza lights illuminate, and the workers hurry home. The plaza empties, and now alone her eyes fixate on the blinking message of the *luminoso*. There, she slowly uncovers a code among the illuminated letters, a code found by uniting, "las letras más distantes; las encendidas y apagadas, los cruces de ambas, los

signos que se construían en el medio, los aparentes vacíos, el intercambio entre mensaje y mensaje" (*Lumpérica* 222). Fascinated by the newly deciphered messages, she stands up and moves about the plaza, letting the *luminoso* imprint its letters upon her body, in a quieter, solitary version of the baptism ritual from the first chapter. In this case, however, the baptism is incomplete: as she tries to pick out the sign that falls over her, L.

Illuminada realizes that, "le era imposible precisar con certeza una combinatoria exacta. Que dos, tres o cuatro letras podrían caer si ella se paraba en un lugar preciso" (223).

Since the light will not clearly inscribe her body with a single name and identity, L. Illuminada returns to the bench and, with great care, opens the paper bag that has accompanied her all night. Reaching in, she pulls out a small looking glass, which she uses to examine her reflection from every possible angle, moving about the plaza to change the lighting of her mirror image. Finally, she replaces the mirror in the bag and takes out a pair of scissors. Raising her hand, she first cuts a single lock of hair, then goes to the center of the plaza, where, "parada bajo el alero del luminoso comenzó a cortar sus cabellos" (225). The cutting that she proceeds to perform in the plaza 'spotlight' of the *luminoso* is severe: she breathes deeply, sweating from the effort, and even before finishing, "A pedazos aparecía su casco blanquecino" (225). This final ritual is performed for an audience of one: it is just her, L. Illuminada, cutting her hair under the *luminoso* in a vacant plaza. With no one around to witness her sacrifice, L. Illuminada cuts off her past in the form of her hair. When she returns to the bench, the sun is beginning to rise. She studies herself in the handheld mirror, then takes one last item out of her bag. It is a necklace, which she drapes around her neck. So adorned, she sits and observes the plaza, which begins to fill with the movement of the earliest risers. Her stillness contrasts with

their hurried steps. The novel closes by telling us, "Todos ellos iban a alguna parte y los ruidos crecían en el momento en que el día ya estaba totalmente despejado" (227).

Although everyone else is headed somewhere, L. Iluminada remains seated on the bench at the end of the novel. She does not get up and incorporate herself into the daily life of the city's other citizens, but rather she remains on the fringes of the plaza, watching as the workers go by. Indeed, this ending is not an ending at all, but rather links us directly back to the first chapter, in which L. Iluminada had already been reborn "lampiña," or without hair, during the baptism. More explicitly still, the commentary listing errors of the first take mentions "Los tijeretazos de su pelo" (24), snips of hair that otherwise only appear in the final chapter. What we see in *Lumpérica*, then, is a cycle of rituals that is performed over and over again, with only the *pálidos* as occasional witnesses, each night when the plaza empties out and the *luminoso* turns on. Each morning, however, finds L. Iluminada sitting on a bench, perhaps bearing new scars or less hair, but otherwise unchanged, ever-distant from the society that moves about her. As readers, therefore, we must ask ourselves *why* L. Iluminada remains in this cycle. What is the social conflict these rituals attempt to resolve, and why are they incapable of resolving it?

As I have already suggested, the performance of ritual behavior in *Lumpérica* reflects a societal violence and the resulting social trauma that L. Iluminada and the *pálidos* desperately try to assimilate through ritual acts. Indeed, Aurea María Sotomayor goes so far as to declare *all* of L. Iluminada's performances in the plaza are an attempt to, "eliminate, throw out, a painful past that subjects [her] to poisonous bondage. [She] purge[s] a putrefact memory" (23). Within the novel, it is clear that this putrefact memory

and poisonous bondage refer to the repressive nature of an authoritarian Chilean state, although no direct reference to Pinochet's government is made. Moreover, in its historical context, *Lumpérica* was published in 1983, in a moment when the violence of the dictatorship was in no way a fact of the past but rather a very present, on-going reality. In her prologue to the 2008 reprinting of *Lumpérica*, Nelly Richard paints a clear image of the social trauma that underlies the novel:

El régimen militar de Augusto Pinochet instauró una cultura del miedo que impregnó de violencia el tejido comunitario, obligando los cuerpos y la ciudad a regirse por los dictámenes de la prohibición, la exclusión, la persecución y el castigo. Este es el adverso trasfondo en el que se recorta la fuerza irruptiva y disruptiva de la novela *Lumpérica*. ("Prólogo" 7)

Within this scene of violence, then, L. Iluminada, sometimes in the company of the *pálidos*, spends each night in a public plaza, performing a series of ritual actions that respond to a need to adapt to and in some way comprehend the brutal atmosphere of oppression and suspicion that surrounds her. From this temporal and psychological point, so firmly rooted inside the repression of dictatorship, however, the performance of these ritual behaviors only barely manages to begin to *address* the trauma -- never mind *resolve* it in any way. Perhaps this is because ritual, "is pre-eminently concerned with the health of the corporate body, with securing balance and harmony between its parts, which are groups, categories, roles, and statuses, rather than individual men and women" (*Drums* 270). In other words, ritual is a societal tool, which does indeed take, "cognizance of the individual, but it does so by prescribing that he subordinates his individuality to his multiple social roles" (*Drums* 270). Thus, when *Lumpérica* presents us with L. Iluminada's repeated performance of rituals in the plaza in an attempt to deal with the social disunity and trauma that has resulted from state violence, we cannot be surprised

when the ritual is unable to affect lasting change. In order to accomplish its goals, the ritual would require the participation of the full community, or, to use the words of Turner, the entire 'corporate body.' In this case, however, it is only one individual -- a ragged, homeless woman -- who performs the rituals, and a small handful of undesirables who occasionally observe and participate.

Yet there is another reason that, in spite of the repeated performance of these rituals, no catharsis is reached, no transition achieved, nor is the social conflict they attempt to address ever resolved: simply put, the trauma is too new. L. Iluminada and the *pálidos* are living a social conflict as it happens -- indeed, in the second chapter the narrator informs us that somewhere in the city someone is being interrogated, if not tortured, as we read (*Lumpérica* 64). In her extensive work in the field of trauma studies, Cathy Caruth discovered that trauma, or the traumatic event, "is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it" (4). Thus, although as readers we witness the clear undercurrent of state violence running throughout the novel, (surfacing, for instance, in the chapters of interrogation, the images of torture, and even as simply as in the curfew that causes the plaza to be abandoned by all but the homeless at dusk),¹⁰³ the psychological effects of that violence cannot be articulated from within the present moment of the trauma. From their standpoint, in the midst of a fierce, on-going trauma, L. Iluminada and the *pálidos*

¹⁰³ Sotomayor reads evidence of the repressive atmosphere into further details, finding it alluded to in the very setting of the novel. The public plaza, she declares, is, "a public urban space originally designed for repression and passivity. The plaza configures state power in an architectural disposition that, paradoxically, attempts to envelope and to contain marginality" (24).

grope at rituals that may help them get through the night. Yet the trauma itself that they face remains unnamable -- indeed, unknowable -- throughout the novel.

To summarize, then, the rituals performed in *Lumpérica* are not capable of producing a lasting catharsis for L. Iluminada or the *pálidos*, nor do they allow for a transition from one stage or condition of life to another. Rather, they are cyclical in nature. Each night as the plaza empties variations of these rituals will be repeated over and over, yet each daybreak will find L. Iluminada unchanged in social status, still sitting on a bench, alone, in the same plaza. For this reason I would like to return to Richard Schechner's terminology to suggest that the rituals we witness in *Lumpérica* are 'limonoid' rituals -- rather than 'liminal' rituals, or even, as Sylvia Tafrá had suggested, rites of passage, both of which, "permanently change who people are. These are transformations. [By contrast,] Liminoid rituals effect a temporary change -- sometimes nothing more than a brief experience of spontaneous communitas or a several-hours-long performance of a role. These are transportations" (Schechner 63). The rituals performed by L. Iluminada and the *pálidos* each night have the power to transport their participants beyond the repressive context in which they live -- but only for a little while. When the rituals end for the night and the sun rises, the homeless remain homeless -- and in spite of their endless repetition of baptisms under the light of the *luminoso*, nameless as far as society is concerned.

Schechner eloquently explains that there is an intimate relationship between the performance of ritual, the maintenance of memory, and the complications brought on by abrupt or violent changes in life. As he puts it, "Rituals are a way people remember. Rituals are memories in action, encoded into actions. Rituals also help people (and

animals) deal with difficult transitions, ambivalent relationships, hierarchies, and desires that trouble, exceed, or violate the norms of daily life" (Schechner 45). Taking this thought and applying it to *Lumpérica*, I contend that the rituals that fill Eltit's first novel are performed by L. Iluminada partially to escape the surrounding violence for a little while, but also as an attempt to help L. Iluminada form, embody, and carry forward, memories of what cannot yet be named -- to take control of the trauma that continues to possess her. In the section that follows, I will analyze the role of performance in the next step in this process of memory-formation as it appears in Eltit's second novel, *Por la patria*.

Before moving on, however, I want to briefly return to the role of the reader in deciphering the performances *Lumpérica* offers beneath the light of its *luminoso*. While I have just pieced together the semblances of a legible storyline, we must recall that *Lumpérica* is, truly, more event and action, than narration or coherent plot. In calling itself a novel, *Lumpérica* questions the articulations and codes we as readers take for granted in reading -- in other words, our own rituals of reading. In essence, *Lumpérica* asks us to experiment with a new mode of reading, turning the act of reading itself into a performance: it stages the act of reading as a new writing, and both acts as theater. Each occurrence of reading this novel cannot help but be unique, as each reader struggles to parse broken language and conflicting variations of plot into a syntax that works for her. Consequently, the present chapter stages my own reading of *Lumpérica* as a contribution to a community of readings in construction that, I hope, will only continue to grow.

Chapter 3

On Trauma and *Desmemoria*: Performing to Survive in *Por la patria*

3.1 State Violence and the Erasure of the Past

I have argued that *Lumpérica* presents the reader with a still-present, on-going trauma, a trauma that the protagonist, L. Iluminada, attempts to escape through cyclical repetition of transportational -- though not transformative -- rituals. In her book *Mourning Sex*, Performance Studies scholar Peggy Phelan describes trauma as 'untouchable,' expounding that, "When I say trauma is untouchable, I mean that it cannot be represented. The symbolic cannot carry it: trauma makes a tear in the symbolic network itself" (5). This experience of a shredded symbolic network is at the heart of *Lumpérica*, and is echoed in the many repeated forms of *cuts* that resound throughout the novel: in the cuts between levels of narration, or those between filmings; in the cuts between words and into language, onto the skin of the protagonist in the "Ensayo general," even those between L. Iluminada's multiple animal states. A solitary figure who each dawn finds herself still on the edges of a society paralyzed by state violence, L. Iluminada cannot articulate the ordeals she has experienced, nor can she affect changes over her living conditions. Instead, she performs a series of rituals endeavoring to un/write her identity: alternately working to sculpt herself as someone of value -- a

citizen -- in this newly market-focused society, or to erase the marks of undesirability that have already lead her to suffer. Her focus, however, cannot go beyond an immediate construction of self, a construction that either way must relinquish her past in order to create the possibility for a future. By the end of the novel, I find myself wondering: if, for Eltit, the performance of ritual can only offer an escape from on-going repression and violence -- an escape, moreover, which requires a denial of history --, what kind of *solution* might she envision to the question of how to live through the brutality imposed by dictatorship? Could, moreover, such a solution permit a survival that doesn't require the erasure of the past?

Indeed, ever since the coup d'état of September 11th, 1973, this issue of memory and *desmemoria*¹⁰⁴ has been at the heart of Chilean nationhood for Diamela Eltit. The subject appears again and again in Eltit's essays, as she explains that the dictatorship, “buscó erradicar una parte de la memoria nacional, porque entendió la memoria como un tumor extirpable” (*Emergencias* 30). While the government viewed memory as a cancerous growth that should be removed as quickly as possible for the sake of the nation's 'health' or unity, Eltit regards memory as essential to a people's dignity and vitality. As such, it isn't surprising that her second novel, *Por la patria*, centers on the question of how to maintain memory -- in both its individual and collective forms -- when faced by a culture of *desmemoria*. In this chapter, I will argue that amid the chaos and violence inflicted by an authoritarian state upon Coya, *Por la patria*'s mestiza protagonist, the performance of memory will become a tool for survival, allowing her to

¹⁰⁴ Not simply 'forgetting,' *desmemoria* is better translated to 'unmemory' or 'dismemory' - that is to say, it refers to an active disavowal of memory, which stands in opposition to the hazier loss of memory that passively occurs over the course of time, a process which we call 'forgetting.'

emerge from detainment and -- though still bearing the marks of trauma -- begin a new life.

Por la patria begins by relating the scene of Coya's conception and her consciousness of her parents' act of intercourse. Fast forwarding to set the scene, it depicts the struggle between Coya and her mother in the moment of her birth, and details the complicated tangle of incestuous relations between the protagonist and her parents that ensues throughout her adolescence. The novel then jumps to the night when, as a young woman, Coya's neighborhood in a city slum is raided for the first time. As the raids continue, they lead first to the death of Coya's father, and later to a psychologically shattering separation from her mother, who 'disappears' without a trace. Coya herself is also detained, and *Por la patria* proceeds to recount her prolonged internment in a prison camp, concluding with her release. Through all of this, Coya is pursued by Juan, an adolescent boy from the neighborhood who is obsessed with Coya and who will, eventually, come to act as her *contramemoria* (anti-memory). By going to work for the state, Juan will be able to constantly shadow her path, repeatedly demanding that she 'forget' the acts of brutality committed against her family in order to remodel her as an ideal citizen of the military *patria* in formation.

Here, I intend to unravel the roles played by trauma, memory, and performance in Coya's survival in *Por la patria*. My analysis will have two parts, the first of which offers a close reading of Juan's attempts to erase Coya's memory. Building on this reading, the second half of the chapter will reveal the ways in which performance allows Coya to recover her memories and invert the terms of her captivity. We shall see how performance upsets the power dynamics within the prison camp, stealing control of

prison discourse and spectacle from the hands of the guards and placing it in those of the detained women. In so doing, these performances become the tool that permits Coya and her friends to survive repeated episodes of torture, and eventually emerge from the prison camp to found what will be a new order.

3.2 Juan – or *contramemoria*

Juan makes his first appearance in the narrative in the underground bar run by Coya's father, in the midst of a spectacle of intoxication shared by Coya and her mother. Coya is unaware that it is the night of the first of the *redadas* (raids) in the neighborhood, and at the moment, Juan's presence seems inconsequential. He is a mere messenger-boy who passes on what he claims is an order from Coya's father. "Era Juan," Coya tells us, "quien me dijo que mi padre me mandaba estar en la casa" (*Patria* 24). In his very first appearance, then, Juan assumes the voice of (paternal) authority, and discovers that by doing so, he is capable of dictating Coya's actions. More specifically, Juan succeeds in confining the unruly Coya to a controlled, domestic space. Disoriented by Juan's message, Coya does go home, just as ordered. Thus, Juan conveniently steps into the triangle that is Coya's family, and separates her from her parents just before the *redada*.

As we soon see, this timing isn't coincidence, nor is Juan's participation in the sequence of events. When Coya departs, her mother remains behind in the bar. Shortly, however, from her inebriated state she tries to convince Juan that she doesn't feel well and that, therefore, he should therefore take her home, as well. Juan, however, refuses, instead informing Coya's mother: "...eres de mala clase y aunque tiñas la mesa te

quedarás al lado mío” (28). Looking up just at that moment, she notices a man wearing a uniform at the back of the bar staring fixedly at her, and who, upon catching her eye, exchanges a wink with Juan. ““Juan,”” she shouts, ““hijo de puta, estás vendido a los perros”” (29), as she realizes that Juan has sold them all out for the *redada* that is about to begin. At the same time, it becomes clear that he wants *her*, Coya’s mother, to be present for the ensuing turmoil. That is to say, Juan’s design required both Coya’s absence and her mother’s presence for the raid, in an act of betrayal that will only mark the beginning of his participation in the repression of the state.

Coya’s narration of the events of that night is disordered and confused; bits and pieces emerge over the course of several chapters. Her father manages to make his way home from the bar, but arrives gravely wounded. Nearly overcome by shock, Coya attempts to care for him, to offer him some comfort. Soon, however, the door is forced open, “...y sin que mediara vacilación alguna, le dieron el golpe de gracia a mi papá” (47). Witness to her father’s murder, Coya tells us that she didn’t miss a single detail of his death, “..como si fueran mis ojos el castigo y a mí el suplicio” (47). Coya is then forcibly brought outside, where a thorough registry of the neighborhood is being conducted. When she finally is allowed to leave, it is only thanks to Juan that she escapes further harm: “Sería inútil, resultaría una falsedad no asegurar que Juan me sacó de allí” (48), Coya confesses.

In the shadow of the still ongoing *redada*, Juan appears at Coya’s door to reset the bones that had been broken when she had been dragged out of her house. Juan’s benevolence in bandaging her wounds, however, belies his true motives. Standing over his patient, Juan begins to inform the weakened Coya of a different version of the day’s

events. In his revisionist history, Coya's father has *not* been murdered; instead, her *mother* is the root of the family's trouble. Juan calmly states that the reason Coya now finds herself alone is because her mother has run off with someone else, causing her father to leave town in her pursuit. Coya's wounds are also her own fault, Juan implies, emerging in the rage after discovering her parents had abandoned her: "Fue muy malo lo que hiciste, Coya, muy feo golpearte contra las paredes. [...] No es mucha cosa, una rabietta tuya. Pero inventa lo que quieras, para mí está bien." (49).

Nor does Juan's malice end there: he proceeds to lie down next to Coya and orders her to talk to him as if he, *Juan*, were her father. Coya recoils at the insinuation of paternal substitution and threatens to leave, never to return to the *barrio*. At this point Juan, who only a moment earlier had dressed Coya's wounds, begins to beat her. Ultimately, Coya concedes to enter into a dialogue with him, at which point, his mission accomplished, Juan reassures her: "...yo te voy a ir apuntando las cosas y te van a aparecer ordenadas otra vez" (51). The implication is that, under the emotional stress of losing her parents, Coya is not capable of ordering or interpreting recent events on her own. Thus, Juan announces that he will organize her memories for her by recounting what has really happened, while Coya should obediently transcribe Juan's version of history into a set of notes for future reference. Yet his need to control Coya's recollections is so great that even her willingness to rephrase her parents' disappearance in terms of her mother's alleged 'infidelity' isn't sufficient: Juan incessantly interrupts Coya's note-taking in order to correct her. "No, [...] Ocurrió de esta manera, anota" (52), he demands. Not satisfied until Coya then audibly repeats the events of the day exactly as he has ordered, he himself takes out a pen to complete the literal rewriting of

her family's history, acting as a secondary witness giving his own testimony by jotting down each sentence for a second time after Coya has stated it aloud. The document that results will later confirm Juan's version of the disintegration of Coya's family over any traces of memory that may otherwise remain.

I want to momentarily suspend this reading of the night of the *redada* to analyze the strategy that Juan employs. Coya has suffered serious trauma at the hands of the (of course, unnamed) State:¹⁰⁵ first, she witnessed her father's murder, then she was abused and interrogated in a raid on her home. Meanwhile, she has been separated from her mother (of whose current state she still knows nothing), and she has now been coerced into a (literal) rewriting of her own past. Once she has been isolated from her family, Juan's objective – both personally, as a man obsessed with Coya, and professionally, as a new representative of the State – is to erase Coya's 'embodied' experience and memories. He intends to replace those memories that compose a 'repertoire' of trauma with a written document that will become the official version of events, assumed into the state archive. I take this terminology from Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, in which she defines “archival memory” as existing in documents and other physical objects that resist change (19), and the “repertoire” as enacting all embodied memory through performed acts of ephemeral knowledge (20).

¹⁰⁵ Although *Por la patria* was published in 1986, Eltit had already begun composing the novel by 1983, when a series of popular protests against Pinochet's government lead to brutal retaliation by the military. Given the violence amidst which she was writing, it is unsurprising that no state could be named nor any regime mentioned in the book (unlike *Lumpérica*, where she makes explicit references to Santiago, Chile). Nonetheless, an astute critical reading of Chilean society plays out in *Por la patria*, though it is kept to an allegorical level through the relationship between Coya and Juan. For further details on the atmosphere in which Eltit wrote this second novel, see Mary Green's monograph *Diamela Eltit: Reading the Mother*, p. 52.

Taylor goes on to connect the concepts of archival memory and the repertoire to the Conquest of the Americas. Digging back into the history of what in many ways was a struggle between orality and documentation, it becomes clear that the Spanish greatly privileged writing over the spoken word and embodied memory. What is more, motivated by the Church, the conquerors went so far as to deny the existence of indigenous cultural production or histories that could have complicated the justification of the Spaniards' imperial presence, whenever those phenomena weren't manifested in confirming written records.¹⁰⁶ Eloquently, Taylor explains how this practice of denial of that which is not documented persists in the present day: "The writing = memory/knowledge equation, central to Western epistemology, continues to bring about the disappearance of embodied knowledge that it so frequently announces" (Yuyachkani 223).

While *Por la patria* does not directly deal with the Conquest but moves, rather, in the context of more recent Spanish American history, a privileging of the written word over oral discourse and performance is still present in the society in which Coya -- and Eltit herself -- lives. Juan's actions, for example, clearly reflect a contemporary version of official repression by the victors of the embodied memories of the victims of a new conflict. In this case, he desperately works to supplant Coya's traumatic past with a falsified -- yet documented -- story, in order to maintain the credibility of the State. Moreover, it is significant that Juan's chosen victim, Coya, is of mixed descent -- that is to say, she is an incarnation of the Conquest's fusion of cultures. As the critic Mary Green

¹⁰⁶ Diana Taylor elaborates on the role of writing versus embodied practices in the pre-Conquest Americas, as well as how the written became privileged over the embodied after the Conquest, in *The Archive and the Repertoire*, pages 16-19

signals, in writing *Por la patria* Eltit had hoped, "...to challenge the illegal political violence [in Pinochet's Chile] by foregrounding other types of repression. The historical violence of the conquest of the Americas is the most prominent example, and the invasion and usurpation of land, culture, language, race and legal rights that the conquest brought in its wake are echoed in the novel" (52). Acting as an agent of the State throughout *Por la patria*, it is not a coincidence that Juan's oppression of embodied memory takes aim at the vulnerable legal rights held by a body that is not just poor and marginalized, but that is also *mestizo*. In other words, his oppression centers on a body that inherently signifies the legacy of the Conquest in the mixture of races, cultures, and languages that it bears.

This specific mestizo body belongs, of course, to Coya. Given that Juan is an agent of the State and that, therefore, only his version of the events will officially be heard or accepted into the State archive, Coya is left with no legal options to pursue following the shattering of her family. Indeed, her legal defenselessness echoes another of Taylor's arguments, in which she asserts that, "...the courts, an 'archival,' document-producing system that in Latin America serves the interests of the powerful, cannot encompass or 'understand' pleas from the poor. [...] Expressions of trauma might just as well be delivered in a foreign tongue" (Yuyachkani 228). Of course, in Coya's case there is no court to which she can turn. Yet even beyond the official space of the court, her expression of trauma will *literally* be delivered in a foreign tongue to the authorities: narrating the first raid on her neighborhood, Coya tells us that the tragedy of her father's death causes a mental and linguistic split in her psyche (in addition to the physical and literal splitting of her family). "Esa noche de la tragedia, alguien acabó en mi nombre y

desde entonces respondo dual y bilingüe si me nombran Coa y Coya también” (*Patria* 27). From this point forward, her name will simultaneously carry two references: as Coya, it alludes to her indigenous roots, meaning Incan empress, princess, or sister; as Coa, it signifies the language of slang spoken in the slums of Chile. Following her father's death, Coya's syntax breaks, forcing her to turn to *coa* – the language, moreover, that she will employ in much of her narration.

As a result, Coya's trauma is indeed expressed in a foreign tongue, in a language that rebels against the official rules of grammar: a language of resistance. Accordingly, it is unsurprising that her testimony as spoken in *coa*¹⁰⁷ must be excluded from the official archive of state history. Coya's *coa* memory of events will be repressed by the versions in state-approved *castellano* (proper Spanish) that Juan will help Coya to co-author, thereby further splintering her already dual identity. Nonetheless, as we have seen, he reassures her that this revision of her memory is just what she needs to bring 'order' back into her life.

Coya's response to Juan's imposed memory on her own family's history is intriguing. After being beaten, she appears to acquiesce to the game, putting up only small resistances. She compliantly invents details of how her mother ran off with a blonde stranger, but in later defiance interjects that her mother never would have any interest in what she disdainfully calls *un zarco* (a blue-eyed man). Juan, however, persists

¹⁰⁷ Significantly, when Coya's father arrives wounded, the one body part Coya mentions as specifically being cut is his *lip*. Although it is clear that his injuries are serious and his condition is critical, she keeps coming back to the fact that his mouth is bleeding (34). As a result, in this scene I would like to suggest that her 'father language' has been metaphorically cut. With her father's death, she becomes Coa and Coya, her own linguistic identity also severed. As she tells us in broken *castellano*, "... yo nada palabra supe qué decir" (35; "...I nothing word knew what to say" -- translation my own).

in his endeavor, demanding an end to her disobedience and the complete rewriting of her past. Ultimately, Coya has little recourse but to agree and affirm that her mother had been having an affair and left with her lover before the raid began. In spite of accepting Juan's rewrite of her memory, though, Coya's dissidence finds its form in one final transgression of the State's order and authority. She adds to the story, "“Antes de hacer trato con él [el zarco], [mi madre] trató conmigo” (53). In other words, Juan, obsessed with Coya, has been able to make her family disappear, and to rewrite the circumstances of their disappearance. He is not able, however, to erase the trace of incest that threatens his control over her. Moreover, by asserting her participation in incestuous relations, Coya embodies a resistance that simultaneously threatens the stability of the national order for which Juan stands.

Yet how, exactly, does Coya's admission of incest represent a subversion of the State, and consequently of Juan's authority? To use Doris Sommer's turn-of-phrase, the "foundational fiction" over which Pinochet's Chile was built was, as Robert Neustadt explains, that of the perfect Catholic family in which women, "participated as auxiliary support within a hierarchical family paradigm. Nuclear families were to support the great 'national family,' *la patria* directed by the father figure Pinochet, purportedly to serve the will of God. Ultimately, the *discurso pinochetista* projected an image of the ideal woman within the symbolism of the Catholic Church, the Madonna" (Neustadt 26).

Consequently, a young woman who covers herself in the impurity of incest, pursuing sexual relations outside of marriage and without the intent to produce children, can only be a threat to the national order that the family unit is meant to support. While Juan would like nothing more than to possess Coya's purity, she declares -- in the seditious tongue of

coa -- that it is too late: her body, tainted by incest, cannot be used by Juan or anyone else to propagate the inviolate 'national family.' In essence, Coya is unwilling to ceder her body *por la patria*.

3.3 *Parlamentos* in Prison

Alternating between other versions of the *redada*, new raids on the neighborhood, and Coya's visions and hallucinations, the novel leaves the *barriada* (or slum) behind and relocates its narration to the concentration camp Pisagua, on the northern coast of Chile. There, Coya (no longer of any official use to Juan) and her friends have been detained, drugged, interrogated, and tortured. Although medically sedated and in a state of shock from the time she arrives there, the torture Coya endures marks her profoundly, yet at the same time, classically, "no trace of a registration of any kind is left in the psyche, instead, a void, a hole is found" (Krystal quoted by Caruth 6). The resulting trauma is beyond articulation; thus, Coya barely alludes to the mental or physical violence she experiences during her internment. Eventually, however, she is subjected to a particularly severe episode that cuts through the haze of her consciousness. When she finally narrates the details, it is only in the form of short, mechanical sentences; of necessity, the verbs are conjugated only in the preterite. First, they cut her left arm, then she is raped by each of the soldiers present; she spends hours shuttering from electric shocks, they stick her with hypodermic needles, and finally they bury her, naked, from the waist down, so that she is defenseless against the insects that crawl along her body, above and below ground, biting her (*Patria* 190).

