

Broken Filiactions: Bodies, Language and Mourning in Twentieth-Century México

by

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Preface

The pages that follow reflect on tensions around mourning and the creation of filiative bonds in the context of twentieth-century México. This dissertation begins with a consideration of the Bicentennial celebrations in México in 2010, paying attention to an official act that entailed the circulation of the bodies of México's founding figures. This performative scene centered on the corpses of the founding fathers of the nation as a means to construct and reconstruct historical memory in the discourse of the Mexican state. Given the current state of Mexico, a consideration of representations of national belonging and filiation in relation to death and mourning seem particularly apt, although in reality these questions are not radically different from historical practices of other nation-states. However, the scene gains a different nuance against the background of violence México was witnessing at the time and that by 2015 amounted to more than 150,000 deaths. The symbolic economy of the discourse of the state was effacing the reality of death and violence; devoting attention to the bodies and sacrifice of the founding fathers, while obliterating the reality of everyday violence and death; a violence intensified at the moment, but atemporal and non-exceptional in its structural relation to the state and to processes of capital accumulation. It is this obliteration around death that interests me. One of the key images with which this dissertation begins, a woman carrying the coffin of an

infant, a photograph of Enrique Metinides, alludes to the mechanism through which this obliteration takes shape in terms of both the socio-economic dynamics of mourning and symbolic representation. The image, marked by death and sexual difference, works as a metaphor throughout the dissertation. I claim (in Chapter One), that Metinides's image generates a close encounter with the limits of legibility that is present in all the works that this dissertation considers.

The first chapter develops key notions such as filiation, sexual difference and chora, and considers the Bicentennial celebration as a space of exhibition of a monumentalized filiation, one structured as a form of communal paternalism around the corpse. The production of this symbolic economy in the discourse of the state stands against the rest of the dissertation in which, through the presence of sexual difference, I explore a set of works that are placed at a conjuncture of creation and rupture of filiation. I depart from the filiation at place in the *Bicentenario* against the background of violence in 2010 (Chapter One) to then examine filial politics in the work of Juan Rulfo in *Pedro Páramo* (Chapter Two). I later explore the antifilial engagement in the work of Teresa Margolles (Chapter Three) and the constant struggle with filiative bonds in Bolaño's work (chapter Four). I consider in this constellation of literature and art various instances in which filiation is put in question. These works explore ruptures in filiation that reveal, in their interruption of signification, a different relationship to death and its representation.

Aiming therefore to reconsider the politics of mourning, these pages examine the symbolic circulation of corpses and the production of language around them. The figure of Antigone, central to the organization of the dissertation, highlights the conditions of mourning as a filiative bond. Antigone opens a conversation about the dynamics of mourning in relation to

state discourse, a question about the creation of narratives of mourning and tensions around memorialization, oblivion, and the absence of symbolization in the aftermath of death. In considering the creation of discourses of mourning, I read literature and art that engages, like *Antigone*, with an interruption of signification and thus opens a different economy of mourning to the one presented in the events surrounding the *Bicentenario*.

From the anonymous woman in Metinides's photograph to *Antigone* to Bolaño's *2666*, sexual difference works in these pages as an analytic tool that allows me to question the politics of filiation. In these pages, its presence marks the entrance of the corporeal and the possibility of a reformulation in the representation of the limits of life. Its presence displaces, I claim, the genealogical filiation around the dead body.

These works interrogate the relation among the aftermath of death, the remains of violence and narratives produced around them. The production of language, and also the interruption of its signification, key to thinking mourning, is at the center of all of the chapters. The works that I explore often blur and complicate lines between life and death highlighting the limits of narrativization. Margolles, for example, through her relation to the corporeal -- bodies both dead and alive -- signals breakages in the processes of narrativization around death and violence, at the limits of language. As we see in the *Bicentenario*, politics of mourning are often centered on providing an authoritative logic to the past, an official narrative that draws violent deaths into a foundational origin. It is this continuum of mourning that these works interrupt. They resist progressive narrativization and instead expose breaks in signification.

Finally, I want to emphasize that although the dynamics I analyze are related to Mexico, they are also present beyond it. I do not read these works in a historically formalist (or historicist) manner, which would concede a notion of temporality to the progressivist idea of the

nation-state. I follow, in a sense, an atemporal and non-chronological time of the nation in its relation to both the production of death and the accumulation of capital. I understand these works – and scenes within them – as interruptions: references that both expose and operate against the empty time that the nation establishes (through this notion of masculine filiation). Each of these works, in their insistence on engaging with what remains in the space of that interruption, with the materiality of *el resto*, point towards temporalities that, in speaking to death and mourning, reconfigure a relation to life as birth.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the limits of the patriarchal structure of the nation in the context of modern Mexico. Set against a background of violence, it considers the production of discourses of mourning through a series of cultural texts that include literature and art. Through its examination of narrative, poetry, photography and art, it engages in a conversation with notions of filiation and crisis, sacrificial logics and the production of alternative discursivities. In engaging with the bodies that appear in these texts, and in dialogue with the psychoanalytic concepts of sexual difference, this dissertation points to the tensions and limits of filiative discourses of mourning that structure ideas about patriarchy and the state central to modern Mexican culture.

The first chapter works out from the performance of mourning in the 2010 Celebrations commemorating the birth of the Mexican nation. It puts this event in dialogue with an image of Enrique Metinides in order to develop the conceptual architecture that informs the dissertation's overarching argument. Chapter Two considers Juan Rulfo's canonical novel *Pedro Páramo*, an essential literary work in the imagination of the Mexican nation. The chapter engages analyzes the filial politics that shape the novel's narrative around mourning. Rulfo's work illustrates a politics of filiation through the creation of masculine genealogies, but also exposes moments of

break with these logics of patrilineal filiation. Chapter Three considers the work of Teresa Margolles (1969). This chapter describes recent intellectual debates regarding Margolles's work, placing them in dialogue with the classical figure of Antigone to show that Margolles's controversial art installations perform a gesture similar to Antigone's insistence on death. I read Margolles, at the center of heated debates about the ethics of using human matter in art, as an artist who places her work within discourses of mourning. Chapter Four examines the writing of Roberto Bolaño (1953-2003). It pays particular attention to two of his novels: *2666* (2003) and *Amuleto* (1998). Both novels are analyzed as interrogations into the production of language around bodies/corpses of and in the aftermath of violence in relation to sexual difference. The chapter examines Bolaño's creation of filiative links as crisis, opening the possibility of different modes of inheritance in relation to the production of language and the nation. The texts, images, and installations explored in these pages look beyond death as statistical fact and seek to interrogate moments where life (as natality), even in the visceral mourning of death, appears.

Chapter One

Mourning Bodies: Sexual Difference and the Limits of Filiation



Figure 1. Woman with coffin. Photograph by Enrique Metinides.



Figure 2. La columna de la Independencia.

In May 2010, in celebrating the Centenary of the Revolution (1910) and the Bicentenary of the War of Independence (1810), the remains of twelve Mexican national heroes were exhumed from the base of one of the most emblematic monuments in Ciudad de México, the *Ángel de la Independencia*, also known as *la columna de la Independencia* (figure 2.). The monument, a 42-meter sculptural ensemble that commemorates the war of Independence against the Spanish colonial powers, and marks therefore the ‘birth’ of the nation, was inaugurated by General Porfirio Díaz in September 1910. Since then, the *Ángel*, as it is popularly known in Ciudad de Mexico, has overlooked the Paseo de la Reforma, crowned by a bronze statue covered

with gold and harbouring at its base the bodies of the leaders of the 1810 independence movement against the Spanish crown. Among those bodies is the corpse of Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, known as the *padre de la patria*.¹

As part of the celebrations of the *Bicentenario*, the bodies of the “founding fathers” were moved from the base of the monument to the National History Museum in the Chapultepec Castle.² After being subjected to a series of forensic analyses in the museum to assess the state of conservation of the corpses, a military parade transferred the remains to the National Palace as part of a yearlong exhibition entitled: *México 200 años, la Patria en construcción* (figure 3.) From the monument to the Independence erected in the days of the Revolution, passing through the National History Museum, the bodies arrived at the National Palace in the Zócalo, as the symbolic epicenter of both the city and the country, to be exhibited to the public. The relation to the dead bodies became a central element in the rearticulation of a national image.

As in other commemorations of the nineteenth-century emancipatory processes in Latin America, this celebration was part of a historical project that aimed to highlight the temporal architecture of the nation-state and thus to relegitimize the field of institutional politics; to promote a certain historical *logos*.³ The state aimed to impose the discourse and rationale of

¹Built in a neoclassical style, the story of this monument, an emblem in Mexico City, can be read as a sort allegory of the modern Mexican state. The project for the monument was first designed under Maximilian I and was finally started in 1902 during the porfiriato in prevision of the one hundred years of the Independence. It was developed under the supervision of the Mexican architect Antonio Rivas Mercado.

² See for example the article “FCH preside homenaje a héroes de Independencia.”

³ In his work *Soberanías en suspenso. Imaginación y violencia en América Latina*, Sergio Villalobos reminds us how a number of recent historiographical works, in an attempt to interrupt these sort of neoliberal mnemotechnologies, have allowed to conceptualize this “original scene” of the Independence not as a inaugural rupture, that foundational origin of the nation, but instead as a metamorphosis of Imperial sovereignty, as a new configuration of the sovereign relationship

national unity by reinforcing the historiography which presented independence from Spain as the teleological origin of national progress.⁴ One hundred years after the beginning of the Revolution and two hundred years after the independence movement, the trope of the dead father of the nation was set in motion as an act of nation-building. The exhumation and reburial of the bodies, as a performative spectacle, wove together narratives of the Revolution and Mexico's independence. The pilgrimage with the corpses mirrored the traditional politics of post-revolutionary Mexico, which, by conjuring the spirit of the father concretized in the revolutionary figures, helped in solidifying a notion of community and national unity.

The progression and viewing of the bodies of “Mexico’s founding fathers” illustrates an act of nation-making in which the political community emerges through its engagement with the corpse, the corpses, through the monumentalization of his dead body. Through the exhibition and veneration of these sacrificed bodies, the political community generated is always located in a position of filiation -- in death and in debt -- that demands faithfulness to the memory and principles of its “founding fathers.” The exhibition of the bodies, then, is an act intended to reproduce a national *raison d’être*. These politics of filiation allow not only for the articulation of a foundational narrative for the nation-state, but also for the reproduction of power structures that promote themselves within a sacrificial economy. The community is one of brotherhood or

connected to the territorial *nomos* of the modern State. According to Villalobos, it is precisely thanks to this metamorphosis that it is possible to read against the grain the official interpretation the so-called *Bicentenario*, not as a final confirmation of the post-colonial project of liberation and progress, but instead as a fetish that edulcorates the process of globalization seeking to veil the transformations at place. The celebration of the Bicentenary of Independence, which in Mexico’s case coincides with the centenary of the revolution, would function under this light as a temporal monumentalization unfolded to reinforce the crumbling and obsolescence of national narratives, and would operate by attempting to conceal a new metamorphosis of sovereignty (*Soberanías* 23).

sisterhood with the father or fathers located at the head of the national community; but is explicitly the act of communion with his corpse that allows for the creation of a community as such. If these historical figures came to be considered fathers of the nation, their “paternity” emanates from their condition of martyrdom, from death in the name of the nation: their sacrifice is a productive event that lends them symbolic value; a value that is then capitalized again in the name of the nation. This logic could be said to be embodied in the very structure of the *Angel de la Independencia*—point of both departure and arrival of the bodies—a phallogentric symbol stretching from the ground to the sky and built on the grave of the founding figures. In inviting the population's mobilization, the movement of their corpses, their symbolic circulation, intends to foster a political community that is loyal to the historical origin they are claimed to represent. In this way, the state attempts to reproduce a historical logos sired by the male.

I suggest putting this scene in tension with a photograph from an earlier era in Mexico's history, taken in 1966 by Enrique Metinides (figure 1.), a photojournalist who for decades covered the aftermaths of disaster and the effects of violence in the streets of Ciudad de México. The photograph belongs to a series in which Metinides followed a woman from a funeral home, where she was constrained to beg to pay for the child's coffin, to the Servicio Médico Forense at the heart of México City where she recovered the body.⁵ In this particular photograph, a woman walks down a busy street carrying what at first glance seems to be a small white box. A closer look at the box's geometry reveals, however, that it is in fact a coffin; a coffin for a small child,

⁵ Metinides's caption informs the reader that the woman did not have enough money to pay for a coffin for her son: “Esta mujer no tenía suficiente dinero para comprar una caja mortuoria para su hijo. Acudió a una tienda de ataúdes y empezó a rezar y a pedir ayuda. Al cabo de un tiempo, se vio rodeada de gente. Entre todos reunieron algo de dinero.” The caption also recounts how after picking up the body from the morgue the mother had to walk several kilometers back home with it.

perhaps even an infant. The viewer cannot distinguish whether or not the coffin contains a body; but the fact that her figure is weighed down on the left, and the tension clearly visible on her calf, betrays the burden she carries. Metinides's photograph interpellates the viewer through the white geometry—the small coffin at its center. As viewers, our attention remains entrapped in that cold shape that might, or might not, contain a corpse and which the camera juxtaposes with a briefcase at an angle suggestive of a link between death and capital.

The vast majority of Metinides's work relies on the open exhibition of broken bodies penetrated by violence and tragedy; the exposure of the corpse, of the object of violence, is central to his photojournalistic practice. Atypically, this particular image presents no dead body. The corpse, however, cannot be said to be absent either; the image is constructed around neither the presence nor the absence, and this fact turns that white geometry into a sort of blind spot, an illegible center that disrupts its logic, that introduces what I will later conceptualize as a *khōric* trace. But Metinides's photograph emphasizes as well the hidden space between the public trajectory of the men on the street and the private drama of that unnamed woman on her way to or from the morgue. As viewers, we are taken to a subjective position in which we bear witness to both the solitary trajectory of the woman and the communal understanding displayed in the masculine space whose subjects seem oblivious to (or unconscious of) her presence. Taken from behind, the camera prevents us from seeing her face; she remains a solitary and anonymous woman carrying her burden in silence under the midday sun. Through the alignment in its composition, the photograph establishes a correlation between the woman's womb, the white coffin and the black briefcase, in a sequence that suggests a logic of sacrifice in the name of capital. The swarming street seems indifferent to the woman's presence, unconcerned or undisturbed by the hefty nature of her task. Her load is assimilated into normality, into the

everydayness of urban and public space. The composition remains centered in the tension between her small silhouette, weighed down by the coffin, and what appears to be a wall of masculine bodies: two men in cowboy hats idly chatting next to the road and a group of tall men in business suits leaning against each other in close conversation just steps in front of her. The image is set in a tension between the public and the private domain fundamental to understanding the dynamics of mourning. This tension is emphasized by sexual difference. In other words, it points to the distinction between a masculine figuration of “business as usual” and a feminine-coded attentiveness and exclusion.

The encounter between these two scenes, these two moments of circulation of and around corpses—the celebration of the *Bicentenario* and Metinides’s image—points to the conceptual knot at the heart of this dissertation. I use the tensions presented by the two images, together with the theoretical threads that I draw from them, throughout these pages. Guided by the notion of sexual difference, this dissertation explores elements that displace traditional representational paradigms of filiative death and mourning through the body itself. By taking account of a khoric trace, a logic between the sensible and the intelligible in the violent encounter with death and mourning, this dissertation sheds light on the blind spot or internal fissure that appears in Metinides’s photograph. Metinides’s photograph, with the woman carrying the small coffin of her child at the center of a space otherwise dominated by masculine exchange, points precisely to the hidden face of these sacrificial economies. The photograph opens a reflection on the atemporal drama of the loss of unnamed bodies that are ignored even while being exposed to the public eye and around which no symbolic community is formed.

The monumentalization of the corpse based on the sacrificial bones that in the ceremonies of the *Bicentenario* operate to perpetuate a given historical logos in the name of the

progress of the nation is but one side of the sacrificial economy. Metinides photograph shows a different part of this sacrificial economy that does not internalizes the living being into an economy of sense in the name of the nation, but in which meaning is produced on the basis of exclusion from the community. These deaths are related for instance to the shadow capitalism of narco-trafficking and to a different configuration of violence in its relation to the state.

I take the case of Mexico, not in an attempt to generate a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon in the territory that we call Mexico, but taking it as a symptomatic space, as an area of study in which still under the demarcation of the nation state, as Sergio González Rodríguez phrases it, “extreme capitalism converges” (*Femicide* 12). Within the present configuration of our globe, the Mexican case can be thought as a paradigmatic example of the flooding effects of capital in the nation-state, and how capital organizes a depoliticized world scene. Although the different forms of violence that have shattered the country in recent years from North to South and South to North, from the femicide violence of the *maquilas*, to *narcotráfico* or the invisible forces that push the immigrants on the Mexico-US border to face extreme precarity, and even the violence of state force, are seemingly very different in nature, they cannot be read disconnected from the violence of capital, a violence that time and again destroys bodies.

The identitarian project of the nation-state was in Mexico extremely strong for the vast majority of the twentieth century. After forty years of accelerated economic growth (1930-1970) promoted by the import substitution industrialization model (ISI), an economic model responsible for protecting the development of national industries, México began to be heavily flooded by transnational capital.⁶ The signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement

⁶ By August 1982 the State had already launched drastic measures of budgetary austerity under the direction of a technocrat cabinet formed in the Chicago School. In return for the debt rescheduling, Mexico was required by the International Monetary Found to implement

(NAFTA) in 1994 under the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) profoundly eroded the sovereignty of the nation-state signaling the collapse of the modern political project. With NAFTA, Mexico became the world's cheapest country for industrial assembly (Gonzalez 32).⁷ The border between Mexico and the United States, one historically characterized by its porosity, was becoming a new regime of selected permeability that would allow the free piercing of capital while retaining economic migrants at the border; that is, it would favor the deregularization of the markets while concurrently regulating labor. Responding to the new spatialization of neoliberal globalization and its economic need to create a space of circulation, NAFTA made Mexico a territory ready for "savage capitalism," a model that consolidated, institutionally, a new relationship between capital and the State. The whole territory of the nation became punctuated in an unprecedented manner by a cartography of violence bound to these new dynamics in the circulation of capital (from the overflow of *narcotráfico*, to the violence associated with the space of the *maquila* and the US border). These new flows fostered by

institutional reforms such as cuts in welfare expenditure, more flexible labor markets laws and privatization of the national industry. Through means of this 'structural adjustment', Mexico became a territory ready for the implementation of a new model of deregulated capitalism, making with it the country one of the first drawn into the growing number of neoliberal states apparatuses worldwide (Harvey 29).

⁷ The Border Industrialization Program (BIP), also known as the *Maquila program*, structured the arrival of a new modality of production that characterized the new era of liberalism; one anchored in a logic of economic integration between Mexico and the United States. The BIP was first initiated after the cancelation of the *Bracero program* which, enacted during the years of the Second World War, exported the labor of men as temporary workers into the United States. When in 1964 the United States decided to cancel the program, Mexico responded with the launching of the *Maquila program* with the promise of combating the escalating unemployment rates around the border region. In contrast with the *Bracero program*, which mobilized male work force towards the United States, the new *Maquila program* started to employ primarily young women in assemblage plants located at the other side of the border. It was only three decades later, when Nafta came into force in the year 1994, that Mexico would see the true blooming of the *maquila* industry.

neoliberal globalization diverged from the reason of territorial containment created by nation-state borders, thus challenging and compromising the binding effects of notions of territory, identity and sovereignty. In other words, this process put into crisis the basic principles of the nation-state. These new configurations of capital left aside political or ethical horizons and began to function as the neoliberal utopia in which capital, dissociated from any kind of regulation, operated only under the logic of free market, and its operating principles of labor disposability.

NAFTA brought with it a boom in the mass-production industry which quickly made border spaces like Ciudad Juárez a powerful center of industrial assembly in need of docile labor. In a country in which a vast population of the males had immigrated to the United States, this entailed the massive incorporation of women into the gears of the neoliberal machine in a process that, in a Marxist terminology, has been referred to as a process of “feminization of labor,” a trait that would become characteristic of free trade zones. Juárez, a “lawless city sponsored by a State in crisis” (Gonzalez 7), started to become a space of condensation of a model of border economic accumulation, but also of the dehumanizing aspects of the *maquila* scheme; a space marked by a disposability that suggests an association between the production of consumable goods and the consumption of bodies. These were the conditions for the gestation of what Sergio Gonzalez Rodriguez has called *The Femicide Machine*: “an apparatus that didn’t just create the conditions for the murders of dozens of women and little girls, but developed the institutions that guaranteed impunity for those crimes and even legalized them (7). An “apparatus,” following Gonzalez Rodriguez, of mass production of both goods and corpses, that made Ciudad Juárez, center of a criminal and killing industry governed by the same economic premises of an assembly line. In other words, workers and their bodies treated as any other form of industrial waste, bodies that could be discharged and then easily replaced [2], always

according to the laws of the market, to the laws of supply and demand, what Melissa Wright has term as an environment of “human disposability.”⁸ In this environment of human disposability hundreds of women were raped, dismembered and murdered, establishing a clear, and seemingly novel, pattern of gendered violence; a sort of contemporary witch-hunt that has been read by Silvia Federici as symptomatic of both a new process of primitive accumulation in the making, and of the emergence of a different relationship with the body.⁹ As Federici shows, the bodies of

⁸ Wright has explored in her work *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* how the development and use of the myth of disposable third world woman appears as the condition of possibility to guarantee cheap labour for global factories. This myth turns women through the passage of time into the personification of human disposability, just another form of industrial waste that can be discharged and then replaced. Bodies at the service of Capital. Wright illustrates how the myth of a disposable third world woman worker travels out of the global factory system and interacts, often in extremely cruel ways, with other stories that degrade women, as in the murders of Ciudad Juárez (72).

⁹ In her book, *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), Federici analyzes the phenomenon of witch-hunting, as a process contemporary to the beginnings of capitalism. She reads witch-hunt against the backgrane of the economic and institutional policy of the 16th century, identifying it as one of the most important political events in both the development and consolidation of modern capitalist society, and the formation of modern proletariat associated with it. The phenomenon of witch hunting was instrumental to the construction of a new patriarchal order that placed bodies, labor, sexual and reproductive powers under the firm control of the state. Thus, Federici reads the witch-hunt as a political initiative crucial not only for the deepening of the divisions between women and men, but also responsible, in its attempt of centralizing knowledge, of the destruction of beliefs, social practices, and subjects which existence was deemed an obstacle for the development of the capitalist system. Following the connection between land privatization and the beginning of witch hunting, Federici explores the genesis of capitalism conceptualizing both as a strategy of accumulation of capital. It is in the moment in which the commons, the collective land tenure, disappears that this biopolitical intervention, if we consider it within the thought of Michel Foucault, is launched. “Just as the enclosure expropriated the peasantry from the communal land, so the witch-hunt expropriated women from their bodies” (184). In this way, Federici illuminates how the advent of capitalism produced a split between production and reproduction, in a new division of labor that set the conditions of possibility for capitalism and which carries onto our days. The body of the woman became a procreation machine closely connected to the labour needs of the market through both an economic vision of procreation and the understanding of procreation as an economic force. For this reason, the confinement of women’s reproductive role to the private sphere has to be read as an essential strategy for capitalist ongoing process of accumulation. The division between public and private was responsible for veiling a key element for the organization of capitalist labour, in as much as

women appear at the site at which structural violence is exercised. Following Federici's work, femicidal violence, a contemporary witch-hunt, exposes the underlying violence of economic relationships in neoliberal times. The violence that pervades the nation--from the death trail left behind by the economic realities of people smuggling to the territorial violence of the international drug trade-- finds its precedent in the femicides of the 1990s; the femicides as one of the morbid symptoms of our contemporary condition, as a symptom of capital.

The violence generated by the so-called *War on Drugs* (since 2006) has left over 100,000 murders in its wake.¹⁰ Mexico seems to have become a lawless land, closer to an image of sheer destruction than to the progressive imaginary of nation-building proposed by the name of the exhibition: *la Patria en construcción*. This state's call to revisit the origins of the nation against the backdrop of violence that was tearing apart Mexico's social tissue revealed a profound crisis in state ideology. While the state proposed that its subjects perform a pilgrimage to pay homage to the founding fathers of the nation, ritually constructing the 'Patria by reintering its dead. The celebration of the founding fathers did not account for the contemporary backdrop of violence and mourning tearing at Mexico's social fabric. Mexico was marked by tens of thousands of corpses and by a growing number of displaced citizens struggling to escape *narcotráfico* related

women fulfill the fundamental role in the production of the labour force. Thus, the lack of remuneration for reproductive labour constitutes for Federici the foundation of capitalist accumulation. This strategy of expropriation of that labour emerges as the necessary precondition for the rise of a capitalist system. The depolitization of the phenomenon of the witch-hunt would be concealing that witch hunting was just class war by other means (176); a strategy to turn "class antagonism into an antagonism against proletarian woman" (47)..

¹⁰ In 2015 some estimates were as high as 150,000 deaths. The very point here, in counting these numbers since 2006, is that the way of understanding the machine-like death in relation to the war on drugs requires the filiation of state-led processes, whereas the pervasive of this violence shapes a broader, embodied landscape of everyday life in contemporary Mexico. See the statement of Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

violence. These corpses were ignored, however, and thus remained absent from any state narrative. In this sense, the national narrative that the state sought to revisit during the celebrations, a memorialization and revitalization of its origins organized around its founding fathers' corpses, also appears to have attempted to contain a contextual and social *pathos*, in an environment of mourning.

These pages are in dialogue with post-hegemonic conversations in the field of Latinamerican studies in their attempt to rethink the conditions of the production of violence in the shadow of the nation-state. In considering what I call the crisis in filiation in relation to the nation, this dissertation does not make a claim about a historical particularity in the contemporary period. In other words, the crisis of filiation with which this dissertation deals is not meant to signify an 'event' -- a rupture in the otherwise stable nation-state -- but rather points to a broader sense of what Gareth Williams has called the Mexican exception. Williams claims that Mexican modernity itself "was orchestrated by a total state that strived at all times to suppress the duality of state and society."¹¹ This characteristic of exceptionality, in which violence was part of that constant suppression, foregrounds the specific kind of violence that is the subject of this dissertation.

The work of Sergio Villalobos is key to illuminating the logics of the industrial production of the corpse and the "forma inherentemente sacrificial en la que el capitalismo despliega sus procesos de acumulación, produciendo no solo cadáveres, sino incluso los

¹¹ Williams claims that this condition "was predicated, not on the principle of self-limitation of government, nor on the quest for the biopolitical regularization of society, but on the consolidation of a police state understood as the direct governmentality of the sovereign qua sovereign" (12). See *The Mexican Exception: Sovereignty, Police, and Democracy*.

mecanismos para consagrar su desaparición” (213).¹² Villalobos suggests that the corpse, el cadaver, is an “índice para pensar las relaciones entre soberanía y acumulación” (211) in an “época caracterizada, según Jean Louis Deotte, no solo por la producción industrial del mismo cadaver (...) sino por la infinita sofisticación de su procesamiento post-mortem” (200). The centrality of the corpse that informs Villalobos analysis shapes this dissertation as well.

Filiation, sexual difference and what I name a *choric trace*, are the conceptual knots that guide this analysis. The paradigm of filiation, is one of the central notions behind these pages. Filiation, and its rupture, has long been a pivotal concept in psychoanalytic thought.¹³ In my engagement with this concept, I look at the various ways—discursively and pragmatically—through which links are established between generations. Filiation should be understood as a relationship to both the past and the future, to debt and inheritance, and to loss and promise. I see this space as a mechanism of the formation of (political) subjectivities that emphasizes an origin to which the subject is indebted, but closes as well any possible futures. In this sense, filiation functions as a temporal grid that entraps the subject in a history constituted by an indebted inheritance. What appears throughout this dissertation as masculine filiative logic can be understood in conversation with Rita Segato’s attempts to reveal the elemental structures of

¹² In his work *Heterografías de la violencia. Historia, nihilismo, destrucción*, Sergio Villalobos explores the relationship between history, nihilist deconstruction, and the exhaustion of modern categorical thought, highlighting the “condición exacerbada del presente, un presente marcado por un tipo de violeolencia generalizada, neoliberal y naturalizada que ya no responde a la noción tisan de violencia sacrificial o revolucionaria, ni menos a la noción de crimen común o delito” (115).

¹³ For Freud, the death (killing) of the father is constitutive of the social code and the perpetuation of his rule. See Freud, *Totem and Taboo*.

fraternal violence.¹⁴ I approach filiation paying attention to its relation to sexual difference, and to the possibility of new forms of relation that it opens.¹⁵ The figure of Antigone, for example, explored in the third chapter is key in this regard.