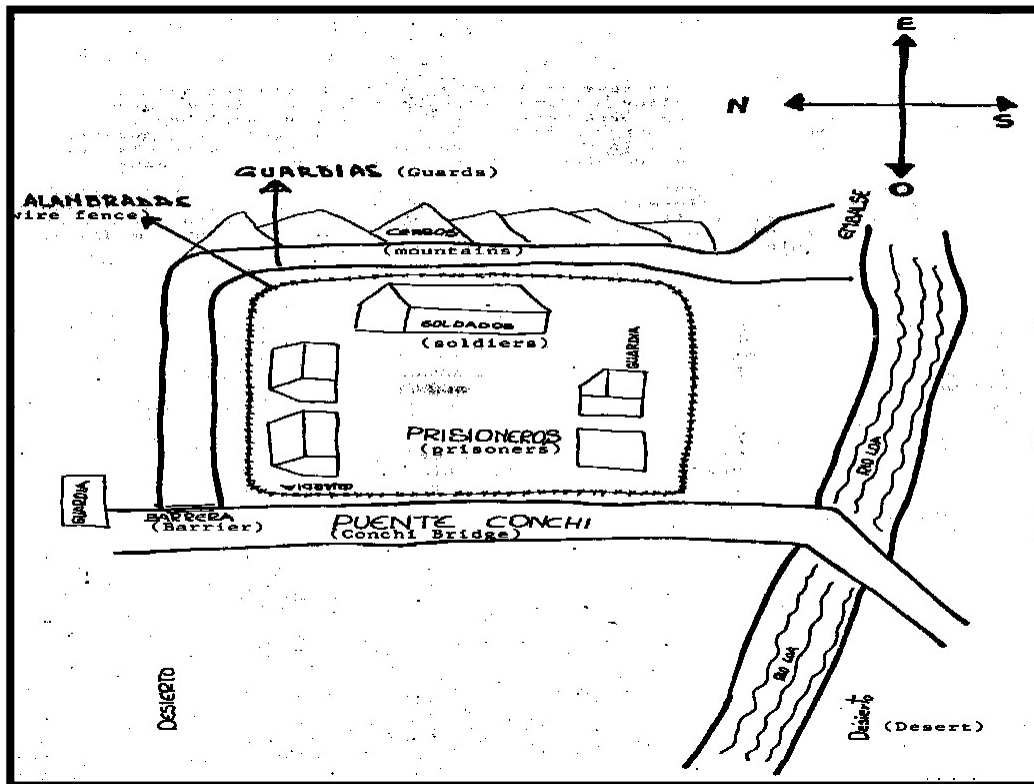


Figure 3.1: Hand-drawn map of the Prison Camp in Pisagua, Chile. Image courtesy of *Memoria Viva*, a website maintained by the International Project for Human Rights.

Although Coya feels herself alternately disassociating from her body, hallucinating, and resigning herself to the torture, this episode will, ironically, provoke her to develop the very tool that will help her to survive. No longer able to deal with the pain any other way, upon being released from her interrogation Coya begins to write a series of what she calls *parlamentos* or speeches (193).¹⁰⁸ These *parlamentos* quickly become all consuming. At first, Coya writes as something to do in the evenings, when the

¹⁰⁸ On the *Real Academia Española's* website for the *Diccionario de la lengua española - vigésima segunda edición*, three definitions of *parlamento* appear that will be particularly useful for our understanding of Coya's new endeavor: "3. Razonamiento u oración que se dirige a un congreso o junta. 4. Acción de parlamentar. 6. En el teatro, relación larga en verso o prosa." (Definitions 1, 2, and 6-8, all refer to legislative assemblies in different countries, or to the buildings in which those assemblies gather.)

guards are less vigilant and can't be bothered to notice a stack of papers growing in one of the cells. Soon, however, she finds that working on these speeches leaves her, "desatada [del dolor], desligada de todo otro menester y el hambre" (198). In essence, the act of writing creates an emotional safe space for her, even from within the walls of her own cell.

Significantly, although she begins by writing in silence, Coya does not refer to her papers as her *memorias*, nor as a journal. Instead, she insists on her original word choice of *parlamentos* for these writings: that is to say, they are meant to be *speeches*, texts that she means to *deliver* to someone else *orally* -- perhaps before a congress, or perhaps in some sort of theatrical staging. Regardless of to whom, how, or where she will deliver these speeches, they contain, she insists, "los recuerdos que superponen palabras tapando, cubriendo el odio manifiesto que me encauza" (198). In other words, Coya's *parlamentos* are performances that reveal a determination to recuperate her past from the hateful and false (yet written) words under which it has been buried. They intend to recover the very memories that Juan has been so determined to revise.

While Coya specifically cites her *recuerdos* or memories as the content of the *parlamentos*, she is quick to declare that alongside "asuntos verídicos e inexcusables" (199) there are also *mentiras* (lies) about everything. Of course, victims of trauma often experience what literary critica and trauma specialist Shoshana Felman terms a "crisis of truth," (*Trauma* 17), finding that they do not have access to the exact truth of what they have undergone -- that their recounting of events may even change, without consciously will it to do so, between tellings. Coya's crisis of truth, however, extends back to well before her imprisonment. Indeed, from the very second page of the novel (which itself

could be interpreted as the script of Coya's finished *parlamentos*), we as readers learn that our narrator may not be entirely reliable: first she will tell us one version of events, then admit she is lying to tell us another, only to then 'correct' herself again: "Miento. [...] Miento otra vez [...] Corrijo. Era al revés, lo mismo pero de otra manera. [...] No, no fue así" (*Patria* 14).

Consequently, this new writing of Coya's past with its unique arrangement of lies and truths is inextricably tied to -- yet simultaneously rebels against -- the re-write Juan previously tried to impose on her memory. From Juan, Coya has learned that history is malleable. Nonetheless, she is also determined to be the one who gets to fix her own memories, rather than allowing truth-values to be dictated to her by the State. As a result, Coya's *parlamentos* may offer multiple versions of her experiences, or contain slight exaggerations, even outright lies -- but these embellishments and variations should not call into question the validity of her *parlamentos*. To the contrary, as Shoshana Felman has suggested, perhaps we should understand testimony, "not as a mode of *statement of*, but rather as a mode of *access to*, that truth [of trauma]" (*Testimony* 16, italics in the original). That is to say, while Coya's words may not represent 'the truth' in the sense of relaying nothing other than the precise and literal details of her past exactly as it occurred, it may offer us a road map to understanding the (subjective) truth of her experience.

Felman goes on to explain that, "...one does not have to *possess*, or *own* the truth in order to effectively *bear witness* to it; [...] the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, *not available* to its own speaker" (*Testimony* 15). Coya's *parlamentos* serve precisely this

function: they bear witness to a truth she cannot possess. Yet they are, nonetheless, as close to the truth as she can come, and for this reason she will not accept changes from anyone else. “Hay cosas que no voy a cambiar” (*Patria* 198), she declares to her friend and fellow-detainee, Berta, when Berta becomes overly curious about Coya’s writings. In spite of her initial resistance to any second-party editing, however, Coya’s plan is not limited to the realm of her own personal memory, and, although her *parlamentos* may contain lies, they profoundly differ from Juan’s rewrite in their intent. For his part, Juan ‘documented’ events -- by inventing an entirely new history -- in order to erase Coya’s memory of the past in the name of the ‘Nation’ as defined by a repressive government. Coya, by contrast, sees her *parlamentos* as, “una toma colectiva del habla” (203): as a collective effort to prevent the detained women from losing their own memories by making them speak of their experiences out loud, and recording – and then performing – what they say. Her *parlamentos*, as a result, may not tell any one woman’s exact story precisely as it happened; rather, as we shall see, they perform a mediation of *all* of the women’s stories

Indeed, even before Berta’s intervention in the project, Coya had already begun to collect testimony from all of the women in her cell. She listens to and documents memories from each of her detained friends (Flora, Berta, and *La Rucia*), as well as from their mothers and sisters. The statements she collects range from childhood traumas and disappointments, to histories of the relationships with their parents and siblings – all of which are experiences that the women conflate with the raids on the neighborhood and their own complicated feelings about each other. Coya explains that her hope is that these *parlamentos* ensure, “que la memoria siga funcionando, operando sobre el espacio de los

derruidos cerebros” (204). Her concern is that memory – both her own and that of her friends – will slowly be worn out and eventually lose the battle to the repeated sessions of torture that incessantly attempt to wipe each woman’s past clean. Indeed, Coya laments her own flawed memory, faulting it for being so vague and imprecise (151). In writing her *parlamentos*, therefore, Coya herself depends on the other women to fill in the lapses and failings of her own recollections. As such, the text that Coya constructs -- and, eventually, Berta edits -- becomes the depository not for 'true' and 'exact' experiences of any one individual, but rather for a greater truth as it reveals itself in the collective trauma and history experienced across the sum of the women from her neighborhood



Figure 3.2: Mural in present-day Pisagua, Chile, bearing the message: "25 Years [since] Pisagua: Nothing is forgotten!" Photo courtesy of *LaMuralla.cl*.

As the *parlamentos* develop, they turn into full performances in which all of the detained women have been cast and participate. With time, they come to form the main occupation in Coya's cell. When a dispute between Coya and Berta brings the composing process to a halt, however, the importance of the *parlamentos* as a pastime suddenly manifests itself. Since the women no longer know what to do without new parts to learn each day or rehearsals to fill their time, Flora finally offers to intercede, ““porque me estoy aburriendo sin hacer nada. Además lo último me lo aprendí de memoria, Coya en persona me lo tomó [el guión] y no me equivoqué en ni una palabra”” (223). Flora's intervention demonstrates the extent to which the women have come to depend on the *parlamentos* and just how seriously they take their roles in this performance. Though the atmosphere by which they are surrounded is designed to inspire only feelings of humiliation, subordination, and fear, in the *parlamentos* they have found a project in which they can take pride, and through which they find confidence and reaffirmation.

Time passes, and the *parlamentos* cease to be a simple diversion to help pass the time the women spend in detainment. When la Rucia emerges from an acute torture session, for example, Berta is concerned by la Rucia's ragged gasps. In response to her critical state, Berta turns to Coya for a solution, insisting “en que hay que darle una indemnización, alguna forma de compensación” (254). Coya immediately concurs: they do have to find a way to counteract la Rucia's suffering. ““Dale rol [...] abre para ella algo especial,”” Coya concludes. In a word, performance has become the means by which the women survive the trauma they experience in their detainment: it compensates for and alleviates their pain. As Diana Taylor explains, “...performance is not about going back, but about keeping alive” (Yuyachkani 230). Thus, in Coya's cell, performance

allows the women to repeat and reiterate those experiences of trauma that, to use Cathy Caruth's language once again, possess them (in this case, quite literally: as prisoners, they *belong* to the guards of Pisagua). Taylor continues: "Trauma becomes transmittable, understandable, through performance – through the reexperienced shutter, the retelling, the repeat" (230).

As Taylor suggests, the trauma they have endured only becomes understandable to the women themselves through the performance of Coya's *parlamentos*. Yet the *parlamentos* apply to more than the immediate trauma of bodily violence that the women have suffered during their detention. While the performances can rebuild their confidence when they emerge broken from a torture session, they also allow them to work through the perhaps less acute yet nonetheless omnipresent losses they suffer in captivity. Indeed, Peggy Phelan observes that, "it may well be that theatre and performance respond to a psychic need to rehearse for loss, and especially for death. Billed as rehearsal, performance and theatre have a special relation to art as memorial" (3). The *parlamentos*, therefore, become a memorial to each of the imprisoned women's lost lives, homes, and loved ones. Each reenactment within Coya's cell thereby becomes a rehearsal in which the women practice returning to life beyond the wall's of the prison -- in which they try out the feelings of once again setting foot in their own, however humble, homes. In this sense, performance gives the women hope, preparing them for the possibility of longer-term survival.

At the same time, the performance of the *parlamentos* transmits each woman's private history of traumatic experiences to the larger group of detained women. That is to say, the *parlamentos* combine the fragments of individual memory into a coherent whole:

they document and maintain, “intacta la memoria colectiva y metalizada” (*Patria* 251). Yet their effect goes beyond their ability to record the past: as the *parlamentos* are performed, even in the small space of the women's cell they create new witnesses to each of the individual traumas contained by the speeches. Diana Taylor articulates how this phenomena works in a study of performance and collective trauma in Peru. Just as is the case in performance, she reflects, in traumatic recall, “Each attempt at communication is also a repeat, as the person who survived the trauma tries to transmit it to another person outside the experience – the one who bears witness and accepts the burden of performative contagion” (Yuyachkani 231). This is to say that performance has the peculiar ability to make witnesses of others in a way that alternative forms of communication do not, thereby passing on, “the dangers and responsibilities of seeing and of acting on what one has seen” (233). Coya’s *parlamentos*, therefore, offer the detained women a strange inheritance: that of a larger, collective memory that distributes the individual burdens of trauma amongst all of the women, uniting them as what Taylor terms a, “community of witnesses by and through performance” (233).

3.4 The Power Dynamics of Spectacle

Although the performance of the *parlamentos* is successful in uniting the detained women of *Por la patria* into a community of witnesses, this community is not a utopia, and, perhaps inevitably, the relationships between the women become defined by the roles that each interprets. A new hierarchy establishes itself, in which the women who play a prominent part in the performances hold more power over those who interpret less

important characters. Coya, for example, immediately casts herself as *madre general* (Mother General), thereby formally indicating her leadership on the 'stage' of the cell, and ensuring that her role in the performances corresponds to the authority she already bears as sole writer and inventor of the *parlamentos*.¹⁰⁹ Berta, as editor, however, silently questions Coya's authority. Aware that the other women believe that her role limits itself to faithfully and unerringly transcribing Coya's dictations, Berta relishes in the knowledge that her edits go well beyond Coya's original intentions. Indeed, "Le complacía ese secreto que le daba una autoridad subterránea sobre los mínimos detalles" (215). Berta's secret pleasure in taking greater authorial control than the other women imagine demonstrates that these performances do not simply occupy the detained women while allowing them to share and work through the traumas they have experienced. Rather, they also instill a confidence in them that is capable of shaking up the complicated tangle of power relations that exists even within the barred walls of their cell. As we shall see, this new, performance-based hierarchy will eventually come to affect the dominance even of the prison guards, who, with their guns and access to fear-inducing power, should so easily be able to control the women's every action.

So how does the performance of the *parlamentos* change the conditions of the women's captivity? To answer this question we must first understand the situation before

¹⁰⁹ There is an inherent irony in this self-casting: Coya, as she proudly proclaims, is in fact sterile: "Tengo hueco adentro, más bien dicho soy huera. Esa es la palabra, soy completamente huera y me pongan al interior lo que me pongan, no hay ninguna posibilidad" (153; "I have a hole inside me, or better put, I'm vacuous. That's the word, I'm completely vacuous and put inside me what you will, there is no possibility." My translation). Although Coya describes her sterility as a "don" (gift or talent), in her performance she intentionally casts herself as the *Mother General*. The *parlamentos*, therefore, create a sphere in which she can overcome the reality of her physical sterility: while she cannot produce children, she is fertile in words. Nonetheless, this casting may well indicate that her 'gift' is in fact a deeply felt lack or hole in Coya's life.

the women became involved in the *parlamentos*. Up until the severe episode of torture that made Coya turn to writing, the women's detainment was defined by brutal interrogations and sessions of physical and emotional abuse meant to pluck information so that their memories could be wiped clean. After one particular torture session, Flora tries to crawl on top of Coya, begging her for relief. ““Coya [...] no me aparece nada en la cabeza, como si no hubiera antes”” (175), she cries, evidencing just how effective the prison guards are in their mission to erase the past. In essence, embodied memories are being obliterated by the repeated occurrences of torture and interrogation; with each session, the physical space for those memories -- the bodies of each of the women -- is literally being destroyed.

Thus, prior to initiating the *parlamentos*, the power dynamic of the prison camp already depended on the spectacle produced by Coya and her friends -- on a spectacle conformed not by *Madre general* and her army of women, however, but by victims of torture. The detained women ‘starred’ in a carefully controlled show meant to reinforce the authority of the soldiers and guards -- of whom Juan is now one, having stalked Coya to Pisagua in order to become responsible for maintaining order in her cell -- and the futility of resistance. Indeed, the guards were aware that, "Spectacles [...] function as the locus and mechanism of communal identity, the 'imaginings' that constitute social systems. They reflect and (re)produce the spatial configurations of the imagined community, establishing both the parameters and organizational structures" (*Disappearing* 73). Consequently, by controlling the spectacles that occurred within the walls of the prison community, one could predetermine the conditions under which all would live there. In the hands of the guards, the primary spectacle of the prison camp was

violence. As a result, a strictly defined hierarchy emerged in which the community came to be defined in terms of those who had the power to inflict pain and mortification upon others, and those who could only fear what could, at any time, be inflicted upon them.

Thus, until Coya began to write her *parlamentos*, the prison camp offered only one spectacle: that of highly orchestrated, public exhibitions of terror and violence. For instance, in one torture session, the guards blindfold the wounded Coya and place her in a ring with an enraged dog on a leash. This does not happen in a hidden away torture chamber. Rather, the event will be absolutely public: “Hay un cúmulo de mujeres mirando mi cerco, el animal me separa de ellas: es mi turno” (172), Coya recounts. The public element of this particular episode is significant: it means that while Coya is the immediate victim of abuse, the terror it is meant to inflict extends well beyond Coya, encompassing all of the women watching. Indeed, Diana Taylor notes that often people who have given testimony about being forced to stand by and observe while others are tortured or killed, “have judged this watching to be the most dehumanizing of acts. To see without being able to do disempowers absolutely” (*Disappearing* 123).

While the other women are required to watch, then, Coya is forced to participate in what appears to be a routine display of humiliation in this concentration camp. She must bark to keep the dog away as a guard lets out the leash, allowing the ferocious animal to get nearer to its ‘prey.’ The guards, amused, watch and advise Coya to keep howling: ““Más fuerte perra”” (172). Ashamed, tired, and mentally broken, Coya falls to the floor and begins to feel like a dog herself. After an hour the demonstration degenerates, as both guards and prisoners lose interest. When she is finally able to remove the blindfold, Coya is surprised to see how inconsequential the wounds she has

sustained from the dog's bite really are. As a result, she begins to doubt her memory of the torture session and has to ask La Rucia to confirm that she hadn't hallucinated the scene with the dog. La Rucia reassures her: “‘Era [un perro] sí, era feroz pero manso, entrenado para el susto de nosotras’” (173). In other words, in Pisagua even the dogs play a role in the public performances of torture, which aim only to maintain a constant state of paralyzing fear in the detained women. It is this fear, even more than the guard's access to weapons, which upholds the hierarchy of power within the prison camp.

Once Coya begins to write and her cellmates begin to perform the *parlamentos*, however, what the women say or don't say is no longer determined by torture and interrogation techniques but, rather, by a constantly evolving script written from their own testimony. True, their performances remain contained within the walls of their cell, and the women are still subject to the pokes and prods of their guards, yet this new spectacle of their own creation quickly gains in power. Whereas the spectacle of torture, as we have already seen, aims to make the body, "crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it" (Scarry 49, emphasis in the original), the *parlamentos* allow the women to reunite voice and body as a coherent and present whole. Their words no longer correspond to the responses demanded by their interrogators -- instead, they are now inspired only by their own hearts and memories, by what they need to say in order to heal. Moreover, as Mother General, Coya openly declares her intention to use the performances to protect personal memory. Not content to simply preserve personal memory, though, Coya insists that these performances will help to reconstruct the memories already lost: “‘Pa, par, para hablar la memoria las convoco a rito adicional en proyecto de reconstitución del barrio’” (*Patria* 252).

Believing that the neighborhood can be reconstituted by the speaking of memory and personal truths, *Coya/Madre general* turns to the other women, cast as Mothers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, and confesses to having betrayed them all by giving in to the torture: she talked, she concedes. The women immediately exculpate her, responding that she only acted in self-defense; they re-characterize the betrayal -- and, more importantly, owning up to her weakness -- as, ““Un acto de inapreciable valor”” (252). In essence, the women have discovered the kind of courage they need to survive and regain their dignity -- a courage that, for example, allows them to stand tall regardless of what they are impelled to do by torture. Newly audacious, they now begin to criticize the guards openly: in chorus, Mothers 1-6 tell Coya that the guards, ““Van correctos, rectos hacia el objetivo multitudinario y sangre”” (252). Unafraid of who might hear it, their blunt assessment emphasizes the blind ease with which Juan and the other military guards unquestioningly follow their bloody orders, regardless of how many innocent bystanders those orders may affect. Not one woman hesitates to speak up in this improvised performance, revealing that the paralyzing fear of punishment has already begun to lose its hold on them.

Though the women continue to be a source of spectacle, their performances now transgress against the order established by their imprisonment, rather than affirm it. This transgressive aspect frequently manifests itself in the content of the *parlamentos*, as we have just seen. But it also goes so far as to usurp authority from the guards, despite their ability to regularly torture and interrogate the women. We see this clearly when, in the midst of yet another rehearsal, Juan enters the women’s cell expecting to immediately command their attention. To his dismay, however, his arrival neither surprises nor scares them, and, “Ninguna se incomoda. Nadie obedece” (*Patria* 257). In spite of the physical

power Juan holds to punish each of them for this display of defiance, not one woman is willing to interrupt the rehearsal to so much as acknowledge his presence, never mind find out what it is that he wants.

What we see here is a change in the power dynamic within the concentration camp that represents a radical transformation in the mechanisms of control. This power shift should not be underestimated. Upon their arrival in Pisagua, these women spent months in a drugged state of existence, incapable of any kind of resistance, only to later be repeatedly and publicly humiliated, and undergo unimaginable forms of torture that lead them to betray their friends and family members. Suddenly, however, Coya begins to write her *parlamentos*, and as the women become involved in these performances, they no longer cower before their torturers or guards but instead become obstinate, refusing to obey orders. Moreover, while on the 'stage' of their cell during the rehearsals of the *parlamentos*, the detained women step into very specific roles: they are not simply women from the neighborhood, but rather a general, *Madre general*, and her army of mothers. They become a force to be reckoned with, a force that, in combination with the memories they have recovered, is even fiercer than Juan and his group of guards can be as they hide behind their guns. These women will no longer answer anyone else's questions, nor take orders from anyone but themselves.

In other words, Coya's *parlamentos* effectively invert the roles of dominance and authority within the prison camp by taking previously broken women and allowing them to share and perform the burden of their trauma. In so doing, the women take control of public representation within the detention center. Trauma, in their performances, is therefore no longer represented as victimization. Instead, its traces are embodied as

power, life, and memory -- as a connection to the past that cannot be taken away from them. As such, the fear previously imposed by the guards' spectacles of torture can no longer hold the same mental sway over Coya and her friends. Through the medium of performance, the detained women refuse to allow their memories to be erased, and at the same time, they reverse the balance of power within Pisagua.

3.5 An Epic End/To Begin Again

Towards the end of *Por la patria*, the reader realizes that at some point along the way, the women began to engage in what are really two distinct levels of performances, both of which work together to invert the terms of their imprisonment. On the first, more personal level, the *parlamentos* that Coya writes turn into an on-going series of performances that provides the detained women with a tool for survival, while maintaining and legitimizing their memories. On a second level, however, Coya also orchestrates the writing of the women's memories into a broader cultural artifact. As she informs Juan in the novel's final pages, what the women have been writing and performing in their cell is nothing less than *una épica*, "una hazaña que no puedes ni podrás con nada desmentir" (*Patria* 277). This epic, then, will stand in contrast to the lies that Juan would like to spread in the name of the State. Coya continues: "Hay una épica. / Surgida de la opresión y destello del linchaco" (277). Indeed, this epic was born out of the oppression the women have faced, but rather than referring directly to their memories as they occurred, it specifically corresponds to *Por la patria*'s interspersed narrative thread focusing on the *Madre General* and her troops.

Coya's choice of genres here is significant: as we have seen, her *épica* is clearly tied to performance, alluding, in this sense, to Brecht's 'epic theater.' In contrast to most forms of narrative theater, epic theater does not attempt to induce the spectators to identify with the actors on stage; rather, it aims to alienate its audience in order to encourage the public to reflect critically on the social situations being portrayed (Abrams 79). This strategy is exceedingly relevant to Coya's own *épica*, which contains an explicit criticism of the society into which she was born. Almost cryptic in content, Coya's epic defies easy understanding, while her characters -- a female general and her troops -- do not offer immediate connection to the spectators' own lives. Not just any set of soldiers, moreover, the epic centers around a troop of barren soldier 'mothers', who venerate *La Madre General* -- a woman described in no uncertain terms as, "un general asesino," (*Patria* 240). The entire 'plot' of the epic, then, consists of these soldier women working together to plan, "la venganza para los ausentes" (*Patria* 240). With an assassin as the leading role, and a bloody violence in retribution for characters the audience has never seen as its action, Coya's *épica* requires its audience to emotionally distance itself from the historical context of dictatorship. Stepping into a world of allegory in which women form and run an alternative military, the spectator then is asked to consider what kind of 'vengeance' could ever be an appropriate response to the institutionalization of 'disappearance' of a nation's citizens. In this case, moreover, the alienation of epic theater works not just on the audience members, but also on the actors. Epic theater offers Coya and the detained women an instrument through which they can deconstruct the trauma of their pasts, making it possible for them to address deeply personal issues by combining fragments of their lives with the lives of their friends, all within a fantastic setting.

Consequently, they are able to perform the *parlamentos* without breaking down during each new staging from the emotional weight of their traumatic memories in a more raw form.

Furthermore, the epic that Coya writes, Berta edits, and in which all of the detained women act, also forms a *document*. That is to say, the transmission of Coya's *parlamentos* and *épica* are not limited to the oral and performative modes of the repertoire -- although those modes are indeed among the greatest strengths of the *parlamentos*, and all along they have been memorized and performed by the women in her cell. In addition, however, they compose a written -- and even corrected -- text. As such, her *parlamentos* will indeed form part of the archive. In spite of all of Juan's attempts to erase and rewrite Coya's history, in the end the composite *épica* will officially testify to -- and record her memories and experience of -- trauma long after Coya is no longer around to perform the *parlamentos* herself.

Finally, it is also worth noting that within *Por la patria*, Coya's *épica* is graphically differentiated from the rest of the narration by a separation into two columns of text. That is to say, it intentionally resembles the presentation of an epic poem. Why, we must ask, would Coya want to imitate the appearance of epic poetry? Traditionally, epic poems are extended narratives in verse, written in a formal style that employs frequent repetition to aid in oral delivery -- and, of course, *memory*. They generally relate the deeds of a heroic figure whose actions affect the fate of a nation or people (Abrams 76) -- a point that is extremely provocative in the context of *Por la patria*. How could Coya's broken *épica* of trauma be of deep cultural significance to a nation or people?

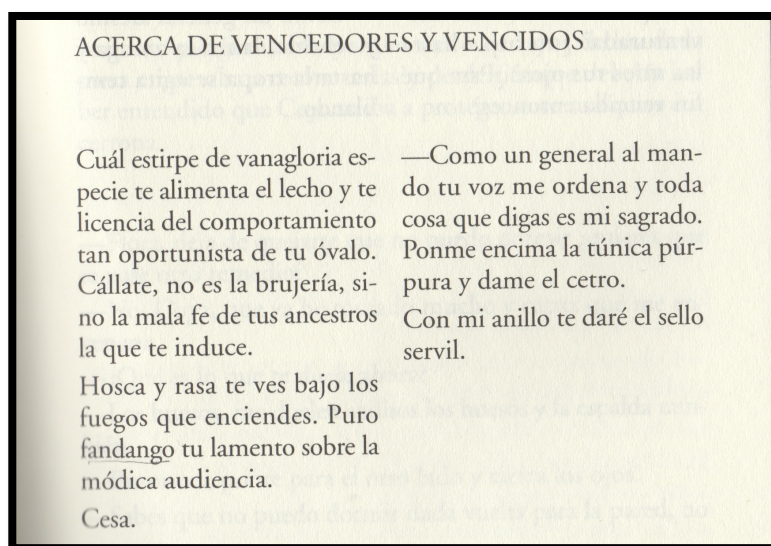


Figure 3.3: Brief excerpt from the *épica* contained within *Por la patria*, demonstrating the graphic representation and more formal -- albeit grammatically loose -- semantic register of this section of the text. (*Patria* 240).

Mary Green has indicated one possible reading of the cultural relevance of Coya's epic. In her view, the entire second section of *Por la patria* (entitled "Se funde, se opaca, se yergue la *épica*," or "The Epic Melts, Dulls, Rises") rewrites the Chilean epic poem *La Araucana* by Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga.¹¹⁰ According to Green, *La Araucana* not only reflects a conventional vision of epic as a genre centered on the valiant, self-sacrificing exploits of men, but also propagates a cultural, "myth of origins" that, "obscures the violent oppression of indigenous communities" (49) in its heroic portrayal of the Mapuche people.

In the second half of *Por la patria*, by contrast, Green sees an epic that is not at all masculine but rather maternal. In this new *épica*, Green tells us:

...the virile 'hero' is emasculated, the 'honour' and 'valour' of the warring military collapses into treachery, and race as a discourse of oppression is

¹¹⁰ *La Araucana* (in English, *The Araucaniad*) was composed in the late 1500s by a Spanish soldier who fought in the conquest of Chile. It recounts various battles between the Mapuche (or Araucanians) and the Spaniards in detail, celebrating the valiance of both parties while also describing indigenous customs and landscapes.

foregrounded. Coya is portrayed as both victim and relentless antihero, embodying a ferocious female presence that subverts the usual tropes of nationhood by ousting the young male hero and the figure of the woman to be defended. (49)

In other words, Green reads Eltit's epic as a gendered counter-point to Ercilla's epic poem. Whereas in Ercilla's poem the role of hero could only be played by a military man -- and, moreover, the heroic role itself is defined by the protection of a woman --, in *Por la patria*, on the other hand, the military officer (Juan) reveals not valor but betrayal of the very woman he should be defending. Indeed, Eltit's novel doesn't offer us a hero or even a 'heroic' woman, but rather presents us with an anti-hero (Coya) who was born in a slum and is forever marked by a forbidden, incestuous past. At the same time, Green hints (although she does not develop this argument) that *Por la patria* posits a *mestizo* antihero as protagonist, thereby drawing attention to the reality of Chilean race relations. I would add that this is significant in that *Por la patria* centers on a marginal character, Coya, whose *mestizo* body is a fusion of the European and the Mapuche: of oral and written discourse, of the Catholic saints and the Mapuche *machi*, of the 'civilized' city centers and the 'savage' -- sometimes criminal -- peripheries and country. Literally centering this body that history would cast aside, *Por la patria* instead makes her the *Madre general* of a new epic -- the mother whose deeds will affect the fate of a nation that is yet to emerge.

Green's analysis of the subversive nature of Coya's epic hinges on a reversal of gender and racial roles in a founding cultural myth. To this I would like to append a linguistic dissidence that I believe is central to the way in which Coya's *épica* works. In her master's thesis, Marina Arrate points out that the colloquial language in *Por la patria*

confronts the official, written discourse that is 'inevitably associated' with the Spanish military conquest of the Americas (82). I would extend the 'inevitable associations' of official written discourse to include the genre of epic poetry. It is therefore significant that Coya's epic is not written in formal *castellano*, but rather mixes the expected 'high' language we associate with epic poetry, with the slang, delinquent tongue of *coa*.¹¹¹ Eltit has referred to her own use of such a mix of discourses in various interviews as a form of 'linguistic incest' or '*mestizaje*.'¹¹²

Certainly, the presence of such 'linguistic incest' in an epic narrative can only be subversive. Through her *épica*, Coya not only recuperates her own past and documents her memories within the national archive, but she also legitimizes the marginal (and oral) language of the slums in which she grew up by making *coa* pertain to the literary sphere. There is, moreover, a certain violence to Coya's use of this language, as is revealed in the final pages of the novel, when Coya and her friends have been granted amnesty (for their

¹¹¹ In her book *Marginalities*, Gisela Norat has also studied the linguistic strategies Eltit employs in relation to the epic genre proclaimed by Coya for her *parlamentos*. Norat interprets Coya's need of an editor in the composition process as a sign of her low education and oral background, whereas I read Coya's choice of broken language as an intentional means of subverting what normally constitutes the discourse of a national epic. Norat goes on to compare Coya's epic to graffiti writing in its underground nature of resistance, and to offer a complete analysis of the ways in which this epic parallels ancient Greek tragedies, mythology, and epic forms.

¹¹² See, for example, "Acoplamiento incestuoso," interview with Ana María Foxley in 1985, or "Tenemos puesto el espejo para el otro lado," interview with Claudia Donoso in 1987, in both of which Eltit terms her mixing of discourses as 'linguistic incest.' This terminology may at first be confusing, since Eltit's technique is to mix what the reader will see as very distinct discourses, whereas incest implies taboo interactions between closely related subjects. Nonetheless, Eltit views the Mapuche tongue, *coa*, and formal *castellano* as cousins, as three variants of language that inhabit the cultural space of Chile. She expresses this idea in an interview with Julio Ortega, in which she describes herself as, "una mestiza, en ese sentido, bi o trilingüe de mi propio idioma" (232). At the same time, one could argue that *Por la patria* itself constitutes a mestizo body -- a body of work that contains mixed cultural and linguistic roots.

'crimes' of political dissidence and marginality) and are able to leave the prison camp together. They walk out speaking a cacophony of language, as Coya declares: “Se levanta el coa [...] *El argot se dispara y yo*” (282, emphasis mine). That is to say, as they articulate their ideas in slang, their words ring out as though they were gunshots taking aim at proper *castellano*. Here we can see that a threat to official and dominant discourse clearly appears in the language the women speak and employ in this epic, and in which they are about to begin a new life.

Once granted their freedom, the women will refuse to return to the *patria* or nation that has imposed such trauma upon them. After what they have lived through, how could they ever pretend to be *por la patria* again? Indeed, Diana Taylor observes how the word *patria* itself is tied up in a subtle discourse of dominance, in which women disappear as subjects so that men can remain the only agents in the creation of the national narrative. In Taylor's words,

The good woman, the *Patria*, was the very image of collective harmony. However, the word *Patria*, meaning belonging to or possessed by the Father, already indicates the profound misogyny of the concept. *Patria*, a feminine term for nationhood, is entangled with *patriarchy*. Thus, the word itself alerts us to the slippery positioning of the feminine in this discourse." (*Disappearing* 77)

Rather than resuming life as secondary citizens within a male dominated society, upon their return to the *barriada* these (ironically, sterile) survivors of trauma will, instead, become the founding 'mothers' of a metaphorical new 'nation.' Although they do choose to go back to their homes instead of starting anew elsewhere, they do so with a set purpose in mind. They intend to open and run the bar that had belonged to the previous paternal order – in this case, to Coya's father.



Figure 3.4: Cover art from the first edition of *Por la patria*. Combining the colors of the Chilean flag with an x-ray of a hand, the image suggests a precarious relationship between life and *patria*.

From the depths of what was once Coya's father's bar, the women will propagate what could be termed a '*matria*': a nascent, *coa*-speaking, matrilineal nation, which will take Coya's transgressive epic of destruction, violence, and trauma as its central myth. "El fuego, el fuego, el fuego y la épica" (*Patria* 283), the women's era begins. Moreover, this newly created *madre patria*'s epic will make it possible for the societal taboos of Coya's past – extreme intoxication, incest, torture, and rape – to function as 'heroic' deeds. Within the emerging cultural and ideological landscape of the neighborhood-nation, Coya finds that the legitimacy granted to her memories through the performance of her epic allows her to begin to *feel* again, in spite of the traumatic numbing of her past. "Volví a sentir: volví a sentir sobre el erial, superpuesta a mi niñez" (283) she tells us as she returns, though marked by trauma, with her 'army of mothers,' home.

3.6 Textual Performance, or How We Became Witnesses, Too

Both *Lumpérica* and *Por la patria* present us with a protagonist who, living in a repressive state, has been the victim of torture, and turns to one form of performance or another in the struggle to survive an otherwise untenable situation. From deep within the clutches of state violence, L. Iluminada chooses a small rebellion against curfew that will allow her to perform transportational rituals in the public square each night. These rituals cannot change the society in which she lives, the past she has experienced, nor how she fits -- or doesn't fit -- into the city when the sun rises. Nonetheless, each sundown they allow her to escape the order in which she must otherwise exist: they allow her to reoccupy the plaza, reinscribe her body with distinct identities, and write her history not only on her own skin in the form of scars, but also on the city floor in chalked graffiti. As I have already suggested, the rituals she performs help her to embody memories of a violence and a trauma so raw that she cannot yet name them. Through these repeated performances of ritual, L. Iluminada hopes to move from what Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler have termed 'deep memory' -- a memory which returns persistently yet "undermines the possibility of a coherent self" -- to 'common memory,' which, "tends toward restoration of coherence, closure, redemptive posture" (*Witness* 15). Indeed, the very structure of the novel itself echoes this idea in a fragmentation that resists chronology and plot: we could say that *Lumpérica* is the story of the persistent return of deep memories of state violence, of deep memories that cannot be controlled, processed, named, or narrated in any coherent form. There is no closure to these memories, they simply replay themselves with each new nightfall, when L. Iluminada must once again

resume her rituals where she left off the previous dawn, in a relentless attempt at working through the trauma that possesses her.

Although Coya also suffers through indescribable state violence in *Por la patria*, eventually she is able to use performance to transform her 'deep memories' into 'common memories.' By writing and performing her *parlamentos*, she is able to achieve distance from, and control over, the traumatic events of her past, learning to name, perform, and write them into an epic that will mark the future of her nation. Coya is able to move on in a way that L. Iluminada is not, perhaps because she has had more time in which to work through her trauma. Yet it could just as well be because she forms part of a community of women who actively work together to create what Douglass and Vogler call, "a claim about the past by means of a shared cultural knowledge and understanding" (15). While L. Iluminada performs her rituals for the *pálidos*, for the other homeless vagrants who sometimes occupy the plaza at night, they are often reluctant observers, not always willing to participate, rarely contributing to her narrative. Moreover, she herself is stuck, night after night, in, "the context in which the memory traces were presumably laid down" (15). Coya, on the other hand, has been forcibly taken from her home and begins to write her *parlamentos* in prison, where the other detained women are immediately interested, determined to work with her to recover and narrate the memories that the regime so resolutely attempts to purge from them all. Collectively they are able to reconstruct a narrative that counters the official version of the raids on their town, and performance allows them to re-embody the memories that the guards would like to have beaten out of them. When they emerge from the prison camp at the end of the novel, they are certainly scarred, but they are nonetheless in control of their past.

In summary, chapters two and three of this dissertation work together to demonstrate that, in situations of trauma induced by state repression and violence, both L. Iluminada and Coya turn to performance as a way to survive the crisis of identity and memory in which find themselves immersed. Yet *Lumpérica* and *Por la patria* also employ performance on another level: the novels themselves perform the traumas they contain for their readers, and, moreover, implicate the readers as witnesses of the narratives they spin.

In the case of *Por la patria*, this transformation of the reader into witness is accomplished quite subtly, perhaps without the reader ever realizing it has happened. Just as through their participation in the *parlamentos* the detained women compose a collective narrative of trauma, a narrative for which they are all then responsible, likewise the reader of *Por la patria* assumes the testimony not only as it is represented in the *parlamentos*, but also as it is revealed throughout the entirety of the novel. In Diana Taylor's words, "witnessing is transferrable" (*Archive* 211). Or, as Cathy Caruth suggests, listening to the 'impossible truths' of traumatic testimony, "may no longer be simply a choice: to be able to listen to the impossible [i.e., to trauma], that is, is also to have been *chosen* by it" (Caruth 10, emphasis in the original).¹¹³ In other words, by listening to Coya and her friends' testimony, the reader of *Por la patria* is *chosen*, is even possessed, by the truths and crises of truth contained within their stories. Consequently, as the

¹¹³ Caruth continues by warning that, without sufficient preparation, the listener of trauma may hear disconcerting testimony, "*before* the possibility of mastering it with knowledge. This is its danger -- the danger, as some have put it, of the trauma's 'contagion,' of the traumatization of the ones who listen (Terr, 1988)" (Caruth 10, emphasis in the original). However, in the context of *Por la patria*, the trauma contained within the testimony of the women's *épica* has been mediated. As a result, I would suggest, the *parlamentos* no longer contain the danger of contagion of traumatization, so much as the power of the contagion of responsibility and collective memory.

women bear witness to the violence they have endured, the reader simultaneously becomes witness to *their* act of witnessing.

More specifically, by separating the reader from the concrete, historical context of the Chilean dictatorship, imposing instead a fictional world that parallels that reality, *Por la patria*, "create[s] a critical distance for 'claiming' experience and enabling, as opposed to 'collapsing,' witnessing" (*Archive* 210). This parallel world of state violence will come to a close at the end of the novel in much the same way as the real Chilean dictatorship ends three years after the novel is published: with the word 'amnesty.' Thus, without the women's intervention, Juan -- who calls himself Coya's *contramemoria* and pursues her throughout the novel in the attempt to erase from her memory the events that devastated her family -- in a period of amnesty would have gone on to propagate a national *desmemoria* or willful rejection of the past. *Por la patria*'s performance lies, precisely, in the need to combat this *desmemoria* before it can take root. The novel combines the archive and the repertoire, turning the reader into spectator and participant in its narrative of trauma, and recognizing, "the importance of performance as a means of re-membering and transmitting social memory" (209).

On the other hand, *Lumpérica*'s transformation of its reader into spectator and participant of performance is a twofold process that is more deeply built into the very structure of the text itself. In the first place, the reader is immediately pulled into witnessing L. Iluminada's performance of rituals in the plaza. The novel accomplishes this by revealing that there are many sets of eyes watching L. Iluminada's performance at all times: there are, of course, the eyes of the *pálidos*, which already by the second page of the novel are fixed on L. Iluminada's baptism (*Lumpérica* 16). Next, we discover that

the eyes of two cameras also follow each of L. Iluminada's gestures and poses, which she makes, "plenamente teatral por la observación de sus movimientos" in the first filmic take (21). Much later, it becomes clear that the interrogator whose voice we hear in chapters two and seven was also present for L. Iluminada's performance in the plaza, hiding in the shadows but observing everything (164). Finally, we realize that we, the readers, are the ultimate layer of spectator, witness to everything that happens in the plaza as well as in the interrogation room. Indeed, the first night that the *pálidos* do not appear, just before the graffiti ritual begins, L. Iluminada addresses the reader directly: "Está sola y por eso su actuación es nada más que *para el que la lee*" (117, emphasis mine).

Going back, we suddenly realize that her performances have always had us in mind, always been meant for us to read, as the novel has hinted all along. Moreover, each performance has also come with instructions offering the reader suggestions on how to understand each ritual as it happens. To give just a couple of examples, in the baptism, we read: "Para el que la mira," -- in other words, for us, the readers -- "es un espectáculo desolador porque balbucea" (18). Suddenly, the desolate nature of the spectacle in L. Iluminada's wordless shout becomes, for the reader, the most striking detail of the scene. In like manner, during the rodeo, the hybrid L. Iluminada increases her efforts, we are told, "para el que la observa que se engancha de otra manera" (69) -- and once again, "el que la observa" is, in that moment, no one other than the reader. Here she has increased her efforts and even changed strategies, moving to a fantastic fusion of woman and animal, in order to engage her reader in her ritual. As the clues pile up, we eventually realize that it is us as readers who are the final witnesses to each of the rituals in the plaza.

The extent to which we are drawn into *Lumpérica's* ritual performances as participant, however, is only made explicit in chapter eight, the *Ensayo general*, when we see the famous photograph of Eltit with her arms cut, burned, and bandaged. At this point our eyes are officially pulled into the narrative, and even made to follow a script: "¿Y el ojo entonces?" (178), the novel asks us, referring to our own eyes as they take in the photograph that opens the chapter. "El ojo que lo lee, errático, sólo constreñido por su propio contorno, se encarcela en una lectura lineal," it answers, telling us exactly how we can read the photograph and the cuts it contains -- lineally, constrained by our own experiences, education, and perspective. The text continues: "El ojo que recorre la fotografía se detiene ante el corte (su corte) y reforma la mirada ante una molesta, impensada interrupción." (178) In the end, the cut of the photograph (composed by the cuts in Eltit's arms just as much as the cut in the novel and, therefore, our reading) becomes our own cut: it is an incision that will reinscribe our gaze. The ritual performed by the novel, then, extends to the reader, marking and changing the reader's identity just as it marks and changes L. Iluminada.

In this sense, *Lumpérica* and *Por la patria* do not simply portray performance as a response to trauma. Rather, they themselves perform by literally acting upon their readers: by converting them (or us) into witnesses of the traumas they narrate. In so doing, they demand a new mode of reading -- a reading that is not just active in its effort to construct meaning, but that also implies taking on a certain level of social responsibility.

Chapter 4

Politics, Justice, and Performance in Chile, 1973-2010

"Politics is best understood as a sequence of enactments, taking place at many different places, including constitutional and non-constitutional stages, through which meaning is given to societal events." (Hajer *Authoritative Governance: Policy-making in the Age of Mediatization* 74)

"What type of theater do we need to liberate ourselves from the past?" (Horsman *Theaters of Justice* 4)

Over the course of the previous two chapters, I have argued that Eltit's first novels, *Lumpérica* and *Por la patria*, engage performance as a tool that permits marginal characters to maintain their dignity through violence and state repression. At the same, I suggest, both of these novels act upon their readers, requiring them to become interlocutors in an on-going dialogue about the meaning of citizenship and the limitations of language. Each book interrogates the reader about her belief systems -- about how her own social and educational experiences determine the way she 'reads' a scarred body, for example, or about the type of official narrative she thinks would be capable of responding to a national trauma such as dictatorship. By posing these questions to the reader, each of these early novels is, without doubt, deeply political. Yet the texts we will consider in this

chapter, I suggest, are political in a different way: they move between documenting political performance to performing politics themselves.

Semiologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Jesús Martín Barbero opened a conference on "Staging Citizenship" in Bogotá, Colombia, in August of 2009, by declaring that, "Politics has been theatrical performance since its origins." He intends this statement to apply to politics in general, mentioning even that the root of the word brings us to the Greek *polis*, a space he contends was inherently theatrical, as it was the place, "where people gathered to exchange opinions and relish in debate." Yet as he gives his talk in Bogotá, Martín Barbero's focus is on the performance of citizenship, rather than of politics at large. "Citizenship," he reminds us, "only exists insofar as it is *enacted*." Indeed, only through the performance or enactment of our privileges as citizens -- the ability to vote, for example, or the right to public expression -- can we guarantee that those liberties endure.

Yet the theatrical, performative nature of politics does not lie solely in the enactment of citizenship, but rather is imbedded in the work of those who would govern, as well. A contemporary illustration appears in political scientist Maarten Hajer's article on the policy decisions leading up to the rebuilding of ground zero in New York City, in which he notes: "Politics is an art, and the analysis of politics as performance brings out the skillful way of persuading, the way in which different audiences are 'acted upon,' are each approached in an [sic] manner appropriate to convincing the group" ("Rebuilding" 449). In essence, the whole of politics, understood in its broadest sense as the sphere of, "public life and affairs involving matters of authority and government" (*Oxford English Dictionary*) -- including both the citizens who live under a government as well as those

lawmakers who compose that government -- is composed of an endless series of performances. On one hand, the politicians stage debates, town hall meetings, and press releases in the attempt to influence citizens and other lawmakers. On the other hand, citizens may orchestrate protests or shows of support, or participate in subtler performances that take the form of every day conversation discussing, for example, what should be done about the debt ceiling and the federal budget.

Both of these layers of political performance, moreover, are shaped by the concept of a single space or entity, co-inhabited by citizens, lawmakers, and government, that is also determined by performance. As Diana Taylor remarks, "Public spectacle is a locus and mechanism of communal identity through collective imaginings that constitute 'nation' as an 'imagined political community'" (*Disappearing* ix).¹¹⁴ In other words, our very idea of ourselves as citizens belonging to a specific nation is dependent upon the performance of nation that surrounds us, a performance or spectacle that allows us to imagine ourselves into a coherent national group.

Consequently, this chapter will trace the performance of politics and justice in one such imagined community, Chile, from 1973 to 2010, as it surfaces in the writing of Diamela Eltit. Parting from one of her essays, "Las dos caras de La Moneda," I will argue that Eltit's understanding of the *golpe de estado* and the next seventeen years of dictatorship centers on the concept of performance, in order to reveal why this approach to the events of recent Chilean history is significant. Maintaining an eye on the historical context that accompanies her narrative production, I will then analyze two of her books,

¹¹⁴ Here, Taylor draws on Benedict Anderson's terminology, in which the 'nation' is understood as an 'imagined community' that relies on the forgetting of difference as well as on the invention of a shared history in order to create a sense of national unity.

Puño y letra: juicio oral, and *Jamás el fuego nunca*, in order to interrogate the way politics and justice are portrayed within her narrative. If Eltit repeatedly emphasizes theatrical and performative elements in her portrayals of politics and justice, I ask, what aesthetic purpose does that insistence reveal? Moreover, do Eltit's texts themselves become political performances, participating in the historical dialogue in a way that exceeds the written page? Indeed, I will posit that through her writings, Eltit (re)stages political protest in the aftermath of Chile's transition to democracy. Her texts, I suggest, then become literary speech acts¹¹⁵ that interrogate the collective memory of a people while destabilizing the imagined sense of a modern, industrial, and healed nation promoted by official Chilean discourse today.

¹¹⁵ The speech act is a concept from the field of linguistics that was first developed by John Austin in a series of lectures at Harvard, later published in his 1962 book *How to Do Things with Words*, and elaborated by his student, John R. Searle, in the 1969 *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. In the field of Performance Studies, the speech act is considered to "have provided a methodology for considering language as performance," as well as, "the grounding for the concept of performativity" (Carlson 61). Richard Ohmann made the first, albeit somewhat limited, application of speech act theory to literature in 1971, in his article, "Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature." There, Ohmann defines literature as works of fiction, and concludes that the 'appropriateness' Austin says a speech act requires in order to be 'felicitous' does not exist in literature. Therefore, literature contains only what Ohmann terms "quasi-speech-acts." In her 1977 book *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*, however, Mary Louise Pratt argues against Ohmann, asserting that in the first place, fictivity should not be a criterion for the definition of literature, and secondly, that the speech acts contained within literature are indeed complete. In contrast to Ohmann's belief that, "the reader is an observer rather than a participant" (18) in literature, Pratt declares: "our role in literary works presupposes aesthetic commitment, not detachment; the conventional responsibilities tied to this commitment are exceedingly elaborate; and that commitment and those responsibilities are what define the literary speech situation" (Pratt 99). Since then, the literary speech act has appeared in the work of critics such from Shoshana Felman's 1984 *The Literary Speech Act: Don Juan with Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, 1984, to Joseph Hillis Miller's 2001 *Speech Acts in Literature*.

4.1 How to Perform a *Golpe*

In an essay published in 1997, seven years into the Chilean transition to democracy, Diamela Eltit reflects back on the *golpe de estado* that ended Salvador Allende Gossens' presidency and life, installing General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte as the country's leader. This essay, titled "Las dos caras de La Moneda," details what Eltit describes as a carefully staged display or spectacle mounted by the Chilean armed forces beginning on September 11th, 1973. Thus, when from the temporal distance of 1997 Eltit tells us that she wants to return to that 11th of September, it is in order to focus our understanding of the day's events in terms of what she calls, "su abrumador despliegue escenográfico que emergió inauguralmente marcado por los signos que después iban a multiplicarse a lo largo de 17 años" (*Emergencias* 18).

In essence, Eltit argues that the *golpe de estado* was orchestrated as a theatrical event, which would, in turn, initiate 17 years of further political performance under the guise of an authoritarian state. She depicts the abandoned streets of Santiago on the afternoon of September 11th, emptied of normal traffic after all workers had been told to go home and remain indoors. Absent the bustle of every-day city life, the image of those few bodies remaining in the streets sharpens: "los uniformes de los soldados sobresaturados con distintivos, con sus rostros tiznados, las armas en posición de ataque, fueron las figuras decisivas para señalar una atmósfera de guerra que parecía provenir de una conocida cinematografía hollywoodense bruscamente traspasada a la neutra y

acotada ciudad de Santiago” (18).¹¹⁶ Consequently, from the windows of their homes the civilian population looked out at the streets of Santiago and saw a composed scene of military power that depended not simply on the raw force of its raised weapons, but also on the Chilean population's recognition of filmic and theatrical tropes of armed intervention and order.

If, after all, one of the coup's central premises was that it would restore order to a nation 'gravely threatened' by a growing wave of anarchy and fraternal conflict that the current regime had 'proven' itself 'incapable' of controlling, then as the Armed Forces stepped in to assume power, they needed to be able to do so in a 'clean' and 'orderly' way. In other words, the *golpe* should be visually identified with a parade of unencumbered tanks moving victoriously through empty streets, rather than with a bloody and stumbling military advance through throngs of protesters. By staging an easily recognized image of military control that echoed the patterns established by Hollywood movies -- an image that has conditioned the population to seek cover rather than resist, or to passively observe the spectacle rather than to participate, the Armed Forces could guarantee that civilians wouldn't impede their approach to the Presidential Palace, nor complicate their official narrative of restoring order to a divided country.

¹¹⁶ Eltit recounts how the streets were emptied of all non-military bodies in detail. In her words, "En esas horas, se dictaminó Estado de Sitio. La ciudad quedaba así despoblada de cualquier cuerpo que no fuera el militar. Cualquier cuerpo que no correspondiera al cuerpo militar podía ser asesinado porque el tránsito por la ciudad ya estaba prohibido, la ciudad perdía así su carácter público para convertirse en un campo minado" (*Emergencias* 20).



Figure 5: Tanks and soldiers were the protagonists of the otherwise empty streets in Central Santiago on September 11th, 1973. Image from page five of *La tercera de la hora*, September 13th, 1973.

Moreover, this choreographed visual spectacle of armed soldiers and tanks patrolling otherwise empty streets was accompanied by an audio performance. From their homes all that day, Chileans listened first to the radio for updates about the military's actions and demands, then to the resignation of President Allende. Later, the radio waves were taken over by a sequence of military hymns alternating with traditional folkloric music, the patriotic notes of which would only be interrupted by the *bandos militares*: military decrees that were meant to notify the population of the change in government, as well as of the new orders with which they were now to comply. The importance of controlling radio broadcasts to the military's strategies is evidenced by the fact that the *Junta* had assembled a 'communication team' prior to the 11th of September. Lead by Roberto Guillard, the team was tasked with carrying out *Operación Silencio*, the suppressing of any radio transmissions by groups still loyal to Allende's government,

while simultaneously ensuring the dissemination of military propaganda over the air waves.