In these pages, sexual difference opens the horizon of the question of justice. As Joan Copjec suggests, sexual difference allows for a thinking of difference beyond the creation of identity politics; in other words, sexual difference is a form of conceiving difference that would not entail the creation of identities but that thinks the space of difference itself. I consider this complex notion of sexual difference in multiple ways. First, the dissertation works within a framework where sexual difference refers to the binary divide (man/woman) as a conceptual category that, within a phallogocentric system, allows for the development of the basic conditions of domination, enabling exploitation through the construction of hierarchies. In this sense, sexual difference also alludes to the fundamental necessity of a gendered division of labour for the process of capitalist accumulation. Here, it reveals the creation of a gender hierarchy that assigns women to the production and reproduction of life, considering it a natural and ahistorical process, whereas man is presented as the creator of value and thus occupies the historical position. Moreover, this divide carries a series of binary oppositions in which one side of the dichotomy is privileged over the other; that of the 'historical' position. This tension could be said to be present in Metinides's image, and is explored for example in the third chapter in relation to discourses of mourning, coded since antiquity as an essentially feminine task.

¹⁴ See for example *La guerra contra las mujeres* (2017) or *Las estructuras elementales de la violencia* (2003).

¹⁵ Derrida reminds us that "the question of woman and sexual difference is at the heart of this analysis of spectral filiation. Specially, this question of sexual difference commands everything that is said in *Specters of Marx*, about ideology and fetishism (*Ghostly* 231)

The notion of sexual difference developed throughout the dissertation considers sexual differentiation as a phenomenon that takes place *within* sexes. In other words, sexual difference becomes a differential that functions as the marker of a realm in which difference can arise, as a sort of *différance*, to use Derrida's term, but it does not essentialize the sexuated being.¹⁶ It attempts to move beyond binary oppositions towards an understanding of sexual difference that also distances itself from a notion of sexual identity as such (as inhabiting one polarity of the sexual divide), but that still remains dual. The notion of sexual difference and feminine sexuality has been key in the discourse of psychoanalytic feminism (Copjec *Sexual*). It is presented as a category that attempts to undo the idea of sexual identity in favor of a notion of sexual differentiation within sexes. Copjec explains that the psychoanalytic category of sexual difference was deemed suspect during the mid-1980s. It was presumed to be heterosexist and thus given up in favor of the neutered category of gender (*Sexual* 31-32).¹⁷ Copjec understands this shift as a “retreat of thought rather than a theoretical advance,” however, which entailed conceiving a multiplicity of sexual identities rather than an encounter of difference (32).¹⁸ In

¹⁶ Among others, Luce Irigaray can be aligned with this understanding of sexual difference that does not stem from a hierarchical dual structure, and that would characterize the difference between sexes as based on alterity rather than in ‘otherness. By thinking beyond the dualist notion of sexual difference the encounter between sexes becomes then a question of alterity rather than ‘otherness’. As Betsan Martin phrases it in “Luce Irigaray: Women becoming subjects for a divine economy”, rather “than subject to object, she is proposing a paradigm of subject to subject relationality in which processes of objectification would be incorporated within subjectivity, rather than being projected on to the other. She regards this as a new balance and a call for new consciousness. In an economy of exchange across differences, men’s subjectivity would change, as would the subjectivity of women” (65).

¹⁷ “The elimination of sexual difference in favor of a study of the social technologies of gender construction left biology behind altogether and produced subjects without any vitality, subjects without bodies or, more precisely, *subjects without sexual organs*” (*Sexual* 38).

¹⁸ “Many are more numerous, certainly, but what concerns me is that a precipitous multiplication pushes aside questions that need to be asked, that the proliferation of kinds of subjects (wereby

other words, the need to nominate based on a plurality of singularities was a step backwards on the thinking of difference.¹⁹ I share Copjec's belief that the psychoanalytic concept of sexual difference concerns a radical split of the subject that is present throughout the chapters.

In my engagement with this notion of sexual difference, I consider it also from the standpoint of Lacanian thought, as an account of the different positions that a subject can assume in relation to the limits of the symbolic order. Masculine and feminine logics, understood as what Lacan calls "sexuated positions" and not as gender roles, entail assuming a different relation to the limits of the symbolic. We could talk about a conceptualization of "sexual difference" in Lacan, based on his graphs of sexuation gains particular importance in the dissertation's third chapter in dialogue with the work of Roberto Bolaño. Although the chapters approach this complex notion of sexual difference from diverse angles, in all of them it functions as a path to articulate alternative relationships to life, death and the body. Sexual difference opens up the possibility of thinking modes of filiation that operate beyond the perpetuation of "the proper" as the base for the production of an economy of sameness.

Lastly, the notion of *Khōra*, previously mentioned in relation to Metinides' photograph, is also present throughout these pages. It points towards the presence of a maternal relation, one

each is her own kind) represents a retreat of thought rather than a theoretical advance" (*Sexual* 32)

¹⁹ The proliferation of genders repeats this same mistake; it multiplies rather than thinks. That is, it shirks from thinking difference and simply adds another one to a previous one, indefinitely: 1+1+1... From where do all these individual ones come? What makes them individual? In large part they come from common-sense observation that there are individuals, there are differences, which observation produces an ontological principle (the ontology of the multiple) to be defended, few questions asked. It is simply assumed that an individual comes from herself, that whatever makes a subject this particular subject makes her so per se. This is the nominalist position. Gender theorists operate largely on this assumption (*Sexual* 33).

without women, towards the emergence of a certain politics of care. The concept of chora or *khōra* (χώρα) has been explored by a number of contemporary thinkers, from Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, to Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida. The definition of chora seems to be elusive by its very nature; however, since Plato developed it in the *Timaeus*, it always has been accompanied by feminine and maternal resonances.²⁰ As we will see in the first chapter, Julia Kristeva understands the chora, what she names as the “semiotic chora”, as a non-expressive totality, a pre-linguistic realm of experience, replete with primary drives, that defines experience and regulates the subject before the entry into the universe of language.²¹ Jacques Derrida, in turn, understands *Khōra* as a logic other than the logic of logos, a logic that is situated beyond the logic of non-contradiction of the philosophers, between logos and myth, a sort of “bastard reasoning” as Plato calls it, able to escape binary opposition.²² Belonging to a “third genus” (*Name* 89), *Khōra* is above all a logic situated “between the sensible and the intelligible” (*Name* 103), and in a way situated as well between body and mind.²³ I would like to relate this notion of

²⁰ Kristeva cites Plato as understanding the chora as “un réceptacle mobile de mélange, de contradiction et de mouvement, nécessaire au fonctionnement de la nature avant l’intervention téléologique de Dieu et correspondant à la mère [...]” (*Polylogue* 57).

²¹ Kristeva, understand the semiotic, not as a prediscursive realm, but as the realm in which the subject is immersed prior to the enter in to language.

²² “*Khōra* appears to be neither this nor that, at times both this and that” (*Name* 89) occupying always “an oscillation between two poles” and oscillating “between two types of oscillation: the double exclusion (*neither/nor*) and the participation (*both this and that*)” (*Name* 91) “[T]he discourse on the *khōra*” says Derrida, “as it is *presented*, does not proceed from the natural or legitimate *logos*, but rather form a hybrid, bastard, or even corrupted reasoning (*logismō nothō*). It comes “as in a dream” (52b), which could just as well deprive it of lucidity as confer upon it a power or divinization” (*Name* 90).

²³ This quality brings Derrida understanding of the *Khōra* close to Kristeva’s, to the relationship with language itself. For Butler, for example, it names the site where materiality and femininity appear to merge to form a materiality prior to and formative of any notion of the empirical.

Khōra, understood as a logic between the sensible and the intelligible. This notion has different manifestations throughout the chapters, but is developed in the third chapter in relation to the notion of *pathos*. The concept of *pathos* comes to us from Aristotle who identifies it as one of the means of persuasion in classical rhetoric (*logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*) and refers to the appealing of an irrepressible emotional reaction that stands between representation and spectacle, that is central for an analysis of Margolles's works. As a mean of persuasion, *pathos* seems to be opposed to *logos*, in as much as the use of *pathos* brings to a halt the audience capacity for reasoning. While we could say that when Metinides exposes the dead body in his more well-known works, he makes a clearer use of *pathos*, in its open exhibition of the corpses, the image at hand, I claim, as other manifestations explored throughout this dissertation, operate in a *khōric* trace, between *logos* and *pathos*, the sensible and the intelligible.

The celebrations of the *Bicentenario* and the image of Metinides, two disparate relations to death and the question of mourning, will be continual points of return throughout these pages. Following Villalobos in his thinking of the corpse as an index, the dissertation examines an array of texts in which the corpse, and the representation of death as a filiative possibility are at the center. The dissertation departs from literary and artistic productions that think both spaces between life and death, and instances of unraveling of filiation often in relation to the paradigm of the nation. In the face of the nature of a generalized violence as one of the manifestations of a break in filiation, in these pages, I aim to consider the politics of life around death, and responds in doing so to scholarly conversations on mourning and the nation.

This dissertation aims to respond to a constellation of filiation, its crisis, embodied as we will see in the notion of the void, and sexual difference, putting these concepts in close relation to the notions such as *pathos* or *khōra*. In these pages, I seek to bring together these approaches

by putting them in conversation with contemporary feminist and psychoanalytic thought elaborated above and developed in each chapter. The dissertation takes sexual difference as an analytic opening to help us think about the production of language in the face of the exhaustion of signification.

Different scholars have pointed to the need to rethink the political categories of modernity locked in a formulation increasingly incapable to account for contemporary dynamics (Esposito *Diez*).²⁴ While filiative structures are considered in relation to acts such as the celebration of the *Bicentenario*, but they can be thought as well as fundamental to the political-communal categories, such as the nation or Patria, that have articulated our understanding of modernity. The exhaustion of our modern political vocabulary as a tool to navigate and give account of the dynamics of a globalized world could be read as a crisis of filiation, as a moment of symbolic deregulation that traps the subject in the paralysis of the postmodern as the work of Bolaño shows. In other words, progressive modernity gives way to the disconnected relativity of postmodernity, and in doing so the genealogies of filiation are broken.

Psychoanalysis reads the contemporary crisis of meaning as a process of “feminization of the world” as Jacques Alain Miller has put it.²⁵ In this view, the crisis of meaning is a product of the exhaustion of all discourse based on universal propositions and of the weakening of the

²⁴ Carlo Galli, for example, focuses on the need for a conceptual work that can generate a new understanding of the relationship between ‘space’ and politics, as a prerequisite for us to produce new forms of political imagination and possibility. Galli posits that the present difficulty in comprehending the globalization process is related to our attachment to the political categories of modernity, categories deeply rooted in a spatial imagination: internal/external, universal/particular, public/private, cosmopolitan/local, etc—dichotomous pairs that belong to the founding vocabulary of modernity. Galli suggests that as much as globalization entails the collapse and exhaustion of these categories with which we try to apprehend it in, this language has become obsolete. See Carlo Galli *Political Spaces and Global War*.

²⁵ See Jacques-Alain Miller, *El Otro que no existe y sus comités de ética*.

relation to the figure of the father as the guarantor of the law. What Miller calls the “feminization of the world,” was the process through which the universal logic gives place to a logic based in the particular, the fragmentary, the *not-all*. This process is undoubtedly at the center of a novel like *2666* which is considered in the last chapter of this dissertation is often related to the experience of the void. This void, what Kristeva names “the unthinkable of metaphysics” (*Powers* 2009) is present throughout the chapters. For this reason, this dissertation explores instances of contact with void or abysses, as a moment of crisis in filiation. While the contact with the void or the abyss manifests itself in various ways in the different chapters, consistently marks an experience of contact with the limits of the symbolic and, in this sense, it signals a moment of broken filiation. While filiation is understood in relation to various forms of kinship bonds and obligation to history —the disruptions to such bonds are figured in voids or abysses, points in which the structural concepts that organize the scene or narrative demand a different form of thought. Therefore, I focus on an analysis of anti-structural performativities (e.g. the installation of Margolles) as breaks in filiation.

I depart by developing a reading of Juan Rulfo’s canonical work *Pedro Páramo*, a foundational text both for Mexican narrative and for the imagination of the Mexican nation. My reading departs from other readings of this canonical work in proposing an analysis of the filial politics in the novel in view of its relation to sexual difference. I consider how through the creation of masculine genealogies, as a strategy of formation of sovereignty that tends to obliterate the feminine, Rulfo’s work illustrates the mechanisms of what, in relation to the opening image of the *Bicentenario*, we could call a politics of filiation. As in the celebrations of the *Bicentenario* it is the circulation of the corps of the father that grounds a narrative of political filiation. The chapter examines how structures of filiation are deployed in the novel, and how

these patrilineal lineages are embedded in a paradigm of debt. Rulfo's novel puts in circulation an economy of repetition that displays the mechanism of historical reason and of the reason of progress in political modernity. Juan Preciado, the main character, appears as a figure that attempts to understand its relation to these dynamics. The chapter pays particular attention to the moments in the novel when filiation is mediated by sexual difference. My claim is that while on the one hand *Pedro Páramo* could be considered a portrait of the same logic displayed at the celebrations around *la columna de la Independencia*, the novel offers as well *choric* traces that open in it counter-genealogical spaces. The chapter develops as well a reading of different economies of language around the dead body and traces the moments of break with the logics of spectral filiation.

The spectrality of *Pedro Páramo* assumes a radical embodiment in the third chapter that considers the work of Teresa Margolles. I read Margolles developing, as Antigone, a very intimate relation to the corpse that unearths the injunction of the polis and its structural violence. Antigone, a figure that introduces a genealogy articulated through sexual difference, is key as it signals the exposure with the limits of the symbolic, “when the limits of representation and representability are exposed” (Butler 2).²⁶ As the daughter-sister of Oedipus, Antigone inhabits the space of crisis of proper filiation and, living at the confines of a symbolic system. The chapter describes some of the recent debates around the figure of Antigone, before turning to examine how Margolles’s controversial art installations perform a gesture similar to that of Antigone’s insistence on death, as an ambivalent figure operating at the very limits of the symbolic. Margolles’ work engages with the massive escalation of violence in post-Nafta

²⁶ The full quote reads: Antigone “as a figure of politics, points (...) not to politics as a question of representation but to that political possibility that emerges when the limits of representation and representability are exposed” (Butler 2).

Mexico, exposing the aftermath of violence and its flooding effects in the social tissue. I read her as releasing a contained *pathos* in which the corporality is located at the center. Complicating our experience of death, diverting the discursivity of the autopsy, as a body of knowledge that functions to rationalize death and with it violence, and conjures up a sensorial regime that displaces traditional representational paradigm of death, operating in a khoric trace between the sensible and the intelligible. I thus consider the relation to materiality in her work, in which the exposure to the remains evokes the experience of violence. In relation to *el resto*, Margolles imposes on her ‘audience’ a spectralization that is experienced through the body in attempt to interrupt official discourses of mourning.

The forth and last chapter develops a motif of symbolic filiation marked by sexual difference in relation to the production and inheritance of language in the work of Chilean born author Roberto Bolaño. It pays particular attention to two of his novels: *2666* (2003) and *Amuleto* (1998). I take both novels as works that open an interrogation about the production of language around the bodies of violence, claiming that they could both be considered as indicating a *khoric* trace. The chapter first examines *2666* as a novel that narrativizes the encounter with the limits of the symbolic. Writing the disarticulation of the coordinates of modernity the novel immerses the reader in an experience of disorientation proper of our contemporary reality. The chapter turns to the character of Auxilio Lacouture, protagonist of *Amuleto*, considering how her relation to the limits of the symbolic illuminates provides an alternative mode of language production and inheritance. Following Lacan’s formulas of sexuation as a mode of inhabiting language, the chapter considers the creation of masculine and feminine logics in relation to language in Bolaño’s work. This serves as an avenue to examine how his concern with the creation of genealogies, between the paternal and the maternal domain,

opens the possibility of different modes of inheritance in relation to the production of language, but also to the ideas of origin and nation.

The need to think the relationship between aesthetic production and filiation is key in a moment in which the dynamics of globalization have exhausted our political vocabulary. In our contemporary moment, marked by the decline of an aesthetics of truth (in tandem with and following postmodernity), the question emerges of how to address the saturation of violence and death without participating in its monumentalization. Filiation, as an original symbolic indebtedness, is of course unavoidable; the task would be to consider, as Bolaño suggests, modes of filiation in which difference can be included, ones that are open therefore to difference, and avoid the perpetuation of sameness echoing Irigaray.

Finally, although this dissertation is in a way articulated around the question of mourning in relation to the dead body and while there is much discussion about melancholia in Latinoamerican studies, it seems necessary to imagine other possibilities that are not only backwards-facing temporalities. In other words, to imagine possibilities that do not, in a sense, mimic the logic of the nation-state's destruction by following its death trails. This focus on melancholia hinders our ability to understand the complex landscape of violence in and beyond Latin America. This dissertation seeks therefore to resignify mourning by paying close attention to encounters of life through death (thinking about biopolitical life).²⁷ The texts, images, and installations explored in these pages look beyond death as statistical fact and seek to interrogate

²⁷ The dissertation diverges from scholarship that conceives of spaces between life and death as inevitably tied to the idea of the nation, such as those overly determined by a Foucauldian approach to biopolitics. This is not to say that this work is not in dialogue with Foucault's understanding of biopolitics, but it follows Roberto Esposito's more elaborated notion of *affirmative biopolitics* – a politics of life rather than *over* life. See *Bios. Biopolitics and Philosophy*.

moments where life – even in the visceral mourning of death – appears. I will return to this point in the conclusion.

Chapter Two

Filial Politics and Spectral Bodies in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*

“There are still sons—and daughters—who, unbeknownst to themselves, incarnate or metempsychosize the ventriloquist specters of their ancestor” (262).

Ghostly Demarcations. Jacques Derrida

"Etranglés par la clôture de la famille incestuelle, les 'mêmes' dans leur imbrication *auto et homo* sont condamnés à la génération *et* à la tuerie : la famille engendreuse est tueuse."

Julia Kristeva
“Antigone, la limite et l’horizon”

If there is a literary work that captures the complex nature of political filiation in the context of modern Mexican history, this is *Pedro Páramo*. Juan Rulfo's canonical novel, first published in 1955, depicts the dynamics set in motion in the construction of political subjectivities by the specter of the father. Through the character of Juan Preciado, and the ghosts

that inhabit the village of Comala, Rulfo guides the reader from the promises to the ruins of modernity, in a journey which, always haunted by the omnipresent and all encompassing figure of Pedro Páramo, reveals how the notion of inheritance and its latent temporal framework structures and conditions the political domain.

First published in the early 1950s, when the institutionalization of the Revolution was beginning to be openly questioned in some intellectual circles, *Pedro Páramo* introduces for the reader a subject who remains perpetually trapped in the promise of modernization and the temporal framework drawn by the experience of the Revolution. While Rulfo's novel addresses the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution and its subsequent institutionalization by the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)*, his work could be said to speak more generally about the intricate nuances of any filial politics. With *Pedro Páramo*, Rulfo stresses the insurability of a gap in filiation, tracing a genealogy of the paternal and of its inheritance mechanisms. Filiation and inheritance, elements manifest in the subject's relationship to time, constitute the conceptual framework for the unfolding of the novel.

The story of the dispossessed figure of Juan Preciado has been approached from a variety of different angles, and often understood as the tale of the creation of a Mexican national subject. In *Modernism and Hegemony*, Neil Larson interprets Rulfo's fiction in this fashion as an ideological project whose goal is to invent Mexico and to do so by means of a populist agenda. Although Larson recognizes that the complexities of Pedro Páramo's narrative cannot simply be reduced to a populist paradigm (63), he understands Rulfo's work as establishing a certain hegemonic discourse aligned with an attempt to conquer a unified field for the creation of *civil society*, and to establish through it the base for the perdurance of the nation-state as a political

project.²⁸ Larsen's thesis suggests an alternate filiation, as a reterritorialization of sovereignty. In turn, working against Larsen's reading, Patrick Dove understands the mediatory force in Rulfo's work as having "the effect of destabilizing some of the basic premises of narrative (...) as the projection of a continuous and causal chronology" (104). For him, Rulfo's critical project attempts to dispel the "illusion of European universalism by affirming the existence of an alternative tradition" while also underscoring "a contradiction within the very projection of universality." In this way, he claims, it undertakes a "demystification of the state's own claim upon universality vis-à-vis the nation" (104). Although I side with Dove on this issue, it is undeniable that whether understood as complicit with a populist agenda or, if we focus on the elements of his narrative that destabilize state discourse as Dove suggests, the work of Rulfo illustrates a conception of sovereignty and political power firmly grounded on principles of inheritance within a patriarchal lineage; that is, in a patrilineal scheme of filiation.

²⁸ Departing from the *transculturation* theory of Angel Rama, who would conceptualize Rulfo as a neoregionalist writer, a "partisan anthropologist, actively committed to the defense of the regional subculture" (55), Larsen reads Rulfo's work as characteristically populist in its attempt to mediate between traditions in the name of the nation. Larsen sketches the question of populism "in the broader lines of Gramscian sociology as one attaining a state of modern capitalist hegemony in a setting of political "irrationality" that is, in the absence (from the point of view of capital) of rational forms of non-state behaviour" (63). "The state" he says "must from the literary standpoint, seek to posit itself directly within the discourse of the nonstate" (63). In this line, Larsen wonders whether the Rulfian narrative does not constitute in fact that discourse of the state as non-state. Larsen, highlights the historical conjuncture in which Rulfian narrative is produced and disseminated, the years of the *alemanismo*, as a new phase of hegemonic consolidation in Mexico, in which a new relationship between the state and different intellectual circles is established. The six-year presidential term of Alemán introduced important changes that began to drastically modify the territorial reality of the country. Through different modifications to the article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, Alemán's term focused on the further protection of private property from any threaten of expropriation, in order to attract new capital able to launch a program of high performance agriculture. For Larsen, Rulfo's production is situated in a moment in which the demands of partisanship and class conflict, put forward by the revolutionary period, appear to have been suspended at an institutional level (65).

As Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito reminds us “the nation defines the domain in which all births are connected to each other in a sort of parental identity that extends to the boundaries of the state” (*Bios* 171). In as much as parental identity is at stake, the question of filiation, as both an identity position and a category of subjection, presents itself as a key element that can help us understand the symbolic articulation of national community. As I have explained before, by filiation I understand the various ways—both discursive and pragmatic—through which links are established between generations, depicting one as emergent from the previous as a mechanism of forming political subjectivities by emphasizing an origin towards which the subject is indebted. Filiation should be understood as a particular relationship to both the past and the future, to debt and inheritance, loss and promise. Filiation works as a temporal grid that entraps the subject, and that constitutes the subject of history as a subject in inheritance. This filiative drive is at the base of the Rulfo’s novel.

The chapter explores this filiative drive analyzing first how structures of filiation are deployed in the novel, and focusing on how patrilineal lineages are embedded in an economy of debt that frames a particular experience of time; one in which there is no possibility for mourning. While Rulfo’s work depicts carefully this genealogical unfolding, his narrative works to disrupt, as Dove says, this sense of chronology. It is here, I claim, that the notion of sexual difference becomes key in the novel. For this reason, the second part of the chapter pays close attention to the embodiments of gender dynamics in relation to filiation; that is, to instances throughout the novel in which filiation is directly mediated by the presence of sexual difference.

This filiative drive appears as a structural element that persists to our day, as we see exemplified in the commemoration of the Bicentenario around the Independence column, or in the all ubiquitous tension between patria and the figure of the immigrants, the infiltrators, as not

belonging to the oedipal structure. The novel depicts points of fraying, unraveling and disruption of this logic present as well in other materials examined in this dissertation.

Creating patrilineal histories

It is in the interlude between the maternal and the paternal domain, in a space that will later on reveal itself as a realm of absolute orphanage, of bare destitution, that we first encounter the character of Juan Preciado. “Vine a Comala porque me dijeron que acá vivía mi padre, un tal Pedro Páramo. Mi madre me lo dijo” (17). The initial sentences that open for the readers the doors of *Pedro Páramo* point to Juan Preciado’s introduction into the history of Comala, and to that gesture of suturing in a gap in filiation. On his mother’s deathbed, Juan Preciado vows to visit his father, “un tal Pedro Páramo” (17), a blurred figure “[que] se llama de otro modo y de este otro” (17). That paternal figure in which he projects his fantasy, functions at this point as an empty signifier, an unknown figure (“un tal...”) around which Juan Preciado can project his fantasy. Dolores Preciado propels him toward Comala, seizing him within a promise of restitution for the wrong inflicted on her (and on her offspring) by Pedro Páramo. “Exígele lo nuestro” (17). Thus, the prospect of inheritance and reparation surfaces as the centripetal, but it’s more linear than circular, so I would suggest “driving” (although below, it does become circular, centripetal/fugal (both, in a way) force around which the future is constructed for Juan Preciado.

Despite the fact that Pedro Páramo will emerge later as an unaccountable paternal figure; one unable to fulfill any kind of filial demand, Juan Preciado makes a promise to his mother to confront his father but one that he claims not to fulfill: “no pensé cumplir mi promesa. Hasta que ahora comencé a llenarme de sueños, a darle vuelo a las ilusiones” (17). Juan Preciado begins then to create “un mundo alrededor de la esperanza [de] aquel señor llamado Pedro Páramo”

(17), an idealized hope closely tied to the figure of his mother Dolores Preciado, a maternal figure marked by the shadows of pain. The inquiry and search into the paternal realm opened for Juan Preciado the possibility of a future. Upon the arrival to Comala he finds however a world of recalcitrant silence whose architecture, covered in weeds, has been shattered by the forces of resentment of Pedro Páramo. What begins as a quest to encounter his father and fulfill a promise of abundance and hope, rapidly unveils the destruction brought about by him. We quickly understand that Juan Preciado's journey to Comala does not attest so much to a return to origins or to the embracing of a lost community, but rather to the moment of his inscription into the universe of (his father's) law.

As Gareth Williams posits in his reading of the novel everything in the novel, including sovereignty itself, "is constructed in the wake of the corpse of the dead father" (20). In Comala everyone is "hijo de Pedro Páramo", and is this condition that generates the fraternal bonds in the community; fraternal bonds that are precisely inscribed in the corpse of the father. As William suggests this element regulates the relationship between law and collective life. From the corpse of the grandfather, to the dead body of the son that bears his name, Miguel Páramo, that patrilineal vector, and the succession of a lineage of masculine corpses, create in Comala a sense of History; of History understood as a shared experience of time. Whether we talk about the corpse of Don Lucas Páramo, accidentally killed during a wedding celebration, and after which his son "Pedro Páramo causó [una gran] mortandad" (83), or Miguel Páramo's whose death "pesaba mucho en el ánimo de todos" (36), these events, the death of a figure of that patrilineal history, function as temporal landmarks of the communal experience of Comala. In the telling and retelling of these deaths, and in the public memory of Comala created through them, we encounter an experience of communion understood as that sharing of the dead body, of the body

of the father.²⁹ It is in the remembrance of the father, in the sharing of his corpse, that the community is brought into being.³⁰ This is for Jean-Luc Nancy precisely the nature of fraternity: fraternity is constructed through the void produced by the absence of the paternal figure. Fraternity is produced not as "the relation of those united by a same family," but instead "as the relation of those whose *Father*, or common substance, *has disappeared*" (57).³¹ This disappearance, this absence, is then an operative one that brings, as in the case of the celebrations of the *Bicentenario*, the community together in an act of remembrance and mourning.

In the case of Rulfo's work, it is through the constant spectral presence of the father that the novel, together with its main character and all the inhabitants of Comala, remains trapped in an Oedipal relation, establishing a discourse of transcendence that guarantees the perpetuation of his law and organizing logic. This sharing of the remains of the body of the father, a sharing that should be understood as well in relation to the administration of its memory, establishes a very particular form of communion, one in which the fraternal bonds are always mediated by the figure of the father. As Jacques Derrida's critique of the notion of 'fraternity' stresses in *The Politics of Friendship*, fraternity, an essential part of the Republican motto put forth by the French Revolution, always already implies a conception of politics mediated by both a paternal

²⁹ As we will see, in the novel, only the communion created around the body of Susana San Juan towards the end seems to escape this logic.