By midday, Eltit writes, the President's Palace, *La Moneda*, was on fire, and, "Sobre el espectáculo [del incendio] se erigía, superponiéndose, el nuevo régimen que seguía y seguía emitiendo sus bandos radiales a la población" (20). The language she uses to describe these events is significant: the Moneda burning was the *espectáculo* which allowed a new government to rise up. Meanwhile, the soldiers in the streets composed a *cinematografía hollywoodense* whose *poses* indicated their readiness to eliminate the 'enemy' that 'contaminated' the nation (19). Together with the din of planes and gunshots, these elements combined to create a *montaje* that could not be avoided by any of Chile's citizens (20). In sum, Eltit's words reveal how the *golpe* constructed itself as a public spectacle, a performance meant to convince Chileans of the necessity of a military take over which would hunt down the 'enemy' it claimed was destroying their country.¹¹⁷

It is important to note that Eltit's casting of the *golpe* as a performance should be in no way understood as an attempt to make light of an acutely devastating moment in Chilean history, nor does she mention Hollywood in order to place the events of the eleventh of September in the context of superficial or cinematic violence intended for entertainment. As she told me in a personal interview, wording her thoughts with great care, "Yo pondría eso [el golpe de estado] en términos performáticos, pero es algo social

¹¹⁷ As Diana Taylor indicates with respect to the Argentine coup of 1976, the Chilean *golpe* of 1973 affected a successful performance and communication of events even though the majority of the population was confined to their homes. Indeed, in both cases, "the military show resulted in absenting the addressee (the public). A performance that 'disappears' its audience seems to invert the traditional theatrical dependence on presencing. But there is nothing unperformative or antidramatic about a strategy that convinces viewers of the reality and power of that which they are not allowed to see" (*Disappearing* 61).

– no es algo frívolo, afectó a miles de personas. Es algo muy delicado. Así que solo podría hablar de lo performático en ciertos términos."¹¹⁸ Yet what Eltit terms the 'performatic' elements of the *golpe* are, in her interpretation of the day's events, not simply its most salient features, but are also its most significant in the social and political repercussions they would have for years to come. As a result, in her essay she labors to reveal the intentional scripting of the military's unified display of force in combination with its control of the airwaves and, indeed, the air itself, as the planes flying overhead, "parecía[n] que de un momento a otro se iban a venir cuesta abajo para despeñarse sobre el techo de una casa (de mi casa, de la de mi vecino, -- cómo explicarlo -- de todas las casas)" (19). Portraying the combination of the sound of machine gun fire with the spectacle of flames emerging from the windows of *La Moneda*, Eltit demonstrates that the *golpe* consisted of and depended on a complex audio-visual performance that was vital to its success.¹¹⁹

Nor is Eltit alone in this understanding of the coup d'état as a performatic event. In an article titled, "Chile 1973 -- el golpe y la voz de la ley," film and media scholar Carmen Oquendo-Villar calls the 11th of September, 1973, "el día-evento más significativo de la historia chilena del siglo veinte," and proceeds to argue that it was, precisely, "Desde la comunicación masiva [que los militares] teatralizaron la toma del

¹¹⁸ From a personal interview at New York University, October 15th, 2009.

¹¹⁹ Indeed, on June 29, 1973, Army Lieutenant Colonel Roberto Souper lead a failed coup attempt against Allende's government that would become known as the *tanquetazo*. Although Souper also put on a spectacle of force by mobilizing a large number of tanks to attack *La Moneda*, the conspiracy had been discovered by the Santiago Army Garrison before a complete plan could be worked out, forcing the Lieutenant Colonel into desperate action. Moreover, the military was not yet capable of displaying a unified front, as several generals -- most notably, General Carlos Prats -- remained loyal to the democratically elected government and were able to put down the rebellion.

poder y el re-establecimiento de la ley."¹²⁰ In Oquendo-Villar's analysis, the *golpe* was an event, "que primero fue escuchado por la mayoría de los chilenos, luego visto y, por último, leído, en ese orden." Immediately establishing tight control over the media, in the first days of the *golpe* the military privileged radio over television as a method of communicating their assumption of power. Indeed, Eltit herself notes that all that day Chilean television stations were reduced to broadcasting nothing other than an incessant series of cartoons that, "bloqueaba, en un sentido tragicómico, la información" (*Emergencias* 20), while the radio emitted only patriotic hymns punctuated by the announcement of new orders in the form of the *bandos*. As a result, the Chilean people was denied access not only to information but, moreover, to any form of visual input about the events of the *golpe* or the men orchestrating it. Incisively, Oquendo-Villar explains: "De esa privación visual inicial surge la autoridad del cuerpo de la Junta Militar." The absence of visual cues created a climate of apprehension and fear, from which only one voice could be heard, the authoritative voice of the *Junta* (which, at this point, still presented itself as a united group composed of the leaders of each of the branches of the military). Appearing to the public as only disembodied voice, the *Junta* was able to project a sense of omnipresence that aided in the assertion of their authority.

Moreover, "Desde la perspectiva golpista," Oquendo-Villar argues, "era necesario plantear la irrupción militar del 11 de septiembre como una teatralización de la reinstauración de la ley." Yet why would the *golpistas* place such emphasis on performance? Why was a carefully constructed and controlled media spectacle that

¹²⁰ Carmen Oquendo-Villar is currently at work on a book project titled *Chile 1973-2010: Re-constructing a 20th Century Media Coup with 21st Century Technologies*, in which she explores the coup as a performance and media event whose leading political icon becomes Augusto Pinochet.

provided only gradual access to the sphere of visibility so vital to the military's assumption of powers? The answer, I would suggest, is twofold. In part, the new leaders of the *Junta* needed to establish the legitimacy of their regime, and themselves as public actors. Due to a series of assassinations, resignations, exiles, and scandals, the Chilean Armed Forces or *Fuerzas Armadas* had changed leadership several times shortly before the *golpe*. Pinochet himself had only been promoted to Commander-in-Chief of the Army on August 23rd, 1973, less than three weeks before the coup d'état. As such, the members of the *Junta* were virtual unknowns at the national level who would have to plan their emergence from what Oquendo-Villar has called, "su invisibilidad en la esfera pública chilena." Thus, on one hand and in the first place, the *Junta* needed to convince the nation that the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende had fallen in what it termed, "la ilegitimidad flagrante" in the fifth *bando* of the 11th of September, 1973.¹²¹ Yet on the other hand, the nation's newly and self-appointed leaders would have to prove themselves to be morally, legally, and politically qualified for the assumption of power.

Beyond establishing the members of the *Junta* as legitimate actors on the national stage, however, the performance of the *golpe* aimed to put on a show of strength that would appear unstoppable. This coup d'état would differ from the attempt of June 29th in that this time no one would dare to stand in the way of the now united military, as

¹²¹ The full text of the most significant of the *bandos militares* can be found through the website *DerechosChile.com*. *Bando 5* was a prolonged announcement containing fourteen points, the objective of which was to officially depose the government of the *Unidad Popular* and justify such an intervention. To give just a partial list of the accusations made in this *bando*, the *Junta* claims that Allende's regime, "ha incurrido en grave ilegitimidad," by limiting the freedom of expression and the right to property; moreover, it had artificially created a class struggle, thereby causing national disunity; and, perhaps most importantly, it had shown itself to be incapable of resolving the reigning chaos and anarchy currently afflicting the nation.

General Carlos Pratt had done to stop the insurrection of the *tanquetazo*. Burning *La Moneda*, then, served precisely this purpose, as Diamela Eltit perceives in her essay, "Las dos caras de La Moneda." More than a necessary military intervention, the burning of *La Moneda* was a symbolic performance indicating to the Chilean people that a complete change of power was taking place. Historian Gonzalo Cáceres Quiero concurs:

Técnicamente, el bombardeo no tenía ninguna utilidad militar. El bombardeo es una demostración de fuerza simbólica que indica la instauración de algo nuevo. No hay ninguna justificación táctica para bombardear el edificio salvo el interés por proyectar una imagen de una transformación absoluta y partiendo por una imagen de lo más genuino de lo antiguo. Es un acto de marketing.¹²²

If Cáceres' analysis is correct and the bombing of *La Moneda* was not tactically necessary to oust Allende, then what was the *algo nuevo* that this 'act of marketing' intended to communicate to the Chilean people? Beyond the message, clearly projected, that the government of the *Unidad Popular* had lost the confidence of the military and allowed chaos to reign over Chile's streets, I would suggest that the deeper answer lies in the symbolism of that particular building. Historian Mary Grace Strasma articulates what was at stake in this attack:

¹²² Quoted in Oquendo-Villar, who cites Cáceres' argument from an unpublished interview.



Figure 4.2: The bombing of La Moneda in Santiago, Chile, on September 11th, 1973. Notice that the streets surrounding the presidential palace are entirely empty, signaling that this was indeed an attack as spectacle and political statement rather than a battle to overtake the building. Photograph property of Reuters.

La Moneda is more than a building; it serves as the physical manifestation of political and social metaphors; for example that open access to the physical place of government by any Chilean equates to democratic governance. The events of September 11, 1973, during which the concrete structure of La Moneda was attacked and partially destroyed, then, built on this earlier metaphor of La Moneda as Chile's political structure and traditions. The attack on the building became the attack on democracy. (Strasma 18)

The flames emerging from the edifice of *La Moneda*, in other words, served as a harbinger not just of a change in the country's leadership, but, significantly, of a change in the nation's entire system of government.¹²³ Indeed, as an article from the newspaper

¹²³ It is true that *La Moneda* had been closed to the public during Allende's presidency, prior to the September 11th *golpe de estado*. However, this had only occurred recently, in

La tercera de la hora reported on the 13th of September, 1973, the governmental palace had been almost totally destroyed during the fifteen minute bombing, with special emphasis to ensure that the building's original facade -- the 'face' associated with *La Moneda* by the public -- had been razed, as well. The flames could be seen a full kilometer away, and, moreover, "el humo junto a las llamas eran dirigidos por el viento hacia la Plaza de la Constitución" ("Quince minutos"). The imagery was not subtle: the bombing left the *Plaza de la Constitución* enveloped in smoke and the governmental palace in unrecognizable ruins. By staging this (technically unnecessary) apocalyptic vision that, in Cáceres' terms, 'advertised' the (literal) demolition of democratic government, the *Junta* ensured that the Chilean people would decipher the meaning of the performance, and, therefore, anticipate its next act: the re-founding of the nation through a regime change that would inaugurate authoritarian repression.

Of course, the *refundación* of Chile could not be accomplished in a single day, but, rather, would require the military to continue to orchestrate the performance of the newly defined nationhood for the country's citizens. Thus, while Oquendo-Villar and Cáceres furnish evidence supporting the depiction of the *golpe* as a political performance intended to meld public sympathies and fears while solidifying the military's assumption of power, Eltit goes much further in, "Las dos caras de la Moneda," asserting that this moment marked the start of two decades, if not more, of political performance in Chile. Here, Eltit's interpretation of *fin de siglo* Chilean history closely parallels Diana Taylor's

response to the previous June's attempted coup, which had demonstrated that an open-to-the-public presidential palace could be seriously threatened with ease.

analysis of a similar situation in neighboring Argentina.¹²⁴ Just across Chile's eastern border, another 'Dirty War' was waged from 1976 to 1983 in which, Taylor maintains, "...a small group of power brokers (in this case the military) engender[ed] and control[led] a viewing public through the performance of national identity, traditions, and goals" (*Disappearing* ix). Taylor calls this performance of a new national identity by the Argentine *Junta* its "consensus-building project," a project that would turn public space into a militarized zone, 'feminizing' the population while validating the use of military violence. In this new spectacle of Argentinean-ness, "The population, confined to spectatorship, was either seduced or coerced into identifying with the military project" (60).

Foreshadowing this consensus-building project that would be promoted just a few years later by the Argentine *Junta*, I suggest, the Chilean *golpe de estado* inaugurated a performance that likewise placed the hard bodies of military men in center stage. So begins what Eltit has called, "esa puesta en escena de una obra política que se iba a representar por los próximos 17 años" (*Emergencias* 22). Yet, I argue, the seventeen-year *obra política* mentioned by Eltit was, in reality, a deeply entangled double performance.

¹²⁴ The histories of late twentieth century Chile and Argentina share enough structural parallels to warrant comparing their cases. Nonetheless, it must be noted that the circumstances of Argentina's *golpe de estado* differ from that of Chile's, as Taylor herself reminds us: "In 1976 Argentina, unlike the 1973 coup in Chile, for example, no one was fighting back" (*Disappearing* 61). Similarly, while both countries experienced years of military dictatorship, each authoritarian state took slightly different forms. Whereas in Chile the dictatorship quickly came under the leadership of a single man, Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, in Argentina, by contrast, the Dirty War was headed by an outwardly united and undifferentiated military *junta* composed of General Jorge Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera (who stepped down in 1978), and General Orlando Agosti. In this chapter I only reference those elements of the Argentine military dictatorship that can help illuminate the performance of dictatorship as experienced in Chile.

As we shall see, the performance of the members of the Armed Forces was met by and inherently tied to yet another, equally important, performance: that of the Chilean people.

To begin with, the *Junta*, together with other military leaders, soldiers, and the *carabineros* or Chilean police, performed for the civilian public a new, correct version of Chilean identity and citizenship. Contrasting with the secretive nature of the subversives who would bring harm to the *Patria*, in both Chile and Argentina, "the military represented itself as all surface: unequivocally masculine, aggressively visible, identifiable by their uniforms, on parade for all the world to see [...]. The military display acted, enacted, and reenacted the (new -- now more than ever -- always) social system: all male, Catholic, and strictly hierarchical" (*Disappearing* 67).



Figure 4.3: President Pinochet, a devout Catholic, welcomes Pope John Paul II in April of 1987. Note the clear display of hierarchy pictured here: Pinochet stands singled out from the crowd, in a crisp, white uniform, to address the Pope. In the background of the image, a mass of anonymous soldiers in dark uniforms stands at attention in neat, straight rows. The Chilean people, however, do not even enter the frame of the photograph. Not a single woman appears in the picture.

At the summit of the hierarchy in this new social system stood the great *Patria* or Chilean Nation. Immediately beneath the *Patria* stood General Pinochet, whose every action was, allegedly, taken in deference to the needs of the *Patria*. On the next ladder

came the rest of the *Junta*, under whose direction marched the military and the police, who, in turn, were responsible for guaranteeing order over the rest of the population. Unsurprisingly, then, the most immediately identifiable features of the new citizenship as performed by the Armed Forces were a deep sense of patriotism and duty to the Nation, and an absolutely trusting obedience towards authority. As an illustration of these qualities, the *Junta* immediately put itself in communication with the Chilean people by radio in order to openly 'explain' (i.e, justify) the actions of the *Fuerzas Armadas* in the *golpe*. Their decision to depose the democratically elected government, *bando* number five professed, had been taken out of 'moral obligation' to the country, in light of the internal and external danger into which Allende's government had caused Chile to fall. As this *bando* illustrates, the spectacle of the *golpe* taking place in the center of Santiago was accompanied by a widely broadcast radio script that instructed the Chilean people on how to interpret the display of force on the streets. In this case and all others, the military's actions were intended to weed out dangerous subversives, and should therefore be understood as part of an honest assumption of duty to the country. Moreover, the obedient, orderly, and open nature of their undertaking, centered on the defense of the *Patria* against anarchy, should serve the civilian population as a model to be emulated of ideal, patriotic behavior.



Figure 4.4: General Augusto Pinochet inspects his soldiers, who present an image of perfect order and obedience. The pristine white of their gloves and the shine emanating from their polished black boots, along with their neatly cut hair and clean-shaven faces, illustrate the standards of hygiene the Chilean population was to follow.

Not content with simple modeling of ideal behavior, the *Junta* would leave no doubts about what it expected of its citizens. Beginning on the 11th of September, a series of *bandos militares* would inform the Chilean public of how it, too, could go about performing its duty to the country. For example, three of the *bandos militares* issued by radio during the first few days of the new government asked that long lists of named individuals who were known to be political organizers sympathetic to Allende's government voluntarily turn themselves in.¹²⁵ After all, if a citizen had nothing to hide, the government had no reason to hurt him, and there was no reason to fear authority. Those who would not voluntarily turn themselves in, the *bandos* implied, must indeed be subversives, and therefore deserved whatever punishment they may eventually receive.

¹²⁵ *Bandos* 10 (September 11th, 1973), and 19 and 23 (September 12th, 1973).

Citizens were called upon to follow in the military's footsteps by swiftly obeying the *bandos* and coming forth to make clear their allegiance to the *Patria*.

Thus, while Taylor describes the Argentine population as limited to a role of passive spectatorship in the military's performance, in Chile the public would have to actively partake in the performance of national values that would go on to constitute the country's seventeen-year *obra política*. To use Eltit's words, after the 'messianic re-founding' of the nation on September 11th, 1973, those in power, "miraba de manera absorta a los cuerpos y los ponía bajo el microscopio del procedimiento militar" (*Emergencias* 20). In public -- i.e., under the military microscope -- it would be essential to perform Chilean patriotism, and, to all outward appearances, conform to not only the *Junta*'s cause, but also to its discipline. Hair length was regulated, and even personal hygiene was enforced. The bodies of good Chilean citizens should be clean and orderly -- just like military bodies, and in direct opposition to the perceived appearance of 'subversives' loyal to Allende.

As these examples demonstrate, the military's performance of 'patriotic identity' was meant to model the new way of being a 'good' Chilean citizen to the general public. The carefully groomed, hierarchical spectacle of the Armed Forces informed Chileans of a new set of rules, standards, and laws. In case this performance left any room open for interpretation about how to behave, however, the government also disseminated publications such as, "Valores patrios y valores familiares" (1982), and Pinochet's, "Mensaje a la mujer chilena" (1974). These texts were put into circulation by the new government in order to instruct Chileans about what it meant to be patriotic, and how they should live their private lives even within the family unit, "la célula básica de la

sociedad" (*Valores* 20). After all, what is the Nation if not an extension of each Chilean family? To quote the regime, "La Patria es verdaderamente el reflejo del hogar. De ahí entonces que la solidaridad familiar sea el primer fundamento del verdadero patriotismo" (11). Family solidarity, of course, depended on acceptance of the roles assigned to each member of the family: the father as the head of the family and decision maker, the mother as the caregiver and homemaker, the children in obedience to their parents, and everyone in deference to the national father, Pinochet, and through him, to the Patria. Consequently, families were to accommodate their behavior to support the moral path of the Nation, currently 'threatened' by, "la acción destructora del marxismo, que pretende fomentar una artificial lucha de clases entre los chilenos" (11).

Accordingly, national identity became, "not so much a question of being as of doing, of being seen doing, of identifying with the appropriate performative model" (*Disappearing* 92). Publicly associating oneself with the wrong performative model -- by exceeding one's gender role, for example, or by giving voice or appearance to political dissent -- could be deadly. It was difficult to know whom to trust, since the government encouraged Chileans to turn in 'subversive' neighbors. Eltit distinctly recalls the dissemination of this message through, "proclamas televisivas que incitaban a la delación como signo de una valiosa muestra patriótica" (*Emergencias* 23). Thus, everyone outwardly performed patriotic conformity, while incessantly feeling obliged to watch everyone else for, depending on one's political viewpoint, telltale signs of either subversive dissent, or of excessive nationalistic fervor. In this high-pressure environment, "People not only cultivated the official look, [...] they became increasingly alert to the dangers around them. Their senses and protective instincts became more acute. They

learned to 'read' other's bodies, a new system of signs and codes, just as they exposed themselves to observation" (107).¹²⁶ In essence, Chile was evolving into a real-world example of Foucault's panopticon. Unsurprisingly, public expression and debate jolted to a virtual halt.

Simultaneously, due to the 'disappearance' of political dissidents and undesirables, another performative stage opened up. In a personal interview, Eltit painstakingly recounted to me how the sudden invention of a previously unknown category -- that of the *desaparecido* -- contributed to a further deepening of the atmosphere of constant performance in which Chilean citizens were required to act. The concept of the 'disappeared' was, she explains, "una categoría de la magia donde la gente no estaba ni viva ni muerta, sino entre la vida y muerte."¹²⁷ This new category of un-existence required family members, friends, and acquaintances to, on the drop of a dime, forget they had ever known the disappeared individual, to go on with life as though nothing were missing. Inevitably, however, the *desaparecidos* affected the circulation and expression of bodies in public spaces, creating a sharp divide between one's true opinions as enacted in private, and the outward presence that had to be projected on the public stage.

¹²⁶ While I take this quote from Taylor's work on Argentina's Dirty War, her analysis applies to the situation of repression created by the Chilean dictatorship. Indeed, Eltit herself makes a similar observation of the necessity to learn to read and respond to new signs in order to survive in her essay, "Las dos caras de La Moneda." In her words, "Un aprendizaje apresurado y violento alteraba velozmente los signos culturales. Junto con las marcas de una cultura de muerte se erigía paralela la cultura de la sobrevivencia, se abría paso la necesidad de organizar una nueva lectura de signos para pervivir, para atravesar la mera sobrevivencia y lograr habitar en medio de poderes que resultaban adversos y antagónicos para aquellos que estábamos cruzados por un imaginario político antidictatorial" (*Emergencias* 22).

¹²⁷ From a private interview with the author in her office in New York University, on October 15, 2009.

Consequently, the Chilean people collectively held their breath as they embarked on a seventeen-year performance in which survival depended largely on reflecting back the 'moral' behavior, obedient thought, and 'appropriate' appearances that were staged for them as 'correct' comportment by the military regime. Eventually, however, the atmosphere of repression would no longer be able to hold back all political thoughts and beliefs beneath a surface of outward conformity. In October of 1988, as mandated by the Chilean constitution of 1980, a plebiscite was held to determine whether or not there should be presidential elections in the following year, or if Pinochet should continue on as president until 1997. Originally written into the Constitution such that the leaders of the Armed Forces could name any candidate they wished for a vote to be held at any time before February of 1989, the plebiscite was intended to, "give Pinochet legitimacy but also to guarantee him another eight years as president" (Brown 275). Believing that he would win based on good economic figures and a lack of unity among opposition candidates, an overconfident Pinochet truly believed he had achieved sufficient control over the population to allow the plebiscite to go on. Several factors lead to this miscalculation, as Cynthia Brown discusses in an article for *The Nation* published two days before the vote:

In January [1988], during the Chilean summer, the opposition to Pinochet and his military regime was floundering; by May, opposition parties had formed an effective coalition and were on their way to gaining the right to have poll-watchers at every voting site. In January, fewer than 4 million eligible voters were registered, and most analysts believed that the majority were Pinochet supporters, since the government had intensively promoted 'yes'¹²⁸ registration; by May,

¹²⁸ The plebiscite of 1988 offered voters only two options. They could vote "Yes," for the continuation of Pinochet's presidency for another eight years. The alternative was to vote "No," a vote that would end Pinochet's presidency, allowing him to continue in office for another year while requiring open presidential and parliamentary elections to be held three months before the end of his term.

largely as a result of opposition campaigning, there were almost 6 million voters registered, and polls were showing that Santiago would be won by the opposition's 'no' vote. In the provinces, where the regime counted on obtaining its victory, the opposition was also gaining ground. (Brown 274)

When the plebiscite was held on October 5, 1988, 7.2 million voters turned out (97.5% of the registered voters), and nearly 56 percent of those who voted mustered the courage to say no. Consequently, when the candidate of the Christian Democrats and the *Concertación*,¹²⁹ Patricio Aylwin Azócar, was elected president of Chile in December of 1989, one might assume that the era of political performance -- or, at least, the enforced political performance of conformity on the part of the Chilean people -- had finally come to an end. Yet for Eltit and many others, the Chilean Transition to Democracy, together with its National Truth and Reconciliation Commission,¹³⁰ only modified and extended the atmosphere of political performance by continuing to work under the 1978 law of amnesty established during Pinochet's own rule. As Amnesty International reported in a 1996 article on human rights violations in Chile, the 1978 amnesty, "prevented the prosecution of individuals implicated in certain criminal acts [those of torture and murder] committed between 11 September 1973 and 10 March 1978[,] the first period of

¹²⁹ The *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia* is the coalition of 17 political parties that joined forces to elect the Christian Democrat candidate Patricio Aylwin Azócar to succeed Pinochet as Chilean president in December of 1989. The coalition was able to remain in power until the presidential elections of 2010, when right-wing candidate Sebastián Piñera Echenique won the second round elections against the *Concertación* candidate Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle.

¹³⁰ Aylwin established the *Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación* in 1990; in February of the following year, after nine months of work, the Commission released a report (commonly known as the *Rettig Report*) on the violations against human rights committed during the military government. Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission aimed to establish the truth around the crimes against humanity that occurred between 1973 and 1990, it was *not* a trial and did not set out consequences for the perpetrators of the crimes. Rather, it limited itself to offering suggestions on how to compensate the families of victims.

Pinochet rule when a state of siege was in force and repression was harshest" (3). With the exception of a very few cases that of murder that did not occur on Chilean soil, the 1978 amnesty effectively made it impossible to prosecute the perpetrators of human rights violations during the dictatorship. Thus, by not immediately moving to repeal the amnesty law, Eltit writes, the *Concertación*, "quiso hacer de la reconciliación un instrumental de olvido" (*Emergencias* 30). In essence, she argues, the Transition governments' repeated concessions to the perpetrators of violence required the Chilean population to publicly act as if it had forgotten the State terror through which it had lived.

Of course, the Transition governments were limited by several factors, all of which contributed to the newly required civilian performance of forgiving and forgetting the recent past. For example, Pinochet was still the Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean army until as late as 1998. Moreover, the Constitution written and voted on in 1980, during the height of the military dictatorship, still stood, and conveniently provided for any president who had held that office for six or more years to become a senator-for-life. As a result, even after Aylwin's election, Pinochet remained politically powerful, and not only the military but also the legislative and judicial branches of government remained loyal to him.¹³¹ Another significant factor for Eltit, however, is that the governments of the *Concertación* continued to operate under the neoliberal economic system¹³² that had

¹³¹ The Chilean Supreme Court repeatedly upheld the 1978 Amnesty Decree, and in spite of winning the 1989 presidential election, the *Concertación* did not procure a majority in the Senate as a result of a constitutional provision that allotted a certain number of seats to appointed (as opposed to elected) senators.

¹³² Many others have defined economic neoliberalism, but Elizabeth Martínez and Arnoldo García offer a concise summary of the term and its use in their, "What is Neoliberalism? A Brief Definition for Activists." After outlining the history of the term "liberalism," Martínez and García list the five main principles of neoliberalism as: "the rule of the market;" "cutting public expenditure for social services;" "deregulation;"

effectively been the driving force behind the *golpe de estado* in the first place. If, as Eltit suggests, "lo que estaba detrás del avasallamiento a los cuerpos, aquello no dicho, radicaba en un deseo económico, en una forma salvaje de repactar el capital"

(*Emergencias* 23),¹³³ then how could a democratic transition in the hands of a coalition of leftist parties, one of which claimed to be the heir of Allende's political ideals, fail to at least tame the aggressive capitalism that the dictatorship had left behind as its most outspoken legacy?

Disillusioned with what she sees as the Left's captivation by the market, Eltit argues that throughout the Transition, "la propia izquierda" had intentionally forgotten its past (and, in particular, its ties to Allende),

para permanecer cupularmente en los escenarios públicos cumpliendo un rol izquierdista que, a menudo, resulta bastante *teatral* (lo digo en tanto representación declamatoria), *una simulación cursada en pactos* relativamente intrascendentes, un socialismo empeñado en sumarse a la instalación de la hegemonía del más común sentido común que se autoimpuso la política a partir de los 90. (*Emergencias* 30, emphasis mine)¹³⁴

"privatization;" and "eliminating the concept of 'the public good' or 'community.'" Indeed, they assert that, "The first clear example of neo-liberalism at work came in Chile (with thanks to University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman), after the CIA-supported coup against the popularly elected Allende regime in 1973." For more on neoliberalism, see David Harvey's 2005 book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, in which he offers his own definition of the term as, "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (2).

¹³³ Indeed, Eltit declares the establishment of an aggressive neoliberal economic system as the hidden purpose of the *golpe* in even more explicit terms: "El escenario del 11 de Septiembre fue, especialmente, una escenografía ornamentada, tiznada, travestida de valores patrióticos que, en realidad, sólo buscaba la implantación de un capitalismo radical, camuflado detrás de discursos estereotipados que nombraban sin cesar la patria, el orden y a la integridad de la familia chilena mientras se extendían, clandestinos, los espacios de la reclusión" (*Emergencias* 23).

¹³⁴ From her essay "Sociedad anónima," originally published in 1999.

In essence, then, the political performance did not end. Rather, what has been performed in post-dictatorship politics has been a change of focus that now centers on a market-based hegemony of forgetting. After all, the market has always worked, Eltit insists, "contra la memoria," in that it, "trabaja con un deseo inapelable y febril de presente" (25). Who has time to remember the past clearly, never mind actively, when we all are so busy wishing for the latest version of the iPhone?

In short, one can unravel a history of 'performances' that defined Chilean political life beginning in September of 1973. On one hand, political expression during the dictatorship primarily consisted of two trends: the performance of 'good' citizenship and patriotism as staged by the military and government, or of political conformity as portrayed by the common citizen who didn't want to attract negative attention to him/herself. During and following the Transition, on the other hand, Chilean politics conditioned the Chilean public to the performance of *olvido* by granting the perpetrators of state violence immunity and encouraging the flux of goods (and desires) of the market to displace memory. Consequently, it cannot be surprising that Eltit's narrative portraits of Chilean politics and justice would be imbued with a heavy theatrical or performative residue, spotlighting the dramatic elements of the political.

Building on the turbulent -- and theatrical -- history of politics and justice that we have just seen, in the rest of this chapter I would like to posit that two of Eltit's recent books, *Puño y letra: juicio oral* (2005) and *Jamás el fuego nunca* (2007), take on political performance as a central theme in direct response to this lived experience. Moreover, I will argue that each of these novels stages (or restages, in the case of *Puño y letra*) political issues from the Chilean transition to democracy that have otherwise been

silenced by the nation's official discourse of forgetting. Here, we shall see how each book in and of itself is a political performance: a literary speech act that articulates and performs judgment (in the case of *Puño y letra*) or political disillusionment (in *Jamás el fuego nunca*).

4.2 Aranacibia's Show Trial: Working through, Witnessing, and Performance

On September 30th, 1974, a bomb went off under a car in Buenos Aires. Ignited by remote control, it killed the ex-Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean army, Carlos Prats González, and his wife, Sofía Cuthbert, both of whom had been living in exile in Argentina since the Chilean *golpe de estado*. Since Prats was a general, albeit no longer in favor and even considered a threat by the new Chilean military government,¹³⁵ an investigation of the assassination ensued. While it didn't take long to establish links to Pinochet's secret police (the *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional* or DINA), as well as to DINA operative Enrique Arancibia Clavel, known as "*El Dinamitero*" ("The Dynamiter"), the common goals of Southern Cone intelligence agencies impeded the case's progress. Consequently, years passed in relative tranquility for Arancibia, who became an Argentine citizen, even opening his own business. Then, in January of 1991, Argentine Judge Servini de Cubría ordered that Arancibia be detained. A wide range of evidence was immediately found in his home, yet nothing further came of the case until October of 2000. Although by then it was clear that the DINA had been directly involved

¹³⁵ At the time of his death, Prats had nearly finished writing a book of memoirs that the Chilean government did not want to be published, for fear of the revelations it likely contained.

in the crime, the victims of which were Chilean citizens, the trial that finally began towards the close of 2010 was held in Argentina rather than Chile.¹³⁶

Thus, *Puño y letra: juicio oral* opens with Diamela Eltit describing how she attended, "de manera sistemática" (*Puño* 13), all of the sessions of Arancibia's *juicio oral* (oral proceedings) in Buenos Aires. In a later interview with Álvaro Matus, Eltit explains that her regular presence at the *juicio* was inextricably tied to the fact that this modality of an open door trial did not yet exist in Chile, where the juridical model was still, in her words, "impenetrable, monolítico" (*Signos* 287). As a result, "Presenciar el juicio en Argentina implicó para mí una situación inédita, en la medida en que se alojaba allí la posibilidad de democratización de un sistema judicial que se sostenía en Chile en innumerables privilegios" (287).

Although in the interview Eltit does not specify the privileges that controlled the Chilean judicial system until as recently as 2005, the flaws of the system in processing cases of the dictatorship's human rights violations were widely known. To begin with, while Aylwin's transition government established the National Truth and Reconciliation

¹³⁶ The assassination of General Prats and his wife was one of two murders planned against well-known Chileans residing abroad during the dictatorship. The other case was that of the ex-Chilean Ambassador Orlando Letelier del Solar and his assistant, Ronni Moffitt, who were murdered in Washington, D.C., in 1976. Much has been written about both cases in terms of human rights trials during and following the Chilean dictatorship, although the Letelier case has received more extensive scholarly discussion. See, for example, John Dinges and Saul Landau's 1980 book on the Letelier plot, *Assassination on Embassy Row*, or Edwin Harrington and Mónica González's 1987 book on the Prats assassination, *Bomba en una Calle de Palermo*. Both the Prats and Letelier murders are often described as exemplary of the workings of the *Operación Cóndor*, the program that united intelligence agencies from Southern Cone dictatorships to mutually help each other in the repression of political dissidence. More concretely, both cases demonstrate how the reach of Pinochet's politics of terror extended well beyond Chilean borders, as well as how the international community must be involved in efforts to bring such crimes to justice.

Commission, the Commission was given explicit instructions that it was not a tribunal and therefore could not name perpetrators: its aim was to establish the truth of a strictly defined series of events, but not accountability.¹³⁷ Evidence accrued by the Commission was sent on to judicial authorities, but was most often dismissed in accordance with the 1978 amnesty law. When a case made it to trial, the appointed federal judge -- who, most often, had been appointed by Pinochet -- could decide whether or not to continue the investigation. At best, these cases would be transferred out of the civilian justice system and into military courts, where a lack of transparency allowed them to be quickly derailed or closed with minimal sentences.¹³⁸

Under this system, the first big human rights trial to achieve a conviction was only in 1993: Manuel Contreras and his second-in-command Espinoza Bañados were sentenced to six and seven years of imprisonment for two high-profile murders that took place on United States soil.¹³⁹ Even then, the Supreme Court delayed confirming the sentences for two years, at which point the military demanded that the time be served in a

¹³⁷ In an effort to recognize and compensate for some of the weaknesses of the resulting Rettig report (1991), which only sought to investigate the truth about cases of human rights violations that specifically resulted in death or disappearance, Ricardo Lagos would commission a second report, investigated and written up by the *Comisión nacional sobre prisión política y tortura*, in 2004. The ensuing Valech Report used testimony to detail the torture and imprisonment of more than 38,000 people, yet once again with the clear distinction that the Commission was not a tribunal. Indeed, in 2004 a further step was taken to separate the Commission's task of recognizing human rights violations from any sort of judgment or penalty for the perpetrators: testimony collected by the Commission was not included in the public version of the report but rather was made classified, not to be released for 50 years, and therefore inaccessible as evidence for trials on crimes committed against human rights.

¹³⁸ For a complete review of accountability and the history of human rights court cases in Chile from the dictatorship through 2009, see Cath Collin's article, "Human Rights Trials in Chile during and after the 'Pinochet Years.'"

¹³⁹ Known as the Letelier case, these were the murders of Ex-Chilean Ambassador Orlando Letelier, and his (significantly) *American* assistant, Ronni Moffitt, in Washington, D.C.

specially constructed military prison, the Penal de Punta Peuco. A 'prison' in name alone, Punta Peuco was staffed by military officers and afforded quite comfortable accommodations: each prisoner, now a convicted assassin, inhabited a cabin that consisted of two bedrooms, a bathroom, and living room, complete with internet and cell phones. More luxurious hotel than penitentiary, the environment was so lax that, unbelievably, "Cada interno pose[ía] llave de su habitación" (*Informe cárceles*). Using this key, prisoners could let themselves out of their rooms in order to access the communal green space, pool, tennis court, and grilling patio. These are almost certainly some of the "innumerable privilegios" of the Chilean legal and penal system to which Eltit alludes in her hope that the open door, civilian trial of Arancibia Clavel in Argentina might allow for a 'democratization' of the judicial process.

Still another factor in Arancibia Clavel's trial fascinated Eltit, however. Not only were all Chilean trials at the time opaque, in that they were conducted entirely behind closed doors, but more importantly, "los juicios eran más bien textuales, con textos, sin cuerpos."¹⁴⁰ What Eltit means here is that, up until the year 2005, the Chilean justice system was built completely upon paperwork: on written declarations and investigative files in what was called the 'inquisitorial' system of justice. Under this system, a trial is a process initiated and carried out in its totality by a judge, who conducts a written

¹⁴⁰ The profound impression made on Eltit by witnessing this system of justice is evident in her repeated insistence on the presence of bodies, as opposed to mere papers, in the Argentine trial: "Lo que pasa es que en Chile en ese minuto -- ahora sí hay -- los juicios eran más bien textuales, con textos, sin cuerpo. Entonces, el sistema en Argentina, era con juicios orales, que en Chile no había en esa hora. Yo me enfrenté por primera vez a ese espacio [porque] en Chile, hicimos todo detrás de las puertas y traían papeles y papeles, declaraciones, pero todo era expedientes, ¿no? En cambio, éste era un juicio con los cuerpos." Quote taken from a personal interview with Eltit at New York University on October 15, 2009.

investigation of the crime in question, makes a decision about the guilt or innocence of the accused and the appropriate sentence for the crime, and writes up all of his findings to be filed away as part of the State archive.¹⁴¹ In contrast, by the year 2000, Argentina already operated on the 'adversarial' system of justice, in which the judge acts not as investigator but as an impartial representative of the State to ensure that the protocols of the law are followed in the trial. Furthermore, the adversarial model depends on the creation of what I will call a 'lived scene' in which the prosecution and defense call and question a series of witnesses. It is their *oral* testimony, given in the presence of the judge and a civilian jury, which creates the body of evidence on which the defendant's innocence or guilt must be decided.

What interests us about the adversarial system of justice -- and, I argue, what so deeply intrigued Eltit in the Arancibia Clavel trial-- is its inherently theatrical or performative nature. In contrast to the closed nature of the inquisitorial system, which is tied to the archive and to the written word, and in which all decisions are arrived at before the defendant can begin to respond (which even then can only be done in the form of an appeal), the adversarial system is an *experiential* process of judgment that requires two parties to present all of the evidence they have in defense of, or in accusation against, an individual. By the same token, it requires those who would judge the case to listen to, and *be present for*, the oral delivery of this evidence before allowing them to deliberate on a

¹⁴¹ This system began to change as early as the year 2000 in Chile, when the *Reforma procesal penal* began with the intention of moving the country to an adversarial judicial system. However, the reform was implemented gradually, region by region, with the country's most populous region, the *Región metropolitana*, only putting the reform into effect in June of 2005.

verdict.¹⁴² Consequently, the adversarial system is dependent not only on the judge and lawyers, but also on the presence and participation of *three* distinct groups of witnesses: the original witnesses to the crime, who will be called to testify; the witnesses to the evidence produced and arguments made during the trial (i.e., the jury), who will be asked to deliberate and reach a verdict on the defendant's guilt; and the witnesses to the due process of the trial, or the judge -- and, significantly, the public.

Dutch literary critic Yasco Horsman has outlined how a trial in the adversarial system sets itself up in its very first moments as a theatrical event, not only for this last group of witnesses, the public, but indeed for all of its 'actors,' as I will call the judge, lawyers, and jury. In Horsman's words, "The ceremonial opening of a trial, the calling of 'La Cour' by the bailiff [...] serves not only to announce the judges' entrance and the beginning of the legal proceedings; it also symbolically separates the courtroom from everyday life, transforming it into a highly structured space that ascribes different speaking and listening positions to its participants" (8). Thus the courtroom immediately begins to resemble a theatre, only the cue for silence and attention in this case is not a dimming of the lights and the lifting of a curtain, but rather the bailiff's order for everyone to rise before the entrance of the judge. What is significant about this system is that there is a divide between those who are there to speak and act, and those who are there to observe and listen -- and yet, as in theatre, all roles are of equal importance. A

¹⁴² This is not to say that the adversarial system has moved away entirely from the written word and the archive -- indeed, many of the articles of evidence submitted in a trial consist of written documents, which must then be read out loud to the courtroom in order to be admitted into evidence. Moreover, all of the evidence that is submitted orally is simultaneously being transcribed, so that by the trial's close a complete documentation of all that transpired enters into the State's permanent records. Nonetheless, the focus of the process of judgment in the adversarial system is on the witnessing of a live presentation of evidence.

performance is not a performance but rather only a rehearsal -- at best -- if there is no audience to watch it; similarly, the open-door adversarial legal process assumes that justice cannot be achieved without the presence -- and, thereby, witnessing -- of a public of observers. Consequently, the responsibility of reaching an accurate verdict and an appropriate sentence does not fall on the shoulders of one individual actor, but rather on those of all gathered in the courtroom: judge, lawyers, witnesses, jury, and the public.

It was as part of this last group that Eltit participated in Arancibia's trial, and in that role she witnessed the testimony that lead to his guilty verdict and the sentence of *reclusión perpetua* that was announced on November 20, 2000. Yet long afterwards, she tells us, "el escenario jurídico que había presenciado se negaba a abandonarme" (*Puño* 13). I would like to suggest that the trial's power over Eltit was doubly tied to the theatrical essence of the event. In the first place, as we have already seen, the performative character of the *juicio oral* in the adversarial system requires the participation of all in attendance, even if that participation simply takes the form of observation. Thus, by virtue of her presence at --and witness of -- the trial, Eltit herself has become part of the trial's history, while the trial has likewise become part of her own history. Yet there is another factor at play here: as Eltit tells us in the very first paragraph of *Puño y letra*, "Para mí [el juicio de Arancibia] constituyó una experiencia intensa en la que se volvía a transitar no solamente un tramo de la historia de Chile sino, además, una época que me competía como habitante de la dictadura chilena" (13). That is to say, for Eltit the act of witnessing Arancibia's trial was part of her own personal 'working through' of the trauma of living through the Chilean dictatorship.

Freud develops the concept of 'working through' in his 1914 essay, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through," which instructs students of psychoanalysis on how to treat a patient who cannot consciously recall certain (traumatic) past experiences. There, he reminds us that we do not forget but rather repress memories, which the patient may, under the condition of resistance, repeat unconsciously by 'acting out.' A cure can only be reached, Freud suggests, when the analyst first identifies and acquaints the patient with his or her own resistance, and then continues on to 'work through' the resistance in order to render the patient's compulsion to repeat or act out, "harmless, and indeed useful, by giving it the right to assert itself in a definite field" (Freud 154). Working through, in other words, is a form of performance: it is the conscious and repeated staging of a symptom of trauma in a controlled environment, until the symptom -- and the trauma -- finally loses its control over the patient. Thus, the act of attending Arancibia's trial, and therefore participating in the effort to bring him to justice, allowed the symptoms of Eltit's personal trauma to begin to constructively surface within the definite field of the courtroom, in a personal working through of post-traumatic resistance.

Yet the dictatorship, of course, did not affect Eltit alone, but rather an entire country. As a result, no amount of individual working through could ever create sufficient healing --never mind closure -- to the traumatic experience. As Chile entered the twenty first century, the nation as a whole had yet to confront an essential question: "How does one get free from a past not fully remembered, yet under whose spell one still lives" (*Theatres* 3)? When Arancibia Clavel's trial began in an open courtroom in Argentina in October of the year 2000, then, it was an opportune juncture to begin the

national process of working through Chile's turbulent past. Or, at least, so it *could* have been. In reality, however, Arancibia's trial was overshadowed by other, more clamorous events of 2000 and the years that followed: Pinochet, who had been arrested in London in 1998 under a warrant issued by Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón, had weathered and won a 16-month legal battle to extradite him to Spain to face charges of crimes against humanity. Set free, he returned to Chile in March of 2000, marking the beginning of a nearly seven year cycle of alternating indictments, arrests, and dismissals of cases against him in the Chilean court system that ranged from his role in the disappearances in the Caravan of Death case, to tax fraud and money laundering.

Unsurprisingly, for the majority of Chileans -- and, indeed, for the international public -- these cases against Pinochet took on a much higher profile than Arancibia's trial in Argentina. Yet at the time Eltit began to write *Puño y letra*, almost four years after Pinochet's return to Chile and three years after Arancibia's sentencing, there were still no signs that Pinochet would ever stand for a full trial: the cases against him were continually dismissed based on allegations of his failing health. Indeed, one year after *Puño y letra* was published, Pinochet would die without ever having been convicted of any crimes at all.¹⁴³

Given the failure of the Chilean justice system to try, convict, and sentence the principal perpetrator of the crimes against humanity committed by the military dictatorship, and the similar lack of resolve of the Argentine system to follow through on

¹⁴³ Arancibia, on the other hand, had been sentenced to life imprisonment in November of 2000 in Argentina-- though his punishment would not be fully served out, either. In July of 2007, Arancibia was released to 'complete' the remainder of his sentence in 'observed liberty.' This liberty, however, was not very long lived: in April of 2011, Arancibia was found stabbed to death in his apartment in Buenos Aires.

the original severity of its sentencing, I see *Puño y letra* as availing itself of the inherently theatrical nature of the adversarial system of justice to offer its readers the opportunity to restage one trial that was held -- specifically, the trial investigating the deaths of General Carlos Prats and Sofia Cuthbert -- and to deliberate on the hundreds of cases that were either dropped before reaching trial or suspended before a verdict could be delivered. Yet *Puño y letra*'s restaging of Arancibia's trial is not just about recuperating a missed opportunity for justice to be served; perhaps more importantly, it allows Arancibia's trial to become a national didactic event in a way that wasn't possible at the time the trial was held.

Renowned law professor and sociologist Mark Osiel has written extensively about the role 'show' trials can play in the collective working through of a past of mass atrocities. In his words, "acts asserting legal rights or officially stigmatizing their violation have often become a focal point for the collective memory of whole nations. These acts often become secular rituals of commemoration. As such, they consolidate shared memories with increasing deliberateness and sophistication" (Osiel 6). Literary critic Yasco Horsman elaborates by adding that war crimes and human rights trials, such as the proceedings that began against Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, both, "serve justice and to teach the public as part of a national process of psychic healing" (Horsman 6). In essence, then, Horsman and Osiel suggest that following situations of mass atrocities, such as those experienced during a period of state violence, a highly publicized trial can conjugate legal, didactic, and therapeutic discourses in such a way as to help a torn nation begin to find the kind of psychological closure necessary to once again view itself as whole. In the specific case of Chile as it transitioned into democracy, however,

such a trial as public and national event never truly occurred. Thus, I argue that *Puño y letra* re-enacts the Arancibia trial in order to set the scene for the delayed national working through of trauma that couldn't take place while Chile's focus was constantly being torn between the various indictments and suspensions of cases against Pinochet.

4.3 Restaging Justice, in Her Own *Puño y letra*

In my contention that *Puño y letra* 'restages' or 're-enacts' a specific moment of Chilean history -- an opportunity lost, as I have suggested, for Chilean justice and national healing --, I build upon an idea that Eltit herself has explicitly articulated in interviews about this book. "Decidí hacer el libro, después de pensar y repensar el tema," she tells Álvaro Matus and the readers of the *Mercurio*. "Pero yo no 'cuento una historia,' lo que hago es *poner en escena* un fragmento documental de orden político que ya formaba parte de la memoria chilena" (*Signos* 288, emphasis mine). Within the pages of *Puño y letra*, Eltit sends the reader numerous hints about the performative nature of her documentation, continually referring to the courtroom as a stage, for example, calling it "el escenario" (*Puño* 25). Even in her description of the parties involved in the case and therefore present on the 'stage' created by the courtroom, she draws references to well-known figures associated with the (tragic) theatrical tradition: she describes Arancibia's sisters and mother in terms of the plays of Federico García Lorca, and the Prats sisters, in her words, "recuerdan la porfía ética de la tragedia griega Antígona" (26). *Puño y letra*,

then, is not a novel but rather a book -- a fact Eltit avers repeatedly¹⁴⁴ -- that *dramaticizes* a past moment, intentionally calling upon the cultural legacy of tragic theater in order to ask her readers to relive the trial, to work through what happened and what didn't happen. Moreover, by restaging specific fragments of the arguments presented in Arancibia's trial, *Puño y letra* allows its readers to reach their own understandings of the present they live in, and conclusions about what needs to happen in the future. Matus puts it this way: "*Puño y letra* no indaga sobre el pasado, sino sobre los orígenes del presente" (287).

On what I shall call the 'stage' composed by the pages of this 'documentary' book, Eltit sifts the courtroom proceedings into a unique, three-act adaptation of the Prats case that mimics the structure of a legal trial. In the first act of *Puño y letra*, Eltit offers legal procedure and formalities as well as opening statements. Act one, scene one consists of a brief prologue articulating the obstacles Eltit faced as she sorted through the massive body of evidence generated by the trial; scene two presents us with the letter General Augusto Pinochet wrote to General Carlos Prats to reaffirm his friendship and loyalty just four days before the *golpe de estado*; scene three anchors us (physically) in the courtroom and (linguistically) in legal discourse by enumerating the place and date of the trial, as well as the parties and sections of the Argentine legal code involved. The second act is composed of witness testimony: in the first scene, Eltit offers a statement of her own testimony as a witness of Arancibia's trial in October and November of 2000 in Buenos

¹⁴⁴ That Eltit stresses this one point of interpretation so heavily is significant, given that she almost always refuses to analyze or explain the intended meaning of her writing to interviewers. Indeed, even here Eltit will argue that it is not her place to offer a reading of her own work and in the same breath repeat that *Puño y letra* is not a novel: "...yo no me puedo transformar en crítica o explicadora de mi propio libro. No corresponde. Lo que sí le puedo decir es que no es una novela, no lo es, más allá de que la editorial la incluye bajo ese prisma. Ahora, si porta o no porta ficción, si existen mecanismos autorales, le corresponde al lector formar su propio criterio" (*Signos* 288).

Aires; the second scene transcribes the questioning of Hugo Zambelli, a minor witness from the original trial who was Arancibia's domestic partner for several years around the time of Prats' assassination. *Puño y letra*'s third and final act offers up two closing statements: in the first scene, we hear the prosecution's closing argument; however, act three, scene two does not present the defense's closing statement, but rather Eltit's own.

Although the reader already knows by the end of the first act how Arancibia's trial concluded -- Eltit's testimony concludes with the sentence to life imprisonment ringing in her ears as she exits the courtroom -- *Puño y letra* conspicuously refrains from delivering a verdict and sentence for the trial it stages. Consequently, I argue, *Puño y letra* enacts a performance in which the reader is not allowed to be a passive spectator but, rather, is required to participate, just as the judge and jury actively participate in the legal proceedings of a trial. After listening carefully to all of the testimony and evidence presented, the reader arrives at the final pages of this documentary book to discover that she must now deliberate on a verdict and a sentence that is, as we shall see, not so much about the past as about the future.

Indeed, the first issue the reader must consider as she closes *Puño y letra* is exactly *who* has been tried in this re-staging of the Prats and Cuthbert case. Certainly, Eltit incorporates very little new evidence, consisting mostly of her own, clearly demarcated testimony, and otherwise limits herself to word-for-word transcriptions of the testimony and statements of witnesses, lawyers, and the judge. Yet as director of this new trial, Eltit spotlights different -- at times, quite unexpected -- actors and articles of evidence. This means that certain voices are privileged over others -- that minor parts are recast as leads, while other roles are virtually eliminated.

Enrique Arancibia Clavel is one such case. Eltit describes him in detail in her own testimony. Indeed, the title of the section of the book that contains Eltit's own testimony is, literally, a list of his aliases: "Enrique, Juan, Juan Felipe, Luis Felipe, Miguel" (*Puño* 21). Likewise, Hugo Zambelli's questioning revolves around trying to establish concrete timelines for Arancibia's actions, while the prosecution's closing statements aim to condemn him. As a result, his image becomes ever-present in the trial's restaging. He appears to the reader, as Eltit recounts, "Deliberado. Majaderamente teatral. Sí, él sabe que a partir de este momento será observado de manera incesante. Lo sabe y lo disfruta. Resulta evidente que le importa sobremanera este torcido protagonismo que ahora adquiere. Posa su pose sin tapujos" (*Puño* 21). Yet here his protagonism is again twisted, in that it is simultaneously granted and denied, in what is perhaps Eltit's own sentence for Arancibia. Although he will be repeatedly mentioned, Arancibia's voice is, notably, never heard on *Puño y letra*'s stage. Not a single word of his own testimony appears in a book that, on the surface, appears to be about his trial. In this way, Arancibia becomes the text's ghost: he is present yet simultaneously absent, always being discussed yet never speaking. If *Puño y letra* were to be performed as a play, Arancibia would stand outside of the action, not participating but always looking on, and always within -- though just at the edge of -- the audience's frame of vision.

I would like to suggest that perhaps the reason that we do not hear Arancibia's voice at all in *Puño y letra* is due to the fact that the trial Eltit restages in her documentary book is not about the culpability or sentencing of any one individual. That is to say, the trial that was held in Buenos Aires in October and November of the year 2000 aimed, on the one hand, to determine the guilt of one specific individual -- Enrique

Arancibia Clavel -- in the assassination of General Carlos Prats and Sofia Cuthbert; and, on the other hand, to mete out a belated punishment for the crime that was committed so many years earlier. By contrast, the trial that I see Eltit as staging in *Puño y letra* is only partially interested in the guilt and punishment of Arancibia. Instead, the aim of this trial is to investigate the greater situation that was responsible for allowing this crime -- and many others -- to have occurred. Although Eltit's trial clearly does ask the reader to consider the guilt and appropriate consequences to those who carried out the Prats assassination (yet without making Arancibia appear as the only defendant of the case), it also asks the reader to deliberate on the guilt and consequences that should be attributed to the, "desapariciones de miles de ciudadanos que se suman como meras cifras o simples nombres en el memorial público de un catástrofe, ausentes de subjetivización, de relatos que los restituyan vivos, paradójicos, deseantes, biográficos" (15).

Consequently, in Eltit's restaging of the Prats case, someone who was never physically present in Arancibia's trial becomes omnipresent, yet eternally absent in *Puño y letra*'s proceedings: General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte. He makes his first appearance on the stage of *Puño y letra* in an indirect reference on the first page of the book, when Eltit describes how attending the trial caused her to emotionally return to the experiences she had lived through, "como habitante de la dictadura chilena" (13). Immediately following her brief introductory statement, moreover, Eltit submits *Puño y letra*'s very first article of evidence: Pinochet's letter to Prats from September 7th, 1973. From there out, Pinochet's presence is felt almost constantly on *Puño y letra*'s set, rectifying a conspicuous absence from the original trial. Indeed, the fact that neither Pinochet nor any of the other military or DINA officials were called to the stand in Arancibia's trial is a

central point in Eltit's own eye-witness testimony about the trial. "Eso es lo que me perturba," she recounts, "la asimetría jurídica. Su falla. Allí está Arancibia Clavel, responsable de sus responsabilidades. Sin embargo, la omisión es flagrante. No están los otros. Sus jefes. [...] Son cuerpos ausentes y, no obstante, cruciales para conformar una escena definitiva" (*Puño* 30).