³⁰ Following the work of Sigmund Freud and Levi Strauss, Lacan suggests that the origin of the law lies in the murder of the father, the killing of the father of the primordial horde, in as much as this killing far from liberating the sons from the law, reinforces it instead, allowing the appearance of the symbolic father. The origin of the law is therefore structured around the death of the father, around his absence. Therefore, the element that structures the law is in fact this absence.

³¹ This is also a predominant theme of Derrida's *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. This quote comes from this work.

logic and a schematic of filiation. Fraternity appears as a bond always established in relation to a patrilineal progeny. The formation of community is organized, as in the celebrations of the *Bicentenario* and the government's call to visit the corpses at the exhibition, in this sharing of the remains of the father, a sharing that should be understood as well in relation to the administration of its memory.

However, and beyond the centrality of the corpse of Don Lucas Páramo, father of Pedro Páramo, the temporal trajectory of this patrilineal history extends itself even further in time. In one of the instances that allow the reader to glimpse into Pedro Páramo's childhood, we learn through the voice of his paternal grandmother about yet another paternal ancestor, who remains this time unnamed. The also unnamed grandmother relates the ruin of the family to the grandfather's infelicitous decision to move to Comala, "tu abuelo jerró con venirse aquí" (26), revealing the links between the family's ruin and the death of Pedro Páramo's grandfather. Thus, she recounts how the expenses that they incurred for the celebration of the grandfather's burial, "los gastos que hicimos para enterrar a tu abuelo" (26), left the family penniless, forcing them to buy on credit from Doña Inés Villalpando, and generating in the family a lineage of debt.³² We see therefore how the debt of the family appears inscribed in in the corpse of this unnamed forefather of Pedro Páramo and incurred due to the Church, as in a payment to yet another father.

³² The scene reads like follows: "Antes de salir, su madre lo detuvo: —¿Adónde vas?
—Con doña Inés Villalpando por un molino nuevo. El que teníamos se quebró.
—Dile que te dé un metro de tafeta negra, como ésta —y le dio la muestra—. Que lo cargue en nuestra cuenta.
—Muy bien, mamá.
—A tu regreso cómprame unas cafiaspirinas. En la maceta del pasillo encontrarás dinero. Encontró un peso. Dejó el veinte y agarró el peso. «Ahora me sobrará dinero para lo que se ofrezca», pensó. —¡Pedro! —le gritaron—. ¡Pedro! Pero él ya no oyó. Iba muy lejos." (27)

The notion of this lineage of debt, the inheritance of debt, appears reinforced in the novel through the story of Gerardo Trujillo, family lawyer and, most importantly, a sort of economic historian of Comala: “Había servido a don Lucas (...), padre de don Pedro; después a don Pedro, y todavía luego a Miguel, hijo de don Pedro” (103). Planning to leave Comala, Trujillo approaches Pedro Páramo seeking from him “una retribución grande y valiosa” (103), after a life devoted to serving the Páramo family. Gerardo Trujillo “[o]ía el tintineo de los pesos sobre el escritorio donde Pedro Páramo contaba el dinero” (104). Pedro Páramo shows however no signs of willingness to grant any retribution, leaving thus his demand unfulfilled. Exposed to the sound of accumulation, Gerardo Trujillo “[s]e acordaba de don Lucas, que siempre le quedó a deber sus honorarios. De don Pedro, que hizo cuenta nueva. De Miguel su hijo” (104-105). Trujillo exposes then the economic dynamics of Comala, in which not only are debts never restituted but, as in the case of the debt with the Preciados, but are also concealed. Debt does not have *per se* a calculable value, since for Pedro Páramo what is important is only to whom the debt is owed and not the quantity at stake. “¿A quién le debemos? No me importa cuánto sino a quién” (45). It is in the name therefore that debt is inscribed. As Fulgor tells Pedro Páramo “[l]a familia de usted lo absorbió todo. Pedían y pedían, sin devolver nada” (46). It is this accumulation, an accumulation without exchange value, that we confront throughout the novel and that generates a constant tension between abundance and scarcity. We see this tension emerge for instance in the initial pages of the novel when Juan Preciado encounters one of his half-brothers, Abundio Martínez, whose name is marked by this promise of abundance. Abundio guides Juan Preciado towards Comala and reappears in the final pages to give death to Pedro Páramo after begging for money for the burial of his wife. In the initial encounter with Juan Preciado, he remarks how despite being sons of Pedro Páramo and his massive accumulation (he owns “toda la tierra que se

puede abarcar con la mirada”), “nuestras madres nos parieron en un petate” (20). Despite the incommensurability of the fatherland, his progeny is born in the humblest of the conditions, and condemned to perish of hunger. Land accumulation appears therefore without real use value.

As Dove points out in relation to the novel, although the Revolution claimed to inaugurate a new historical era, opening the temporal horizon of the nation, there was an “uncanny homology between the cacique (...) and the post-revolutionary state” (104). *Pedro Páramo* displays and interrogates the revolutionary claim of inauguration of a new historical period, highlighting the continuity between both regimes of power.³³ We know that in Comala “[t]odo parecía estar como en espera de algo” (19). Dove stresses the fact that if Juan Preciado can be read as an allegory of a national subject, he is a national subject who enters into modernity by turning toward the past (109). This temporal torsion that Dove underscores is vital in understanding how the novel displays the mechanism of political filiation. It is in this shift in which the subject is trapped, suspended in a moment of transition which functions as a subjectivizing structure, anchored in the promise of restitution; a promise that establishes a horizon on the ghost of the past and sets in motion a historical time of inheritance and debt. Comala is trapped in a liminal temporality in an impasse between debt and promise, living in the suspension of all the ones who “se quedaron esperando que Pedro Páramo muriera, pues (...) les había prometido heredarles sus bienes” (84). By narrating the intricacies of that impasse between debt and promise, Rulfo's novel tells the story of the injection of a ghost, a communal fantasy centered on the figure of the father, that has kidnapped the entire population of a village. This is one instance of how Rulfo allows us to bear witness to the creation of a subjectivity that

³³ More than the outset of a new temporality, the Revolution then would have accomplished a consolidation of a mode of sovereignty through a process of subjectivization based on the promise of land redistribution.

structures the political scene and entraps the subject in a discourse presented always in filiation, but a filiation that is always in debt.

As in the case of Pedro Páramo, the politics of filiation put forth by the specter of the Revolution were also articulated around the promise of inheritance, fostering hope in the process of land redistribution. It is the notion of property that permits the continuity of the national project, and it is in the sharing of the land that the community comes into being. This is a sharing through time, that is, a matter of inheritance, an inheritance based however in an open gesture of appropriation. While *Pedro Páramo* portrays the moment of transition from the Porfiriato to the Revolution, the novel could be said to speak beyond the specificity of that historical moment. It profiles the constitution of a subject who would stand at the base of the long hegemony of the PRI in Mexico. As we saw in relation to the Bicentenario in the introduction to this dissertation, this is an ongoing subjectivity linked to an oedipality fundamental to the structure of the nation itself, stemming from the patrilineal implications of its foundational fictions.

When we encounter Juan Preciado in the initial pages of the novel, he is only an orphaned subject, a mere potentiality, a subject propelled towards the future. Juan Preciado's search for his father is the story of his submission to a discourse that preceded him as a subject and that will also be his heritage. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the arrival to Comala entails the entrance into what Jacques Lacan has identified as the 'name of the father.'³⁴ As we see occur in the beginning of *Pedro Páramo*, for Lacan the exit from the maternal universe

³⁴ Playing with the homophony between *le nom du père*, the name of the father, and *le non du père*, the no of the father, Lacan coins this notion to refer to the inscription of the subject into the symbolic order. This would attest to the moment of creation of the subject, understood as his or her embedding in the laws of the symbolic.

through the figure of the father entails the subject's entry into the social realm, into the symbolic register of the law. Throughout the novel, he becomes alienated from the structure of Comala until he finally comes to occupy the position which, as a subject to the power of his father, belongs to him: death.³⁵

In his journey towards the past, towards a promise of restoration doomed to remain unfulfilled, Juan Preciado is both propelled towards the future and possessed by the specter of the past, trapped between past and future in a temporal architecture that cancels out the experience of the present, but also the experience of finitude. Despite the clarity of the public deaths that mark the history of Comala, the deaths of the Páramos, the experience of the community is deeply marked by the impossibility to experience death and finitude. Everything has become pure spectrality. Juan Preciado is in fact not even aware of the precise moment or circumstances of his own death, he is trapped in time and unable to discern whether he is dead or alive. He is a subject, captured in the chronology of a paternal discourse that determines a sense of history, but one without present, one without recourse to another experience of temporality that, for thinkers such as Jacques Derrida or Jean-Luc Nancy, is key to non-patriarchal forms of community and social organization. The profile of Juan Preciado responds to that of a historical subject who, like the one at the base of the government discourse on the *Bicentenario*, is aimed

³⁵ This notion of the subject in search seems to be key in understanding the model of subjectivization at place. In her article *Infinitization of the Subject*, Jelica Šumič Riha posits that “[t]he symbolic birth of the subject or, rather, the quandary of his/her existence is formulated by Lacan, as is well known, in terms of a fundamental alienation: “either I am nothing but this mark” (this role, function, or mandate, attributed to me by the social Other), “or I am not this mark”, which means that “I am not at all”. The subject can thus “be” a mark, or not be. What is thus “created” is an empty subject, lacking being and signifier: from the moment the subject consents to his/her symbolic existence, i.e., takes up the symbolic identification assigned to him/her, he/she becomes name-less, caught in an infinite quest, in the metonymy of his/her identifications, for the missing signifier, the one which could at last name him/her in his/her being” (248).

to fulfill a historical project; but looking towards the past, like Juan Preciado. This is a subject teleologically oriented towards the future, marked by the horizon opened by the state of modernity and its discourse of an always forthcoming and cumulative progress. But also oblivious to the material realities that mark and condition the historical moment in which the subject lives.

As Dove reminds us, Rulfo's narrative works to disrupt a progressive chronology in order to reveal the artificiality of this lineal history. By breaking the stream of history he calls into question as well a certain mapping of history and with it the sense of historical time that pervades Comala, one focused on the *father-son lineage*, on the deaths of the masculine kin of Pedro Páramo.

In her work *Sexes and Genealogies*, Luce Irigaray denounces the way in which History tends to collapse "male and female genealogies into one or two family triangles all sired by the male" (v). In the context of contemporary Western culture, she claims, genealogies are always built by privileging a masculine lineage. Irigaray suggests that the fundamental sacrifice that society does not acknowledge is the sacrifice of the mother, a sacrifice that should be understood, first and foremost, as the failure to symbolize the maternal-feminine. The negation of the feminine, its expulsion from the field of the symbolic, constitutes in her view the fodder for the creation of genealogies that are not but a perpetuation of sameness. When Freud, Irigaray notes, "describes and theorizes about the murder of the father as the founding act for the primal horde, he is forgetting an even more ancient murder, that of the woman-mother, which was necessary to the function of a specific order in the city" (11). Irigaray asks if "when [Freud] talks about the father being torn apart by the sons in the primeval horde," he is not, "out of full-scale denial and misunderstanding, forgetting the woman who has been torn between son and father,

among sons” (13). It is this original negation of the maternal-feminine, the occlusion of the mother and her body, the original matricide at the base of the symbolic order that *Pedro Páramo* narrates as well.

Although the public history of Comala is undoubtedly marked by this genealogical principle described by Irigaray, —“sired by the male” Rulfo’s novel works as well to disrupt these genealogical dynamics creating also an architecture in the feminine. While the masculine genealogies, from Don Lucas Páramo, to Pedro Páramo, to Miguel Páramo, work by aligning themselves with a project of perpetuation of sameness-- the novel opens itself as well towards other spaces, towards a multiplicity of fragmentary genealogies conjugated in the feminine. Sexual difference in Comala opens a doorway towards the possibility for thinking a different notion of the subject and its relation to the object. The feminine universe in the novel, points to a rupture of closed economies and an interrogation of a notion of inheritance based on the protection and perpetuation of property and the proper. The next pages explore the treatment of what I will call *liminal femininity* in the novel. Against the immensity of Pedro Páramo’s presence and his logic of ever expanding accumulation, the maternal-feminine universe appears in the novel both as the sacrificed domain, and as a space able to create an outside to the totalizing logic of Pedro Páramo. Although some participate in the very same patriarchal logics that Pedro Páramo instigates, women often appear as well in the novel as limiting and demarcating figures with the ability to restrain and question his power. These figures tend to inhabit thresholds, liminal spaces; neither inside, nor outside points towards the very architecture of his power. Perhaps for this reason that the contact with the maternal-feminine universe often takes place in the presence of doorways.

Femmine liminality

“-Han matado a tu padre.
-¿Y a ti quién te mató, madre?” (36)

Pedro Páramo. Juan Rulfo

“If we continue to speak this sameness, if we speak to each other as men have spoken for centuries, as they taught us to speak, we will fail each other. Again... Words will pass through our bodies, above our heads, disappear, make us disappear. Far. Above. Absent from ourselves, we become machines that are spoken, machines that speak.”

When Our Lips Speak Together. Luce Irigaray

It is at the doorway of the novel, lying in bed, that we encounter the character of Dolores Preciado, mother of Juan Preciado. In these initial pages, Dolores Preciado states as we saw a desire for restitution for what she and her son did not enjoy in life, directing our attention to the sacrifice, a sacrifice of patrilineal legacy, that structures the social reality of Comala. This sacrifice refers towards a process of bastardization of inheritance through which Pedro Páramo cancels the inheritance of his son Juan Preciado, appropriating the goods of the mother, and leaving behind a bastard that, stripped of his father's name, would not be able to participate in the sharing of the legacy. While Dolores Preciado gives language to sacrifice, enunciating the wrong of Comala, and opening thus the possibility to revealing its structure, she also propels her son on a quest for reparation aligned however with the logic of patrilineal filiation. She impels Juan Preciado to participate of the distribution of inheritance, of the sharing of the father's body. In this sense, her name indicates perhaps what she cannot fully articulate, her pain, her *dolor*, for not being able to take part in that fraternal *partage*.

As we saw, the story of Juan Preciado takes shape in the tension between two corpses; only by leaving behind the dead body of his mother, Dolores Preciado, and doing so in his search

of the paternal figure, Juan Preciado becomes a subject of History, a History whose organizing principle is in fact the corpse of the father. Juan Preciado struggles to leave behind this maternal universe and “zafarse de sus manos muertas” (17), but he leaves behind her corpse in search for the idealized figure of his father. Following this desire for restitution and impelled by his mother’s idealized memories of Comala, Juan Preciado then takes reader toward the arid architecture of a village “lleno de ecos” where he is followed by “risas ya muy viejas, como cansadas (...) voces desgastadas por el uso” (36). It is here that Juan Preciado begins to inhabit the symbolic universe of Comala.

As soon as Juan Preciado reaches the threshold of Comala leaving his mother, the certainty of that origin, that maternal origin, seems to disappear. Edugives Dyada, the first woman Juan Preciado encounters, puts in question this maternal origin when she states: “yo estuve a punto de ser tu madre” (28), telling the story of how she took the place of Dolores Preciado on the wedding night.³⁶ This questioning of the maternal origin, can be thought in relation to what Derrida would call the “unicity of the mother” and could be read for instance as a sort of matricidal desire, understood as the effacement of that pre-symbolic moment.³⁷ While

³⁶ “No puedo—me dijo--. Anda tú por mí. No lo notaré” (30). “Al año siguiente naciste tú; pero no de mí, aunque estuvo a un pelo que así fuera” (30).

³⁷ In *The Night Watch*, Jacques Derrida addresses this topic of the “unicity of the mother.” He claims identifies the existence of two logics, “two competing but also strangely allied logics, almost indistinguishable in their dynamic rhythm. One of term is classic, or most precisely “Freudian” or “Joycean.” Then Lacanian. (...) While paternity would always be a problematic attribution, a conclusion reached through inference and reasoning, a “legal fiction” (...) and thus a sort of speculative object susceptible to substitution, the maternity of the mother is unique, irreplaceable and object of perception, like the “womb” we so often speak of as the place of conception and birth” (*Derrida and Joyce* 99). “The other logic would subject the mother to the same regime as the father: possible substitution, rational interference, phantasmatic or symbolic construction, speculation, and so on” (*Derrida and Joyce* 99). Then the mother can also become a speculative element and even a “legal fiction”.

his arrival to Comala reinforces his sense of filiation with Pedro Páramo, since he discovers that there all the inhabitants are his sons, Juan Preciado is introduced as well to that doubt about the maternal origin. This doubling of the maternal appears as a dyad, as a splitting and multiplicity of what should be one that questions both mater and origin.

From the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the formation of the subject, its entrance into the symbolic order, is closely related to both the internalization of the paternal prohibition and the displacement of the maternal figure.³⁸ It is in this double gesture, as a symbolic wound that is later materialized in language, that the subject is constituted as such. The passage between the maternal body, which is presented as a chaotic space of non-difference, that is as a space in which difference as such is not symbolizable, to the Symbolic order is thus built on the displacement of the originary identification with the mother, with the *mater*, as a realm of undifferentiation between body and language. For the child to become a subject, she/he has to give up the space of undifferentiation proper to the maternal universe, substituting the desire of the mother for the Law of the Father. It is at this moment that the figure of the mother is symbolized. That universe prior to language, what Lacan would call *the Real*, is then spectralized. As a spectral formation, *the Real* constantly returns to haunt us, erupting whenever the subject is put in close touch with the materiality of existence.

The internalization of the paternal prohibition, the *No/Name of the father*, is therefore responsible for generating the distinction between *mat(t)er* and world, between subject and object and, therefore, between you and me. This exclusion of the maternal is deemed necessary

³⁸ For Lacan it is the introduction of what he terms as the *No/Name of the father* that breaks the unmediated dyad between child and mother. This moment of immersion in language constitutes the entrance into the Symbolic order.

to avoid the fall into a psychotic universe.³⁹ The entrance into language marks from this perspective our separation, our exit, from the maternal universe from which we are forever severed; by symbolizing the maternal universe, this universe is spectralized. While this constitutes the traditional psychoanalytical understanding of the process of formation of the subject, other theorists such as Julia Kristeva, or León Rozitchner, work to “unravel the double-bind between completely inhabiting the Symbolic—and thereby taking up a rigid unified subject position—and refusing the Symbolic—and thereby inhabiting psychosis” (Oliver 13). This line of work, which will be further explored later on, challenges the fundamental premises of Lacanian psychoanalysis and exposes the consequences of that spectralization of the maternal, that “sacrifice”, not only in the most obvious exclusion of the feminine, but also in the conception of the political and social realities shaped by it.⁴⁰ Is this process of spectralization that *Pedro Páramo* illustrates as well.

The notion of spectrality appears at the very center of Rulfo’s novel manifesting itself in different manners. This spectralization speaks not only to a certain experience of the temporal framework, but also as we shall see, to a divide between body and mind that crosses the whole novel and that is intimately related with the maternal-feminine universe. Beyond the initial encounter with Dolores Preciado, the entrance to the universe of the maternal-feminine is often

³⁹ As Kelly Oliver points out “the psychotic, who forecloses the Law of the Father, is an outlaw.” (22)

⁴⁰ Yannis Stavrakakis posits in his work *Lacan & the Political* that “there is no society and social reality without exclusion, without it the world collapses”, he claims “into a psychotic universe”. This exclusion and ordering emerges from the displacement of the maternal. For this reason he wonders, “what is exactly (...) sacrificed in the world of language?” (34). The child has give up the space of indifference proper to the maternal universe, substituting the Law of the Father for the desire of the mother, Stavrakakis suggests that what is sacrificed in this entrance into language “is the mother, the maternal thing” (34).

invoked in the novel through recurrent incursions into Pedro Páramo's private sphere. Against the public history of the village and its architecture of power, these oneiric moments, brief reminiscences of his childhood, are presented almost as episodes of dissociation, scenes characterized by the deployment of a rich sensuality, that expose the fractured nature of Comala's sovereign figure. Time and again, Rulfo allows the reader to peek into his intimate universe, his inner life, a universe that bears the deep imprint of the maternal-feminine. These memories, which are often marked by the liminal presence of doorways, find resonance in the novel with the figure of Susana San Juan, whose adult psychosis resists the law, and yet another central but scattered presence: the unnamed mother of Pedro Páramo.⁴¹

One of these early scenes, the very first moment of contact with the inner experience of Pedro Páramo, presents him locked in the intimate space of the bathroom, where he thinks of Susana San Juan.⁴² In the scene, marked in its totality by a clear sensorial imprint, Pedro Páramo recalls a playful moment flying kites with her, "cuando volábamos papalotes en la época del aire" (25).⁴³ The scene appears organized around the thread of the kite that Pedro and Susana fly

⁴¹ Juan Preciado appears as an illegitimate son that is, almost a "child" in the sense that Jean-François Lyotard presents this figure in *The Inhuman*. Juan Preciado, as an outsider of Comala, remains in a status of illegitimacy as a form of childhood in the Lyotardian sense.

⁴² The previous passage reads: "El agua que goteaba de las tejas hacía un agujero en la arena del patio. Sonaba: plas plas y luego otra vez plas, en mitad de una hoja de laurel que daba vueltas y rebotes metida en la hendidura de los ladrillos. Ya se había ido la tormenta. Ahora de vez en cuando la brisa sacidí alas ramas del granado haciéndolas chorrear una lluvia espesa, esampando la tierra con gotas brillantes que luego se empañaban. Las gallinas, engarruñadas como si durmieran, sacudían el polvo de sus alas y salían al patio, picoteando con prisa, atrapando las lombrices desenterradas por la lluvia. Al correrse las nubes, el sol sacaba luz a las piedras, irisaba todo de colores, se bebía el agua de la tierra, jugaba con el aire dándole brillo a las hojas con que jugaba el aire" (24-25).

⁴³ The first part of the novel is specially marked by these memories of Pedro Páramo's childhood and, by the sensorial imprint this time as well in relation to the figure of Susana. Por la noche volvió a llover. Se estuvo oyendo el borbotar del agua durante largo rato; luego se ha de haber

together interlacing hands. The thread, “el hilo de cañamo,” in the scene becomes the organizing element that generates an experience of communion, a playful interplay open to the contingency of the elements. The scene offers in a way a glimpse to a different structuring of the notion of filiation.

Beyond the figure of Susana San Juan, a character that we will later explore in more detail, these passages that allow the reader to access the inner world of Pedro Páramo are intimately connected to the figure of his mother, a woman that Pedro Páramo had attempted to forget and that he ultimately “había borrado del recuerdo cuando ya no hubo nadie que se la recordara” (73). In the wake of the death of his paternal grandfather, during his *novena*, therefore after one of the key moments in the fabrication of Comala’s public history, we see the figure of Pedro Páramo’s mother appear: the image of a woman at the doorway. She stands at the threshold while Pedro Páramo contemplates how the candle she holds creates a “sombra recorrida hacia el techo, larga, doblada” (28). Exposed to the light of the candle, symbol of reason or clear sense, the body of the mother of Pedro Páramo appears broken in pieces, as the beams of the ceiling “la devolvían en pedazos, despedazada” (28). At this point, Pedro Páramo’s mother blows out the candle, closes the door behind her and opens up her sobbing, a sobbing that dissolves in the murmur of the rain, her suffering melded with the natural elements.⁴⁴

dormido, porque cuando despertó sólo se oía una llovizna callada. Los vidrios de la ventana estaban opacos, y del otro lado las gotas resbalaban en hilos gruesos como de lágrimas. «Miraba caer las gotas iluminadas por los relámpagos, y cada vez que respiraba suspiraba, y cada vez que pensaba, pensaba en ti, Susana» La lluvia se convertía en brisa. Oyó: «El perdón de los pecados y la resurrección de la carne. Amén». Eso era acá adentro, donde unas mujeres rezaban el final del rosario. Se levantaban; encerraban los pájaros; atrancaban la puerta; apagaban la luz (27).

⁴⁴ The text reads here: “Entonces ella se dio vuelta. Apagó la llama de la vela. Cerró la puerta y abrió sus sollozos, que se siguieron oyendo confundidos con la lluvia” (28).

This first subjective experience of fragmentation, of the disarticulation of the body of the mother, appears in the novel, as do the subsequent ones, in a close entanglement with the construction of the masculine lineage, marked by the *novena* of his paternal grandfather. Pedro Páramo's awakening to the death of Don Lucas Páramo, his father, is deeply marked as well by this fragmentation in relation to the maternal body, a fragmentation that brings with it a subjective experience of splitting in the young Pedro Páramo. The scene, preceded by another sensory experience of close contact with water, takes place once again in the space between the threshold of the door and the bed, and constitutes, as we will see, a sort of reverse of the later scene of Susana San Juan's death. In a scene structured by a strong dissociation between corporeal experience and voice, a voice takes control over his body making him wake to an image of his mother's face leaning, once again, against the frame of the door. "The voice of his mother wakes him from the drowsiness of sleep announcing his father's death: "La voz sacude los hombros. Hace enderezar el cuerpo. Entreabre los ojos" (35).⁴⁵ "¿Por qué lloras, mamá?" he asks: "Tu padre ha muerto" (35). The announcement of his father's death unleashes once again a fractured experience of the maternal figure; Pedro Páramo observes how his mother's body stands in the threshold, torn apart by pain and grief, ungovernable, "como si se le hubieran soltado los resortes de su pena, (dándose) vuelta sobre sí misma una y otra vez, una y otra vez" (35). Pedro Páramo observes a body convulsed by the effect of grief and pain, a body that seems to escape, in its convoluted and disorderly motion, any sort of sovereignty.

The death of Miguel Páramo, Pedro Páramo's son, which recalls again the death of Don Lucas Páramo, brings with it yet another image of his mother; the image of "una mujer

⁴⁵ It is interesting to compare this description to the state of death/sleep of the whole town later: in between corporeal integrity/consciousness and dissolution.

conteniendo el llanto, recostada contra la puerta” (72). In every death, in fact, “estaba siempre la imagen de la cara despedazada; roto un ojo, mirando vengativo el otro. Y otro y otro más” (73). Every death recalls for him this image bringing with it an experience of fragmentation of the figure of the mother, a kaleidoscopic image, that not only attests to the remembrance of the death of his father, but that brings about an optical multiplicity permeated by a sense of revenge that is marked by the figure of a woman; his mother. Pedro Páramo contemplates “aquella mujer, de pie en el umbral” (36). Her body “impidiendo la llegada del día; dejando asomar, a través de sus brazos, retazos de cielo, y debajo de sus pies regueros de una luz asperjada como si del suelo debajo de ella estuviera anegado en lágrimas. Y después el sollozo. Otra vez el llanto suave pero agudo, y la pena haciendo retorcer su cuerpo” (36). This sensuous experience is marked by an arresting temporality, “su cuerpo esperando la llegada del día” that against the “retazos de cielo” and the “regueros de una luz asperjada” creates a vision reminiscent of a virgin. This scene suggests that his experience of mourning moves towards a threshold – an alternative logic captured by the virgin Mary -- that incorporates the empty cycle of paternal death central to the logic of Comala. The body of the mother appears as a suffering figure torn in pain blocking the dawn of day, transmuted into a virginal suffering presence. In this impasse between the torn body of Pedro Páramo’s carnal mother, transmuted into an immaculate virgin, a spiritualized body, we see appear a phallogocentric spectralization of female purity.