Thus, Pinochet's 'omnipresent absence' in *Puño y letra* amends what Eltit saw as a judicial 'asymmetry' in the original trial, allowing her to stage what she calls the "escena definitiva" (30) for justice in the Prats case. Significantly, however, the man whose "rostro no iba a cesar" (*Emergencias* 21) after the 11th of September of 1973 only 'speaks' in *Puño y letra* long enough for it become perfectly clear that his words are false. His letter, placed on Eltit's stage in the context of both the *golpe* four days after it was written and the Prats assassination barely a year later, articulates itself as a speech act that performs the betrayal of a man he had insisted upon calling *amigo*. In this way, Pinochet's role on *Puño y letra*'s stage is to reveal how the dictatorship founded itself upon (false) performances of loyalty. Literary critic Daniel Noemi puts it this way:

Y Pinochet presente, siempre presente, no representado, presente, su carta solo 4 días antes del golpe, declarando amistad, lealtad a Prats, el afecto de la traición. Esta carta, ahí, en la primera parte del libro: esa es la carta que presenta todo lo que sucede, es la carta que da inicio al teatro, a la *performance* militar que solo hará repetirse a sí misma. Porque sí [sic] hay una representación que *no representa nada*, la dictadura. (*Redes* 204)

Noemi's analysis of Pinochet's letter limits itself to connecting the gesture of a false friendship to the emptiness of the dictatorship's founding premises. Yet in *Puño y letra*, his letter initiates what Eltit views as yet another performance, as we shall see: the performance of justice acted out in Enrique Arancibia Clavel's trial in Buenos Aires in the year 2000.

As a result, Pinochet becomes another of *Puño y letra*'s ghosts, ever present at the far corner of our imagined stage, opposite the ghostly figure of Arancibia. Although he never gives his own testimony (beyond his letter) in *Puño y letra*, Pinochet's name will never be far from the jury/reader's mind. In fact, there are only two scenes in the book that don't make reference to him: the first, of course, is in the list of the original trial's participants, and the second is in Zambelli's testimony. Even there, however, Pinochet has a near appearance, yet fades away only because Zambelli claims to know absolutely nothing about politics: describing Arancibia's trips to the Chilean embassy, Zambelli states, "...él siempre iba [a la embajada para] esa fiesta los días 11 de septiembre, que no sé qué fecha es en Chile" (80). In order to distance himself from Arancibia's political and criminal activity, Zambelli pleads ignorance of the Chilean *golpe de estado* and Pinochet's dictatorship, repeating in varying formulations: "No leo nada que sea político, eh...mi vida siempre se basó en el teatro, el teatro y el teatro" (39).

Interestingly, then, Eltit's version of the Prats case turns two of the crime's supposed protagonists -- Arancibia and Pinochet -- into ghosts, while giving the leading roles neither to the defendants nor the victims, neither to the judges nor the lawyers. Rather, the main characters are witnesses: Eltit herself (as witness to Arancibia's trial), and Zambelli (as witness to the actions of Arancibia). Not by coincidence, these two leading roles in *Puño y letra* represent the two extremes of possible witness behavior. On one end of the spectrum, Zambelli's testimony makes it clear that he would like to disown all responsibility for what he knows or has seen. Called to the stand by both sides, he is nonetheless an unwilling and evasive witness, and his statements are full of contradictions for which he does not want to be held accountable. "Lo que sí me

preocupa," he tells the courtroom upon being pressured about a long series of vacillations and discrepancies with his previous declarations, "me preocupa a mí como persona, porque estoy bajo juramento y bajo juramento y [es que] yo estoy convencido de que digo la verdad" (93). Zambelli wants nothing more than to get off of the stand, to have the trial come to an end and be forgotten so that he can get on with his life. After all, as he reminds the judge on more than one occasion, his only training is as an actor: "Yo hice esta carrera para salir en el diario como artista, no como testigo de esto, ¿me entiende Doctor?" (111)

At the opposite end of the witness continuum, Eltit was just one among many anonymous observers of a trial, a member of the public who decided to attend Arancibia's *juicio oral* of her own accord, upon whom no one had called to give testimony. On the contrary: it is her own initiative that motivates the attestations that appear in *Puño y letra*. Just as the witness or victim of a traumatic event is possessed by the trauma he or she has experienced, Eltit is unable to forget or let go of the trial she has witnessed and all of the memories it brought up: "...el escenario jurídico que había presenciado se negaba a abandonarme [...] las imágenes del juicio seguían y seguían asaltándome..." (13). Impelled by a need to do something with what she has witnessed, Eltit offers up her testimony in the form of a book that dramatizes her understanding of the trial. Yet she doesn't rely on her memory alone, but rather spends countless hours reading through the legal documents, listening to recordings of depositions, and transcribing, word for word, long sections of the proceedings in order to balance and complete the vision of the trial that had formed in her memory. As a result, the testimony that *Puño y letra* offers is open-ended. That is to say that, while it certainly is composed of one individual's

reflections on the trial, it strives to recount memories, experiences, emotions, and documented declarations, leaving judgment to the reader. Of course, the resulting text represents only a fragment of the available documentation from Arancibia's trial, but those fragments nonetheless consistently (and coherently) articulate the essence of the trial as Eltit experienced it. In this way, Eltit represents the witness who cannot remain silent, who takes responsibility for what she has witnessed in the only way she can: by voluntarily coming forward to testify, speaking out to her country, and to the rest of the world, through the pages of this book.

Yet the prominence of Zambelli's voice in *Puño y letra* cannot be explained simply by the contrast his reluctance to give testimony creates with Eltit's willingness (and, indeed, necessity) to bear public witness to the events she has experienced. A full 94 pages (of the book's total of 190) are dedicated to Zambelli's questioning -- more pages than Eltit gives to any other voice and, indeed, more than four times the space she allows for her own. Moreover, Zambelli was one of nearly fifty witnesses to testify in Arancibia's trial -- yet it is only his (complete) testimony that appears within the pages of *Puño y letra*, while the words of none of the other witnesses are transcribed in the book. If Zambelli's constantly self-contradicting words are privileged over those of the author, as well as over those of all of the other witnesses called to the stand during the trial, the original defendant (Arancibia), and the man who I have suggested is another of the book's implied defendants (Pinochet), then we must ask ourselves why it is that his *titubeo* rings throughout the majority of the Prats case as it is restaged in *Puño y letra*.

From his testimony, the reader gleans that Zambelli is a former actor who, "al no haber tanto trabajo" (38) is now a hairdresser, and who spent several years living with

Arancibia -- years that coincide, if not exactly with the murders of Prats and Cuthbert, then certainly with the period following their assassinations, up to and through Arancibia's first arrest. In light of this period of cohabitation, the majority of the questioning from all sides -- by the lawyers for the defense as well as the prosecution and the state of Chile -- attempts to establish a timeline for the relationship between the two men, as well as the patterns of Arancibia's behavior that Zambelli was able to observe during that relationship. At first, Zambelli answers these seemingly simple questions with what appear to be precise, undisputable answers. Asked when he met Arancibia, Zambelli replies that it was on May 27, 1975, "Y esa fecha me la recuerdo bien, aparte, porque, exactamente, tres años después muere mi madre. Exactamente la misma fecha, 27 de mayo" (45). As his testimony proceeds, however, it becomes clear that nearly all of the dates still remain in question, in spite of the supposed exactitude of certain memories that align events with the death of his mother or the performance of a given show. Zambelli's mother, for example, died in May of 1981, not in May of 1978 as he has lead us to believe; likewise, in previous statements Zambelli claimed to have met Arancibia in the summer (or towards the end) of 1974 (depending on the declaration), rather than in May of 1975. A chorus of, "No sé cómo fue. Yo no lo recuerdo bien, Doctor" (79) becomes familiar as Zambelli's contradictions multiply.

Thus, in Eltit's staging of the Prats case, Zambelli represents not only the reluctant -- and unreliable -- witness, but also the fool. Although Eltit has in no way modified Zambelli's testimony, but rather transcribed it word-for-word from the trial's proceedings, his statements almost appear to have been scripted to fit this role. In a long theatrical tradition, the fool is typically a cowardly, subservient character who provides comic relief

to serious situations. Likewise, Zambelli is a minor character in the unfolding drama of the Prats case, whose only duty is to answer the questions as posed to him by the lawyers and judge. Meanwhile, he grows increasingly apprehensive as the court catches him in the tangle of his own discrepancies, making it clear that he is worried not about whether or not the parties guilty of the Prats and Cuthbert murders are convicted, but rather about whether he himself might be accused of perjury for the incessant contradictions in his sworn statements. As a result, in the end his testimony provides so little admissible evidence as to become laughable. Indeed, a summary of the trial compiled by the Equipo Nizkor notes: "siendo que de aquellas manifestaciones surgieron graves contradicciones que se fueron ahondando a lo largo de sus exposiciones, es que luego el Tribunal decidió extraer testimonios de sus expresiones y de lo documentado en las audiencias celebradas durante la instrucción."¹⁴⁵ It is unsurprising that his testimony had to be struck from the record and investigated for perjury, since the transcript of this portion of the trial reads like a veritable comedy of errors. As this excerpt about the timeline of Zambelli's career demonstrates, his testimony, in the end, did little more than provide a comic counterpoint to the gravity of the trial itself:

Fiscal: ¿Participó usted en la obra teatral Hair?

Zambelli: ¿Cats? .. ¿la comedia musical? No.

Fiscal: Hair

Zambelli: Sí, Hair sí.

Fiscal: ¿En qué año fue?

Zambelli: No le quiero mentir, pero me parece que fue el 72, porque al año siguiente debuto con Nélida Lobato y Zulma Fayad en la revista Escándalo, en el Teatro Nacional. Creo que, si no me estoy equivocando, fue en el 72.

¹⁴⁵ Equipo Nizkor is an international organization that investigates human rights abuses, working to help develop international human rights law, fight impunity, and preserve memory. For a thorough summary of the legal proceedings against Arancibia Clavel in Buenos Aires in 2000, see the organization's article, "Sentencia del caso contra el agente de la DINA Enrique Lautaro Arancibia Clavel."

Presidenta: Señor Zambelli, si es tan amable, diríjase al micrófono.
Zambelli: Perdón, perdón.
Fiscal: ¿Usted participó...?
Defensa: Perdón, señora Presidenta, ¿Puede quedar constancia de lo que acaba de decir el testigo?, ¿que fue el año 72?
Presidenta: Exactamente, ¿qué?
Defensa: Que fue el año 72 comenzó a trabajar con la obra Hair.
Zambelli: Sí, sí, profesionalmente, por primera vez...
Presidenta: ¿Cómo quedó escrito? ¿A ver?, un momento.
Zambelli: ¿Podría tomar un vaso de agua? (40-1)

While the courtroom should be the epitome of order, here Zambelli has brought it to near chaos by confusing the names of musicals, offering long winded responses, not speaking into the microphone (when, as an actor, he should know enough to speak into it without being told to do so), and interrupting questioning to ask for water.

It would be easy for the reader to laugh at Zambelli's constant contradictions and dismiss him altogether, perhaps wondering why anyone at all would have bothered to listen to him in the first place, never mind call him to the stand in a case with important international implications. Yet not only was Zambelli called to testify by all parties in Arancibia's trial, but as we have seen, Eltit has privileged his voice over all other voices. Why, the reader must ask herself, would Eltit choose to allow the antics of Zambelli's testimony to dominate the discourse of justice as it is portrayed in her representation of the Prats case? I would argue that the reason Eltit grants Zambelli such a prominent role is because it is none other than Zambelli who, again like the fool of theatrical tradition, can in the end reveal an important truth to those who listen closely to his words. The truth that I would like to suggest underlies Zambelli's testimony is that this trial is itself, at essence, little more than a performance, a piece of officially directed social theater -- and a laughable performance, at that. Eltit herself hints at this interpretation in the preface to *Puño y letra*. In her words, "el interrogatorio a Zambelli pone de manifiesto la teatralidad

que contiene el escenario jurídico oral. Su realización en un 'aquí y ahora' lo transforman en una representación única, irrepetible, en una pieza (teatral) que porta múltiples sentidos y desde luego la posibilidad de establecer diversas analíticas" (16). While suggesting that the unique, unrepeatable nature of an oral trial, in combination with its particular setting of the courtroom, closely resembles the ephemerality of a play performed on a stage, Eltit leaves it to the reader to uncover the multiple meanings that this similitude could bring to light.

Thus, the reader must ask herself how, exactly, does the interrogation of Zambelli manifest the theatrical nature of the oral trial? On one level, the connection between Zambelli's legal testimony and the world of theater and performance becomes clear when, by way of answering the questions posed to him, he almost always manages to refer, conveniently, to his theatrical career. For example, he explains that he met Arancibia because of his work in a musical revue with Susana Giménez. As he recounts it, one day he had been out doing an errand for the show in which he was dancing, when Arancibia recognized him, "Bueno, y...él me paró y me dijo: 'Vi el espectáculo, me pareció bárbaro, bailás muy bien'" (46). While this certainly may have been exactly how Arancibia and Zambelli met, his testimony at times deteriorates to such an extent that it appears to be a form of self-promotion -- becoming little more than an instrument that allows him to publicly mention the names of the stars with whom he once worked. The prosecution, for example, asks Zambelli to tell the court when the show *Hair* ended, yet Zambelli does not give a date as a response but instead proceeds to expound:

No me recuerdo bien si es el 71 o el 72. Pero creo que fue el 72 porque en ese caso yo conocí a...trabajaba con Adrián Lobato, hijo de Nélida Lobato, y yo quería conocerla porque la admiraba muchísimo. Y en un cumpleaños de Nélida me llevan a su casa y, bueno, en la fiesta bailábamos y qué sé yo. Y ella me dice:

'Adrian' -- Adrián es mi nombre artístico, seudónimo artístico -- 'vos tenés que bailar y bueno, mirá, se van a dar pruebas para el nuevo Teatro Nacional, ¿por qué no te presentás?' Lo que sí le digo es que Escándalo [otra obra de teatro en la cual participó Zambelli] fue en el 73, señor. (42)

Had Zambelli answered the question by recounting that he had been dancing in *Hair* when he was invited to attend Nélide's 38th birthday, and since she was born in June of 1934 then the year must have been 72, his lengthy response would at least have corroborated his initial doubt about the exact year in which the show had ended. His answer, however, in no way establishes the year in which the musical *Hair* ended; rather, what it does do is allow him to present himself as a dancer admired by one of the most prominent stage actresses of that time. Likewise, in telling the court when *Escándalo* ended, Zambelli conveniently mentions how the well-known Susana Giménez wanted him to be her first dancer in a show in Mar del Plata. Throughout his 94 pages of testimony, Zambelli repeatedly goes on rambling digressions filled with perplexing inconsistencies, which inevitably ensure that long stretches of questioning that should have been devoted to clarifying the nature of his relationship with Arancibia and the defendant's actions during a specified period of time, instead become entirely focused on trivial details of Zambelli's career. In essence, the witness stand becomes Zambelli's stage, a place from which the one-time actor, who has been forced to retire into hairdressing due to a lack of work, attempts not just to give testimony, but also to publicly re-sculpt his identity as an 'artist.'

Considered in light of the self-promotion so evident throughout Zambelli's testimony, Eltit's suggestion that the oral trial is inherently theatrical allows us to begin to see how, on a much broader level, Arancibia's *juicio oral* functioned as a public staging

of (inter)national propaganda.¹⁴⁶ Following on Mark Osiel's conclusion that, "These events [publicized legal proceedings redressing state violence] are both 'real' and 'staged'" (Osiel 6), I would like to suggest that Eltit centers her version of the trial as performed in *Puño y letra* on Zambelli because he is the perfect metaphorical figure for the trial at large. Just as Zambelli is at least as concerned with refashioning his career as with bearing witness, I argue that the trial itself is just as concerned with portraying the administrations of both Chile and Argentina as supporting "a process of working through the past" in an effort to encourage a "moment of 'healing' for the nation" (Horsman 6), as it is with rendering justice to the assassinations of General Prats and his wife.¹⁴⁷ How else to explain the fact that after sitting on evidence against him for twenty-six years, Arancibia Clavel was only brought to trial in the year 2000?

Indeed, as the start of both a new century and a new millennium, the year 2000 offered an optimal juncture for the leaders of each nation to make public gestures distancing themselves, and the nation as a whole, from the state terror of the past. While

¹⁴⁶ Although Eltit's original comment, quoted above, can be read as describing the format of oral trials in general, it is nonetheless clear that Arancibia Clavel's trial represents an exceptional instance of the theatrical nature of oral legal proceedings, and, as the sole trial mentioned in *Puño y letra*, indeed is the case that most interests Eltit.

¹⁴⁷ The dual goals of this particular trial have manifested themselves in Chilean government press releases as recently as 2007, when Arancibia Clavel was released on parole in Argentina. In response to the parole decision, the acting Chancellor Alberto Van Klaveren declared that Chile would send a lawyer to participate in the appeal, and that he believed the decision would, in the end, be repealed because, "'tanto Chile como Argentina 'coinciden en el respeto por los derechos humanos y la enorme preocupación que tienen porque se haga justicia en los casos en que se puede hacer justicia'" ("Gobierno confirma"). In this press release, it is telling that what is mentioned first in the press release is that both countries coincide in their respect for human rights, rather than that justice be carried out. As a result, the emphasis of the statement is placed not on the crime committed by Arancibia Clavel, nor on the ethical issue of whether someone who has committed such crimes could ever deserve to receive parole, but rather on the international image of Chile and Argentina that could be projected by the decision.

by this point both countries had gone through their own distinct truth commission processes, the year 2000 nonetheless arrived with virtually no consequences for the perpetrators of human rights abuses in either country. Even the few criminal convictions that had been reached (sentences ranging from lifetime imprisonment to four and a half years in prison, for example, in the case of the 1985 trial of four members of the Argentine military juntas) had been overturned or pardoned. Thus, in the bid to portray themselves as modern and democratic nations, as safe places to travel that fully respect human rights, the year 2000 tangibly marked the start of a new era. Consequently, the data that had long since accumulated against Arancibia Clavel represented an opportunity to capitalize on the widely spread, "belief that trials can help bring about a moment of closure" (Horsman 6). Reaching a well-publicized verdict in this case would help both nations to shut, "the books on the past, as it were, thereby satisfying a desire for an ending that has psychological, legal-political, and aesthetic components. Judging the past [...] makes it possible to both face the past [...] and to close it off as distanced history" (6).

Yet, of course, the man who stood trial in this case was only a minor figure in the human rights travesties of the Chilean dictatorship. As Diamela puts it, Arancibia Clavel was certainly, "responsable de sus responsabilidades" (*Puño* 30), and deserved to be judged and sentenced for his actions, but he was neither the mastermind of, nor the one who gave the orders for, the assassination of Carlos Prats. In order to achieve (inter)national closure, then, the trial asks Arancibia Clavel to stand in for the other guilty parties not present -- primarily for prominent members of the military and the DINA. It is this transference of collective guilt onto the figure of Arancibia Clavel that will be the trial's greatest weakness -- and, I believe, that explains why Eltit felt haunted by the trial

for so long after its verdict had been announced. As Mark Osiel notes, this sort of trial, "can easily sacrifice the rights of defendants on the altar of social solidarity" (7), and here the rights of Arancibia Clavel are indeed sacrificed for the sake of fostering a sense of closure. Thus, when Arancibia Clavel's sister loudly denounces the verdict and sentencing in press releases, declaring that her brother has been made into a "chiavo expiatorio" ("Contrarias opiniones"), her biased perspective does not make her any less correct in her assessment that he has been made into a scapegoat and is being asked to bear the weight of crimes that go well beyond his own.

Likewise, in Eltit's restaging of the Prats case, Zambelli occupies the witness stand and is cross-examined almost as though he were the defendant, on trial for the inconsistencies of his many sworn statements. In essence, his long-winded and self-contradicting voice replaces that of the silent Arancibia Clavel. In this way, *Puño y letra* mimics the logic of substitution of the original trial, while highlighting the problematic -- even absurd -- nature of that substitution. Eltit sets the reader up to recognize that Zambelli's discrepancies can no more stand in for Arancibia Clavel's work in planning and preparing the Prats assassination, than Arancibia Clavel can stand in for the torture, disappearances, and murders ordered by Pinochet and other senior-level members of the military, and carried out by DINA operatives. Consequently, Zambelli's stammering prominence in *Puño y letra* problematizes the cast of characters present in the original trial.

Yet Zambelli's role does not end there, either: as we shall see, his stumbling speech serves another function -- a function that, I believe, contains the key to *Puño y letra*'s primary message for and effect upon the reader. The entire time that he is on the

witness stand, Zambelli reiterates his willingness to cooperate with his questioners, his desire to concretely locate the events about which he is asked in time, and his fear of being accused of perjury. Yet his memory consistently fails him, and dates do not match up with what is already known or what he has previously declared. When the prosecutor begs of him, "Le pido que haga memoria, Zambelli, ¡por favor!" (*Puño* 83), Zambelli can only reply, "Sí, pero es lo que yo quisiera, Doctor, pero realmente le mentiría si le digo. [...] No lo recuerdo" (83). In the end, Zambelli's testimony is absolutely unsuccessful in establishing a clear chronology, in spite of his declared intentions.

I would argue that it is irrelevant whether Zambelli actually knew the dates and intentionally misstated them in order to distance himself from Arancibia Clavel's involvement in the Prats assassination, or whether he simply could not, as he repeatedly claimed, remember those dates with any certainty. Rather, I suggest, Zambelli's inability or unwillingness to remember proves to be far more important than any quantity of details he could ever have accurately provided. This is because Zambelli embodies the essence of what I would call *human memory*, of that memory which even in the best of cases is always fickle, ever shifting, full of gaps and holes and invisible patches. In the words of Daniel Noemi, "Toda memoria, sabemos, es necesariamente inconclusa e imperfecta" (*Redes* 204). Noemi continues: "En otras palabras, la incertidumbre constante, la imposibilidad por parte de Zambelli, remeda e indica el proceso de construcción de/hacia la verdad que la lectora/documentalista debe efectuar continuamente" (205). As a result, when Eltit places Zambelli center-stage in her retelling of the case, she confronts the reader with the difficulty of the very premise of a human rights or mass atrocity trial. This is because the objective of the trial is to reach a verdict,

deciding the guilt or innocence of the parties charged, and in the case of a guilty verdict, to determine an appropriate sentence for the crime committed. Given the impossibility of human memory to permanently, objectively, and accurately capture the past, our notion of justice as achieved through a trial presents an inherent problem, as Yasco Horsman explains: "Pronouncing a verdict or giving amnesty are totalizing gestures, both of which seek to establish truth about the past and to radically alter our relation to it" (Horsman 8). By casting Zambelli as the leading man in her restaging of the Prats case, Eltit places our notion of justice and its demand for absolute truth face-to-face with the impossibility of truth.

Under the weight of Zambelli's clashing declarations and *titubeo*, *Puño y letra* reveals that it is not possible for us to establish the truth about the past, regardless of what questions we ask, who asks them, or how many times (or even how officially) we pose the questions. Yet if we cannot collectively reach an agreement about the truth of the past, then how can closure on a societal level ever be achieved? Mark Osiel suggests that, in spite of how frequently they have been publicly framed in this way, trials alone cannot resolve the divisive and troubling nature of memories that remain behind in a nation that has endured mass atrocities. On the contrary, "...legal efforts to influence collective memory may fail because such memory -- almost by nature -- arises only incidentally; it cannot be constructed intentionally" (7).¹⁴⁸ Moreover, the closure such trials attempt to induce inevitably asks both the victims and the perpetrators to make more concessions

¹⁴⁸ This should not be read as indicating that these trials are unproductive; rather, Osiel has written at length about their pedagogical use, declaring that, "such trials, when effective as public spectacle, stimulate public discussion in ways that foster the liberal virtues of toleration, moderation, and civil respect" (2). The key here, of course, is that closure suggests the end of a public dialogue, where Osiel believes, and I concur, that the show trial's purpose should be to promote debate and conversation, rather than end them.

than either party ever really could. Osiel eloquently outlines half of the issue, explaining that the verdict pronounced in state violence trials almost always requires, "more extensive admissions of guilt, and more repentance, than most nations are prepared to undertake. This is because efforts at employing law to instill shared memories sometimes require substantial segments of a society to accept responsibility for colossal wrongs and to break completely with cherished aspects of its past" (7). What Osiel doesn't mention is that, by the same token, another substantial portion of the population is simultaneously asked to accept whatever punishment is handed out once a verdict has been pronounced, whether or not they feel that the punishment fits the crimes, never mind whether it adequately compensates for them. Moreover, legal efforts must concentrate on a few individuals or specific groups who can represent the greatest wrongdoing. As a result, once the trial comes to a close, victims and their families will still find themselves sharing the streets with people who may have sided with or (to varying degrees) caused the repression.

The trouble, then, with the attempt to use a trial to specifically induce *closure* is that it endeavors to collectively and permanently veil a disputed past that cannot be cloistered away and forgotten over night, or even over the course of a few years. While it might be possible to temporarily repress the trauma of mass atrocity, it will inevitably resurface again and again in the forms of individual memories that bear the weight of many different kinds of loss. For this reason, Horsman affirms that, "Finding closure in relation to massive trauma is at best unlikely, and at worst constitutes a betrayal of the past" (Horsman 8), because it would require each individual within the society to alter her relation to the past whether or not she is ready or willing to do so. In this instance,

Arancibia Clavel's trial had prompted Eltit to resume working through the traces of the trauma of living under dictatorship that still remained, perhaps unconsciously, for her in the year 2000. Yet although the official sentence of life imprisonment clearly rang in her ears at the trial's close, she nonetheless found that her relationship with the past could not be immediately or easily altered. Regardless of the legal outcome, as Eltit puts it, "la alevosía no cesa" (*Puño* 34). The trial might be over, but that does not mean that she is -- or could even pretend to be -- ready to forgive, forget, and move on. Indeed, how could the trauma of her past be forgotten when it has defined who she has become, and the society in which she lives?

This is why Eltit re-dramatizes the trial in *Puño y letra*: she brings it back onto the public stage not just to allow her personal memories to survive, but more importantly in order to change the lighting and direct our gaze to the difficulties presented by the blind belief in justice as a force capable of finding the absolute truth for a society, at the cost of all other truths. Thus, she refuses to offer her own verdict or conclusion to her staging of the case, leaving the reader not with closure but rather with a dangling question mark that will demand further reflection. As a result, *Puño y letra*'s principal performance consists in dusting off a troubled past and returning it to the (inter)national optic, making it once again a source of conflicting memories and dialogue rather than a superficial yet unified silence.

4.4 Sold on the Neoliberal Market: The Work of Justice and the Role of the Reader

In this chapter I have argued that what *Puño y letra* does is *perform* rather than *narrate* -- that it *restages* a trial, altering its cast of characters and even the role each character plays, in order to question the 'justice' it originally had rendered, bringing the issues at the heart of the trial back to the present for the book's readers to reconsider. Yet this terminology demands that one more essential question be addressed: if Eltit's goal in *Puño y letra* was to dramatize or *poner en escena* the legal proceedings that addressed the Prats assassination, then why did she choose to do so through a book? Why didn't *Puño y letra* take the form, for instance, of a script, to be interpreted and performed on a stage? Or, more like Eltit's earlier performances in brothels and *acciones de arte* in the streets of Santiago with CADA, why didn't *Puño y letra* emerge as an open-air urban performance welcoming public participation and taking place in front of *La Moneda*, perhaps, or the Chilean Supreme Court?