In this doubling of the maternal that we see in these scenes, present both as the fracturing of his mother body, and as a sensorial perception associated with a virginal apparition that, following Rozitchner, we could read as veiling the maternal figure. For Kristeva, the “cult of the Virgin” proper to Western patriarchy is the paradigm of this veiling of the disrupting elements of maternity for the symbolic order. The Virgin Mary is presented as a body without *jouissance*; a

body marked already by the *Name of the Father*, which replaces “the sexual body by the “ear of understanding” (*Sabat* 148).⁴⁶ Kristeva denounces in this way the veiling of the maternal function, a veiling that has important consequences in understanding the process of subject formation.⁴⁷ Rozitchner works in a very similar line than the one proposed by Kristeva. In *La cosa y la cruz* (1997) or *Materialismo ensoñado* (2011), he shares with her the same determination to rescue what Kristeva refers to as the “semiotic chora.” Criticizing the alleged universality of the Oedipus complex postulated by Freud, Rozitchner focuses on what he names as the “complejo parental cristiano” responsible, in his view, for the emergence of a new historical construction of subjectivity. Like Kristeva, Rozitchner emphasizes the way in which Christian technology conceals and rejects the maternal/feminine, instituting a virgin-mother that conveys the same language as the father. The paternal language, responsible for “[m]arcar (...) el orden restrictivo y necesario, metros, minutos...” (*Materialismo* 12) ordering, that is, arranging

⁴⁶ “Kristeva suggests that the silent ear, milk, and tears “are metaphors of nonspeech, of a ‘semiotics’ that linguistic communication does not account for. The Virgin mother becomes the representative of a “return of the repressed” semiotic. Although the myth of the Virgin can control the maternal semiotic, it cannot contain the semiotic. Kristeva argues that Christianity, with its Virgin birth, both unravels and protects the paternal function” (Oliver 51)

⁴⁷ Kristeva postulates the maternal function *prefigures* in fact for the paternal one in terms of negation. While Lacan seems to ignore the importance of this moment of undifferentiation between body and language that is prior to what he conceptualizes as the mirror stage, Kristeva understands subjectivity as a process that begins well before entering the Oedipal universe, with the material experience of the body. In this way Kristeva challenges Lacan who seems to establish a more rigid limit between the relation between madness and reason in relation to the Symbolic order: entering into the *no/name of the father* or inhabiting psychosis. She aims to bring back what she terms the “semiotic chora” to the domain of signification”, a pre-linguistic realm of experience, replete with primary drives, reinscribing the body into language. For Kristeva, the semiotic *chora*, the choric experience of the maternal universe, gets transformed by entrance into language but not efface, it resists codification. For her, Lacan’s theory does not allow nonmeaning to enter the realm of signification. The notion of *lalangue*, “does not allow for nonmeaning or what is heterogeneous to meaning within the realm of signification. (...) presupposing an ‘always already there of language’ that prevents what is meaning—the semiotic—from entering signification.” (Oliver 39).

and commanding, with its logic our thoughts, displaces the maternal, what Rozitchner designates as *las marcas maternas*, and the relation to materiality associated with it.⁴⁸ This operation sacrifices, as Kristeva would put it, an identification with the semiotic maternal body for the identification to the symbolic mother, the paternal mother, sacrificing the mother to the Virgin. The maternal, along with its registered qualities of sensitivity, affection, original materiality, and enjoyment, is veiled according to Rozitchner by the patriarchal and abstract reason provided by the Father-God. The Oedipal triangle proposed by Christianity, the Holy trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit— entails in synthesis a displaced mother, turned into a Holy Spirit, a voided carnal father substituted by an incorporeal and abstract father, and a perpetually suffering son. *Pedro Páramo* presents the emergence of this patri-centered logic.

In the novel, one of the characters most marked by the presence of these maternal traces is the character of Susana San Juan. Susana who exposes the logics of filiation present at Comala remaining a figure in close contact with the materiality of death and the body, occupying a position of liminal femininity. Susana San Juan, whose death Pedro Páramo aims to mourn on December 8th, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, stands as a threshold into a maternal-feminine universe, in which we see the crumbling of the patriarchal logic of Pedro Páramo.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ For Rozitchner, only poetry, as an entrance into an alternative symbolic order, can speak the language of the original mother; only the poet can make the matter speak.

⁴⁹ Williams reads the non-observance of the mourning of Susana San Juan as the momentary suspension of the authority of Comala's sovereign figure (21). The mourning of Susana becomes a popular celebration in which "the people fail to live here according to either the laws of the Christian calendar or the secular economic order of the cacique" (22).

Because of her constant refusal to occupy the position assigned to her, Susana San Juan emerges as the character that perhaps more clearly questions any logic of filiation in Rulfo's text.⁵⁰

The predominance of these *marcas maternas* in the case of Susana San Juan is directly link to her condition of madness, but articulates as well the possibility of alternative filiative links. The analysis of a traumatic event involving her father, Bartolomé San Juan, illustrates the nature of Susana's position. The episode in question underscores the filial link that binds her to her father, Bartolomé San Juan. The scene opens with a performance of filiation by recalling the day that Bartolomé San Juan held her "colgada de aquella soga que le lastimaba la cintura, que le sangraba sus manos", a rope that Susana "no quería soltar [porque] era como el único hilo que la sostenía al mundo de afuera" (93).

While swinging from the rope, Bartolomé San Juan makes her descend into an abyss of darkness, constantly repeating: "Más abajo, Susana. Más abajo. Dime si ves algo" (93). His words reverberate in a shout that makes her shudder as he greedily repeats "¡Dáme lo que está allí, Susana!" In the darkness Susana palpates blindly "una calavera de muerto." "Debes encontrar algo junto a ella" says her father, "dáme todo lo que encuentres" (93). Susana hands over piece by piece a corpse "[que] se deshizo en canillas," in which "la quijada se desprendió como si fuera de azúcar." Susana handles then "[l]e fue dando pedazo a pedazo hasta que llegó a los dedos de los pies y le entregó coyuntura tras coyuntura. Y la calavera primero; aquella bola redonda que se deshizo entre sus manos" (93). While she experiences this intimate physical

⁵⁰ Williams observes how Susana San Juan "has refused her predetermined place in the world by systematically resisting her physical, psychological, and spiritual domination by the unholy patrilineal trinity of her biological father, Bartolomé San Juan, her spiritual father, Father Rentería, and her economic patriarch, Pedro Páramo, respectively" (20). As Williams points she emerges as a figure able to resist every symbolic position assigned to her, through her displacement from every identification, as daughter of Don Bartolomé San Juan (87), religious daughter of the padre Rentería (95), and, later on, as wife of Pedro Páramo.

contact with the remains of death, the voice of Bartolomé San Juan resounds urging her yet again: “Busca algo más, Susana. Dinero. Ruedas redondas de oro. Búscalas, Susana” (93). This is also the moment in which Susana loses ground; when “ella no supo de ella, sino muchos días después entre el hielo, entre las miradas llenas de hielo de su padre.” (93). That “hilo” that suspends Susana above the abyss of death is the thread of filiation from which she is totally dependent as it constitutes her only connection to life and prevents her from falling into the abyss, the abyss of madness. I want to suggest that this traumatic scene, deeply marked by the verticality of that underground descent, and built around the tension of that hanging rope, functions as a key moment to understand not only the notion of the shifting economies present in the text, but the paradigm of filiation developed in the novel as well.

The episode, driven by the desire of capitalization of Bartolomé San Juan and imprinted by the intimate encounter with death, the trespassing of the space of the grave, concerns the encounter of two related economies.⁵¹ This encounter appears articulated not only in the crossing of exchange between Bartolomé and his daughter, but also around the repetition of the motif of roundness: the “ruedas redondas de oro” that Bartolomé demands from Susana, and “la calavera”, “aquella bola redonda,” that disintegrates while being handled by her. The doubling or repetition of the figure of the circle, a figure that we could consider essential to economics, seems key here as it articulates two very different models of circulation engraved as well at the very level of language. The first economy comes into being in Bartolomé’s recurrent demand to Susana San Juan: “Busca algo más, Susana. Dinero, ruedas redondas de oro” (93). Through his

⁵¹As Jacques Derrida suggests in *Given Time* “economy no doubt includes the values of law (*nomos*) and of home (*oikos*, home, property, family hearth, the fire, indoors). *Nomos* does not only signify the law in general, but also the law of distribution (*nemein*), the law of sharing or partition [*partage*], the law as partition (*moira*), the given or assigned part, participation” (6).

insistent shout, his imperative that demands to take hold of the money, Bartolomé sets in motion an economy of repetition that displays a yearning for accumulation that reveals a will to subjective control. In the outline of that circle, “ruedas redondas de oro,” in the never ending turning of those dazzling wheels, we see appear a roundness bound to the figure of a closed economy. The “ruedas redondas de oro” speak to an economy based on the circulation of sameness. This economic model appears manifest even at the level of language in the form of the alliteration and the epithet, as an enunciation of constant repetition, of what we could refer to as the *echonomy* that surfaces in the novel.⁵² This is the echonomy that makes Comala “[un] pueblo (...) lleno de ecos” (50), a village immersed in a state of echolalia, an unsolicited repetition of vocalization that lingers around its ruins. An echonomy as a filliative law that traps the subject in the temporality of repetition. Damiana Cisneros, the cook at la Media Luna, the woman who took care of Juan Preciado when he was just a baby, utters however: “llegará el día en que estos sonidos se apaguen (50), predicting an ending to the economy of repetition in Comala.

Yet, Susana seems to be oblivious to her father’s demand, focusing instead in the production of a very different logic. While we still hear echoes of the greedy utterance of his father, Susana, in her descent to the grave, is self-absorbed in a tactile experience that puts her in very close contact with the materiality of death. In response to her father’s urge, she gives Bartolomé one by one the pieces of a skeleton, “[I]e fue dando pedazo a pedazo hasta que llegó a los dedos de los pies y le entregó coyuntura tras coyuntura” (93), bringing steadily to surface the remains of a corpse. As in the case of Bartolomé, the language, and the sense of temporality that the text creates, is centered on the figure of the circle. In the depiction of Susana’s experience,

⁵² Irigaray develops this idea of *echonomy*.

anchored in tactility, roundness plays a different role. While handling “aquella bola redonda,” the first piece of the skeleton she gives to her father, the skull gets undone in her hands, “aquella bola redonda (...) se deshizo entre sus manos” (93), “la quijada (...) se desprendió como si fuera de azúcar” (93). The figure of the circle appears here open; circulation interrupted giving rise to an open material economy. It is her mediation that disintegrates roundness, bringing with it an experience of finitude. This is therefore not a closed economy in as much as death dissolves the circular experience of exchange opening as well a different relation to inheritance. We see here emerge a different experience of finitude, of life and of death.⁵³

In this sense, one of the most important moments in the scene, which reflects the profound dissociation between the two economies at play, comes from the mouth of Bartolomé San Juan: “Busca algo más, Susana. Dinero. Ruedas redondas de oro.” Bartolomé repeats once again *dinero*, adding in a sort of explanatory apposition, “ruedas redondas de oro,” as if Susana could not understand the word *dinero*, as if she was unable to grasp the abstraction, what following Derrida we could call the “spectralizing disincarnation” (*Specters* 51), the bodiless body of money. Susana San Juan is incapable of comprehending the abstract nature of money as the mediator of general equivalence. While in the scene Bartolomé San Juan’s eager voice talks about the processes of capitalization over death, Susana San Juan brings this logic to a halt, meeting the demand for gold with the offering of the remnants of a fragmented body: the remnants of the body becoming therefore her currency in the exchange. Susana lives split, dissociated from that logic of circulation and accumulation of capital without exchange value.

⁵³ In her article “The sexual compact”, Joan Copjec suggests “that an immanent analysis regards the finite not as something that is limited to a specific length of time or that is circumscribed chronologically but as what, in its ongoing singularity, has no term and as such repels circumscription” (36). This is the dimension that Susana San Juan opens.

She stands beyond the filiation that structures the *partage* of the paternal, a closed economy that arises from the figure of Pedro Páramo whose logic is materialized in Comala. As a woman, Susana cannot participate in the paternal inheritance, but she is urged to search for the inheritance of the dead, of an orphan inheritance that, abandoned and hidden, can be reappropriated. She breaks the patrilineal lineage of accumulation, an ever-present theme developed throughout the whole novel. But Instead, Susana's experience is focused in the materiality of the dead body, in an experience of disintegration, that repeats the image of fragmentation of the maternal body. This encounter between two different economies—one open and another closed in their relation to finitude—brings with it a question about the architecture of inheritance itself.

Despite Bartolomé's silent oblivion regarding the presence of the corpse, centered as he is in his logic of appropriation, Susana recovers the contact with the corpse. Rozitchner highlights the ideological importance of this *velamiento de lo materno*, and its radical consequences in the relationship the subject establishes with the body. The intersection between bodies and capital has to be thought in close proximity with the subjectivization techniques developed by Christianity as a technology that organizes social space. Rozitchner suggests that the rise of capitalism cannot be explained without the techniques of Christianity as an antimaterialist doctrine that creates "subjects organized at the level of the unconscious by a myth of patriarchal and abstract content" (*Cosa* 9).⁵⁴ At the core of these techniques lies the negation of the *mater*; or, in other words, the destruction of the body of the mother which stands for the

⁵⁴ Rozitchner attempts to "volver al origen cultural de la historia occidental (...) no ya solo a la historia económica del capitalismo y de su origen, sino a la configuración más densa de la configuración imaginaria y fantasmal de nuestra cultura" (*Cosa* 12).

reality of the corporeal itself.⁵⁵ In this sense, for Rozitchner, Christianity has to be thought of as a premise for the expansion of capitalism that successfully promotes the disdain for the body, a body ready to become the object of capital exploitation (*Cosa* 13).⁵⁶ Organized around the identification with an icon crucified and tortured to death (*Cosa* 12), Christianity encourages the subjection of the body as the price of salvation of the soul; the sacrifice, in a way, of the corporeal to the surplus value of transcendence. It is in this negation of the body, in this radical split of the subject between body and soul, that Rozitchner locates “el lugar subjetivo más tenaz de sometimiento” of capitalism (*Cosa* 10). For Rozitchner capitalism entails in fact the passage from “la ensoñación maternal”, “la marca afectiva del cuerpo” to “el espectro patriarcal.”

Susana’s sensory experience works in the scene by displacing the paternal language and staying in a close relation to the body. We see a similar process at place in the scene that sets in motion the final events of the novel, when Susana San Juan is forced, just upon her death, to receive the *anointment of the sick*. Holding Susana by the shoulders, el padre Rentería attempts to “encaja(r) secretamente (...) sus palabras: the ritualized and codified utterance of extreme unction. He repeats the sentence in first person, sowing in her ear an image of an organic undoing of the flesh: “[t]engo la boca llena de tierra” (...), “[t]rigo saliva espumosa; masticos terrones plagados de gusanos que se me anudan a la garganta y raspan la pared del paladar... Mi boca se hunde, retorciéndose en muecas, perforada por los fientes que la taladran y devoran. La

⁵⁵ For the Argentinian philosopher, “[I]a tecnología cristiana, organizadora de la mente y del alma humanas, antecede a la tecnología capitalista de los medios de producción y la prepara” (*Cosa* 11)

⁵⁶ “[E]l cristianismo prepara ese desprecio hacia el uso de nuestros cuerpos que el capital expropia” (*Cosa* 13). The disdain for the body, the disposability of the body and of bodies, is situated at the center of contemporary production within the neoliberal paradigm. This view generates interesting tensions with the work of Melissa Wright has explored in and her work on the topic of disposability. See *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*.

nariz se reblandece. La gelatina de los ojos se derrite. Los cabellos arden en una llamarada” (113). Rentería “encaja” in Susana San Juan word after word. Susana, however, immediately reconfigures the priest’s words, re-signifying entirely his discourse: “Tengo la boca llena de ti, tu boca. Tus labios apretados, duros como si mordieran oprimidos mis labios (113). Susana’s anointment of the sick, known as a ceremony of renunciation of sin and *profession* of faith, soon becomes a sacrament of renunciation of faith and *profession* of sin. Rentería attempts to *encajar* with his words an image of disincarnation, of the disincarnate in the name of the salvation of the soul, while Susana insists on iterating a joyful incarnation, a sensuous evocation of life, of the contact between two bodies. The touch between two mouths, four lips, in close proximity, speaks to a continuity of flesh that lays bare her desire, and that refers to a moment of openness, exposure and communion. Her words speak the embodiment of experience against a disincarnating logic of transcendence.

In this renunciation of faith, in this scene of apostasy deeply imprinted by the shadow of sexual difference, Susana San Juan denounces the logic of valorization of the soul and devaluation of the body underlining Western philosophy and religion.⁵⁷ Like in other passages of the novel, Susana San Juan is here recalling the body of Florencio, her deceased husband and lover. It is this body that opens the horizon of Susana’s madness, since it is in relation to his loss that her madness unfolds. As the madwoman of Comala, Susana San Juan is fixated on his life rather than his death, on the affirmation of his material and living body— as a radical defiance of the sovereign’s logic. Her madness therefore should not be understood in relation to a perpetual state of mourning in the wake of Florencio’s death. It is from that stance that she negates a

⁵⁷ This points to a philosophical tradition that associates women with finitude and mortality, while conceptualizing men as related to infinitude and eternal life.

faceless masculine figure, “¡Señor, tu no existes!” to whom she rebukes/objects: “Te pedí tu protección para él. Que me lo cuidaras eso te pedí. Pero tú te ocupas nada mas de las almas (102) (...) Y lo que yo quiero de él es su cuerpo” (102). Her iteration and the uncorrupted presence of her body opposes a philosophical tradition that focuses on the mortal subject and emphasizes a solitary and disembodied notion of the self. She confronts this tradition with a radical embodiment.⁵⁸ She becomes, as Irigaray would phrase it, a guardian of the flesh.⁵⁹ With her words, Susana exposes the denial of the body and the focus on mortality as the paradigmatic founding stone of a philosophical and religious tradition that structures an economic system of accumulation.

Despite her defense of life, the figure of Susana San Juan is not untouched by the finitude of death. Her death is presented as both presence and finitude, against the patrilineal logic of transcendence. She steps into the darkness of night, a darkness without any promise of transcendence: “sintió que la cabeza se le clavaba en el vientre. Trató de separar el vientre de la cabeza; de hacer a un lado aquel vientre que le apretaba los ojos y le cortaba la respiración; pero cada vez se volcaba más como si se hundiera en la noche” (114). This warped body of Susana San Juan, which conjures up early images of the body of Pedro Páramo’s mother, bears witness to the fusion of “cabeza” and “vientre.” In that collusion between *cabeza* and *vientre* we could see the emergence of a thought that operates in a choric logic, a sensible thought against a

⁵⁸ For more on this idea of radical embodiment see the work of Robin May Schott’s *Birth, Death, and Fertility* (158).

⁵⁹ Irigaray develops in *Sexes and Genealogies* this notion of women as guardians of the flesh (19).

disembodied reason, the opening to a third genus, as Derrida puts it.⁶⁰ Here, her circularity crumbles. Susana gives language to a liminal experience between life and death that Juan Preciado is unable to name. Susana, from her psychotic position stands beyond the law of the father, outside of the control of the sovereign figure of Comala, Pedro Páramo. In his analysis of the novel Williams suggests that Susana San Juan incarnates the absolute limit of the power of Pedro Páramo. This limit should not be understood as a mere liminal position, as a line of containment that restrains his overreaching power, but instead as the entrance to a universe, a dimension, situated beyond his sovereignty.

Conclusion

Pedro Páramo displays the encounter between at least two models of filiation. First, the patrilineal one whose architecture encloses the subject reducing any possible social organization to rubble, and which entails, as we see in the final pages of the novel, the entering into a universe governed by violence and sheer scarcity.⁶¹ But also, the possibility of a different communal rapport, as we saw at place in the scene of the kite, a filiative experience of communal space

⁶⁰ Hannah Arendt in *Martin Heidegger at Eight*, develops this idea of a passionate thinking. She claims that “[w]e are so accustomed to the old opposition of reason versus passion, spirit versus life, that the idea of a *passionate* thinking, in which thinking and aliveness become one, takes us somewhat aback.”

⁶¹ Irigaray concludes that what has been sacrificed is the natural fertility of the earth. The goddesses were the guardians of the earth and her fertility, and these have been repressed in favour of the transcendence of the Father-God and the all powerful son. The sacrifice of the earth (and her goddesses), in the form of exploitation is linked to an economic system that privileges scarcity, thus creating a commodity value for the products of the earth. This has produced a system in which some starve while others feast and waste. The sacrifice of the value of the earth and the sacrifice of the maternal/feminine are one and the same thing.

open to contingency. That is the realm that Susana embodies: an alternate filiative bond, love, as a relation to life that engages the material and finite.

Following Rozitchner we could say that *Pedro Páramo* unfolds in Comala the encounter between “las marca afectivas,” and the patriarchal specter of repetition. In the forgetting of the *mater*, what remains in Comala is only a dry and empty architecture; an architecture that stands in a suspended temporality, pure spectrality without flesh.⁶² It is a space inhabited by a subject trapped in trauma, a spectral trauma, in which the patriarchal law of repetition and accumulation displaces the original identification with the maternal universe, as *mater*. In portraying this encounter *Pedro Páramo* operates in a similar logic to Metinides’s photograph, revealing the encounter of these forces around a corpse. The men in suits, the pace of the city, all work together to expel and render invisible the body inside the coffin weighing on the woman’s hip (or soon to be placed there). *Pedro Páramo* reveals the mechanisms of filiation – and concurrently a break from them – through the repetition of death and mourning and the disintegration of the nation. The celebration of the Bicentenario appeared in a sense, as an effort, to compensate for that repetition, engineered to obscure the surrounding violence. *Pedro Páramo*, shows both the mechanisms of political filiation at the base of the architecture of the nation and marks as well the insuturability of a gap in filiation. The chapters that follow explore other stagings of these

⁶² As Oscar Ariel Cabezas puts in *Post-soberania. Literatura, política y trabajo*, in the thought of Rozitchner “el olvido de la Mater es la condición de posibilidad del espectro del capital (210). “El olvido de la Mater,” the necessary oblivion of the maternal and the material traces, entails the sacrifice of the body in the name of an abstraction devoted to transcendence. While “[l]a religión del puro culto sin dogma, religión de la ley del padre abstracto y espectral, de la lógica inmaterial del dinero, convierte en comedia la *materia* rasgada de las lágrimas y el dolor de todas las madres y los hijos de la historia”, “[l]a memoria de la *materia* es la negación de la ley espectral (210).

tensions between the deployment of a patriarchal order, sexual differentiation, and alternative modes of filiation in relation to inheritance and mourning.

Chapter Three

Teresa Margolles: Antigone in the Aftermath of Death

“The effect of focusing, in a text, around an impossible place. Fascination by a figure inadmissible in the system. Vertiginous insistence on an unclassable. And what if what cannot be assimilated, the absolute indigestible, played a fundamental role in the system, an abyssal role rather, the abyss playing an almost transcendental role and allowing to be formed above it, as a kind of effluvium, a dream of appeasement? Isn't there always an element excluded from the system that assures the system's space of possibility?”
Jacques Derrida, *Glas*

“Purification is something only the *Logos* is capable of.” (27)
Julia Kristeva.
Powers of Horror.

This second chapter considers the work of Mexican artist Teresa Margolles (Culiacán 1962) as a body of work that addresses the blind spot presented so starkly by Metinides's photograph. Margolles's project is a testimony to the violence that Mexico has suffered in the wake of NAFTA, and in this sense engages the realities of contemporary violence in Mexico, from the femicides in Ciudad Juarez to the deadly effects of drug-related violence. Her work focuses both on the origins and afterlives of unclaimed corpses, often of violent deaths, that

arrive at the Servicio Médico Forense, the morgue of Ciudad de México. By processing residues of life, remains of everyday violence in the city, Margolles work exposes the production of death, the accumulation of corpses, opening an interrogation into the value of life and on the absolute disposability of the human body. Despite the contentious and disturbing nature of her praxis, her work gained attention both in national and international art venues. Margolles's artistic methods have been critically recognized in Mexican art circles, and have also gained traction in international exhibitions. Some have understood the importance of Margolles work as rooted in its capacity to make visible the violence in today's Mexico. This view of her work, as a denunciation and social protest against the conditions of death in a socio-economic system founded on a principle of disposability of bodies, has however also been criticized, understanding her praxis as a mere particularization of death and a problematic reiteration of violence.

The central element of the controversy generated around her work is articulated around the use of human matter for her installation, and around the complex questions that arise in relation to its circulation in the realm of art. Her works with organic matter, first animal and then human, provoked debates about the ethics of using human matter for artistic purposes. Such ethical tensions were present both in the work of SEMEFO and in Margolles's independent work.⁶³ Trained as a forensic pathologist, Margolles worked for years in the Servicio Médico

⁶³ Some critics have attempted to establish a clear distinction between Margolles's work with SEMEFO and her independent trajectory afterwards. Since the days of SEMEFO, Margolles had begun to develop a more complex relation with the exhibition and the use of corpses, elaborating a new mode of circulation around them. However, the presence of a manifest continuity in terms of both conceptual and formal strategies between those periods is difficult to deny. During the 2000s, she started to work not by representing the dead body as such, but using the residues from the cleaning of the corpses and presenting them to the public through a variety of media. Her work moved away from pieces in which the presence of the physical bodies had a more central prominence—pieces mostly created in collaboration with SEMEFO like *Lengua* (2000),

Forense and she has for long focused on what she terms *la vida del cadáver*, the life of the corpse. Her pieces are often imbued in fact with images of absorption and saturation, of permeation and penetration that expose the aftermath of violence. Her artistic praxis overturns any sanitized version of death and exposes the viewer to abject materials, such as bodily fluids or residual waters from cleaning of corpses.

Kristeva describes abjection as “the feeling of horror or disgust that is caused by that which disturbs identity, system, order” (*Powers* 39). The contact with the corpse constitutes for her the quintessential moment of this experience of abjection, as an experience of breakdown in meaning, a threat to the very structure of the symbolic, due to the loss of distinction between subject and object, between self and other and between life and death.⁶⁴ I claim that Margolles’s work with matter touches upon this same capacity to disturb the coordinates of our symbolic system.

In the following pages, I consider Margolles’ work with material remains and abjection in relation to the classic figure of Antigone. I read Margolles as occupying an *antigonice* position, arguing that her work and the ethical implications that her work creates can be read in close relation to Antigone. Margolles work is permeated by some of the very same tensions and ambivalence that we encounter around the classical figure of Antigone. This ambivalence can be seen for example between the readings that make Antigone a defender of human rights in the

Autorretratos en la morgue (1998) *Lavado de cuerpo* (2004), or *El agua en la ciudad* (2004) — to the creation of pieces that were united in their attention to the absence of the corpses. In the absence of the bodies, and their physical representations, abject materials—such as bodily fluids or the residual waters from the cleaning of corpses—took central stage in her work.

⁶⁴ The contact with the abject, as an experience situated before the symbolic order would, constitute in Lacanian terms a moment of eruption of the real. See *Powers of Horror: An Essay On Abjection*.

face of oppressive regimes, and others who, like Jacques Lacan or Slavoj Žižek see in Antigone a monstrous figure, a harbinger of totalitarianism.⁶⁵ To develop this argument the chapter engages with different readings of the classical figure, looking at some of the numerous debates around her figure, and paying also attention at some of her embodiments in Latin America. Margolles's practice touches on some of the same tensions that we see arise as well around the figure of Antigone

As we know, the classical play of Sophocles, *Antigone*, dramatizes the aftermaths of civil war; war as fratricide. The drama recounts the story of an unburied corpse lying at the gates of Thebes. It presents both Antigone—the daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta—and the city of Thebes trapped in the wake of the fraternal disputes of Eteocles and Polynices. Her two brothers have cancelled each other by mutual murder, leaving the city under the power of Creon, their maternal uncle. As ruler of Thebes, Creon resolves to honor only one of them with burial. As poet Anne Carson puts it in her translation of Sophocles play, “Eteokles he has laid in the ground in accordance with justice and law, while Polineikes is to lie unwept and unburied sweet sorrymeat for the little lust of birds”(Carson unpagged).⁶⁶ Antigone who, as a female, is in charge of the funeral rites, decides against the mandate of Creon, defying therefore the legal principles ruling the polis, to cover the body of her dead brother Polineykes. In doing this, she puts into question the larger structure of justice.

The character of Antigone has gained significant weight in our political imagination in recent years and has been examined from an array of conceptual positions to try to account for

⁶⁵ See *Interrogating Antigone In Postmodern Philosophy And Criticism* (23). Slavoj Žižek “refers to Antigone as a proto-totalitarian figure who refuses any rational argumentation and blindly sticks to her decision” (*Interrogating* 3).

⁶⁶ The book is unpagged.

the complex relations that she establishes with the political field, especially from the perspective of feminist thought. Antigone has been widely read as a figure in tension with questions of ethics and responsibility, a figure that engages the paradigm of individual agency, of what to do in front of the dead body of our kin.⁶⁷ Philosophers such as Hegel, and more recently both Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva or Judith Butler have understood Antigone as key to articulating a philosophical framework for modern ethics.⁶⁸ Antigone as a classical figure is situated at the very center of modern political thought. In this sense, one of the most influential readings of the drama remains Hegel's, who locates Antigone in the tension between the universal and the particular, the state and the family, human and divine law. Hegel interprets Creon as representing human law, while Antigone responds only to the mandates of the divine law.⁶⁹ By identifying Antigone with divine law, Judith Butler claims, Hegel's "Antigone (...)

⁶⁷ Diana Taylor claims for example that the plight of Antigone illuminates the continuing struggle to exert individual agency in the face of unethical political demands. See "Notes on Antígona"

⁶⁸ Joan Copjec has claimed that "German Idealism *resurrected* Antigone at the beginning of our own era and refashioned her as the paradigmatic of *modern* ethics. Hegel, Schelling, Hölderlin all wrote with deep fascination about this young Athenian woman, and it is their fascination that commands contemporary interest in her"(14). Before "the intervention of German Idealism, the play had not received any special attention and had, in fact, been relatively neglected" (14).

⁶⁹ Derrida develops in *Glas* "Antígona- To this great opposition (the law of singularity/ the law of universality) is ordered a whole series of other couples: divine law/human law, family/city, woman/man, night/day, and soon. Human law is the law of day(light) because it is known, public, visible, universal; human law rules, not the family, but the city, government, war; and it is made by man (vir). Human law is the law of man. Divine law is the law of woman; it hides itself, does not offer itself in this opening manifestation (Offenbarkeit) that produces man. Divine law is nocturnal and more natural than the law of universality, just as the family is more natural than the city. Once more, the family appears as the most natural degree of the ethical community. Natural, divine, feminine, nocturnal, familial, such is the predicative system, the law of singularity. In this law-this is said more precisely, in this place, of the family-the concept is "unconscious." Glas (142)

becomes redefined as the power of the Spirit to produce a son for the purposes of the state, a son who leaves the family in order to become a warring citizen” (12): she is therefore invested in transcendence of the state.

From the nineteenth century to the present, the specter of Antigone has materialized often in the context of Latin America in relation to the question of social mourning. Fradinger tracks the first retrieval of Antigone on American soil to 1820s Buenos Aires, with Juan Cruz Varela’s *Argia*. Varela’s rewriting of Sophocles’ play replaces Antigone with Argia, Polynices’s wife and the mother of his son. Sophocle’s Antigone is here rewritten as a “wife and a mother instead of a virgin and a sister, demanding a corpse, fighting for her son and defending her honor” at a historical moment in which the Argentinean nation was focused on populating the pampas.⁷⁰ Staged the very same year of the last battles for Independence from Spain, for Fradinger *Argia* initiates the tradition of what, following Marcela Nari, she terms “political maternalism” (227). For Fradinger, this is an example of how Antigone “has come to the aid of playwrights for a critique of both the bio-necro-political control over life and the premises guiding the modern liberal national projects” (227).⁷¹ In Fradinger’s analysis, Latin American Antigones have overwhelmingly followed this trend, “pondering the *political* production of the living and the dead through the characterization of Antigone as *wife, mother, or grandmother*” (229). Thus, the instrumentalization of the drama of Antigone has been deeply connected with processes of production of life and the administration of death at the service of the birth and consolidation of

⁷⁰ Fradinger refers here to the slogan by Juan Bautista Alberdi “In America, to govern is to populate” (228). For Fradinger offers of a later version of the play, situated as well in that mythical foundational time: Marichal’s *Antígona Vélez*.

⁷¹ Fradinger refers here as well to a questioning of “liberal notions of autonomy based on the model of the (male) rational individual: for at the most basic level, motherhood implies “two bodies in one,” disturbing all notions of the “individual” (227).

the national-state projects. In analyzing the instrumentalization of Antigone Fradinger speaks to the sacrificial logic at the heart of the modern political imagination: the production and sacrifice of life in view of the transcendence of the nation, at the service of the perpetuation of its very ideological project. Fradinger sees this phenomenon as the characteristic feature of the “americanization” of Antigone. Fradinger shows as well how the figure of Antigone has been often conjured in Latinamerica by writers, artists and philosophers in moments of social mourning when we see arise the question of a family’s right to bury its dead and of the right to rebel against their government. Antigone reappears as well at the height of Argentina’s “Dirty War” in *Antígona Furiosa* by Griselda Gambaro, or in the aftermath of the 1968 student massacre in Mexico in *La joven Antigone se va a la guerra* by José Fuentes Mares. Less than two decades later, Olga Harmony published *La ley de Creon* (1982), set in the years of the Mexican Revolution. That is, the figure of an Antigone opposing Creon but still engaged in sacrificial practices in the name of the state.

Antigone gains however a very different nuance when placed facing a necropolitical crisis that cannot be contained or memorialized as in the case of contemporary Mexico, where we encounter a space of pure trauma without possible mourning. In 2012, shortly after the bicentennial celebrations, Sara Uribe, presented a version of Antigone at the heart of the drama of present-day Mexico with *Antígona González* (2012).⁷² The play is based on the appropriation, intervention, and rewriting of different literary and academic texts dealing with Antigone in and outside the Latin-American tradition. Uribe creates in it an intricate cacophony of voices in

⁷² The piece was commissioned by Sandra Muñoz and Marcial Salinas, and first premiered on April 29th, 2012 in Tampico, a city in the northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas, in the state of Tamaulipas, a state strongly marked by the realities of migration, of the maquiladora industry and narcotraffic.

which we find texts of very diverse origin from Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim, La tumba de Antígona* by María Zambrano, *Antígona o la elección* by Margarite Yourcenar, *Antígona, una tragedia* by Rómulo E. Pianacci, *Antígona Vélez* by Leopoldo Marechal, or *Antígona Furiosa* by Griselda Gambaro. To these *antigonics* voices, Uribe adds different fragments of real testimonies of relatives of the victims published in different newspapers.

Through them, Uribe revisits the specific conditions of the drama in contemporary Mexico, presenting a reality characterized by the end of the model of antagonism, the enmity between Polynices and Eteocles of modern readings of Antigone. Uribe's piece presents an Antigone marked by fraternal war; brothers that have cancelled each other by mutual murder, narco- and state power, leaving the city under the power of Creon as a necropolis, a space governed by pure death. In *Antígona González*, both sides have become mirror images developing a mode of power that demands silence and promotes oblivion; prescribes acquiescence, paralysis and complicity in the name of future generations. If in Sophocles's Antigone, we encounter the conflict between Polynices and Eteocles, and Antigone's resistance to the power of Creon, what characterizes the drama of Uribe's Antigone is a sense of homogeneity and sameness in the absence of law.⁷³ Silence, void, and absence as new forms of sovereignty, ubiquitous forms of power that cause bodies to disappear. In Uribe's version of Antigone the corpse at the gates of the polis becomes also plural representing a wider social fabric exposed to decomposition; the body of Polynices is "los cadáveres de los migrantes" (67) and "Tebas, la ciudad abismo" (29), the northern and bordering state of Tamaulipas. Thus, Uribe

⁷³ We see this logic at place throughout the whole piece. "Son de los mismos. Nos van a matar a todos, Antígona. Son de los mismos. Aquí no hay ley. Son de los mismos. Aquí no hay país. Son de los mismos. No hagas nada. Son de los mismos. Piensa en tus sobrinos. Son de los mismos. Quédate quieta, Antígona. Son de los mismos. Quédate quieta. No grites. No pienses. No busques. Son de los mismos." (Uribe 23).

presents an Antigone situated at the border between the United States and México, bearing witness to the story of a Polynices trapped between under the sphere of law and legitimacy, or lack of it, of a double polis.

Uribe work entails a rethinking of lineage in relation to Antigone, a broken body, performed in the play by the technique of citation/ collage that prompts a rethinking of the subject of inheritance. Uribe's work touches also like Margolles's on the impossibility of mourning in the wake of violence and it does so in close contact with the body working on the relation between the impossibility of contact with the corpse.⁷⁴ In Hegel's reading of Antigone, the public/private divide, which is responsible for delimiting what counts as "political," remains key. Hegel confines Antigone to the private domain, the family, that stands in opposition to the public realm of the State. For him, the polis comes to be the political field, while the private domain remains a non-political space. The care of the corpse, the performing of funeral rites, stays thus enclosed in that private, feminine domain and can never be recognized as a political

⁷⁴ *Antígona González* was given a subtitle derived from the subject line of an email exchange: "Instrucciones para contar muertos." *Antígona González* insists on avoiding a *ballistic reason*, a measuring ratio of the reason of violence, and centers it in "el nombre", in naming the singularity of that loss an absence, signaling the incommensurable gap between two understandings of the presence or the absence of the bodies: "ellos dicen que sin cuerpo no hay delito. Yo les digo, que sin cuerpo no hay remanso" (24). The piece incarnates the encounter of these two logics when confronting the absence of a corpse. First a logic for which the absence of the corpse entails the impossibility of determining the authorship of the crime and the criminal act itself. Under this logic, without the presence of the corpse, in the absence of the body, without palpable proof of death, no responsibility, no accountability can be established: "sin cuerpo no hay delito." Sheltered under the legal maxim "no body, no crime" we find the complicity of the legal system itself with the violence, with the production of corpses. Confronting the economy of this legal logic, Uribe rescues a different relation to the absence of the bodies, in which absence constitutes the impossibility of justice beyond the legal regime. To reinsert the bodies into historical discourses, to tell their stories, *Antígona González* counts "inocentes y culpables, sicarios, niños, militares, civiles, presidentes municipales, migrantes, vendedores, secuestradores, policías" (13). *Antígona González* is determined to "Contarlos a todos" (13), beyond their symbolic position in the carnage.

gesture in nature.⁷⁵ Antigone's gesture, the covering of her brother's body, does not belong to the public domain, but rather to the private one. The covering of the corpse remains unintelligible as a political act. Antigone cannot then be considered a political figure; if anything, as Butler claims paraphrasing Hegel, she might embody "a pre-political opposition to politics" (2) always contingent upon the nature of her symbolic position. The covering of her brother's corpse breaks Creon's binary logic defying his power, law and authority. Situating herself beyond both civil order and religious one, her positioning defies and challenges the very intelligibility of a whole system of thought.⁷⁶

Most readings of Antigone touch upon her condition at the threshold between human and non-human, life and death, friend and enemy. Without claiming a political position as such, situated in fact beyond politics, Antigone disrupts the continuity of a whole symbolic architecture. This condition of being beyond politics would articulate in this view precisely the political potentiality of her figure: the element that allows her to exist beyond an identitarian stand.⁷⁷ For Adriana Cavarero this is "the female principle of Sophocles's play: an apolitical *philia* inscribed within maternal generation" that neither contemplates nor recognizes "its contrary" (*Feminist* 59). Antigone cares for her youngest son, the one who does not inherit power

⁷⁵ Elaine Miller posits that "Hegel aligns the masculine with subjectivity, the polis, and freedom and the feminine with nature, the family and the private realm" in blind adherence to the divine law and trapped in the repetition of the cyclical time of reproduction" (123).

⁷⁶ Antigone as a political figure also breaks the logic of the either/or therefore the logic of friend and enemy in a Schmittian sense. Antigone could be considered for this reason as a figure that inhabits the borders of the political.

⁷⁷ This is for example the position of Luce Irigaray for whom "the insurrectional power of Antigone remains (...) outside the political" (Butler 3-4).

in a paternal genealogy, but is the “dead man born of [her] mother.”⁷⁸ In this line, Irigaray claims that Antigone defends a different lineage, a genealogy favoring the values of life, of generation, of growth (*Interrogating* 205), and which follows “unwritten laws that do not clearly distinguish civil order from religious ones” (*Interrogating* 205). Antigone’s gesture, her *antigonic* deed,⁷⁹ transcends in this way the dual and excluding logics of power displayed by her uncle, who sacrifices Polynices for the sake of the unity and transcendence of Thebes. Her gesture exposes and challenges not only what Derrida would call the “proprietary” reason of Creon, the logic of property and priority that rules inheritance, but also its structure of fratricidal struggle; the crucial political distinction between friend and enemy.⁸⁰ Antigone’s legacies appear to contest the dualistic limits of modern thought and to challenge its very architecture. Antigone’s relation to the dead body of her brother, the proclaimed enemy of the State, is situated beyond an *identitarian philia*,⁸¹ which effectively places her outside of politics, committed to preserve the

⁷⁸ Sophocles’ *Antigone* quoted on *Feminist Readings of Antigone* (49).

⁷⁹ Antigonic would be therefore a particular form of antagonism.

⁸⁰ In *Goshtly Demarcations*, Jacques Derrida explores this relation between property and priority: “Proprietary ‘is a very good word. I would suggest making it still more precise: prioprietary. For, spelling it that way, one lays claim not only to property, but also to priority” (222).

⁸¹ Antigone is focused on the irreproductibility, in the singularity, that entails her relationship with her brother, and it is from here that her commitment stems: Lacan quotes in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*: “Understand this: I would not have defied the law of the city for a husband or a child to whom a tomb had been denied, because after all,” she says, “if I had lost a husband in this way, I could have taken another, and even if I had lost a child with my husband, I could have made another child with another husband. But it concerned my brother, born of the same father and the same mother.” (255) *The ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Lacan emphasizes here the singularity of her brother “the fact that here is no possibility of another brother ever being born” (255)

singularity of her brother, and according to Irigaray devoted only to a maternal origin.⁸² She defends a genealogy of (sexual) difference that privileges another economy where value is difference itself. She escapes the law of the father, the written law, as the perpetuation of sameness. Her figure is closely related to the nature and disruption of the Oedipal lineage.

Butler builds on Irigaray's interpretation of Antigone, describing her as a figure for whom symbolic positions, including the traditional models of kinship, have become incoherent (22). In this sense, Antigone "draws into crisis ... the representative function itself, the very horizon of intelligibility in which she operates and according to which she remains somewhat unthinkable" (Butler 22). For this reason, for Butler, Antigone "as a figure of politics, points (...) not to politics as a question of representation but to that political possibility that emerges when the limits of representation and representability are exposed" (Butler 2).

Kristeva sees Antigone as a figure marked both by sexual difference, and by a decision to cut "to change the course of fate by cutting the thread [fil] of the inextricable descent of auto and homo. Such would, in effect, be the solution of Anti-gone (anti-engendering): face to face with a death that endures forever" (*Antigone* 220). Kristeva sees in Antigone an experience of crisis of filiation,⁸³ a figure in that fundamentally abject space that "does not respect borders, positions, roles" (*Powers* 39) The abject exposes the subject to an experience of collapse of meaning" while drawing direct attention to the fragility of the law (*Powers* 4). This is the space that

⁸² For Irigaray, "[t]he fact that she and her brother come from the same womb emphasizes the genealogy of the mother and contrasts it with Creon's patriarchal order" (113). See *The Antigone Complex: Ethics and the Invention of Feminine Desire*.

⁸³ In opposing the gonê, in refusing to produce any descendants, she refuses to produce and reproduce a lineage as well.

Antigone occupies and abject position aiming to cut “le fil dans l’inextricable descendance du *auto-et du homo*”⁸⁴ as Kristeva phrases it.⁸⁵

If Margolles's work occupies an *antigonic position*, her position is clearly far from the embodiments of political maternalism described by Fradinger. Although her artistic praxis exposes the sacrificial logic that governs modern imagination, Margolles relation to Antigone seems more connected with the dislodging and profound ambivalence that follows the protagonist of the classical drama. By processing the remains of violence and incorporating them into her installations, Margolles’s work interrupts the filiation that separates her audiences from systemic violence (and attaches them instead to the logics of paternalism). Like in the case of Antigone, this forced encounter renders vulnerable the boundaries of conceptual categories, aligned with patriarchal thought. Margolles creates an experience of horror that exposes the patriarchal logic of pure abjection and production of death. Her transgressive art inhabits an *antigonic position* as a symptomatic space that marks a moment of crisis of filiation.

In what follows, and always keeping in mind the question of mourning, I further explore this relation between Antigone and Margolles, focusing on the formation of a biopolitical paradigm and on this crisis of filiation that the figure of Antigone signals, and posing the question of mourning.

⁸⁴ See “Antigone, la limite et l’horizon”.

⁸⁵ Also, in this regard Copjec has suggested that “Lacan’s claim is not Antigone immortalizes her brother, erecting a monument to his memory, but that she immortalizes the family Atē, that point of madness where the family lineage is undone or overturns itself. ‘Immortalize’ does not mean here to preserve in memory, but to continue not to forget that vitalizing fracture that permits one to ‘go mad’ to dissolve oneself in a transforming act” (*Image* 42-43)

Teresa Margolles on biopolitics and mourning.

As in the case of Antigone's care for the corpse of her brother, left uncovered and forgotten by the city in the aftermath of fraternal violence, Teresa Margolles has developed an artistic praxis centered on abandoned corpses, often product of violence, that arrive at the Servicio Médico Forense in Ciudad de México. The lack of funerary rights and rites, and the very circulation of dead bodies are therefore at the center of her artist praxis. Margolles began her career during a period marked by the economic integration between Mexico and the United States, in a Mexico marked by the effects of the socioeconomic inequality and structural instability intensified by NAFTA. The realities of violence related to the new modalities of movement of capital that appeared around the maquila industry, phenomena as the femicides of Ciudad Juárez, and the incipient conditions of narcotraffic related violence marked the socio-economic dynamics of that historical moment. Those new realities had brought with them a depreciation of the value of life, related to the new regime of disposability of bodies described by Wright.

Perhaps as a symptomatic manifestation of this depreciation of the value of life, in the early 1990s, a group of artists, including Margolles, created the collective SEMEFO, an acronym derived from the *Servicio Médico Forense*, where Margolles worked at the time.⁸⁶ SEMEFO began to create exhibitions using matter and biological residues. The collective became famous for their violent performances that attempted to generate what they called "psychological terror", pieces characterized by an overt aim to transgress common legal, moral and ethical boundaries. SEMEFO started to create first pieces with animal corpses. In 1994, for example, they presented

⁸⁶ The founder members of Semefo were Arturo Angulo, Carlos López y Teresa Margolles, but other members such as Arturo López, Víctor Basurto, Juan Pernás, Juan Luis García, Antonio Macedo or Anibal Peñuelas, collaborated as well with the collective.

Lavatio Corporis (figure 4 and 5.), a set of sculptures made with wood, steel, coal and the embalmed cadavers of a horse, a mule and unborn foals, in which the animal bodies became statues in contorting poses. This work created a set of organic dead statues and presented a carousel made with corpses of animals, in which the collective transformed a childhood dream into a movement of degradation of innocence. Soon, making use of Margolles's institutional affiliation with *Servicio Médico Forense*, they turned to the use of human corpses as raw material for their pieces. They used the residues of bodies that could not be buried, that were aimed to recirculate in medical studies, or simply meant to populate the oblivion of mass graves; bodies that had become pure waste and were confined in an institution that was responsible for processing of human remains, unclaimed bodies. At the heart of this system, bodies were pure waste, another residue to be disposed of.

The easy appropriation and repurposing of corpses present in their work overtly spoke to the economy of disposability at the center of the reproduction of capital. The work with human remains, often the objects of legal investigations given the violent conditions of death, prompt questions both about the legality of the artistic praxis and about the institutional compliance with transgressions of the law that the works and the exhibits entailed. This constant attempt to transgress ethical and legal boundaries present both in the work of SEMEFO and Margolles engages with what Giorgio Agamben conceptualizes as the *homo sacer*, as a subject that could be killed without legal punishment.⁸⁷ Margolles praxis is constantly situated in this line between politically constituted life and bare life complicating, as Antigone herself, the clear lines of the biopolitical divide.

⁸⁷Agamben traces the root of the problem back to the Greek distinction between *zoē* (the fact of being alive) and *bios* (the way of life). Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

Cecilia Sjöholm, claims that what is at stake in the classic tragedies of Oedipus and Antigone is precisely the creation of the categories of *Zoe* and *Bios*—Eteocles and Polynices; *Bios* as qualified life, the life of worthiness and dignity, and *Zoe* as unqualified and apolitical life, life reduced to the sheer necessity, life beyond politics (*Returns* 54). Polynices is for Sjöholm, the *homo sacer*, the foundational element of the architecture of modern sovereignty, who cannot be judged or condemned, who can claim no rights, and who represents a total exteriority in relation to the political community (*Interrogating* 7).⁸⁸ However, through her gesture, Antigone undermines this distinction: the incommensurable distance between *Zoe* and *Bios*. She uncovers the fact that only in the eyes of the polis—that is, in the eyes of Creon—a clear difference exists between *Zoe* and *Bios*, Eteocles and Polynices. In doing so, Antigone destabilizes the foundational biopolitical categories of the polis, pointing to a realm outside of the polis, and exposing the limits of representation and representability as Butler signals in her reading of Sophocles’s classical character. She breaks the distinction between *Zoe* and *Bios* as the foundational stone of biopower. The use of organic matter as artistic matter that we encounter with Margolles touches upon this very same displacement of the divide between *Bios* and *Zoe* a subject present also in the early artistic praxis that Margolles developed with SEMEFO.

Antigone not only makes manifest however the construction and limit of the biopolitical logic as such, but exposes the relationship as well between this logic and the question of mourning. We can see here yet another tension between the Margolles’s work and the figure of Antigone. The ethical and legal questions around the work of Margolles, specifically those raised

⁸⁸ According to Agambé’s analysis “the killing of *homo sacer* is considered neither as homicide nor as sacrifice, since it is banished to a space that lies outside human and divine law” (22) See David Kishik, *The Power of Life: Agamben and the coming politics*.

around the use of human matter as a material for her pieces, point directly towards the subject and limits of grievability that we see at place in the story of Antigone.⁸⁹ In the drama of Antigone, Polynices, her outlaw brother, is stripped off the right to be grieved. Occupying the position of *Zoe* as unqualified and apolitical life, Polynices is deprived of the right and ceremonies of burial. Grievability appears here in direct relation to the division between *Zoe* and *Bios* that Antigone touches upon and to the decision about which lives deserve to be grieved or memorialized.

Margolles exposes the circulation, use and abuse of bodies, within legal and extralegal channels, opening a discussion about ethical tension and burial rights. The question of the conditions of grievance, so well portrayed in Metinides's photograph and in a way present as well in the celebrations of the *Bicentenario*, is situated at the very center of Margolles work. As in the case of the woman at the center of Metinides's photograph, obliged to beg to purchase a coffin for her child, the challenge of covering the costs of burial, is at the center of several of Margolles's works. Perhaps the most controversial of them was *Lengua* (2000) (figure 6), in which the pierced tongue of a young heroin addict was exhibited in the Palacio de Bellas Artes of Ciudad de México. Margolles had obtained the tongue after negotiating with the family in exchange for the costs of the burial that the family could not afford, convincing the mother to have the body of her son speak for anonymous overlooked deaths.⁹⁰ This was not the first time

⁸⁹ In recent years Judith Butler has extensively explored this question of grievability. For a discussion of this concept see for example her work *Frames Of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2009) or *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (2004).

⁹⁰ In relation to *Lengua*, in a disturbing interview dated from 2004 and which was published in *Muerte sin fin*, Margolles explained the way in which she approached the man's family: "Hablé con la madre y quise pedir que me diera el pene, pero cuando iba a pronunciar la palabra pene me salió lengua. La madre, por supuesto, reaccionó indignada, algo completamente normal, mi trabajo fue convencerla para que el cuerpo de su hijo hable sobre las miles de muertes anónimas

that Margolles was involved in an exchange of this nature. In 1999, she had presented *Entierro* (figure 7). The piece consisted of a cube of concrete containing inside the body of a stillborn baby. Allegedly, after an involuntary miscarriage, a penniless woman unable to cover the costs of burial, had approach asking her to give the unborn child a tomb.⁹¹

The nature of these exchanges points toward some of the problematic tensions in Margolles's work in relation to questions of grievance and exchange, that had at its very heart a logic of sacrifice. They open a query about the conditions of mourning under an economy of exchange that freely disposes of unwanted bodies, about the logics of sacrifice, and about the right to bury one's dead.

Antigone insisted on burying Polynices, in being close to the body outside the boundary of the polis, where he was condemned to be, in a gesture that remains as we saw unintelligible as a political act. Yet it is a gesture that had the ability of deeply perturbing the order of the polis in as much as it called attention to the order of law and its mechanisms of exclusion. Margolles insistence on situating the matter of death at the heart of a public setting is haunted, I claim, by a very similar logic. The encounter between present bodies of the audience and "absent" corpses that she facilitates through her work breaks down the borders and divisions that render violence in capitalism invisible. By exhibiting the exchange and circulation around the corpses, engaging in a problematic mediation with them, she exposes the underpinning of a logic of sacrifice and

que la gente no quiere tener en cuenta. Finalmente me la dio y la llevamos a Bellas Artes que es, además, el lugar de los velorios de personajes célebres en México'. See Silva Santistéban.

⁹¹ *Entierro* operated in a sense under the very same logic of the *Bicentenario*, or the *Angel de la Independencia* itself, generating a monumentalization around corpses. But with this piece, inserting in concrete cube an unborn human body, Margolles exposed also the limits between zoe and bios, as a corner stone of the biopolitical paradigm as such.

production of death and the practice of law, economic exchange and circulation organized around it.⁹²

In Hegel's reading of Antigone, the public/private divide, which is responsible for delimiting what counts as "political," remains key. Hegel confines Antigone to the private domain, the family, that stands in opposition to the public realm of the State. For him, the polis comes to be the political field, while the private domain remains a non-political space. The care of the corpse, the performing of funeral rites, stays thus enclosed in that private, feminine domain and can never be recognized as a political gesture in nature.⁹³ Antigone's gesture, the covering of her brother's body, does not belong to the public domain, but rather to the private one. The covering of the corpse remains unintelligible as a political act. Antigone cannot then be considered a political figure; if anything, as Butler claims paraphrasing Hegel, she might embody "a pre-political opposition to politics" (*Antigone's* 2) always contingent upon the nature of her symbolic position. The covering of her brother's corpse breaks Creon's binary logic defying his power, law and authority. Situating herself beyond both civil order and religious one, her positioning defies and challenges the very intelligibility of a whole system of thought and its binary oppositions that it creates.⁹⁴

⁹² This relationship with the question of sacrifice could be also explored in tension with the figure of Antigone in relation with Butler's ethical reading of Antigone as an interrogation of a version of politics based on sacrifice.

⁹³ Elaine Miller posits that "Hegel aligns the masculine with subjectivity, the polis, and freedom and the feminine with nature, the family and the private realm" in blind adherence to the divine law and trapped in the repetition of the cyclical time of reproduction" (123).

⁹⁴ Antigone breaks also the logic of enemy and friend, and in this sense is situated at the borders of the political, beyond it.

On bodies and mourning

In *Mothers in Mourning*, historian Nicole Loraux explores both funeral legislation and classical Athenian dramas to retrace mourning practices in ancient societies (36). Loraux deals with questions of law and regulatory practices in mourning and social custom, and focuses especially on the importance of mourning in relation to the public and private divide. In the ancient world, mourning took place in the tension between public and private domains; between the public domain of citizens, the one constitutive of the political realm, and the private domain of the family.⁹⁵ Funeral regulations, for example, controlled the number of people, especially women, exposed to the corpse, and rituals were created by the civic community, Loraux claims, in order “to circumscribe the *pathos* of mourning” (37). Rituals structure this *pathos* by organizing a clear sequence in which the corpse is exposed, carried, and buried—exposition, procession, burial. Often only men accompany the procession as if there was no place in the Athenian streets for female lamentations, for the weeping of women, as if public mourning required a continuous exercise of containment.⁹⁶ Loraux shows how, in Athenian tragedy, mourning was codified in the case of mothers, whose relation to the dead body acquired a special dimension because the “sight of a son’s corpse is *pathos* in the highest degree” (37).⁹⁷ It is to

⁹⁵ Loraux demonstrates the direct relation between the exclusion of women, and the structural regulation of the polis, a regulation of the *páthos* of mourning that shapes the divide between the public and the private spheres.

⁹⁶ According to Loraux women “will appear at the cemetery, the only place where their lamentations are allowed (15). Only in this place, reserved for the final ceremony of death and of contact of the corpse with the earth, women are allowed to weep their dead ones.

⁹⁷ In the Greek world it is for the mother to close the eyelids of a dead son (Loraux 35). Long before the funeral rites, before any social codification of mourning, “there is the mother’s crying, which accompanies the vision of the corpse that used to be a son” (36). During the delay

avoid an excess of *pathos*, Loraux explains, in *The Phoenician women*, that Theseus, the unifying king and founding hero of Athens, ensures that mothers do not see the disfigured bodies of the soldiers. Just as in official funerals in Athens, mothers have a right only to the bones of the funeral pyre, what Loraux calls “pure abstraction of the beloved body” (37). This *pathos* of mourning, especially feminine mourning, is a passion against which the city protects itself, as if women’s mourning constituted a potential threat to the polis (11), as if female excess threatened the political order itself (27).⁹⁸

Somehow in conversation with Loraux, Adriana Cavarero, in her reading of *Antigone*, highlights the fact that in Sophocles’s play human corporeality and female identity cohere within a single—dreadful and apolitical—concept (*Feminist* 45). The body is “expelled from the polis along with the women” (*Feminist* 48), left to lay under open skies, waiting for decomposition.⁹⁹ The exclusion of the feminine is the exclusion of corporeality itself, and is constitutive of the founding categories of the political order in ancient Greece, where the body is “judged to be

imposed by the ritual care of the corpse, “there is the body of the mother clinging to that of the dead son.” (36), in an image reminiscent of a christian *pietà*. For Loraux, the intimacy of grief is a result of “an intensification of the feeling of corporeal closeness” (35), and it is the intimacy of these encounters that “produce excessive pain for the body-memory of mothers” (37).