Ironically, by 'staging' a trial within the pages of a book rather than in a theater or the city streets, Eltit is able to take advantage of the way our legal system works, while simultaneously bringing its methods and assumptions into question. It is not coincidence that *Puño y letra*'s formal structure in many ways parallels the old inquisitorial system of justice that had defined Chile's judicial system up until the *Reforma procesal penal* was fully implemented in 2005. After all, it is yet another written document that contains the sum of one individual's investigation of a crime, and therefore reports only on the evidence the author has considered to be most important. As a published book with a trackable ISBN (International Standard Book Number), *Puño y letra* may not form part of

the state archive of legal documents, but it does get filed away into a different, yet nonetheless official, archive: it becomes part of the catalogue of *Grupo Planeta*, the largest publishing and media conglomerate in the Spanish-speaking world.

In spite of these apparent similarities, however, we have also seen that *Puño y letra* differs from the inquisitorial judicial system's depositions in one fundamental way, a way that in and of itself gestures beyond, "la posibilidad de democratización" (*Signos* 287), even, of the adversarial system, and towards the sphere of performance. *Puño y letra* offers a counterpoint to both the inquisitorial and adversarial modes of justice by not delivering a verdict to the reader. Rather, like the tragic theater of Brecht, Eltit's book/performance desists the temptation of catharsis and closure in order to compel the reader to continue reflecting and perhaps, as a result of that reflection, to take social action (or, at least, spark social dialogue and debate). Thus, Eltit does not leave us with her own judgment on the case -- indeed, yet another verdict would only have had the effect of more fully cordoning off the crimes from the present, sealing them as harmless events from the past with which we no longer would need to concern ourselves since they already would have received the due measure of the law (as well as the author's additional investigation). Instead, *Puño y letra* culminates with the following words on its final page: "[El asesinato de Prats y Cuthbert] Ocurrió en plena capital de un país fronterizo y, sin embargo, nos parecía tan lejano, tan distante. Así fue porque en 1974 nuestro opaco y penoso adentro ya había terminado por consolidarse" (*Puño* 190).

In essence, Eltit ends *Puño y letra* by connecting the events of the past to the present: even today (whether the today of Eltit's writing, in 2005, or the today of my own, in 2011), we continue to live in an "opaco y penoso adentro," an opaque and terrible

'insided-ness' or self-centeredness that in Chile was consolidated and defined by the events of 1973 and 1974. Thus, as much as we would like to think that we have moved on, long since having distanced ourselves from the violence that resulted in the Prats assassination and the disappearance, torture, and death of thousands of others, these events still cannot be abdicated to the past or to previous generations. Instead, they form the foundation for who and what we have become today, and that makes it ever more urgent for us to think back in time and consider how it was that these events came about. As Daniel Noemi suggests, then, the pages of *Puño y letra* emit, "*históricamente radicalizada* la necesidad de una comunidad abierta tanto a las heridas del pasado como a la consecución -- siempre incompleta, siempre porvenir -- de la justicia" (*Redes* 211, emphasis in original). Consequently, *Puño y letra*'s performance stands in contrast to both the inquisitorial and adversarial systems of justice. Rather than file a case away, *Puño y letra* creates a community for whom the present is permanently connected to the past, a community for which the work of justice is just that -- an ongoing process, *work*, which does not have an end.

Moreover, as a performance contained within the pages of a book, *Puño y letra* is able to sustain this position bridging the past and the present for new readers/spectators in a way that a traditional, enacted performance could not. While I disagree with Peggy Phelan's argument that, "Performance's only life is in the present" (*Unmarked* 146), there is a sense in which the live, embodied nature of performance limits its reach. Indeed, plays and performances can only remain in the memories of those who were present, for those who participated in or attended the performance. Beyond those original memories, they are dependent on another director coming back and choosing to perform a given

script with her company, the performance artist choosing to repeat the same performance again, or on the performance being handed down through story telling and reenactment from those who were present to those who were not.¹⁴⁹ Yet in the fast-paced, technology-driven culture of the developed world's twenty-first century, very little is passed down through story-telling and re-enactments, and little attention is given to that which is not the newest, most novel, or best-selling show in a marketplace focused on entertainment. Given the importance of longevity to Eltit's message, as reflected in her focus on how the past impacts and defines our present and future, a book can offer a small advantage over performance art in that it contains the potential to repeat its performance at any time, whenever any single reader decides to pick it up.

At the same time, *Puño y letra* is able to partake of the centrality of literature and the written word to the developed world's episteme. If Eltit's book/performance contains a bid to create social solidarity -- perhaps not through shared historical memory but rather via the shared and ongoing working through of divided and traumatic memories --, then it must align itself with the forms of discourse our society recognizes in order to be effective. Undeniably, the principal type of discourse that the developed world acknowledges is that which is written down and documentable. To use Rebecca Schneider's phrasing, "The archive is habitual to Western culture" (Schneider 100). Indeed, the written word as it appears in the pages of the published book is the driving force at the heart of all of our knowledge-producing institutions, whether as the textbooks

¹⁴⁹ This is not to mention the ways in which a given work can change every time it is reinterpreted by a different director, becoming a new work in and of itself in a different staging or interpretation, or even the way a work performed by the same artist can be affected and varied by the way in which the spectators/participants who are present engage with it. In these senses, a performance can never be repeated, but is always unique, accessible only to those who were present for a particular enactment.

that provide the basis for the curriculum of our elementary and secondary schools, or the scholarly monographs that determine tenure in our universities. Consequently, *Puño y letra* works from within our knowledge system to question the very basis of that same system: its search for universal and absolute truths.

In the highly transportable form of a book, *Puño y letra* extends its geographical horizons in a way that a physical performance cannot. Thanks to the advent of online book distributors, *Puño y letra* is available well beyond the cities of Santiago and Buenos Aires, past the borders, even, of Chile and Argentina: indeed, it is accessible to readers and consumers located anywhere in the world. This potential for global reach is significant in the ever more connected neoliberal world composed of interdependent, borderless markets. After all, *Puño y letra* is ostensibly about an Argentine trial in the year 2000 that sought to render justice to the assassination of two Chilean citizens in Buenos Aires in 1974. For the non-Chilean and non-Argentine reader-- or even for Chileans and Argentineans of the younger generations -- it would be easy to dismiss both the trial and the assassination as being of little bearing to our own lives. Yet *Puño y letra* casts a much wider net of relevance in two very simple moves.

First, it gently reminds the reader of the international socio-economic context that latently accompanied all of the 'disappearances' -- including the Prats assassination -- that followed the *golpe de estado*. This broader international context is only alluded to once in the original trial's discourse, when the prosecution briefly mentions the possible role of the CIA in planning and supporting Prats' assassination. Thus, in the version of the trial staged in *Puño y letra*, it surfaces in Eltit's own closing statement. Her statement begins by recollecting how difficult the year 1974 was for so many Chileans, many of whom had

to choose between passively remaining in Chile and learning not to say anything that could lead to a denunciation, going into exile, or risking disappearance. However, Eltit notes, not all Chileans suffered. The owner of the corner store, for instance, in 1974 was content, "con el surtido de sus mercaderías, con los precios, con la posición de los estantes, con la neutralidad de los clientes, con la paz superficial que rodeaba su esquina. Un almacén común y corriente, un dueño común y corriente, repetido en las esquinas" (*Puño* 184). In essence, Eltit tells us, neoliberalism is the force that emerged triumphant from the *golpe* -- and it is the force that continues to reign not only over Chile but also over much of the developed world. Indeed, both the author and the reader are implicated in the neoliberal system, if only through the sale and the purchase of this book, as Eltit is acutely aware: "Desde luego estoy consciente que siempre el libro literario ha sido un bien de consumo" (*Emergencias* 24), she tells us in one of her essays. In other words, all of our actions fall within this system, a system in which we participate daily whether or not we are conscious of it.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ In her essay "La compra, la venta," Eltit goes on to detail how the current socio-economic system plays itself out in every reader's relationship to any given text, in a paragraph that I believe is worth quoting at length: "Sé que estoy simplificando bastante, pero lo que quiero decir es que pienso que los que entendemos por lectores son únicamente el resultado disciplinar de un programa político-económico, dentro del cual estos nuevos lectores, más que leer literatura, lo que garantizan al leer (que en este contexto es una forma de no leer) es su propio habitar en el sistema, o, dicho de otra manera, sólo pueden/deben leer lo que el sistema les propone para obtener así un espacio legible y confortable en el sistema. Al mercado no le preocupa ni necesita ni desea lectores literarios sino sujetos monetarios. De tal manera que los tan celebrados lectores-de-la-nueva-narrativa-chilena son los que producen y posibilitan a su vez la nueva narrativa-chilena, pero gran parte de estos lectores son el efecto de una operación del mercado que es el sistema radical sustento del actual proyecto político -- el proyecto neoliberal -- que, en buenas cuentas, sí que me parece a mí que es la nueva narrativa chilena o para decirlo de otra manera, el proyecto neoliberal es la real y actual narratividad oficial chilena" (*Emergencias* 25).

Finally, *Puño y letra* places the reader, regardless of her age or nationality, in the dual roles of witness and jury to the trial it stages. Just as Eltit herself became a witness to Arancibia Clavel's trial by virtue of her regular attendance at each session,¹⁵¹ each reader also becomes a witness to the retrial that emanates from the pages of *Puño y letra*. Yet since Eltit does not offer a verdict at the end of the book, the reader simultaneously becomes a member of the jury, in that she is left to weigh and work through the evidence presented in search of her own conclusions. In this way, the text requires the reader to accept a certain responsibility for, and connection to, what may otherwise seem to be far-off events. Although by now, in 2011, the Arancibia Clavel case has long since come to a close, *Puño y letra* continues to ask the reader, whomever she may be, to consider how we as a global society can best move forward following events of state violence and mass atrocity.

4.5 *Jamás el fuego nunca* and the Performance of Political Disillusionment

The trial staged within the pages of *Puño y letra* takes pains to establish the connections not only between performance and the type of justice an oral trial seeks to render, but also between a certain kind of theatrical mode and repressive politics. Yet we have seen that Eltit does not locate political repression in the closed-off distance of the

¹⁵¹ Some of Eltit's final words before turning *Puño y letra* over to Zambelli make this power of presence to create new witnesses clear: "Ahora mismo transcurren las semanas y se acerca el fin del Juicio. Han comparecido más y más testigos. [...] Empiezo a reconocer las voces y sus singulares entonaciones, la recurrente terminología, las diversas estrategias y comprendo que yo misma me he convertido ahora en testigo del Juicio. Una entre otras, entre otros" (*Puño* 34).

dictatorship: rather, as she writes in her preface, Zambelli's testimony in the year 2000 revealed to her,

...el cruce cómplice entre farándula y represión y [...] estimo que estas zonas complejas, confusas, en principio, sorprendentes, conservan *de una manera oblicua su vigencia en los sistemas actuales*. Sencillamente la farándula mediática (sitio preferencial del ultracapitalismo) continúa no sólo presente sino en ascenso operando una violencia múltiple que produce ya de manera simbólica o literal el aniquilamiento de cuerpos y experiencias humanas. (*Puño* 15, emphasis mine)

Perhaps the main performance of what Eltit calls the "farándula mediática" or media spectacle of "ultracapitalismo" (i.e., neoliberalism) consists of its ability to overwrite the memories and refocus the preoccupations of the general population. Daniel Noemi has remarked on neoliberalism's, "afán por borrar el pasado [y] decreta[r] una nueva velocidad, la velocidad absoluta del presente" (*Redes* 203). In her own essays, Eltit insists on this point: "El mercado -- eso lo sabemos -- trabaja contra la memoria, trabaja con un deseo inapelable y febril de presente: 'A comprar a comprar porque mi mundo se va a acabar'" (*Emergencias* 25). While the Chilean government has made an effort over the past two years to preserve very specific types of memory -- as one of her final acts as President, for example, Michelle Bachelet opened *El museo de la memoria* in Santiago de Chile in January of 2010, and current President Sebastián Piñera recently toured Massachusetts colleges with a video collage of images from the 2010 earthquake and later Copiapó mining accident -- it has also allowed another kind of memory to quietly fade beneath the clamor of the latest technology products, engineering developments, and other news. This missing memory, I would like to suggest, is that of the political ideals that had once been represented by Salvador Allende and the Unidad Popular.

By way of concluding this chapter, then, I would like to take a brief look at Eltit's mid-2007 *Jamás el fuego nunca*, in order to demonstrate how this memory otherwise

absent from current Chilean discourse bursts out of the pages of her penultimate novel in a performance of political disillusionment. Set in an unspecified time that, nonetheless, is much like our own, in an unidentified city that simultaneously resembles Santiago de Chile, *Jamás el fuego nunca* tells the story of two unnamed political dissidents who were once active militants working to combat a repressive government.¹⁵² The present of the novel, however, places them in a future that, in spite of sounding much like the year 2007 or 2010, to them feels so distant from the past of their militancy that the protagonist will repeatedly refer to their political activism as having happened more than a century ago: "un siglo entero y quebrado, mil años, una época que termina prácticamente sin ecos, como si no hubiese sucedido, ¿te das cuenta? Sin final y ya es memoria" (*Jamás* 19). In this remote future that appears to have completely disconnected itself from the past, the ideals for which the two ex-militants had once fought have long since been forgotten, pushed aside by the country's economic prosperity. Believing they must still be wanted for their former political non-conformity, the novel's two main characters have taken to living 'underground,' secretly surviving in a tiny apartment that hides them away from the rest of the city.

Performance functions on many levels in this novel, such that it truly deserves a chapter of its own, but here I would like to succinctly outline the distinct incarnations of political performance contained within *Jamás el fuego nunca*'s pages.¹⁵³ We will see how

¹⁵² *Jamás el fuego nunca*'s two main characters remain nameless throughout the novel. As a result, in my analysis I will refer to the female protagonist who narrates much of the novel as either "the protagonist," "the narrator," "the enunciator," or "she;" and to her male companion as "her partner" or "he."

¹⁵³ Also deserving of an extended study is the theatrical adaptation of the novel as staged by renowned Chilean director Alfredo Castro and his theater collective, *Teatro la*

the nameless narrator reflects upon the earlier events of her life in a series of memory performances; how the meetings of the militant cell to which the narrator and her partner belonged disintegrate into speech acts or performances of language; and how Marxist ideals are reduced to mere performances of doctrine as the cell's objectives degrade from political activism to simple survival. Finally, we shall see how the performance of memory becomes a tool that allows the narrator to go on living in a "nuevo siglo," in which Marxist dreams have long since failed.

Upon opening the first pages of *Jamás el fuego nunca*, the reader observes two bodies stretched out upon a bed. As the reader continues, this bed becomes the stage of a drama in which a female protagonist speaks, thinks, and sleeps, incessantly spilling memories out loud. Meanwhile, her male partner twists and turns under threadbare covers, getting up only to drink a cup of tea, and occasionally grumbling, "¡Cállate!" by way of response to his companion's constant stream of words. The novel immediately takes on the texture of a play in the tradition of Jerzy Grotowski's Poor Theatre: two principal actors appear on a 'stage' composed of the novel's pages, yet stripped of all props, with an intense focus on the actors' bodies, movements, and interactions. It is structured around a series of memories that impose themselves over the necessities and aches of the flesh -- aches from which the two ex-militants cannot escape even though they have otherwise buried themselves alive in a closet-like apartment. There, they live in secrecy, attempting to 'rest' while hiding away from a world that has forgotten their Marxist dissidence. Nonetheless, the narrator's urgent need to repeatedly go over past events impedes the possibility of *descanso*. Rather than sleep, she tells us, "*Recorro*

memoria, from August to October of 2009; however, that analysis does not fit within the scope of the current chapter.

cuidadosamente las escenas, intento ponerlas en orden para examinarlas, pero se precipitan, se confunden. Dos siglos o más. [...] Cómo se podría evocar el dolor, el asombro confuso del dolor, con qué imágenes podría rehacer el ascenso de una violencia que era concreta pero, a la vez, se desdibujaba entre una impresionante abstracción" (*Jamás* 160, emphasis mine). The language that the novel's enunciator uses here is significant: she refers to the key moments in her life as 'scenes' that have confused themselves, that rush ahead of each other, somehow losing their true order. In other words, now enclosed in a clandestinity that is not only aseptic¹⁵⁴ but also useless in this new century, the narrator sees her life prior to the political change as a series of now incorrectly linked performances. As a result, throughout the novel she will rehearse scene after scene of her life, painstakingly reorganizing them -- and even writing alternative versions of the memories that make up these scenes.

Obsessed, the narrator insists on interrupting the rest of her partner in her attempts to reconstruct the past -- because she needs his help to relive experiences that have begun to blur in her own memory. In the first scene of the novel, for example, while her partner sleeps, the narrator remains awake, worried about her inability to remember the date of Franco's death. She knows that it occurred on "un día preciso" (12) -- a precise day when,

...fumábamos concentrados, entregados a nuestra primera célula, mientras tú, precozmente sabio, con la plenitud que pueden alcanzar las habilidades, sostenías unas palabras legítimas y consistentes que no se podía soslayar y te mirábamos extasiados -- tus argumentos -- cuando explicabas la muerte de Franco y yo [fui] cautivada por la rigurosidad de tus palabras. (12)

¹⁵⁴ In their apartment that is barely more than a room, the narrator and her partner live in the most absolute degradation. Rather than purchase any tiny luxury, they are constantly saving in order to survive with the minimal salary the narrator earns when she goes out to take care of the personal hygiene of the elderly living in different regions of the city.

Yet in spite of its preciseness, this day has detached itself from any kind of chronological order for the narrator. Urgently, she wakes her companion to ask him about the date of Franco's death and to discuss the reactions of the other members of the militant cell upon hearing the news, because, she tells him, she will never be able to sleep without recuperating "el tramo perdido" that has left her with "un hueco nefasto del tiempo que requiero atraer" (13). Indeed, in the confused scenes of the narrator's life, Franco's death fuses with the tensions between the militants, tensions that had eventually resulted in the group's collapse. However, she does not want to simply remember what had happened the day of Franco's death. After all, if calling up the memory were sufficient, she would not need to wake up her partner (whose responses she will often refute), nor would she need to go over each detail out loud. Rather, the narrator feels the need to relive the past through a performance that requires the participation of her companion, whom she asks to take on the role of spectator as well as actor in the reconstruction of the past that they live together within the novel's pages.

Curiously, in spite of her identity-defining involvement in a Marxist movement, the scenes that the narrator remembers do not include workers' protests, nor *acciones de arte* with political messages, nor even the writing of the militant groups' manifesto. Instead of political *actions*, all of the moments that the narrator retraces -- indeed, the moments that end up deciding the destiny of the militant group -- are composed of speech acts.¹⁵⁵ Between the scenes remembered, an image of the militant cell emerges in which

¹⁵⁵ Here I build upon the Speech-Act Theory developed by John Austin and John Searle. Austin referred to certain types of enunciation as "performatives" when, upon pronouncing them, these statements do not simply articulate a description or a declaration, but, rather, they act. His best-known example is that of the marriage vows: upon saying "I do," the enunciator performs an action: he or she changes legal status.

we see a group divided, composed of an explicit hierarchy that is nonetheless constantly in tension. As a result, the words pronounced in the cell's meetings take on a tremendous power: for example, calling someone "estalinista" is enough to silence that person.

Likewise, by calling a proposal "inconducente," one can guarantee that it will never be tried, precisely because *inconducente* is, "Una palabra máscara que intimidaba" (26).

Before the fall of the cell, the narrator's partner had been a master in the use of language, someone who could, "pulir [s]u liderazgo luego de medir con rigurosidad el uso de cada una de [s]us palabras" (28). By contrast, the narrator at one point had believed herself to be at the point of being elected head of the cell when suddenly another member called her "muñequita," 'little doll.' Immediately upon hearing this word spoken aloud, she tells us, "percibí cómo naufragaban mis esperanzas y no pude sino resignarme" (84). In spite of having been defeated by a single word in her hope to lead the group of militants, we shall see how the narrator nonetheless clings to language throughout the novel in a prolonged speech act that attempts to recuperate the past.

While the words pronounced accumulate performative power within the cell, just as capable of inverting the hierarchy of militants as of guaranteeing their immobility, the cell's activities dwindle into mere performances or empty re-enactments of doctrine. The dissidents, for instance, come to consider Marx's texts and the movement's hymns to be so sacred that the narrator confesses to us that upon singing "La internacional," she herself, "luchaba por fijar la letra de la canción, no quería equivocarme, era peligroso, sí, cambiar una palabra o una sílaba en el interior de esa letra magna y rutilante" (107).

Searle, by contrast, recognizes a performative nature in all language. The examples that concern us here, however, fall under Austin's idea of performative language: each one of the examples that appear in *Jamás el fuego nunca* demonstrate the power of words and language to *do* something.

Restored behavior has been taken to an entirely new level: not only do the militants repeat learned behaviors and beliefs from the study of the 'sacred' texts of Marxism, but now they must imitate them exactly, word-for-word, without daring to improvise a syllable. Yet in spite of the 'sacred nature' the militants now attribute to these texts, quoting Marx has also devolved into a strategic move: indeed, it turns out to be the most effective weapon in the arsenal of possible methods to climb up a rung within the internal power struggle of the cell. For instance, the narrator remembers how,

Luego de un instante de silencio, un silencio dramático, producido, teatral, continué: es necesario (me vi obligada a corregir), se hace necesario para nosotros, para el buen rumbo de nuestra célula, comprometer a las bases porque: 'Las ideas dominantes en cualquier época no han sido nunca más que las ideas de la clase dominante.' Fue un golpe de efecto. [...] Junto con el tono de voz, me preocupé de mantener una expresión facial dotada de un grado moderado de neutralidad, controlé aquellos movimientos de mis pies que podrían delatarme, procuré mantener las manos en estado de calma. Me preocupé incluso de la dirección de la mirada, nadie en particular, nadie en el objetivo del ojo. (60)

Thus, the act of reciting Marx literally becomes a theatrical performance. Moreover, the 'golpe' or blow the narrator gives in this scene is *not* effective because of the exact words she has chosen, the logic of her argument, or the feelings conveyed by the content of the fragment she repeats, but rather due to her expert use of pauses, facial expressions, carefully controlled body movements, and the direction of her gaze.

At the same time, by having become a sacred -- and therefore untouchable -- doctrine, Marx's texts lose their ability to initiate dialogue between the people and the system. Rather than incite conversation, action, and change within the community, the texts fall in on themselves, becoming insular. As a result, any given performance of the text ends up as a mere exercise of dissidence, estranged from the reality beyond the military group. At some point even the narrator realizes this, telling herself and her

sleeping companion that it had become, "Absolutamente necesario descabezarte porque tus ideas no, no, no significaban más que una mera burocracia en medio de una situación que parecía inmovible. Nos habíamos convertido en una célula sin destino, perdidos, desconectados, conducidos laxamente por un conjunto de palabras selectas y convincentes pero despojadas de realidad" (27). Nonetheless, even this recognition remains tied to the narrator's own desires to climb the group's power structure. With time, the reader observes how the internal conflicts and power struggles continue, coming to displace all other actions the group could have organized. No one, not even the narrator or her expertly word-wielding partner, will be able to redirect the group's path before the moment of the fall, when one by one the cell's members begin to 'disappear.'

During the fall, the narrator and her companion are both captured, albeit separately. Eventually, the narrator is able to escape, apparently pregnant, from her captivity. Upon getting out, she encounters another member of the cell, Ximena, who finds her the tiny apartment where the majority of the novel takes place, and from within which the narrator will obsessively go over the decisive episodes of her life. Although Ximena is somehow able to walk the streets safely, her militancy evidently not attracting too much attention, she recommends that the narrator not risk leaving the apartment -- at least until her baby is born. Then, one day, the narrator's partner appears, having managed to flee from his own captors. Showing up at the narrator's door, he tells her that he has nowhere to go, that there are no safe places left for him outside. So begins the lock in, the shrinking of the stage to little more than the bed with its raggedy sheet, the tiny table, the stove where the narrator makes tea. Although they almost never leave the apartment, seeing virtually no one at all, the narrator tells us, "Continuamos, en gran

medida, clandestinos, nos situamos afuera, radicalmente. No contamos con nombres civiles, seguimos prendidos a nuestra última chapa, ya nos acostumbramos o nos posesionamos, no lo sé" (32) . Once again, however, the couple's militancy has lost touch with any kind of objective. Having shut themselves into the apartment, abandoning the attempt to affect change in the world, their militancy disintegrates into a performance in which they continue to decipher what they believe to be codes appearing in current newspaper headlines. Even on the rare occasions when they do leave the apartment, they do everything they can to ensure that they do not interact with anyone or anything, to leave no traces behind them. "Nos habíamos convertido en profesionales de la clandestinidad, sabíamos cómo movernos, en qué rutas disimularnos, cómo merodear por los espacios, evadir, evadir la ciudad y atenuar el impacto de nuestros cuerpos en las calles" (109). In the end, they distance themselves from reality to such a point that their militancy collapses in on them, turning into a black hole that the narrator attempts to fill by reviewing episode after episode of her past.

The novel's enunciator does not ignore the empty nature of the clandestinity that the couple continues to uphold, enclosed in their apartment, barely connected to the world beyond. Seeing the downfall of the cell's political ideals had been a traumatic experience for her, and as a result, it is as a victim of trauma that the narrator attempts to involve her companion in a performance of the past that will allow them both to relive the moments that have brought them to their current state. These performances of past experiences are necessary tools that allow them to survive in a world that has moved on, completely leaving behind their political values. This trauma explains the narrator's repeated spiraling of memory, her inability to move out of the past: as Diana Taylor

explains, "Trauma becomes transmittable, understandable, through performance -- through the reexperienced shutter, the retelling, the repeat" (Staging 230). For the narrator, then, reliving so many scenes of her political life is her attempt to find a way to understand the complete failure of her ideals, and the loss of the world for which she had fought.

Trauma, moreover, is the link between the political scenes that the narrator constantly relives and the other type of scene that pursues her: scenes involving her pregnancy and a very young child. Her performances of motherhood weave a confusing web of distinct and alternate stories, leading the reader to wonder which might be the truth. In one version, for instance, the child is born but gets seriously ill at two years of age. Since the couple doesn't dare to break out of their underground life by leaving the apartment to go to a hospital or otherwise seek medical help, the child dies. In another memory performance, the narrator tells of how she escaped captivity but had been impregnated by her torturers. Upon reencountering her partner, he becomes furious, demanding to know, "'Por qué no te lo sacaste'" (*Puño* 125). But she doesn't abort, instead beginning to plan a clandestine birth with Ximena. Eventually she informs her partner of the plan for the birth: "tú lo vas a hacer, te dije, tú mismo, pero Ximena te va a entregar las pautas, los pasos correctos, ella te va a indicar cada una de las maniobras necesarias. Y, además, te dije, ella está confeccionando un manual para que lo ejercites, lo aprendas, memorices, entiendas, te sientas seguro" (134). In this way, even the birth of the child becomes yet another performance, one that, moreover, follows a written script -- "Todo perfectamente escrito a máquina, nunca a mano, nunca" (160). Yet another, final version of the narrator's maternity contradicts both of these stories by relating how her partner,

with the help and plotting of Ximena, intentionally gives her a tremendous overdose of ether just as she entered labor. He needed to kill her and impede the birth of the child, she relates, in order to protect the few members of the cell who are still left. Or was it that way? "La cama y el éter, la sangre y el éter, mis piernas y el éter. No lo sé. No puedo asegurar nada. El niño nació muerto o murió a los dos años. O no nació. O no nació" (162). Completely estranged from life, from the world beyond the walls of the apartment, the past, reality, even identities fade away. All that is left to the narrator is the reiteration, the obsessive repeat with endless variations, the performance of what was -- or of what could have been.