⁹⁸ Loraux explains how “mourning is strictly contained in the sphere of close family ties for Greek women, and thus subjected to many restrictions, while women’s mourning in Rome is limited by recognized in its private sense, and always liable to become a public display by part of the city” (33). “By confining private funerals within extremely strict limits, the city regulates mourning and the role played by women in the context of mourning” (19). From the classical period on, feminine mourning appears represented as an excess that the city, the polis, has to regulate to maintain its order. It is in this space that the funeral ceremony takes place.

⁹⁹ The body that the city excludes and exiles is first the body of Polyneices, and then the body of *Antigone*, a body buried alive Cavarero reminds us that “in its very founding categories, the political order of classical Greece clearly excludes the corporeality judged to be mere material support for the human capacity for language and thought, at the same time excluding women, insofar as they are “naturally” rooted in the matters of the body” (*Feminist* 45). See Adriana Cavarero *Feminist Readings of Antigone*, edited by Fanny Söderbäck.

mere material support for the human capacity for language and thought” (*Feminist* 45). “This clash” warns Cavarero “takes place in a tragic framework where the body plays the part of the prelogical and the dreadful, both cadaverous nausea and incestuous sexuality” (*Feminist* 46). Cavarero points here to the dissociation between language and body a key splitting in the paradigm of binary opposition of the dualistic structure of western metaphysics. Margolles’s work could be said to tackle precisely this splitting, this metaphysical operation, the creation of that divide. Her work often through the presence of the abject, engages in a *choric trace*, that its: appealing to a logic closer to the corporeal.

Rebecca Scott Bray has posited that Margolles’s work often denies the easy facility of graphic images in the representational economy of death (944). In *Vaporización* (2002/2018) (figure 8.), Margolles created a misty installation in the space of the gallery. The use of residual waters from the cleaning of the corpses had for long been part of Margolles’ artistic practice. But it was with *Vaporización* that she began to make a new use of them. Creating a mechanism that puts particles of dead bodies in direct contact with the living bodies of her audience, Margolles forced them to physically confront the residues of violence. The audience was invited to walk in the haze she had created only after to discover having been exposed to the fog, that they had in fact walked through vaporized water used to wash the bodies of murder victims in the morgue. Margolles would create a very similar experience in another of her installations, *En el aire* (2003) (figure 9 and 10), where a rain of bubbles, also made from residual waters, floated around the audience bursting both upon contact with the gallery space and with the bodies of the viewers visiting the exhibit. As the public walked around, admiring the futile beauty of the bubbles, they encountered a legend that read: “*En el aire*. Burbujas hechas de agua con la cual se lavaron los cadáveres antes de la autopsia. Todos de personas asesinadas.” The audience was

there put in direct physical contact with biological residues of violence, with the matter of death.¹⁰⁰ The encounter with the text turned an experience of naïve playful beauty into physical and emotional horror.

In contact with the body, moreover, this disruption was generated by appealing to a logic beyond the visible, a logic that could be thought as situated in a choric trace, that put the corporeal at its very center. In pieces like *Vaporización* or *En el aire* we can see this denial that Scott Bray sees in the work of Margolles. Margolles disrupted in them the coordinates of visual regimes, engaging with an artistic praxis that penetrated a different domain of experience; she did not attempt to represent death, but offered in its place an experience of encounter with death itself, with its aftermaths. She played at the limits between revelation and concealment offering a visceral experience that moved its audience beyond visual reason. Rather than operating under a logic of revelation these installations were in fact resistant to such logics. Some of her pieces shatter in a way the opposition between what is seen and what is not seen, complicating the coordinates of regimes of visibility and invisibility and the creation of a simple divide between presence and absence¹⁰¹

These installations gave rise to an unsettling and profoundly ambivalent relationship to the space of the gallery itself, and by extension to the role of aesthetic production (and participation) in these dynamics. In the space of an art venue this moment made evident the profound disconnect between the audience and the realities of violence. As the water was

¹⁰⁰ Some saw in this piece just another manifestation of Margolles's morbid fascination with death.

¹⁰¹ These newer works tended to abandon the monumentalization of the dead body that marked her earlier work, and complicated the idea of exposure and trace.

absorbed by other bodies, the installation was meant to create a traumatic space, to perforate the boundaries of the viewer, exposing the public to death in an unmediated and tangible manner, undermining and eroding their affective distance from violence. Margolles worked to create an atmosphere of pure *pathos* that aimed to saturate her audience. In the clash with the materiality of the corpses, in a sort of *partage* of those remains, Margolles dismantles defense mechanisms aiming to create an affective short-circuit in the audience.¹⁰² The intimate contact with the corpse, the one reserve in ancient Greece, as Loraux explains, to the private realm, was taking place in the public space of the gallery. In the moment of exposure to this atmosphere which penetrates the audience's body, Margolles sought to trespass and destabilize borders in a moment of contact with the abject. She prompted an intimate experience, through the unfolding of a profound sensory disjuncture. Margolles was exposing her audience to a close encounter with the corporeal, to a pure *pathos*, and intimate experience of contact with death. Collapsing the here and there, presence and absence, life and death, subject and object, spectator and exhibition, Margolles was creating, as Antigone herself, a moment of contact with the very limits of the symbolic.

Margolles operates in a way against the regulatory practices of mourning that Loraux recounts as being critical for the preservation of order and the avoidance of disruption, of a potential threat to the order of the polis. Her work aims to generate a disruption that would be brought about by the contact with the corpse; a *pathos* derived from exposure to the body of the dead, seeking to generate almost a somatic memory in her audience. Margolles was releasing a

¹⁰² Amy Sarah Carroll, who also points to the connection between Margolles and Antigone, understands this moment of contact as an attempt to generate an interiorization of the remains of the dead by forcing the viewers' bodies to assimilate body particles of the dead. See "*Muerte Sin Fin: Teresa Margolles's Gendered States of Exception*"

pathos at the heart of a public setting. Her work creates an intimate moment public of *pathos*, which does not remain locked in the isolation of the private realm, but rather is situated in the exposed public one. Against the ritualistic structuring of *pathos*—a process organized around a clear sequence of exposition, procession and burial of the corpse—like the one unfolded in the celebrations of the *Bicentenario*, Margolles's praxis dislodges, by releasing an excess of *pathos* that cannot be efficiently controlled by the rule of law and order, any orderly relation to death. *Pathos* as destabilization of borders.

In 2009, Margolles was invited to represent Mexico in the 53rd Venice Biennale of Art.¹⁰³ She presented an exhibition entitled '*¿De qué otra cosa podríamos hablar?*' (What Else Could We Talk About?), where she situated the massive production of violence and death, the overwhelming trauma that the country was suffering, at the apex of the international art circuits. 2009, was also the year of the celebration of the *Bicentenario* in México, the year of the exhibitions of the corpses of Mexico's founding figures.

In Venice, the Mexican pavilion was housed in the Palazzo Rota-Ivancich, a 16th century noble residence located outside the main site of the Biennale and surrounded by the canals of the city center of trade during the Renaissance. The central performance, *Limpieza* (2009) (figure 11.) was an empty room. Twice a day during the Biennale, family members of victims of violent crimes were in charge of mopping the empty room with the residual waters of the cleaning of corpses of violent crimes. *Limpieza*) pointed towards the invisibilization of the cleaning of the remains of violence, and the invisibilization also of work of mourning that remained confine to

¹⁰³ The first Mexican participation in the Venice Biennale took place in the year 1950 when muralists David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and Rufino Tamayo first represented the country. Mexico was not represented again in the Biennale until the year 2007.

the private space and invisibilized in the representation of the social body.¹⁰⁴ Margolles was situating in the public realm of the gallery, tasks traditionally bound to the private one, and destabilizing as we saw in *Antigone*, the clear borders of mourning. Although one could traverse the physical space in which *Limpieza* was performed totally oblivious to the installation, Margolles made her public complicit in the dispersal of the residues of violence. In this way, Margolles disrupted the borders between public and private realms. Through this displacement, her work delocalized the remains of violence, problematizing in this manner any clear territorialization of violence, and destabilizing at the same time the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the exhibition.

Other pieces of Margolles's exhibition in Venice included *Ajuste de cuentas* (2009)(figure 12.), a collection of 21 jewels made in 18K gold that, instead of gemstones, had mounted pieces of glass extracted from bodies executed in Culiacán in the state of Sinaloa, or *Narcomensajes* (2009) (Figure 13.), an installation in which a group of embroiderers, both men and women, worked with gold threads to embroider, in pieces of fabric also impregnated with blood like *Bandera*, different messages left in *narco* related crime scenes throughout the country.¹⁰⁵ The aim of the exhibit at the Biennale as a whole was according to Cuauhtemoc

¹⁰⁴ Jaime Ratliff posits that “Margolles’s act of cleaning (...) complicates the boundary between domestic actions, confinement within the house and the practice of such activities outside the home” (215). See “Visualizing female agency: Space and gender in contemporary women’s art in Mexico.”

¹⁰⁵ Several pieces on the exhibit were clearly marked by the displaying of its own labor—the cleaning, the moping, the embroidery—labor not only associated with feminine domestic chores, but also traditionally confined to the private domain. Through this exhibition of labour the private and public divide was dissipated. Like other of her pieces presented at the *mostra* in Venice, *Limpieza* also rendered visible maintenance labour.

Medina, who curated Margolles's exhibit in Venice, to expose his public to what he termed the "sacralidad fantasmal:"

"En Venecia, Margolles llevado a cabo una instalación a partir de acciones discretas, y a veces casi inmateriales, que tienen lugar en un sitio históricamente sobrecargado. Aquellas sustancias de furia, pérdida y desecho social, son transferidas (o mejor dicho, contrabandeadas) a un palacio veneciano del siglo XVI, canibalizando de paso los signos de decadencia e historia del edificio. Más que una presentación de objetos o imágenes, lo que Margolles hace es exponer a su público a la sacralidad fantasmal y abyecta de fluidos y residuos: joyas hechas con fragmentos de parabrisas (figure 12.), aforismos asesinos bordados en oro sobre sangre (figure 13.), sonidos grabados en los paisajes de la muerte, todos ellos convergen para producir un espacio de reflexión, amenaza corporal y ansiedad."¹⁰⁶

In Medina's description of the exhibit we encounter the aim to create a somatic experience, an experience of physical threat, characteristic of other works by Margolles. But as Medina observes in relation to her work in the Biennale, Margolles's installations also alludes to a deeper tension with, and even transgression of, the law. Margolles work with "contraband substances," remains of violence such as blood and glass fragments from crime scenes, is put in Venice in tension with the architecture that houses the exhibit itself. Medina points out that Margolles exposes the public not to objects or images, but rather to a "sacralidad fantasmal," that is embodied for example according to Medina in the jewelry pieces, made with fragments of

¹⁰⁶ See Cuauhtemoc Medina's text: "Teresa Margolles: ¿De Que Otra Cosa Podríamos Hablar?"

windshields, or other symbols of material power, but also in the *palazzo* itself whose flag stands as a relic of the cross-border capital accumulation of early-modern Venice. In other words, the sacrality, of these pieces, ghostly in nature, seems to be connected to the audience encounter with the sacrificial logic at the heart of a regime of accumulation ones that is part of the historical landscape of the building itself.

These experiences of exposure to the corpses was very different in nature from the one performed by the ceremonial exhumation and rehousing of the remains of the founding fathers in the celebrations of the *Bicentenario*. The 2009 celebrations used the exhibition and exposure to the corpses, with the exhibit at National Palace of the bodies of the founding fathers, as an exposure anchored in capitalizing those deaths to reinforce the binding, the *liaison*, to the national community. The exposure of the relics was put at the service of national formation. In installations like *Vaporización* or *En el aire*, the contact with death does not attempt to generate an internalization of the living being as we see happening in the case of the *Bicentenario*, where the exposure to the dead bodies is meant to be incorporated into the building of the national narrative. Her works, instead, attempted to provoke in the audience a moment of symbolic deregulation. Margolles worked by creating an unbounded experience; an experience without containment fostering open and boundless exposure to death. By opening up the enclosure, she exposes what cannot be organized or assimilated into an economy of sense.¹⁰⁷ The open exposure to the materiality of death arouses an experience of the abject that threatens to destabilize the symbolic system of the State (or of the national community) and its economy of

¹⁰⁷ In this exposure, in this *partage* of the remains, we could see, thinking with Derrida, a call for responsibility, a responsibility aligned with that act of *déliasion*, with that process of debinding from a community of fusion.

meaning. She offers a physical encounter with death which she often presents as an atmospheric field of experience. Margolles's praxis provides a material contact with violence and dislodges any orderly relation to death; it does so by opening up questions about our relation to matter.

One of the defining characteristics of classical tragedy for Aristotle was its ability to generate a process of *catharsis*, a process of liberation or purification. Lacan claims that *catharsis* is itself the aim of tragic drama; tragedy allows for the cleansing, the purgation of the soul.¹⁰⁸ It works by generating an emotional climax that allows the audience to release emotion before returning to the inertia, to the normality, of their mundane lives. This ability to induce a process of *catharsis* is the fundamental characteristic of tragedy.¹⁰⁹ But as Judith Butler points out, Lacan's discussion of Antigone in his Seminar VII, *The Psychoses*, forces a revision of Aristotle's theory of *catharsis*. For Lacan, Antigone, a figure that represents for him the very essence of tragedy, does not in fact involve purgation—or expiation—she does not lead “to restoration of calm but rather to the continuation of irresolution” (Butler 48). This is, I claim, the

¹⁰⁸ In *Poetics*, Aristotle states that “[t]ragedy, then, is an imitation of a noble and complete action, having the proper magnitude; it employs language that has been artistically enhanced (...) it is presented in dramatic, not narrative form, and achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such incidents” (*Poetics*. Part 7)

¹⁰⁹ Aristotle did not leave a clear definition of catharsis resulting in centuries of discussion. For centuries, medicine had used the term “catharsis” to mean a purging which helps to rid the body of disease-causing elements. used to “purge” the mental disturbances that resulted in physical illness, by stimulating the passions of an audience and leading them to an emotional crisis. “For every feeling that affects some souls violently affects all souls more or less; the difference is only one of degree. Take pity and fear, for example, or again enthusiasm. Some people are liable to become possessed by the latter emotion, but we see that, when they have made use of the melodies which fill the soul with orgiastic feeling, they are brought back by these sacred melodies to a normal condition as if they had been medically treated and undergone a purge [catharsis]. Those who are subject to the emotions of pity and fear and the feelings generally will necessarily be affected in the same way; and so will other men in exact proportion to their susceptibility to such emotions. All experience a certain purge [catharsis] and pleasant relief” (*Politics*, Book 8).

very same effect that we encounter in Margolles' praxis. Although her works are often deeply anchored in a registry of cleansing—the washing of the body and its preparation for burial, her artistic praxis offers however no space for purification.¹¹⁰ While she aims to arouse visceral emotions in her audience, “fill the soul with orgiastic feeling” as Aristotle puts it, in her artistic praxis there is no denouement that can provide a calming effect; she hints at no possible return to the normality of life. In this sense her work does not provide a cathartic effect, the one associated with the classical mechanics of tragedy. She aims to interpellate the chorus of this drama, the public, to unravel emotion, but does not offer any resolution or purification.

In *The Catastrophe of Modernity* Patrick Dove explores how the post-independence national discourses in Latinoamerica made use of tragedy as a tool to provide aesthetic reconciliation and create a sense of national unity. Dove suggests that the aesthetic would be uniquely able to reconcile political conflict, heal social antagonism and foment a sense of group unity or identification (12). By representing conflict, tragedy would attest to strife between distinct and seemingly incommensurable social orders, epochs, or “worlds.” Through the symbolic production of tragedy, one marked with foundational intentions, the nascent nation-state would seek therefore to reconcile social antagonism. Thus, Tragedy “provides an important aesthetic or identificatory mechanism through which the modern state will justify its tutelary and disciplinary functions” (12-13). However, Dove identifies a different economy of tragedy that

¹¹⁰ This ritual of cleaning of the body is one of the ways in which Margolles puts her work in tension with a religious imaginary. Other interesting example is the work *En el aire*. *En el aire* was first presented between June 27th and July 13 2003, in the *Muestra Internacional de Performance*, at the center Ex Teresa Arte Actual in the historic center of México City. Ex Teresa Arte Actual is a former convent of the Carmelite order, Santa Teresa la Antigua, located in the historic district which since 1989, has housed the center. The water of the cleaning of these corpses was bursting against the walls of a space formerly dedicated to the consecration to god. Her work is both a sacralization and a desacralization.

would not be at the service of the formation of national identity, but which would signal instead towards a break with that community of fusion. This is the realm that Margolles praxis, as an *antigonic* gesture, inhabits.

In her work in the Biennale, Margolles was exposing a fractured sense of identification, and departing therefore from any seamless national identification. At the *façade* of the Palazzo Rota-Ivancich, a renaissance palace assigned to Mexico as a pavilion, Margolles hung a piece of fabric saturated with the blood of victims from different executions sites in Northern Mexico. Between the European Union flag and the Venetian one, she situated the *Bandera* (2009) (figure 14).¹¹¹ *Bandera* presented an erased identity, an identity stained by blood. Despite representing Mexico in the set of an International art venue, the piece, as the exhibit as a whole, could hardly said to be at the service of the representation of the nation or even put at the service of the formation of national identity. *Bandera*, as the exhibit, was seemingly more concerned with processes of deformation of this identity, marking therefore a symptomatic space of a crisis of filiation.

While the celebrations of the *Bicentenario* captured and economized the work of mourning with the aim of creating a community through fusion, Margolles unleashes a disruptive

¹¹¹Some have read this intervention as an attempt to reinforce the idea of death and violence as the core of modern Mexican identity. Anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz has suggested that México has become a recognized site for alternative “deathways” in our global imaginary. In this line, Angel Rafael Vázquez-Concepción claims that “SEMEFO’s work can be seen as an attempt to implode the alleged kinship Mexicans have with death.” “This view situates Margolles not within the contexts of national traumas that have made corpses more invisible, or national art with a long story of depicting and representing death, but simply as another component of the essentialising interpretation of Mexican cultural production and supposed affinity with Death (31) See Julia Banwell’s book *Teresa Margolles and the Aesthetic of Death*. Also, for a detailed discussion about the relationship between Mexico and death, see the work of anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz *Death and the Idea of Mexico*.

pathos without closure. The experience of death, the exposure to corpses that Margolles offers, generates an *atmosphere of trauma* without reparation, a space without possible mourning. By opening up the enclosure, she exposes what cannot be organized or assimilated into an economy of sense.¹¹² With the open exposure at place in the installations, Margolles created instead what we could call an act of debinding, of *déliasion*, based, as her artistic carrier as a whole, in an active transgression of limits. Margolles's pieces unleashed a space of pure trauma subject to a logic fundamentally different to the one of the *Bicentenario*. The horror of the logic of production of death.

Conclusion

Margolles's response to violence differs from other approaches to processing violence such as basic forensic reason, complete ignorance, denial or mere memorialization of the victims. Margolles explores – and forces us to explore -- our relationship with dead matter. She insists on the corpse as something that can neither be seen nor covered over, it resists memorialization yet perturbs memory. Her work inhabits a porosity dissociated from clear and irrefutable divides, one that works also against catharsis and resolution. In her work with residues of violence, in an act of terror and transgression, she exhibits some of the key tensions in the coordinates of our day, but contemporaneously exposes the logics of violence, law and exchange that facilitate that violence. Through her relation with *el resto*, Margolles interrupts the circulation of international art by exposing the physical, material trace of the corpse.

¹¹² In this exposure, in this *partage* of the remains, we could see, thinking with Derrida, a call for responsibility, a responsibility aligned with that act of *déliasion*, with that process of debinding from a community of fusion.

Lacan sees in Antigone a blind perseverance situated in an “unshakeable, unyielding position” (*Ethics* 279).¹¹³ By following her desire, Antigone becomes the model for the ethical subject.¹¹⁴ But this is also a dangerous desire, Antigone is situated for Lacan beyond the reality principle, one that incarnates the realization of a desire that he terms as “the pure and simple desire of death as such” (282). Her “radically destructive” desire makes Antigone a criminal. For Lacan, Antigone chooses to be “purely and simply the guardian of the being of the criminal as such” (283). As in the case of Antigone, with Margolles we encounter the question of mediation in the wake of violence. Is Margolles simply a guardian of death—and thus a kind of destructive criminal – in her insistence on inserting dead bodies in living matter? Or, is Margolles *the* ethical subject? Margolles’s praxis exposes the problematic mediation of corpses, of human matter, and of capital value, like that hidden in Metinides’s photograph, and opens questions about the representation of death – and representational politics -- in our day.

¹¹³ “To act ethically” Lacan suggests, “is to act not in conformity with the external laws of the state and the community, but in conformity with one’s inner desire: ‘the only thing one can be guilty of is giving ground relative to to one’s desire’” (*Interrogating* 3).

Chapter Four

Filial Politics and Sexual Difference: The Production of Language in Roberto Bolaño

“Estoy harta de los mexicanos que hablan y se comportan como si todo fuera Pedro Páramo, dije. Es que tal vez lo sea, dijo Loya. No, no lo es, se lo puedo asegurar, dije yo” (780).

2666. Roberto Bolaño.

“Olvida esta casa que se sostiene en la no vida,
en la antimateria, en los agujeros negros mexicanos y
latinoamericanos, en todo aquello que una vez
quiso conducir a la vida
pero que ahora solo conduce a la muerte” (116)

Amuleto. Roberto Bolaño

“Essere figlio—essere figlio giusto—significa farsi erede di quella provenienza dall’Altro che non abbiamo deciso; riconquistarla, farla nostra. Il compito del figlio è trovare la propria parola nelle leggi del linguaggio; è assumere singolarmente quello che i padri hanno lasciato. Si tratta di soggettivare il debito che ci lega alle generazioni che ci hanno preceduto” (33).

Il segreto del figlio. Da Edipo al figlio ritrovato. Massimo Recalcati

This last chapter develops the motif of filiation marked by sexual difference, present in previous chapters, thinking about it in relation to the production and inheritance of language. The

chapter considers the relation between aesthetics and violence analyzing the representation of trauma in the work of Chilean born author Roberto Bolaño. It does so while paying particular attention to two of his Mexican novels: *2666* (2003) and *Amuleto* (1998).

The first part of the chapter looks at *2666*, understanding the novel as an experience of crisis of filiation. Bolaño's posthumous novel confronts the reader with reality of our contemporary crisis of meaning, narrativizing the encounter with the limits of the symbolic as a modern experience. By performing at the limits of intelligibility Bolaño opens an interrogation about how to articulate inheritance in front of the obsolescence of our symbolic system. The first part of the chapter reads Bolaño's consideration of our contemporary crisis of meaning, thoroughly scrutinized in the novel, his exploration of the crisis of modern reason, and with it, of language.

2666 creates an experience of disorientation, marked by both process of decentralization and fragmentation proper to a contemporary reality. While Bolaño's work puts the reader in touch with an abyssal experience at the limits of language,¹¹⁵ his work opens as well a consideration of the limits of the symbolic and its relationship to inheritance. Through his literary praxis, Bolaño often explored the complicities between the production and reproduction of discourse and violence. The question of representation of horror and its relation to language, the question of how to symbolize horror and bear witness to it, is at the very center of Bolaño's literary praxis. We see it for example in the case of *Amuleto*, and its recollection of the student massacres in 1968 in Tlatelolco, but is also present in the hundreds of pages that recall the femicides in Ciudad Juárez in *2666*. *2666*, as other narratives of Bolaño, expands on these

¹¹⁵ Gareth Williams has claimed that *2666* situates the reader "before the absent ground that opens up at the limit of language" (x). See *2666, or the Novel of Force*.

considerations of the question of violence, as an interrogation on practices of representation and its underlying complicities with violence. These considerations of how to symbolize death and violence, which appear in close proximity with the notion of sexual difference, open in Bolaño's work an interrogation about the relation of ethics and aesthetics as a matter of inheritance: this is a question of how to inherit and represent the event.

For these reasons, the second part of the chapter turns to explore the theme of inheritance in relation to the production of language in Bolaño's narrative.¹¹⁶ The notion of inheritance, of the inheritance of language, has in fact a paramount importance in his work. My claim is that Bolaño's concern with the creation of genealogies (often literary ones), is always situated in a tension between the paternal and the maternal domain that opens the possibility to thinking different modes of inheritance in relation to the production of language. Here we see sexual difference appear again in close proximity with the production of language. The chapter explores among others the character of Auxilio Lacouture, main protagonist of *Amuleto* a novel that is placed, like *2666*, in direct contact with an event that can have no filiation, in this case the student massacre of 68. The chapter aims to develop therefore multiple aspects of the relation between the production of language, filial politics and sexual difference in Bolaño's work.¹¹⁷ And as a point of departure to frame these tensions, I propose to approach Bolaño's work in conversation with Lacan's formulas of sexuation as a mode of inhabiting language.

¹¹⁶ It is difficult to read the work of Roberto Bolaño without perceiving it as a constellation. Every work generates a entelequia that makes difficult to discern the limits of each literary body.

¹¹⁷ The importance of sexual difference in his work remains still understudied. Among the vast critique articulated around the literary corpus of the Chilean born writer, few critics have engaged in depth with the importance of this notion in his work.

In his seminar *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (1998), Jacques Lacan introduces what is commonly known as his formulas of sexuation. These formulas, which are not to be thought as rooted in the subject's biological sex, account for the different positions a subject can assume in relation to the symbolic order, and particularly to the void at its origin.¹¹⁸ the differential between these two positions could be called sexual difference. Masculine and feminine logics, understood as what he calls sexuated positions and not gender roles, would entail a different relation to the limits of the symbolic, to the void at its center, and would therefore account for different modes of "inhabiting language" (1998, 80). While all speaking beings are subject to what Lacan terms "the phallic function of castration," that is, the subordination to the constraining limits of symbolization, this fact generates different effects in the subject whether he or she assumes a masculine position or a feminine one. These two positions would speak to the language's failure of totalization, to the fact that language can never fully apprehend the real, that the symbolic can encircle the real, but never fully capture it.¹¹⁹ Lacan reads these two positions as the logic of the all, the masculine logic, and the not-all, the feminine one.¹²⁰ While masculine logic is ruled by universalism and governed by the cult of

¹¹⁸ Lacan says that "it does not hold up... there is a fault, hole, or loss therein". Quoted in Yannis Stavrakakis work *Lacan and the Political* (39).

¹¹⁹ Lacan focuses specifically in the types of *jouissance* through which the subject meets this failure of totalization through language. He understands this in terms of masculine and feminine logics of *jouissance*. While masculine *jouissance* would be organized by a fantasy of complete satisfaction, what he terms as phallic *jouissance*, feminine *jouissance*, the other *jouissance*, would account for a *jouissance* outside of language, one that can not be expressed in language; a form of boundless *jouissance* that he associates with mystic's experiences.

¹²⁰ The logic of the one and the exception is for Lacan also de oedipal logic that establishes the universal castration through the existence of the exception of the original father and his boundless *jouissance*.

homogeneity, feminine logic would be anchored on particularity, fragmentation and difference. While masculine logic would be more prone to identification with symbolic categories, feminine logic would allude to an unstable relationship to symbolic categories, an irreducible position never fully captured, that “will not allow for any universality” (80); the logic of the “not-all” would escape once and again identification,¹²¹ and would expose the limits of the universal logic, it would be a logic open to the difference within, disrupting the possibility of establishing a stable (or total) symbolic identity.¹²²

In view of these two modalities of relationship with the void, with the crisis of signification, the chapter considers the creation of masculine and feminine logics in relation to language in Bolaño’s work.

Inhabiting the void

In the presentation of *Bolaño salvaje* (2008), a compilation of critical essays on Bolaño’s work, the Spanish critic Ignacio Echevarria suggested that Bolaño’s literature emerged from the thematization of the *emptiness* of contemporary culture, a culture, Echevarria claimed, suspended in the void, *el vacío*, left behind by both the lost dream of the revolution and the avant-garde.¹²³ Forx Echevarria, within this void Bolaño’s literary project was put forward as an aesthetic and

¹²¹ This brings about Lacan’s provocative statement, “*la femme n'existe pas*”, Woman does not exist, as an utterance that attempts to work against any essentialization of femininity.

¹²² As Susan Feldman puts it less able to maintain an illusion of the symbolic or its own wholeness the feminine subject is also in a “better position to establish a relationship to its own internal alterity and accept as unthreatening the position of being “not-all” or not wholly represented within the symbolic” (269).

¹²³ See Echeverria, Ignacio and Paz Soldán Edmundo. *Presentación De "Bolaño Salvaje"*.

ethical search, a search for a language, in the aftermath of the defeat that the emergence and consolidation of Latin American dictatorships, especially in the Southern Cone, represented. Bolaño's aesthetic and ethical search, his literary praxis, appears closely connected to both the failure of the political promise of his generation, and to the evolution of the understanding of politics in his work. But beyond the direct contingency of Bolaño's political experience, this void, *el vacío*, alludes as well to a more general experience of disorientation linked to the disarticulation of the coordinates of modernity, and to the exhaustion of our modern political vocabulary as a tool to navigate and give account of the dynamics of a globalized world. This experience translates into a crisis of meaning.

With *2666*, Bolaño exposes his readers to the unsettling encounter with a world that has exhausted the coordinates of its symbolic system, uncovering the crisis of universal reason and the loss of a referential framework brought with it. The emergence of a world that is no longer polarized, but pulverized, profoundly fragmented in the name of capital, is presented by Bolaño as a moment of crisis in terms of the production of knowledge, as a crisis of reason and sense.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ This notion of a reason in crisis, of a modern reason in crisis, is widely present throughout Bolaño's work in, and beyond, his last novel. His narratives are populated by characters associated with a modern imaginary (journalist, detectives, poets, writers, academics...) who, as residues of an enlightened European reason, repeatedly fail to accomplish the task entrusted to them. This tendency is especially manifested through the figure of the detective, one of Bolaño's ultimate obsessions, as a character that, by retracing the story of a violation of the law, is charged with the task of restoring intelligibility to a given universe, signaling in this way the victory of reason over chaos. Within the universe of *2666* it is with the character of Óscar Amalfitano, a subject of knowledge heir of a philosophical lineage, that the novel puts us in close contact with this collapse of a historical reason that structured a modern identity, entrapping the subject in an epistemological model that has become obsolete as a tool to understand the world. Amalfitano's madness could be read however as the only possible opening. If we allow ourselves to be guided by the notion of the unconscious in front of the Cartesian rationalism proper to modernity, Amalfitano's unconscious decision of reproducing Duchamp's ready made, could be the only *autoimmune* gesture to save reason. Thus, this crisis of reason would constitute at the same time a threat and a promise. Trapped, as we are, in our inheritance of thought, in our geometric legacy, there remains no possibility for movement. The only alternative might be perhaps that

Some of the criticism produced on the work has already reflected on what we could call this diagnostic dimension of Bolaño's work, on how Bolaño's posthumous novel writes the dissolution of the political coordinates of modernity.¹²⁵ As Dove understands it, *2666* explores this crisis of reason, of modern reason, understood as the factual obsolescence of the paradigm that has served as a matrix for interpretation and production of meaning, as a phenomenon manifest both at the level of the state and of the subject, that weakens our ability of thinking and acting in our contemporary world.¹²⁶ *2666* unfolds for the reader as an intimate experience of

one: deranging our own *testamento geométrico*, the heritage of the very architecture of modern rationality.

¹²⁵ Patrick Dove's reading of the novel, "Literature and the Secret of the World: *2666*, Globalization, and Global War," Brett Levinson's article "Case Closed" Madness and Dissociation in *2666*", or Gareth William's "2666, or the Novel of Force", explore different aspects of this diagnostic dimension in relation to a crisis of reason.

¹²⁶ In his work, *La desazón de lo moderno*, the Chilean philosopher Pablo Oyarzún explores the notion of the crisis of modern reason, understood as a profound change in the paradigm that has served as a matrix for interpretation and production of meaning in the last 350 years of Western history (137). Oyarzún asserts that this crisis of reason has to be understood as a phenomenon inherent to the very installation of modern reason. The crisis consists in the exposure of reason itself to its otherness, to what is different and distinct from it. Only under the threat of its own crisis, that is only by exposing itself in a control manner to its alterity, to the possibility of going mad, can reason save itself. Oyarzún thought is situated within a Derridian trace. Derrida, would probably name this in terms of the autoimmunity of reason. For Oyarzún, the crisis of modern reason, of a deductive and constructive reason, does not only affect the cognitive dimension of our existence; instead, what for Oyarzún is in crisis is "la propia *magnitud de lo humano*" (140). In as much as *reason* is the name "que el hombre se ha dado a sí mismo, fundando en esta atribución la posibilidad de su reconocimiento" (140), the crisis of reason "tendría que entenderse entonces como trizadura (...) de ese nombre, la crisis del *animale rationale* como tal: no la de una definición o una fórmula, sino la de un nombre, la crisis (la elipsis) del nombre" (140). In Oyarzún's text it remains unclear how we should understand this *crisis del nombre*; is he referring to the name of the human or to names, as such? That is, can we think about the *trizadura del nombre* (of the human) as a phenomenon connected to the exhaustion of language that Echeverría suggested that triggered Bolaño's work? Does that abyss of disorientation in the novel spring from such fragmentation? Could this be, essentially, what *2666* begins to unravel: *la trizadura del nombre* (of the human) or the madness of language among dismembered bodies of women?

contact with a crisis of reason and language, as a manifestation of a crisis of filiation. A moment when meaning breaks and becomes unintelligible.

French philosopher Jean Luc Nancy has extensively explored the contemporary experience of exhaustion of meaning offering important insights around this phenomenon in relation to the dynamics proper to globalization. Nancy provocatively suggests that what characterizes this historical moment is in fact that “[t]here is no longer any world: no longer a *mundus*, a *cosmos*, a composed and complete order (from) within which one might find a place, a dwelling, and elements of orientation. (...). There is no longer any spirit of the world, nor is there any history whose tribunal one could stand. In other words, there is no longer any sense of the world” (*Sense 4*). In *The Creation of the World or Globalization* (2002), Nancy suggested the existence of two possible destinies for humanity, which he conceptualizes under two different terms: *globalisation* and *mondialisation*. The choice between them constitutes for Nancy a necessary and critical decision that humanity has to face. For Nancy, *globalisation* refers to the creation by the market of a global dimension profoundly marked by the uniformity produced by an economical and technological logic. This logic, responsible for an “increasingly concentrated interdependence that ceaselessly weakens independencies and sovereignties,” debilitates as well “an entire order of representation of belonging” (*Creation 34*). For Nancy, *globalisation* “rather than a becoming world, would lead to the proliferation of the unworld” (*Creation 50*). The promised access to totality prompted by *globalisation* entails in his view at the same time the disappearing of the “world,” understood as a totality of meaning.

When he states that there is no more sense of the world, Nancy understands sense as transcending meaning, as “any essential summation of existence that would somehow provide a teleological orientation in terms of absolute values” (*Sense ix*). Thus, the loss of sense or

meaning “is to be understood from the start as a loss of absolute value” (*Sense ix*). This loss would constitute the “capitalist version of the without reason, which established the general equivalence of all forms of meaning in an infinite uniformity” (*Creation 52*) characteristic of a market epistemology.¹²⁷ This entails the inauguration of a world of general equivalence connected to the process of homogenization brought about by neoliberal globalization, that is, the creation of a landscape of dissolution of difference created by capital and for capital, and that brings about the crisis of the symbolic system, the crisis of the “law of the father” as the primordial signifier to put it in Lacanian terms.¹²⁸ In the face of a landscape of *general equivalence*, a product of the domination of technological power and pure economic reason, Nancy exhorts us to avoid both a position of negation of absolute meaning, which would entail a nihilistic abyss that only reinforces the dominion of capital, and a mythical position, which would imply the creation of origins of absolute meaning.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ For more on this idea of market epistemology see Brett Levinson’s work *Market and Thought: Meditations on the Political and the Biopolitical*.

¹²⁸ See Massimo Recalcati’s *Il complesso di Telemaco*.

¹²⁹ Nancy suggests that “our task today is (...) the creation of a new form of symbolization” (*Creation 53*). This undertaking, which he conceptualizes under the notion of *mondialisation*, would entail the opening to an authentic experience of world forming, understood as the possibility of creation of a place of meaning, and a common space of signification, the construction of a community of meaning. For Nancy “[t]o create the world means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of a global injustice against the background of general equivalence. [T]his means to conduct this struggle precisely in the name of the fact that this world is coming out of nothing, that there is nothing before it and that it is without models, without principle and without given end, and that it is precisely what forms the justice and the meaning of the world” (*Creation 54-55*). Nancy insists on the necessity to conceptualize creation as “a motif, or a concept, that we must grasp outside of its theological context” (*Creation 50*). This is a creation *ex-nihilo*, that is a creation “without roots” (*Creation 51*) To let then a *world*, understood as a totality, as a community of meaning, emerge.

We could say that a logic of *general equivalence* assembles Bolaño's last novel. He operates exposing the reader to an abyssal experience within language, to the crisis of symbolization and referentiality, to a degrounded and *degrounding* language, to echo Williams's characterization of Bolaño's poesis.¹³⁰ Within the referential density of *2666* this principle of *general equivalence* can be said to relate to events, characters, dismembered bodies. Everything seems haunted by a sort of splitting, a doubling, that make the different elements ready to be randomly transposed. As Levinson points out, sometimes it appears that for Bolaño any content will do. The "narrative explodes not events but their relationship: meaning" (Levinson 182). What Nancy calls the "absence of reason" of capital can be read in relation to this inability to establish sense in the novel, to a certain crisis of legibility, in as much as everything is regulated by that principle of *general equivalence*.¹³¹

The notion of intelligibility, as the possibility or impossibility of providing "sense," seems to be at the sheer core of Bolaño's project in the novel. Like the unsettling experience of Oscar Fate in his escape from Santa Teresa, when he can no longer recognize left from right, reading *2666* is in itself an exercise of disorientation.¹³² *2666* escapes any closure, confronting

¹³⁰ This crisis of meaning manifest in *2666*, what Williams calls a "crisis of communicability", the condition of the novel as a work of "poiesis without humanist grounding or rather humanist grounded placed under erasure for more than 1000 pages" (X).

¹³¹ In a sense, the novel emphasizes the loss of absolute value, and dissolution of difference. General equivalence would therefore entailed the emergence of a logic of universalization rooted in difference. This seems to be the logic that general equivalence puts forward in which difference is emptied in equivalence. In a way, this touches with the discussion Joan Copjec develops around the suspicion on sexual difference denounced by gender studies in favor of a multiplicity of sexual identities.

¹³² The experience of lack of referentiality in the novel appears especially thematized through the character of Óscar Fate, a journalist working for a Harlem political magazine, *Amanecer Negro*, based in New York City, who arrives to the Sonoran city after his encounters with the remains of an obsolete political model; Barry Seaman, forgotten member of the Black Panthers, and

the reader with the unease of perceiving the exhaustion of meaning, and pointing directly to our recurrent contemporary demand for sense. While a fantasy of total intelligibility might lure us, finding our way through the galaxy that constitutes *2666*, attempting to hold *one* constellation of meaning, soon becomes an impossible task. The strategy of the novel to resist interpretation entails trapping its readers between what Echevarria, in the short epilogue to the novel, calls its “foolish aspiration to totality” (*2666* 1122) and Bolaño’s awareness of our inescapable condition as orphans of it [totality], inviting us to inhabit a space of suspension of sense.¹³³ As readers, despite the close connectivity and referential density of the narrative tissue, and even if we repeatedly attempt to account for a narrative of totality, to account for Bolaño’s *world’s sense*, to paraphrase Nancy, the novel seems to reject time and again any totalizing interpretation. It

Antonio Ulises Jones, character that Bolaño presents as the very last communist of Brooklyn. In his fleeing from the violence of Santa Teresa, at the crossing of the Mexico-US border, Fate appears incapable to “recognize any of the things he had seen a few days before, when he traveled the same road in the opposite direction. What used to be my right” says Fate “is now my left, there are no points of reference. Everything erased” (348). That is as well the experience of the reader of *2666*: all erased, all wiped off: the total collapse of the system of referentiality, since not only one point remains that can help us order a violent and apparently lawless whole. In this sense, *2666* is also a novel about the border, but of the borders of the symbolic order, a border that has lost most of its symbolic weight.

¹³³ Bolaño’s fragmented narrative constantly warns its readers against any teleological understanding of history, preventing any temptation to give a causal account of the different historical scenarios of the novel, and pushing instead towards a reading of this dispersion of the ruins of history. “[H]istory, which is a simple whore, has no decisive moments but is a proliferation of instants, brief interludes that vie with one another in monstrousness (794). Just as the bodies of women piled up in the streets of Santa Teresa, for Bolaño history functions as an accumulation of events that compete among themselves in an exercise of pure monstrosity. By avoiding totalization, and presenting History in a broken temporality that stumbles forwards and backwards, the work of Bolaño unveils the nightmare that underlines the dream of universal History.

intimately confronts the reader with the impossibility to fixate meaning.¹³⁴ Exploring the vastness of Bolaño's territory in *2666* equates to an exercise of withdrawal of any fantasy of total intelligibility, of "possessing" the text, of generating a stable and total identification. *2666* is a work without phallic revelation that can order the whole. The double impasse that *2666* lays out for its readers is how to navigate a text, a world, built upon this disarticulation of meaning without imposing on it a new totalizing logic; this is, how to avoid a fixation of meaning subordinated only to the work of sovereign interpretation, reading, therefore, as an act of sovereign force.

The crisis of legibility affects both the readers and Bolaño's characters, and can also be understood in terms of the disappearance of "the subject as a principle of unity" (Levinson 182). In *2666*, Levinson poses, "[t]he subject who associates, who draws links, is himself de-arranged by the effort to unify, to produce a narrative" (182).¹³⁵ In that experience described by Levinson in which the subject, the reader, is de-ranged by his own effort to produce unity, and with it a narrative, we can see one of the most persuasive gestures of Bolaño's last work; the reader remains trapped in a feeling of fragmentation. Like the character of Amalfitano, the reader clearly perceives "la orfandad más grande del mundo, fragmentos, fragmentos" (265). Within that position, the best the reader can do is come to terms with the uncertain experience of suspension of sense that the work entails, a condition that goes beyond the textual reality

¹³⁴ Brett Levinson points out that "Bolaño's narrative evolves as the accretion of disparate tales, each bound to the next by a common and continuous form. The reader therefore encounters no fragments in *2666*, appearances notwithstanding" (177).

¹³⁵ In this sense Bolaño's work becomes a mirror image of the renowned and elusive German writer Benno von Archimboldi who "was always far away, partly because the deeper they went into his work, the more it devoured its explorers" (*2666* 29). *2666* also seems to devour its reader.

itself.¹³⁶ The experience of crisis of reason, of breakdown of signification, without a logic that orders the whole, prompts both a sense of crisis of agency, and the need to resignify that fractured totality in the midst of an experience of disorientation.

One instance of this phenomenon takes place at least two times within the *Hotel México* where first the three European critics and later PRI congresswoman, Azucena Esquivel Plata, stay in their visits to the northern Sonoran city of Santa Teresa. These episodes talk to a vertiginous moment in which both women, Norton and Esquivel, fail to clearly position themselves in relation to their surroundings.¹³⁷ During their sojourn in the hotel, Liz Norton and Azucena Esquivel seem to occupy the same room, or at least a room with the very same spatial configuration.¹³⁸ Esquivel arrives to Santa Teresa to take into her hands the disappearance of her friend Kelly Rivera Parker. Trying to pull her political strings to clarify the causes of Kelly's disappearance, she soon realizes that her position will not give her any kind of leverage in that milieu. In the midst of this experience, directly related to the reconfiguration of power itself, Esquivel describes the room where she stays, noticing the presence of two mirrors in her room.

¹³⁶ In the final pages of *2666*, Lotte Reiter, sister of the German writer von Archimboldi and mother of the Santa Teresa's suspect killer, Klaus Hass, posits in the final pages of the novel: "I don't understand anything and the little I do understand frightens me. Nothing makes sense" (890). Within that position, the best the reader can do is come to terms with the uncertain experience of suspension of sense that the work entails, inhabiting Bolaño's abyss as his deep shattering of the aesthetic object.

¹³⁷ Beyond the interiority of the *Hotel México*, Albert Kessler gives a similar account of his time in Santa Teresa, describing the city as a fragmented landscape "fragmented or in the constant process of fragmentation, like a puzzle repeatedly assembled and disassembled" (602), thus portraying the city as a space of perpetual disidentification, marked by the impossibility to generate a sense of belonging.

¹³⁸ This could be read as another example of the doubling of characters and scenes often present in Bolaño's work.

One at one end and the other by the door”, which “didn’t reflect each other” (621). Exploring the room, she realizes that “if you stood in a certain place, you could see one mirror in the other.” What she couldn’t see then was herself (621).¹³⁹ The more she studies them, the more uneasy Esquivel feels confronting the threat of her own erasure.¹⁴⁰

A similar experience in front of the facing mirrors triggers the disappearance of Liz Norton, from Santa Teresa. The scene is presented as in the case of Esquivel in a sort of *mise en abîme* that brings with it a similar sense of a crisis of presence and agency. One night, in a dream, Norton “saw herself reflected in both mirrors. From the front in one, and from the back in the other. Her body was slightly aslant. It was impossible to say for sure whether she was about to move forward or backward” (115). In this instant of hesitancy, “[t]he stillness of her body reminiscent of” “lo inerte y también en lo inerme” (155), this no life, “made her wonder, (...) what she was waiting for to leave, what signal she was waiting for before she stepped out of the field between the watching mirrors and opened the door and disappeared” (115).¹⁴¹ This moment, which could be read as sign of a crisis of agency, and orientation vis-à-vis the objective world, generates in her a deep sense of dissociation: “All at once Norton realized that the woman reflected in the mirror wasn’t her (...). Objectively, she said to herself, she looks just like me, and there’s no reason why I should think otherwise. She’s me” (115). Despite her efforts to rationalize her experience, and restore her sense of unity, Norton still remains dissociated,

¹³⁹ “La que no se reflejaba era yo” (621) reads the original.

¹⁴⁰ A sense that adds to the increasing sentiment of helplessness before her task in Santa Teresa.

¹⁴¹ Natasha Wimmer translates the original “lo inerte y también lo inerme” (155) as “reminiscent of inertia and also of defenselessness” (115). In my opinion, this translation fails to convey the relationship to death present in Bolaño’s text. For this reason, I have decided to maintain the original words used by Bolaño and not Wimmer’s translation.

doubled: “I’m being reflected in the mirrors too, (...) [a]nd if she keeps moving, in the end we’ll see each other” (116). The scene is organized again around a moment of suspension of identification, moments of dissociation, marked by an experience of fragmentation, separation and disconnection.

The encounter with the mirror points, for Lacan, to the importance of the symbolic in the construction of the subject. The subject enters the symbolic order, and becomes a subject as such, when she confronts her image in the mirror, being able to name herself and experience a sense of mastery and unity in the identification with the image provided by the mirror. The symbolic order, materialized in the mirror image, is responsible for establishing a sense of unity in the subject, replacing the previous sense of a fragmented body. In this sense, identification works as a principle that conceals the fragmentation of the subject, making the ego appear as an imaginary formation able to provide the subject with a sense of coherence; identification would be in this way a defense against that exposure to fragmentation and to the limits of symbolization. Following Lacan we could read these scenes not only as a moment of dissolution of the subject, “as a principle of unity” as Levinson puts it, but as an instance of exposure to the limits of the symbolic system as well.

Norton and Esquivel’s scenes are marked by a crisis of agency that stems from disidentification, as a sort of crisis of symbolization. Both characters, solidly embedded in a genealogy of politics and reason, undergo an experience in which the subject itself seems decentered. This experience of disorientation, that we could say talks as well to the contemporary *malaise*, exposes the rupture of identification, and the break of a sense of totality and unity and blurs with it any possibility of agency.

In the next section, I will explore this crisis of reason together with the notion of sexual difference, to introduce the question of sexual difference in relation to the production of language.¹⁴²

Sexual Difference and the Production of Language

Bolaño's posthumous work is above all a work produced in the wake of the disappearance of women: Óscar Amalfitano and his mental breakdown after being abandoned by his wife Lola; the three critics frantically moving across European borders to anxiously reunite with Liz Norton; journalist Oscar Fate who begins his unforeseen quest across North America only hours after the unexpected death of his mother; and then the countless women bodies piling in the middle of the openness of the Sonora desert. The core of the novel is thus closely related to the violence and disappearance suffered by women, to the exercise of a very particular modality of violence that directly takes issue at sexual difference itself. As we saw, *2666* exposes the reader to the experience of fragmentation at the limits of symbolization rooted in deploying a principle of *general equivalence*. But despite the fact that the novel is constituted as a realm of *general equivalence*, difference, that is, sexual difference, stands at the very core of the novel. The novel could be in fact considered a work built on the notion of sexual difference, or better yet, built on the absence of it, a work that reflects on the effects on the obliteration of (sexual) difference as such. The text hinges on it, not as an attempt to essentialize the sexuated being, but as the marker of a realm in which difference, understood as a sort of *différance* to use Derrida's

¹⁴² It is here, perhaps, where we should locate Bolaño's search for a new language as an attempt to generate a new community of meaning on the wake of totality.

term, can potentially arise. In *La parte de los crímenes*, the corpses of women, as markers of difference, appear as the remnant that cannot be absorbed.¹⁴³

Through the thematic of the femicides Bolaño introduces the reader to questions about the social production of violence. According to Bolaño himself, *2666* took shape as a project in response to the femicides that during the 1990's became a common reality in Ciudad Juárez. Violence against feminine bodies is only one of the diverse types that cuts open Bolaño's posthumous novel—the experience of violence is presented beyond any concrete temporal or spatial coordinates, but the femicides retain however a central position, if we can use a term like *centrality* to refer to a novel like *2666*. While femicide violence is at the very core of its unintelligibility, it is paradoxically also one of the few elements able to generate a collectivity meaning in the novel. The killing of women appears as an exercise of violence beyond any traditional logic of war; in as much as it cannot, and does not, claim any sort of redemptive or revolutionary value, this remains a depoliticized violence.¹⁴⁴ In the face of the weakening of systems of belonging, to echo again the work of Nancy, violence against women functions as an organizational element in the contemporary social tissue.¹⁴⁵ Thus, violence against women appears not only in the streets of the Sonoran city, not only in the intimacy of the private realm

¹⁴³ If the aim of capital, is to generate a universe of *general equivalence*, one difference that cannot be fully or easily reintegrated, even following its own logic, is sexual difference. The importance of this hinge should not be underestimated since it conceals an essential aspect in the formation of capitalist logic itself. It is through the conceptualization of sexual difference that the notion of difference as such is created—woman being the first other for Western man—, allowing for the development of the basic conditions of domination.

¹⁴⁴ This could be read as a sort of pre-political violence to safeguard the interests of consensus. which, escaping signification, emerges as a manifestation of pure abjection.

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of the question of the *munus* in relation to the notion of community, see Roberto Esposito's work *Bios. Biopolitics and Philosophy*.

where some of the women of Santa Teresa are killed, but even in spaces devoted to order, discipline, and law like the cells of the police station where we see how “policemen were raping the whores from La Riviera” (401). Violence against women pervades the whole social tissue, becoming the only logic that organizes the community.¹⁴⁶ In this way, Bolaño’s novel sets forth the question of the constitutive function of violence, violence against women, as a key organizing principle structures the configuration of a virile fraternity, of a space of *communal masculinism*.¹⁴⁷

One of the few instances in which a trace of an idea of community is presented in the novel appears in relation to the description of the jail of Santa Teresa offered by the Mexican journalist Guadalupe Roncal. In *La parte de Fate*, a terrified Guadalupe Roncal, fearing for her physical integrity, begs her colleague Óscar Fate, to accompany her in a visit to the Santa Teresa’s prison where she aims to interview a possible suspect of the femicides, Klaus Hass. In her distressed description of the building, she refers to the prison of Santa Teresa as being like a dream, as a jail “[m]ore alive than an apartment building, for example. Much more alive (299).” “[I]t looks,” she says asking her interlocutor not to be surprised by her choice of words, “like a woman who’s been hacked to pieces (*destazada*). Who’s been hacked to pieces but is still alive.

¹⁴⁶ Thinking with Walter Benjamin we could conceptualize this violence as a manifestation of pure violence. This entails the exercise of violence beyond what Benjamin calls law making violence and law preserving violence, that is, pure violence is not meant to transgress or oppose the law.

¹⁴⁷ Within *2666*, this thematic of “virile fraternity” through the body of women, often filtered by violence, finds numberless echoes. For example, in *La parte de los críticos* in the triangular relationship established between Pelletier, Espinoza and Norton and the experience of a *ménage à trois* first sublimated through violence and later consummated within the exceptionality offered by their trip to Santa Teresa. For a discussion of this notion of “virile fraternity” in the context of the murders of Ciudad Juárez see the work of Rita Laura Segato, “La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Cd. Juárez”.

And the prisoners are living *inside* this woman” (299, *emphasis in the original*). The dying body of a woman brings life to the community of inmates, a community gathered around a logic of *destazamiento*, around an act of dismembering and violence; a fraternal community inside the broken body of a woman in which the inmates gather and take shelter.¹⁴⁸ The feminine voice of journalist Guadalupe Roncal, a voice pervaded by fear, enounces for the reader the architectural reason, the structuring conditions that sustain this community. The community of prisoners appears as a proponent of a logic of equivalence, of which the prisoners are also born, having been subjected to this logic themselves: a mother hacked to pieces.¹⁴⁹ In this description the breakdown of the prison, the dissolution of its walls, creates a different kind of sociality centered on and around violence, in which the dead body of the woman, the corpse, becomes in itself an organizing element.¹⁵⁰ However, this *munus* that organizes the community is not only present in

¹⁴⁸ We could read this image of the building as a breaking feminine body, as signaling the undoing of the distinction between public and private realms. Given the dynamics of violence in place even beyond the prison in Santa Teresa, it is difficult to establish a clear differentiation between inside and outside. The city of Santa Teresa emerges as a space in which violence circulates in a pattern very similar to the dynamics found within the prison itself. The jail, as a space of discipline, as an institution anchored on a technology of power proper to modern sovereignty, to put it in Foucauldian terminology, appears as broken as that feminine body, still containing but barely alive. With this dissolution between inside and outside, the space of the jail, although still a place, appears as one that cannot restrain anymore a delinquent body as such; there is not a logic of containment of the elements disruptive to society in as much as the defiance of the law seem to have pervaded the whole social tissue, both in the inside and the outside the realm of the prison. Within this logic, “women are like laws, they were made to be broken” (553).

¹⁴⁹ The architectural description recalls in a way a figure of optics, a kaleidoscopic representation that we encounter in the first chapter of the dissertation with Pedro Páramo.

¹⁵⁰ This takes place in what Jean Franco in her work *Cruel Modernity*, identifies as a phenomenon of “extreme masculinity,” that is, as an experience of “the meltdown of the fundamental core that makes humans recognize their own vulnerability and hence acknowledge that of the other” (15). For Franco, these “expressive crimes” “these extreme forms of masculinity are endorsed by society itself, (245) developing an ideal of masculinity that “kills the mother and exalts the father” (247). The case of Juarez should be considered as the drama of

the violent acts *per se*. In other words, the formation of the *munus* takes place at the level of language and of the organization of discourse as well. It organizes a language that makes the violence that it perpetuates invisible, and develops a filiative principle aligned with a patriarchal logic. We see this principle manifest in an exchange among police officers that Lalo Cura overhears: “Hábleme de su genealogía, decían los cabrones. Enuméreme su árbol genealógico, decían los valedores. Bueyes mamones de su chingada madre. Hábleme de su escudo de armas” (693). Bolaño inserts this logic at the heart of a community bound at reproducing the patriarchal inheritance of violence that makes itself manifest at the level of language itself.