Jamás el fuego nunca places the reader inside a series of memories of a failed militant group. In doing so, it presents us with two performances, pertaining to completely distinct spheres of life. On one hand, it presents us with the performances of failed maternity: it makes us witness a birth that never quite gets to happen -- or, if the labor is successful, it is only to give birth to a child who will absurdly die at the age of two due to the couple's paralyzing fear of being seen in public or pursued by their enemies. On the other hand, it stages failed politics, as the readers witness how the narrator observes, rewinds, replays, and endlessly alters, the series of political and linguistic performances that led to the militant cell's downfall. In spite of their apparent separateness and independence from each other, I would like to suggest that in reality these performances are one and the same: the child who dies at two years of age -- if, indeed, he ever was born at all -- is the incarnation of a set of political hopes and values that in Chile were born when Salvador Allende was elected president, and that also died before ever really having the chance to live, with the *golpe de estado* on September 11th

of 1973. Although Eltit published *Jamás el fuego nunca* in 2007, well after Chile's transition to democracy, this novel nonetheless continues to perform the death of a political utopia that the rest of Chile has long since buried and forgotten, moving on to live in the oblivious haze of a neoliberal dream.¹⁵⁶

From Eltit's recent novel *Jamás el fuego nunca*, to her 2005 documentary book *Puño y letra: juicio oral*, and through her essays as collected and published in *Emergencias* and *Signos vitales*, I have argued that an understanding of politics and justice as inherently performative forces that mark us as citizens emerges. For its part, *Jamás el fuego nunca* performs a political memory that had, itself, gone underground during Chile's transition to democracy: the memory of a people's movement and of the potential of a true 'left' -- even of socialism. *Puño y letra*, on the other hand, restages a trial that was held in Argentina in 2000 as an international forum on how justice for human rights crimes can be reached *without* requiring the memory of those crimes to be sealed off into the past. At the same time, both of these texts, I have suggested, take a performative lens to current political issues in response to the performative nature of politics Eltit had witnessed throughout the dictatorship -- and even into the Chilean transition to democracy. My analysis of these texts, I believe, not only demonstrates that performances emerge from the pages of Eltit's written texts, but, moreover, that a

¹⁵⁶ Indeed, Eltit's husband, Jorge Arrate, ran for president as a candidate for the Communist Party in the first round of Chilean elections in 2009. Never expecting to be elected, Arrate carried a little over 6% of the first round vote. As we watched the results of the second round come in from his home in Ñuñoa, he explained to me that his campaign had principally attempted to remind the country of a past and a set of values that had long since been absent from Chilean politics. Nelly Richard summarizes by commenting that Arrate's campaign, "'se alza como una memoria de lucha, pero también como una imagen de futuro, que rescata los ideales soñadores que expanden esta mezquina realidad'" ("Candidatura presidencial").

performatic reading of her writing is necessary to recognize the full creative and political scope of her work.

Concluding Performances

"Rather, at the brink of meaning, poised between abjection and regression, writing as *doing* displaces writing as meaning; writing becomes meaningful in the material, dis/continuous act of writing. Effacing itself twice over -- once as meaning and reference, twice as deferral and erasure -- writing becomes itself, becomes its own means and ends, recovering to itself the force of action. After-texts, after turning itself inside out, writing turns again only to discover the pleasure and power of turning, of making not sense or meaning per se but making *writing* perform: Challenging the boundaries of reflexive textualities; relieving writing of its obligations under the name of 'textuality'; shaping, shifting, testing language. Practicing language. Performing writing. Writing performatively."

-Della Pollock, "Performing Writing," p. 75

Over the course of this study, we have charted the distinct iterations of performance as it appears in much of the narrative of Diamela Eltit, from her first novels to her more recent projects. Thus, we have seen how, from 1980 to 1989, Eltit's artistic production focuses the potential of performance to remap urban 'Culture' as a complex network without centers or exclusions. On one hand, she collects 'poetry' from the mouth of a rambling schizophrenic, 'centering' his marginal discourse and publishing it as literature. On the other hand, she locates her own literary endeavors within the margins of a brothel, or within an abandoned warehouse that links back to Salvador Allende's social programming. Then a second evolution occurs, in which Eltit makes performance the subject of a novel -- a novel that is, as Robert Neustadt has argued, itself a multi-media performance. Here, the enactment of a series of rituals allows a marginal subject to define

her own identity and the terms of citizenship she is willing to accept, while offering her a temporary transportation out of a repressive environment. In its next iteration, Eltit re-envisions performance as an alternative to the official state archive, as a force capable of preserving contested memories through embodiment. At the same time, performance inverts power structures, giving prisoners a sense of dignity and control they could not otherwise have in a situation of extreme physical and psychological abuse.

From the year 2000 on, I have argued that Eltit's narrative performs political and judicial issues that address the essence of contemporary Chilean identity. In one case, a book restages a trial, altering the roles of characters in order to provide a renewed opportunity for (inter) national learning that the original trial had missed. Another novel reveals the decay of political dissidence into little more than an imitation of activism and the repetition of empty words. Meanwhile, the book itself performs the political disillusionment of Allende supporters who have watched the ideals of socialism disappear from the public agenda in favor of the establishment of a neoliberal democracy. Together, these two works ask the reader to work through the evidence presented, to construct her own conclusions about the legacy of a 'child' or political movement that died too young, and about the best ways to move forward as a nation in spite of the conflictive memories a shared past of state violence cannot help but generate.

In examining each of these incarnations of performance as they surface in Eltit's work, we have simultaneously traced a progressive engagement with different types of space. Eltit's earliest work took up urban peripheries and centers, working with the *eriazos* or wasteland, the brothel, and the abandoned printing press. In her performances from the *Zona de dolor* series and *El Padre Mío*, Eltit calls awareness to our circulation through

urban space, altering our sense of what 'Culture' is and where we should look for it. From this broad reflection on the mapping of the city, Eltit's first novel moved into a more defined space. Thus, in *Lumpérica* Eltit interrogates the public plaza, and the types of performance that can occur in a space that had once been a center of cultural exchange but was then narrowed into a space of transit. *Por la patria* takes L. Iluminada's public plaza and extends it, in order to consider yet another space of community that is inevitably defined by a multiplicity of identities: the *barrio*. Coya's *barrio*, she reveals, is the space of transgressive performance, a space that defies authority. Contrasting with the prison camp -- a space that was built to deny the possibility of community --, Eltit nonetheless uses performance to demonstrate how a *barrio* can be reconstructed anywhere. In recreating the *barrio* even within the detention center, the women in *Por la patria* posit the existence of an alternative citizenship that doesn't require the 'imagined community' of the 'nation' to forget its past in order to forge its future.

Emergencias picks up where *Por la patria* leaves off, expanding the space under consideration to the entirety of the nation, if indeed seen through the perspective of Santiago. Performance in this space takes the shape of political spectacle: the visual and aural show of the *golpe*, the daily enactments of ideal citizenship by those who remained in Chile during the dictatorship, and the embodiment of *olvido* required by the Transition. This is Eltit's widest angle, the broadest focus she will take to performance, before returning to smaller and smaller spaces. *Puño y letra* narrows the lens significantly, working with the enclosed space of the courtroom. There, justice is staged as an open-ended process, a working through that does not end with a verdict but rather with an ongoing dialogue about the past and its consequences for the future. *Jamás el fuego nunca*

performs one final contracting of the space under consideration, moving from a necessarily public performance of justice to the private performance of ideals and disillusion as they show up within the intimate space of the bed.

C.1 A Poetics of Performance

Studied together, these works offer up two commonalities that, as I will demonstrate shortly, reveal the essence of Eltit's poetics. First, they call into question the concept of *citizenship*. They ask the reader: What does it mean to be a citizen? Is nationality the only type of citizenship that is legitimate, or are alternate citizenships possible? What should we be willing to give up to become citizens, and what, by contrast, should we hold on to at all costs? What kinds of responsibilities accompany the acceptance of citizenship? This last question ties directly into what I see as the second common link between each of the texts studied here: they all foreground the act of *witnessing*. Eltit witnesses the speech of a schizophrenic vagrant; prostitutes and their clients witness Eltit's scarred arms as she reads from her novel in process in a brothel; the *pálidos* witness L. Iluminada's performance in the plaza; the other detained women participate in and witness the performance of Coya's *parlamentos*; the reader re-witnesses Eltit's own witnessing of Arancibia Clavel's trial, as well as the break down of political ideals for the nameless protagonist of *Jamás el fuego nunca*. Consequently, each of these texts demands that we, the readers, ask ourselves: What does it mean to witness? Does witnessing participate in a power structure of she who looks versus she who is watched? Or does witnessing alter preset power structures by placing responsibility on the

shoulders of the one who watches? Indeed, what does one do with what one has witnessed? What kinds of responsibility does witnessing entail?

As we have already seen, Jesús Martín Barbero insists that, "Citizenship only exists insofar as it is *enacted*." For Eltit, then, I would like to suggest that a complete enactment of citizenship requires a willingness to witness: a willingness to observe what happens around us or to listen to the stories others have to tell us, but also to (voluntarily) come forward and testify based on what we have heard and seen. Witnessing, from her perspective, is a risky yet necessary element of citizenship: an active process that, as Diana Taylor describes it, "is always an intervention and [...] the space of interlocation is always performative. It works within an economy of looks and in a scenario where positions -- subject/object, seer/seen -- are constantly in flux, responding to each other" (*Disappearing* 261). By describing the 'space of interlocation' of witnessing as performative, Taylor suggests that witnessing requires the 'spectator' to follow in the steps of Boal's 'spect-actor.'¹⁵⁷ Indeed, this exactly what happens in Eltit's work: the witness must *do*, not simply *watch* or *listen* but, importantly, *act*.

Of course, we already know that Eltit's texts offer us many layers of witnesses. In *Lumpérica*, for instance, we have seen that while L. Iluminada performs in the plaza under the incessant gaze of the *luminoso*, she is also watched by the *pálidos*, two cameras, the interrogator, and, indeed, by us, the readers. This final level, of the reader as witness, repeats itself in each written text that we have studied here: in *Por la patria*, *El padre mío*, *Puño y letra*, and *Jamás el fuego nunca* -- as well as in many that could not

¹⁵⁷ In Taylor's words, "My role [as witness] is neither to take on one's fear [that of the victim] or the other's guilt [that of the perpetrator], but to understand my role as *spectator* in enabling or disrupting the scenario" (*Disappearing* 260).

form part of this dissertation. By positioning her readers as witnesses in each of her texts, Eltit demands the reader's active participation in the construction of meaning that can emerge from them. Indeed, the texts *perform* upon their readers: they *convert* their readers into witnesses, imposing the responsibility of witnessing on them. At the same time, the reader of Eltit's text is baptized, like L. Iluminada, into a new and particular kind of citizenship: the reader becomes a citizen of a community composed of other readers.

Here, I posit, we begin to see the articulation of a poetics -- a poetics defined by the break down of genres and borders that permits a written text to flow into and fuse with a (theatrical) performance in a brothel, or with a video filmed in an abandoned warehouse, or with a series of photographs, or with the transcription of a schizophrenic's jumbled thoughts. Moreover, for Eltit art is always performance: it is a free-form conversation in which the artist creates a work but never quite views it as being finished, so much as always in the midst of construction. Thus, we have an answer to the principal question I posed at the beginning of this study: How can literature move beyond the limits of the page and market to make itself more effective and productive of change? We have seen that Eltit's work does just that through a poetics of performance. In essence, her texts demand a new mode of reading by seeking to initiate what will be an-ongoing and ever-changing process of engagement with the reader/specta(c)tor/witness. In this sense, Eltit's writing fits neatly into Della Pollock's description of 'performative writing' or 'writing that performs.' Such writing, Pollock declares, "tends to favor the generative and

ludic capacities of language and language encounters -- the interplay of reader and writer in the joint production of meaning" (80).¹⁵⁸

At the same time that reading for Eltit is a performance of interaction between reader, text, and author, she has also spoken about how writing itself has, for her, been a performance. Thus, when looking back from 1993 on the writing of her first novel, *Lumpérica*, Eltit described the process of writing under dictatorship as an *act of resistance*: "Cuando se vive en un entorno que se derrumba, construir un libro puede ser quizás uno de los escasos gestos de sobrevivencia" (*Emergencias* 171).¹⁵⁹ Yet, of course, writing under the threat of censorship and state violence may create a situation that is more conducive to viewing the process of writing as the embodiment and enactment of political dissidence. Nonetheless, Eltit's relationship to the act of writing -- in which the writing of a text itself constitutes an event, an action -- did not change with the transition to democracy. As a result, in an essay written in 1995, Eltit depicts writing as *un hacer literario* -- that is to say, as 'literary doing' -- that contains an innate, "presencia ceremonial e íntima de la escritura como zona de incertidumbre, de suspenso y de riesgo

¹⁵⁸ Indeed, an extended analysis could demonstrate how Eltit's narrative fits each of Pollock's "Six excursions into Performative Writing." To give just a single illustration, however, Pollock's discussion of what she calls the 'metonymic' nature of performative writing could just as easily be an analysis of the use of language in *Lumpérica*. Performative writing, she affirms, "dramaticizes the limits of language [...] It marks the materiality of the sign with the use of a practically unspeakable, non- or counter-presential element of punctuation, an element intelligible only by reference to visual grammatical codes by which a slash or '/' is distinguishable from a '!' or ';' , that in its particular use here to divide and double a word -- to make the word mean at least two things at once and so to refuse identification with an unitary system of meaning -- locates language itself within the medium of print-play" (83).

¹⁵⁹ From her essay, "Errante, errática," originally published in Juan Carlos Lértora's 1993 compilation of reflections on Eltit's work, *Una poética de literatura menor*.

en el empeño por la construcción nómada de sentidos sociales" (*Emergencias* 186).¹⁶⁰

Writing, then, becomes a personal ritual performed in order to organize social sense.

More recently, she has asserted that writing, "se trata de un tejido propio y vivo que se va a resolver o no se va a resolver en la letra" (*signos* 294).¹⁶¹ This living fabric or tissue that is writing is also a voyage: it is *el viaje literario*, in which, "la letra, que ya se hubo de desplazar en su formato libro, arrastra -- esto pudiera ser inadecuado -- el cuerpo del autor, lo conduce detrás de la letra" (257).¹⁶² Finally, she declares, "...diría que la escritura es política" (296). From these varied affirmations Eltit has made about the process of writing, an image emerges of an embodied act that is at once intimate and political, of a ritual that both organizes social sense and yet changes the author herself as she writes, moving her from one intellectual state to another. In this vision, writing *is* performance, or as Eltit put it in a personal interview, "La escritura también tiene que ver con escenas. Pienso que la letra misma tiene su teatro, que la letra tiene elementos visuales -- en cuanto a lo material, el elemento gráfico -- que surgen de un modo que se podría pensar como performático en la práctica de la escritura."¹⁶³

All of these statements, however, only discuss Eltit's private endeavor of writing, when in fact there is another element of her writing that is, I believe, innately performatic: her ongoing work in the writing workshop or *taller*. Even now, at the time of

¹⁶⁰ Entitled "Quisiera," this is from Eltit's acceptance speech upon receiving the "José Nuez Martín" prize for her 1994 novel, *Los vigilantes*.

¹⁶¹ From a 2006 interview with Adrián Ferrero, originally published in *La Revista Iberoamericana* under the title, "Pienso en la literatura como un campo geológico, siempre dialogante."

¹⁶² From Eltit's 2007 essay, "¿Qué eres?", originally included in *Provisoria-mente, textos para Diamela Eltit*.

¹⁶³ From a personal interview in Eltit's office at New York University, in October of 2009.

this writing, Eltit is accepting applications for a *taller* of twelve students, which will be given through Alfredo Castro's *Teatro la memoria* beginning in April of 2012. Chilean writer Andrea Jęftanovic (b. 1970), in describing her participation in one of Eltit's *talleres*, portrays this work of writing as, "parte de un ritual. [La persona que presentaba su trabajo] incluso venía vestida distinto, impostaba su voz en medio de un respetuoso silencio, para luego anotar los a menudo punzantes comentarios de la ronda de crítica " (*Redes* 296). Much like L. Iluminada in *Lumpérica*, Eltit and her *talleristas* create a public writing in the public plaza of the *taller*, then withdraw to the plaza's periphery to watch as the other participants follow in the steps of the *pálidos*, examining the writing, erasing bits of it, offering elements of their own that contribute to the text-in-process as it continues on. When in the same interview I asked Eltit about her involvement in *talleres*, she phrased her response in terms of performance: "Cada sesión de taller es teatral, performática," she told me. "Es una puesta en escena, performática, de la escritura. Es imprevisible, no es presagiable. Cada sesión es única e irrepetible."

Thus, when Eltit declares that she does not really perform any more, that now she chooses to leave the performance to younger artists, I would disagree. Rather, I would posit, her work as the facilitator of *talleres* constitutes a continuous, ever-changing performance. As a *tallerista*, Eltit helps her students to stage the *act* and *process* of writing, rather than focusing on a private endeavor that eventually results in a publishable final product. In essence, the *taller* turns writing into a dialogue among a circle of readers/writers, framing the practice of writing as an interactive spectacle that demands the participation of others in the construction of the text. Applying Della Pollock's

phrasing, the writing workshop is, indeed, the, "shaping, shifting, testing [of] language. Practicing language. Performing writing. Writing performatively" (75).

C.2 A Ripple Effect: Eltit's Narrative Performances and Contemporary Chilean Art

In an essay titled, "Confronta tu icono," contemporary Chilean performance artist Alexander del Re (b. 1961) declares that he will narrate the history of, "una generación de artistas cuya voz ha emergido con el nuevo siglo" (115). Including himself in this group of performance artists -- a group based out of Valparaíso, in contrast to those artists working in Santiago, and whose artistic production surged in the 90s rather than the 80s --, del Re strives to distinguish contemporary Chilean performance art from the work of artists such as Eltit who participated in what he calls the "Escena de A." (116). With this clear reference to the artists of *la escena de avanzada*, del Re commences a fierce rejection of the previous generation's work. He affirms that the *avanzada*'s downfall was due to the fact that their performance art was only, in his words, a repetition of "fórmulas desgastadas" that had long since been employed elsewhere in the global performance art scene. The new generation of artists, he claims, would not make the same mistakes as those of the *avanzada*, instead studying the history and theory of performance art in order to ensure that their contributions were new. Renouncing any artistic inheritance that might have been handed down by the *avanzada*, del Re positions himself and the artists of his generation as more geographically peripheral, more economically marginal, more deeply embattled subjects than those who had come before them. "A diferencia de la 'Escena de A.', los artistas de esta década no aparecerán en galerías 'alternativas', no

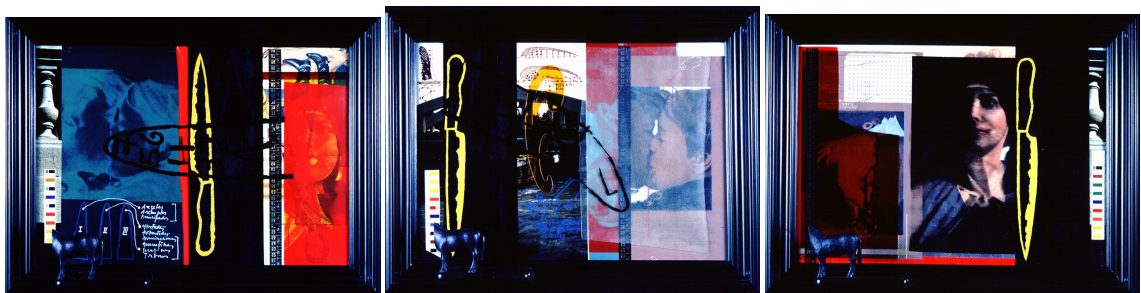
recibirán fondos ni de sus familias ni del primer mundo para desarrollar su arte (ya existe la democracia, por lo tanto, los artistas no pueden utilizar la palabra 'dictadura' para conseguir dinero internacional), y tampoco se escribirán sobre su trabajo" (118).¹⁶⁴

Given the fervor of his repudiation of Eltit's generation, I was surprised when, upon continuing to read del Re's description of the projects of the new Chilean performance artists, I found multiple echoes of the *avanzada*'s work. I will give just two examples here: in one case, Del Re tells us how Luis Campos staged an intervention that consisted of, "trazar una línea en el aire sobre el Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Santiago, volando en una avioneta, mientras en el museo se traza una línea en los platos de una pequeña balanza" (118). Perhaps it is only because I have dedicated so much time to the study of Eltit's performances, but this work sounded in my ears like a fascinating recombination and renovation of two of CADA's *acciones de arte*: "Inversión de escena" (1979), a performance in which CADA covered the façade of the Museo de Bellas Artes with a white sheet, and "¡Ay, Sudamérica!" (1981), an action that consisted of flying in an airplane over Santiago in order to release pamphlets over the *poblaciones* stating that, "cada hombre que trabaja por la ampliación, aunque sea mental, de sus espacios de vida es un artista" (CADA 151)). In another instance, although del Re has already insisted that the performance artists of his generation depart from the work of the *avanzada* by distancing themselves from the use of writing in their performances, he portrays Nilda Saldamando as a performance artist whose work is tightly linked to visual poetry. Her

¹⁶⁴ Indeed, del Re's 'history' of Chilean performance art assumes an envious tone as he argues that, "Los ochenta poseen todo el poder, los noventa no poseen ninguno. Los ochenta poseen toda la prensa, toda la crítica a su disposición; y aunque ya no practican la performance, ni mucho menos la enseñan, durante los noventa el público les reconoce indistintamente como el único equivalente del país a un artista de performance" (120).

performances, he recounts, "utilizan el texto como soporte fundamental, para explorarlo, disectarlo, y extenderlo más allá del confinamiento de la literalidad. La palabra en sus performances es un elemento tan relevante como las imágenes u objetos" (119). Yet again, without wanting to detract from this younger artist's contributions, I found myself thinking that this description could just as easily apply to Eltit's performances (particularly in the overlapping cases of *Lumpérica* and *Zona de dolor*) as to Saldamando's own.

Without a doubt, the performance artists and groups that have emerged in Chile from the 1990s through the present day deserve to be studied as independent entities -- as the creators of new aesthetics, who work through different formats and with different media to communicate unique political, social, and artistic messages. Nonetheless, just as Eltit and CADA's work did not appear in a cultural vacuum but rather builds on the concept of the *happening* as it had manifested itself in Argentina, or on the urban interventions of the *brigadas muralistas*, Eltit and CADA now form part of the genealogy of performance from which today's Chilean performance artists begin. Indeed, even del Re's manifesto of rejection, "Confronta tu icono," reveals the importance of the work of Eltit's generation as a point of departure just as much as it attempts to renounce the *avanzada* as part of the current generation's lineage.



Figures C1-C3: *La Lumpérica (tríptico) I-3* (1988). Mixed media paintings by Gonzalo Díaz -- images courtesy of the Latin American Collection of the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art.

At the same time as del Re imposes distance between what he defines as the current performance project in Chile and that of Eltit and the *avanzada*, many other contemporary Chilean artists (whose production spans from the 1980s through the present day) have, by contrast, embraced Eltit's influence. Thus, traces of Eltit's aesthetics and principal preoccupations echo throughout Chile today, both in the world of performance and in other arts. For example, the visual artist Gonzalo Díaz (b. 1947) created a series of mixed media paintings titled *La lumpérica (tríptico)* in 1988. Much more recently (in 2010), a mural was created by a group of students based on several of the themes of her novels, telling passersby: "Escribe para detener la vida. Tener ese privilegio y algunas fantasías pendientes. ¿Qué esperas para convertirlas en literatura?" In the literary sphere, contemporary writers who have participated in Eltit's *talleres* -- such as Andrea Jeftanovic, Lina Meruane (b. 1970), and Nona Fernández (b. 1971) -- have developed their own voices while following in Eltit's footsteps, pushing the boundaries of literature and the exploring the potential created by the complexities of language.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Indeed, Jeftanovic, Luane, and Fernández have been antagonistically described as "diamelitas" for their "pasión por Diamela Eltit" and their "complejo estilo 'diameliano'" ("Les pasa a las 'diamelitas,' as quoted by Jeftanovic in *Redes* 299 -- I was unable to track down the full original article as it was published in *La Tercera* on December 16, 2006). This term originated in a disparaging article, attacking the younger writers for allegedly imitating Eltit's 'excessively complex' style. While I believe the author of this article is correct in connecting the literary production of these three women to that of Eltit, I disagree with the pretense that they are not authors in their own right, who have their own unique contributions to make to the literary sphere. Moreover, such comments simply reveal the resistance from certain sections of the cultural press and a few more mainstream authors to experimental narratives such as Eltit's, and, indeed, to the existence of what could be called an "estilo eltiano" that has already gained international attention and acclaim.



Figure C.4: 2010 Mural created by student artists Sebastián Araya, Maximiliano Poveda, and Pablo Aguirre as a project for "4 Medio B." Image courtesy of diamela2010.blogspot.com.

More significant for this dissertation, however, are the many reverberations Eltit's narrative has had in the theater, beginning in 2003 when the choreographer Magaly Rivano staged a dance-theater adaptation of Eltit's 1988 novel, *El cuarto mundo*. At the same time, Chilean director and actor Alfredo Castro (b. 1962) staged an adaptation of Eltit's 2002 novel, *Mano de obra*. In 2006, one of Eltit's collaborations made it to the stage: her photography prose project with Paz Errázuriz, *El infarto del alma*, was produced by the company La Krisis and director Cristián Cheuque. That same year, 2006, also saw the young director of the company Teatro Niño Proletario, Luis Guenel (b. 1973), stage what he termed a *relectura* of Eltit's 1994 novel *Los vigilantes*, presented under the title *Hambre*. Most recently, Alfredo Castro's Teatro la Memoria returned to Eltit, performing an adaptation of *Jamás el fuego nunca* in late 2009. This production had such an impact in its relevance to the current Chilean social and political situation that it was selected to be brought back this past January (2012) as part of Santiago's annual month-long theater and performance festival, *Santiago a mil*.



Figure C.5: Production flyer for Teatro Niño Proletario's 2006 staging of *Hambre*, based on *Los vigilantes* by Diamela Eltit. Image courtesy of Luis Guenel.



Figure C.6: Alfredo Castro's 2012 second staging of *Jamás el fuego nunca*. Photo courtesy of Teatro la memoria.

In January of 2010, I asked Castro why he thought so much of Eltit's work had been adapted to the stage. Castro replied, "Me es bien evidente que su escritura es completamente teatral. De hecho algunas de sus novelas, como *Los trabajadores de la muerte*, están escritas con la estructura de tragedia griega. Y es que siempre, desde su primera novela, su escritura, su lenguaje, su estructura siempre son tremendamente

teatrales."¹⁶⁶ Moreover, he went on, the political nature of her *obra* speaks to the Chilean political, social, and economic situations today. Indeed, Eltit's narrative remains in constant evolution: it has moved from dictatorship to the transition to democracy, from the fall of Marxism to the rise of neoliberalism, through feminist perspectives and gender performances, and most recently to motherhood, illness, and the bicentennials of Latin American independence in her late 2010 novel, *Impuesto a la carne*. Consequently, as Eltit's narrative performances persist in their provocative responses to the socio-political context of Chilean society, echoes of her work will continue to ripple through the stages and streets of Chile, inspiring some while framing a point of departure for others.

¹⁶⁶ From a personal interview in Alfredo Castro's office in Teatro la Memoria on January 27, 2010.

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