The language adopted by Bolaño in *La parte de los crímenes* reverberates in a quasi-identical mode along the descriptions of the bodies of more than one hundred women found in the vicinities of Santa Teresa. Generally understood as an emulation of a forensic jargon, mimicked from the reports of the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez to which Bolaño gained access through the work of the Mexican journalist Sergio González, the aesthetic choice of Bolaño in *La parte de los crímenes* carefully recreates several years of a calendar of death in which the use of language itself is put at the very center of the stage. Body after body, corpse after corpse, Bolaño steadily weaves together a nuanced narrative tissue in which, however, not only the moment of death, but with it the moment of violence itself, appear to remain unnamed. He offers very few details in the account of these deaths: name of the victim, age of the victim, clothes she was wearing, and a description of wounds found in the corpse. Subjected to the countless descriptions of corpses, displayed at a continuous and monotonous pace, through the use of a detached language that unifies the different bodies, Bolaño turns his reader into a

masculinity performed on the body of the helpless woman (16), phenomenon that is often presented as a corporate act that dramatizes a “collective shared fantasy of male power and female subjection” (17).

passive spectator, and a consumer, not of violence itself, but its refractions of it: images that cannot come together and are found in the aftermath of violence.

Ángeles Donoso Macaya argues that Bolaño's enunciation of violence in the novel operates as an act of denunciation and visibilization.¹⁵¹ Following Jacques Rancière's conception of the political, as a moment of interruption of a hegemonic distribution of the sensible, Macaya claims that, in the novel, repetition emerges as a form of articulating *the visible*, or better yet, she says, *the invisible* (135). Thus, in her view, Bolaño develops a narrative that employs the same methodology of evil that he rejects—repetition, disappearance, and systematized violence (132)—as an element of denunciation. The descriptive fragments, she posits, insist, exhibit, and repeat, in order to make visible the reality of violence. Repetition would function in this sense as a channel that successfully achieves in her eyes a certain de-automatization of perception (138). While for Macaya the strategy at place in *2666* is aligned with a visibilization of violence, as a mechanism of denunciation capable of interrupting and destabilizing our perception, in the novel however there seems to be little hope about the possibility of achieving such effect. My reading is instead that Bolaño appears to draw here direct attention toward the mechanisms through which violence is concealed, preventing the subject from an exposure with what Julia Kristeva would conceptualize as a potential instance of contact with abjection.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ See her article “Estética, política y el posible territorio de la ficción en *2666* de Roberto Bolaño.”

¹⁵² As we saw for Kristeva the vision of the corpse constitutes the quintessential moment of abjection, understood as an experience of a threatened breakdown in meaning due to the loss of distinction between subject and object, between self and other. The contact with the abject, as an experience situated before the symbolic order would, constitute in Lacanian terms a moment of eruption of the real. See *Powers of Horror: an Essay On Abjection*.

If the strategy employed by Bolaño in *2666* succeeds in making something visible, it is in fact the exhaustion of that ability to de-automatize our perception. As Óscar Fate overhears Professor Albert Kessler saying, in our contemporary condition like in *2666*, “testimonies or proofs of this evil no longer move us. They strike us as futile, senseless” (266). The testimonies and evidences of this form of evil no longer retain any capacity to unsettle and move us; they have become normalized’ just as Morini who only one hour after reading in an article appeared in *Il Manifesto* about the horrible murders in the Sonora desert “he’d already forgotten the matter completely” (43). This is therefore not a question of visibility--after all the bodies of the women lie uncovered scattered through the streets of Santa Teresa--but of an anesthetized consciousness, that receives and quickly digests violence, normalizing in this way the acts of brutality, and creating a dissociated experience. Whether the deaths are rendered visible or not, what remains is just oblivion, a suturing that prevents any possibility of moving beyond trauma.

In *La parte de los crímenes*, Bolaño exposes the reader to the production of an empty but highly functional language at the service of representation of horror. Through his aesthetic choice tinted with forensic resonances, Bolaño denounces in *La parte de los crímenes* the complicity of language, and literature itself, in this foreclosing gesture that takes place within a readable discourse. Discourses structured around a language able to block any possibility of communion, any communality both in grief and sense, confining the subject to a sterile rationalization of death, in which the cause of death can only be accounted for and pinpointed within the physical body of the victim. This language is the mad voice of reason, a saturation of a technocapitalist logic that reduces the individual bodies to an economy of sameness and repetition, avoiding to

account for any kind of subjective experience.¹⁵³ This is the language of force that brings us back to the linguistic realm of state computation, reinforcing a given *partition of the sensible*, as Jacques Rancière would put it, proper to the symbolic order of domination that structures the social realm.¹⁵⁴

Sol Peláez suggests in her article *Counting Violence: Roberto Bolaño and 2666*, that the novel examines in fact: “the enjoyment and indifference involved in writing and reading about violence. For Peláez the text explores “how the enjoyment of language and the reification that language entails pervade the telling and reading of violence, questioning the position of morally alert criticism” (30). Therefore, she claims “2666 locates language at the intersection of responsibility and complicity, leaving no possible external position for language and violence” (30).

I would like to focus on a particular scene of *La parte de los crímenes* that puts at center stage the relation between the production of discourse and violence, and the dissociative experience articulated at the level of language itself that Levinson perceives. The section devotes several pages to an encounter of police officers who, meeting at the end of their shifts to have breakfast, spend their time telling and retelling, in turns, degrading jokes that condone violence

¹⁵³ The work of Gareth Williams, Patrick Dove, Brett Levinson and Sergio Villalobos around the novel touches on this question of the mad voice of reason.

¹⁵⁴ In the glossary that accompanies the English translation of *Le Partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique, The Politics of Aesthetics: the Distribution of the Sensible*, the partition of the sensible is defined as: “the implicit law governing the sensible order that parcels out places and forms of participation in a common world by first establishing the modes of perception within which these are inscribed.” It “produces a system of self-evident facts of perception based on the set horizons and modalities of what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made or done.” Thus, it refers “both to forms of inclusion and to forms of exclusion. The ‘sensible’, of course, does not refer to what shows good sense or judgement but to what is *aisthēton* or capable of being apprehended by the senses” (85).

against women. Lalo Cura overhears “what is the definition of a woman? (...) *pues* a vagina surrounded by a more or less organized bunch of cells” (552); “how many parts is a woman’s brain divided into? *Pues* that depends on (...) how hard you hit her” (552); or, in the same line, “how long does it take a woman to die who’s been shot in the head? *Pues* seven or eight hours, depending on how long it takes the bullet to find the brain” (552). The jokes, the object of which a woman is, and any woman will do, are shaped as questions whose answers, preceded by a recurrent and totally meaningless “*pues*”.

Above all, the reiterative structure of the jokes bears witness to the moment of production of an empty language, articulated through what Irigaray would understand as a “sexuated reason;” sexuated not directly because of the content of the jokes themselves, but instead because of how it perpetuates the production of a phallogentric and pre-established economy of sameness and substitution. It is the reiteration of an empty language that obliterates difference and slowly normalizes violence, that articulates our discursive reality and naturalizing an order of domination. It is this language thus that organizes the community of meaning, creating a rationalizing suture between the social and the subjective experience that is able to distort the word that describes the violent event in order to integrate the horror of the everyday experience.¹⁵⁵ The formulaic repetition of language produces a “sexuated” *munus* that organizes

¹⁵⁵ A perfect example appears in *La parte de Archimboldi* when Bolaño presents a SS officer discussing the nature of the word *murder*. He describes it as “an ambiguous, confusing, imprecise, vague, ill-defined word easily misused.” (681) General Von Berenberg responds by saying “that he would rather leave the laws to the judges and criminal courts and if a judge said a certain act was murder, then it was murder, and if the judge and the court ruled it wasn’t, then it wasn’t, and that was the end of the matter” (681). As Hannah Arednt suggested in her work *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, published in the year 1963, what characterizes the reality of modern abstract capitalism is precisely the presence of this kind of radical gap between objective social process and subjective experience. The emergence of this gap is in fact mediated by language, by the production and assimilation of language itself. If, following the thought of Jacques Lacan, we understand language as the constituent place of

the community, and with it, its discourse. Language is used to reiterate once and again the subjection of women; community formed then through an act of verbal exclusion. There is no speech act to be identified anywhere, no sense of agency or decision in relation to language; just the repetition of a prefabricated discourse that orders the whole, distributing in this way social roles. The construction of a universe of repetition and equivalence built on women's bodies. This is, in a sense, the experience of language to which Bolaño exposes his readers in *La parte de los crímenes*.

In the scene of the jokes, after scratching his crotch, the inspector drops his two pound gun on the plastic tabletop, in a sort of performative repetition of the “pues”, “attracting the attention of the five or six nearest cops, who were listening, no, who *glimpsed* his words, the words the inspector meant to utter, as if they were wetbacks lost in the desert and they had *glimpsed* an oasis or a town or a pack of wild horses” (553).¹⁵⁶ The scene is focused in the contiguity between phallus (crotch/gun), image (glimpse), and evisceration of women in the jokes, identifying a certain relation to the reception of language as an articulation of community. No real act of reception is needed; no listening required. Words are glimpsed, and that is enough to fulfill their task. This speaks to the nature of the encounter with the jokes themselves and the general discourse around the jokes that the inspector deploys. The oasis represents an entrance in the same violent discourse, a joining in. Laughter, as affect, is aimed to be pre-produced in response to a certain structuring of language that demands a pre-stated rejoinder from the

subjectivity, this is then the impasse in which the agency of the individual is lost, and where the emancipatory potential of language also vanishes.

¹⁵⁶ “[The inspector] scratched his crotch and dropped his Smith & Welson Model 686, which weighed almost two pounds, on the plastic tabletop” (553).

listener: to belong to the community, the listener must laugh no matter what, remaining at the same time dissociated.¹⁵⁷

Rather than providing a point of contact with the reality of these deaths, offering a possibility of de-automatizing our perception, to put it in Macaya's terms, language becomes a logic that, by exposing, hides instead the violence, successfully dissociating the subject from the reality of the inert and broken bodies of women. This phenomenon does not only refer to the inevitable failure of language to account for the moment of death, to what we can understand as an experience of ineffability around the moment of death, but instead to a deliberate use of language itself to suture the possible disruptive effects related to the bare exposition to the corpses. It is the extreme legibility provided by the use of language that veils and reifies the experience of violence. As Albert Kessler, the specialist who arrives in Santa Teresa from the United States to investigate the murders, suggests in his long digression at the Mexico-US border, society uses the "filter of words" to contain the effects of death. "Everything was passed through the filter of words, everything trimmed to *fit our fear*" (266 *emphasis mine*). Hence, the experience of contact with the bodies remains foreclosed through the use of a logic of a prearranged and prefabricated discourse created in the name of calculation, that veils the reality of violence. This act of "trimming" is therefore to be understood as a strategy of containment. At best, therefore, language can succeed in providing an order full of oblivion detached from affect. If for Kessler it is the "filter of words" (226) that functions as a mechanism of contention

¹⁵⁷ Exhausted after a night's work, wonders to himself how much of God's truth lays hidden in these ordinary jokes: "Who the fuck comes up with jokes? (...) And sayings? Where the fuck do they come from? Who's the first to *think them up*? Who's the first to *tell them*? (553 *emphasis in the original*). While the use of the verbs *tell* and *think*, does suggest (human) agency, the logic behind the jokes seem to be conceal almost an indisputable divine truth, origins are therefore impossible to retrace, but that is gathered and protected both around his overstated masculine performance and the threat of use of force that accompanies it.

of violence in society, *2666* would somehow perform a different and even opposite gesture; through its fragmentation, the novel, as a whole, would attempt to engage instead in a strategy of absolute decontainment but point directly to this sense of splitting of dissociation from the reality of violence: the inert and broken bodies of women.¹⁵⁸

In *La parte de los crímenes*, the experience of Juan de Dios Martínez, one of the local police officers assigned to investigate the crimes of Santa Teresa addresses this moment of splitting, and performs? a momentary contact with the limit. Bolaño describes how Juan de Dios “turned on the TV and watched late-night shows broadcast across the desert from the four cardinal points, at that late hour he could get Mexican channels and American channels, channels with crippled madmen who galloped under the stars and” “se saludaban con palabras ininteligibles” (668), “in Spanish or in English or Spanglish, but every last fucking word was unintelligible. Then, Juan de Dios Martínez sets his coffee cup on the table and covered his face with his hands and a faint and precise sob escaped his lips, as if he were weeping or trying to weep, but when finally he removed his hands, all that appeared, lit by the TV screen, was his old face, his old skin, stripped and dry, and not the slightest trace of a tear” (534).¹⁵⁹ A multitude of choices coming from all possible directions; a multitude of languages to choose from. Still, “every last fucking word” (534) remains unintelligible in the middle of that wide openness. This impasse between openness, simultaneity, and unintelligibility is key here, as a moment of contact

¹⁵⁸ For more on this idea of “decontainment” see the work of Gareth Williams “Decontainment: The Collapse of the Katechon and the End of Hegemony” in *The anomie of the earth: philosophy, politics, and autonomy in Europe and the Americas*.

¹⁵⁹ I have decided again to keep the original, “se saludaban con palabras ininteligibles” (668) of the Spanish version, instead of Wimmer’s translation, “[they] uttered unintelligible greetings” (534)

with the unlimited. Even if provided access to all possible words or because of it, Juan de Dios Martínez remains trapped, unable to express his pain. Bathed in the titling light of the television, his body radiated by this *technological logic*, Juan de Dios Martínez cannot express his anguish.¹⁶⁰

This scene, the dry face of Juan de Dios incapable of producing tears, brings to mind a frequently quoted passage from *Amuleto* in which Auxilio Lacouture follows Arturo Belano and Ernesto San Epifanio through the windy and dormant night of Mexico City, crossing Paseo de la Reforma, and going down Avenida Guerrero. Among the disjointed temporality that characterizes Auxilio's discourse, we see an apocalyptic scene emerge. “[L]a Guerrero a esa hora” says Auxilio, waking behind the *realvisceralistas*, “se parece sobre todas las cosas a un cementerio, pero no a un cementerio de 1974, ni a un cementerio de 1968, ni a un cementerio de 1975, sino a un cementerio del año 2666, un cementerio olvidado debajo de un párpado muerto o nonato, las acuosidades desapasionadas de un ojo que por querer olvidar algo ha terminado por olvidarlo todo” (77). The richness of this image can be seen as condensing Bolaño's literary project constantly pointing towards the ceaseless rumblings beneath the surface of language; to a current of affect, which despite all efforts, seems unable to find avenues to materialize itself, to be named. The “cementerio olvidado debajo de un párpado muerto o nonato” points both to the conditions of memorialization and oblivion in death, and to the presence of a dead or unborn eye witness, perhaps like the character of “El Ojo Silva”, alienated in a regime of oblivion “un ojo que por querer olvidar algo ha terminado por olvidarlo todo” (77). The scene shows then the impasse between language that repeats violence and the affective pressure that palpitates behind,

¹⁶⁰ This inability to cry of Juan de Dios Martínez appears as well in another scene later on: “Juan de Dios apoyó la cabeza contra el volante y trató de llorar pero no pudo” (749)

embodied in the tears or in the inability to produce them. In this junction between 2666 and *Amuleto* we encounter a key question around politics of representation.

Keeping in mind this tension in relation to the production of language, this second part of the chapter will now turn towards the question of inheritance, of thinking alternative relationships to the production of language in Bolaño's work.

Inheritance and the Production of Language

In his quest for a new language, Bolaño repeatedly examines the tensions between the debt towards past generations, and the relation of the poet, and, with him, language itself, to the specters of the past. Throughout his whole literary corpus, but especially with the tales of the *realvisceralistas* in *Los detectives salvajes*, he explores the complexity and inevitability of processes of inheritance, often aiming to undermine genealogies, while simultaneously creating new ones.

In this novel, the character of Manuel Maples Arce (a major figure of the Mexican avant-garde) states that “[a]ll poets, even the most avant-garde ones need a father”; but, the *realvisceralistas* “meant to be orphans” (SD 161), “huérfanos de vocación” (*Detectives* 177). Orphanhood operates here as a locus that allows to consider both the break and destitution from a preexisting symbolic origin and its inheritance, that is a possible rethinking of filiative bonds in relation to the production of language.¹⁶¹ In 2666 the experience of fragmentation and of

¹⁶¹ This rupturist tendency in relation to genealogy, which linked to the quest for a new language, can be put in terms of an avant-garde quest, structures also, as we saw, the realm of the political for Bolaño. The fleeing of the dichotomous grid of hostility, a certain political orphanage appears as a necessary precondition to establish a political position as well.

exhaustion of the symbolic system that had articulated the experience of modernity, is in fact framed in terms of orphanage: “toda la orfandad del mundo, fragmentos, fragmentos” (265).

The longing for orphanhood, to be born an orphan, “huérfano nato,” has been associated with a desire of self-generation, of fathering oneself; a fantasy, “I want to be my own ancestor,” Sigmund Freud would say, that certainly entails a yearning to break with the inheritance of a given symbolic order.¹⁶² While bringing to light a disposition to abandon what Derrida calls “reassuring stories of filiation” (*Derrida and Joyce* 89), the dream of self-generation is also an eminently patriarchal; a dream that moreover attempts to do away with sexual difference. In the short story compilation *Putas asesinas*, Bolaño reinforces this aspiration in relation to the production of language, giving it this time parricidal shades: “hay que matar a los padres, el poeta es el huérfano nato” (210). At the heart of the pierced community of the *realvisceralistas* we seem to find a clear impulse to break with filiative forces, but this drive seems to be especially related to the linking effects of a masculine lineage. During one of the meetings of the *realvisceralistas*, we learn that among them “ocurría algo raro, faltaba algo, la simpatía, la viril comunión en unos ideales” (*Detectives* 151).¹⁶³ While these lines emphasize the general lack of cohesion within the group, this phenomenon seems to have a direct relation to a lack of virility, to the rejection of a certain kind of communal masculinism.¹⁶⁴ It is here that the emergence of sexual difference in relation to the production of language seems to gain importance indicating a

¹⁶² Quoted in “The Night Watch” in *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts* (93).

¹⁶³ The English translation by Natasha Wimmer reads “something was off here, something was missing: the camaraderie, the strong sense of shared ideals” (*Savage* 136). In the English version this direct reference to virility is lost.

¹⁶⁴ As in other of Bolaño’s works the notion of sexual difference is closely related to the formation of community. See for example “El Ojo Silva” in *Putas asesina*, where where the exilic experience and the presence of sexual difference marks the character of Mauricio Silva.

sort of vital hinge in Bolaño's work. His literary corpus is haunted by a ghostly presence through which he explores the possibility of new genealogies: the maternal. I refer here among others to characters such as Cesárea Tinajero, "la madre de los realvisceralistas" (*Detectives* 461), the hidden precursor of their "vanguardia inexistente," or Auxilio Lacouture, "la madre de la poesía mexicana." This is however not a matter of substituting a male origin for a female one, but of a different relation to the origin, of a different mode of filiation.

In Bolaño's universe, while the father seems to presuppose a certain relation to the origin and the production of logos, the maternal allows for a different production of language that articulates a possible opening towards the future. The maternal opens for Bolaño a filiative link characters always in motion, and without property. These characters represent in Bolaño's work a horizon of possibility for the production of a language *other*, materialized in figures of transcendental homelessness in close relation to the corporeal. These genealogies, which attempt to escape the filiative effects of the paternal domain are articulated through the presence of sexual difference as origin, that is of the maternal, opening up the possibility for the creation of alternative genealogies and modes of inheritance in relation to the production of language.¹⁶⁵ They suggest feminine genealogies that might refer to the birthing of an "other language" belonging to the domain of *la sinrazón*, as a position that challenges the regimes of reason and truth.¹⁶⁶ They gesture toward a production of language closely connected both to madness and to

¹⁶⁵ Regarding the realvisceralista's relationship to time and History: "los realvisceralistas caminaban hacia atrás" "De espaldas mirando un punto pero alejándose de él en línea recta hacia lo desconocido" (DS17). This entails a sense of a relationship to finitude, not a constructivist use of history.

¹⁶⁶ In Bolaño's corpus, maternal genealogies and madness seem to develop often an intimate relationship. One example of it appears in *2666* with the character of Oligario Cura, *Lalo Cura*, the only male descendant of a long genealogy of Marías Espósito. Interestingly, the last name Espósito was a last name traditionally given in Italy to children abandoned or given for adoption.

an insistence on the corporeal, on the visceral, that is present in the story of the *realvisceralistas* themselves.

As Jacques Derrida warns in *The Night Watch*, we should proceed with caution given that the maternal domain can generate the same speculative, calculative, and phallogocentric logic that is normally attributed to the paternal. In other words, the maternal can work as a specular double of the paternal. Like the father, says Derrida “the mother can also be a speculative object and even a legal fiction” (*Derrida and Joyce* 100). Following his reading of Jacques Thrilling, Derrida identifies the existence of two logics, “two competing but also strangely allied logics, almost indistinguishable in their dynamic rhythm. One of term is classic, or most precisely “Freudian” or “Joycean.” Then Lacanian. (...) While paternity would always be a problematic attribution, a conclusion reached through inference and reasoning, a “legal fiction” (...) and thus a sort of speculative object susceptible to substitution, the maternity of the mother is unique, irreplaceable and object of perception, like the “womb” we so often speak of as the place of conception and birth” (*Derrida and Joyce* 99). “The other logic would subject the mother to the same regime as the father: possible substitution, rational interference, phantasmatic or symbolic construction, speculation, and so on” (*Derrida and Joyce* 99). Then the mother can also become, a speculative element and even a “legal fiction”. Derrida insists on the need to clearly distinguish between the figure of the mother and the figure of maternity (*Derrida and Joyce* 88). While the mother can speak the same language as the father, this distinction between the figure of the mother and the notion of maternity opens up the possibility of being born and giving birth to a different language; that is, the possibility of a po(i)etic act in relation to language, of generating a

A different iteration of Oligario Cura appears as well in *Putas asesinas* with the short story “Pefiguración de Lalo Cura.”

language heterogeneous to the traditional symbolic order understood as a purely regulatory field. The feminine genealogies that Bolaño establishes with characters like Cesarea Tinajero or Auxilio Lacouture, two maternal figures as alternative origin, might refer to the birthing of an “*other* language” that would belong to the domain to a position that challenges the coordinates of regimes of reason and truth of phallogentric logic

Cesárea Tinajero is among the characters in Bolaño’s narrative that, through the notion of maternity, articulates this possibility of being born, and giving birth, to a different relationship to language. In *Los detectives salvajes*, perhaps Bolaño’s most filial and fraternal novel, the rejection of a paternal inheritance, and the fantasy of self-generation appears in close tension with the realvisceralista search for Cesárea. Cesárea, “la poeta perdida” (349), and “madre de los real visceralistas” (461) becomes the horizon that compels the young group to move along the Sonoran desert. They relentless search for this horizon in the feminine, presented as a precursor in her relationship to the production of language. In her wandering condition in the desert, Cesárea performs, like Auxilio Lacouture, an exilic journey marked by the forgetting both of its origin and destiny to the point of becoming a non-foundational character. This is a characteristic that we often find in Bolaño’s narrative,¹⁶⁷ that takes place under that specter of the maternal.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the entrance into the order of language, that is, the order of the Symbolic, should be conceptualized in direct relation to an interplay between the

¹⁶⁷This relates to how Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* distinguishes between genesis and beginning (*Entstehung*). The term origin (*Ursprung*) “is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis” (45). Kate Jenckes points here that the origin is not something that comes from a stable place, a beginning as such (the root in *Entstehung* meaning standing, to stand). See *Reading Borges After Benjamin: Allegory, Afterlife, and the Writing of History*.

maternal and the paternal domains.¹⁶⁸ The entrance in the symbolic order appears as the result of the internalization of the paternal law, the *No/Name of the Father*, and the displacement of the primary identification with the mother, as an undifferentiated space between body and language. In this sense, language, and especially the written word, would be but the materialization of the internalization of the subject of the law --*the name of the father*-- that turns the preverbal universe of the child into a mere spectral past.¹⁶⁹ Through language, the mother, as origin, appears symbolized. Through this symbolization we witness also a process of spectralization of the prelinguistic universe associated with the maternal figure as Kristeva explains, which brings with it in a sense the spectralization of the body itself. I suggest that the treatment of Cesárea Tinajero, as Auxilio Lacouture, resists in a sense this process and its relation between body and language.

The story of Cesárea, as the one of Auxilio, is marked by an insistence on her corporeality, both as a dead body, the body that Garcia Madero struggles to move off from his friend Arturo Belano, and before as alive body characterized by excess. Cesarea was “gorda, desmesuradamente gorda, (...) tenía arrugas y ojeras profundísimas (...). Debía de pesar más de ciento cincuenta kilos y llevaba una falda gris hasta los tobillos que acentuaba su gordura. Los

¹⁶⁸ As American scholar Kelly Oliver points out, “in traditional Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis it is the paternal function that initiates the negation and identification that finally propels the infant into both language and subjectivity” (3). “It is in the *name of the father*,” says Lacan, “that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified this person with the figure of the law” (*Écrits* 67). Lacan and other Lacanian theorists acknowledge that the paternal function does not necessarily belong to the domain of males, in the same way as the maternal should not immediately be associated with the female domain. The paternal function, as the maternal one, can therefore be fulfilled by both men and women (7).

¹⁶⁹ This is what Derrida would call the matricidal essence of writing, to “the inevitability or fatality for the one who writes... of a certain matricide” (*Derrida and Joyce* 88).

brazos, desnudos, eran como troncos. El cuello había desaparecido tras una papada de gigante (...) (598). The “inmensa humanidad” (602) of Cesárea Tinajero, seems more related to her corporeality, with an emphasis on the excess of her body, than with any possible humanistic philosophical horizon as such.¹⁷⁰ Cesarea is one of the feminine figures in Bolaño’s narrative that puts us in touch with the materiality of the body, pointing towards a horizon of production of language that recovers the corporeal; a corporality that distances itself from a romantic association with the body as a realm of transcendence, and is linked to a sense of the degradation and finitude of the body.¹⁷¹ These elements seem closely connected with the non-linguistic character of her poetic production which takes place beyond the written and spoken word. The enigmatic drawings that for the *realvisceralistas* constitute Cesarea Tinajero’s first work represent an example of this practice.¹⁷²

The relation between the maternal domain, language, and the question of inheritance appears intertwined in the work of Bolaño can be found embodied in the character of Auxilio

¹⁷⁰ In “Rebeldes con causa. Los poetas del Movimiento Infrarealista”, a text by published in *Nada utópico nos es ajeno [Manifiestos Infrarealistas]*, Ramón Méndez Estrada refers to the character of Cesárea Tinajero as: “Cesárea Tinajero, generosa siempre, el ánfora que abrimos para que se alimenten los seres humanos, y despierten” (33). This nurturing quality of the character resonates here as well.

¹⁷¹ It is here where the *realvisceralistas*, the whole community of *letraheridos* wounded by the letter, by the sign, wandering Bolaño’s texts, operate. The term “letraherido” appears first in the short story “Una aventura literaria” included in the compilation *Llamadas telefónicas*. The term seems to have been introduced to Spanish from the French *via* Catalan, “lettreferit”. Chiara Bolognese has published an article with the title “Viaje por el mundo de los letraheridos. Roberto Bolaño y la salvación por la escritura.”

¹⁷² In the final pages of the novel the *realvisceralistas* reproduced similar drawings, opening the question about the inheritance of *la madre de los realvisceralistas*. Cesarea by staying outside the archive complicates the coordinates of any possible inheritance.

Lacouture, protagonist of his 1998 novel *Amuleto*.¹⁷³ Like Bolaño's work as a whole, *Amuleto* explores closely the tension between action and responsibility in relation to the representation of horror, and it does so by playing close attention to the intergenerational transmission of language. The novel, in which almost invoking an *antigonic* specter Bolaño claimed to offer us "la voz arrebatada de una uruguaya con vocación de griega," (*Entre paréntesis* 13), is presented as a farewell letter to his generation: "la carta de amor o despedida a [su] generación" (*Entre paréntesis* 37). In its farewell gesture *Amuleto* points to a problematization of the notion of inheritance of language. In this sense, the novel presents itself both as a farewell and a will, and signals toward the production of language to account for the event, that cannot be simply received and reproduced, following more traditional conceptions of inheritance.

Sheltered in the women's bathroom of the Philosophy and Letters department of the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM), Auxilio, "la madre de la poesía mexicana", endures the military occupation of the University in 1968.¹⁷⁴ Auxilio is "incapaz de formular un relato coherente de [su] historia" (147). "Tenía", she says "la mente al revés. La travesía (...) me había convertido en piel." (152) This somatic condition marks her discourse. As in the case of Cesárea, the insistence on Auxilio's body, and especially in its decay, her wrinkles, her emaciated body, pervades the totality of the novel. While this focus on the decline of the body, and its decline,

¹⁷³ The character of Auxilio Lacouture appears as well in *Los detectives salvajes*.

¹⁷⁴ We could say that, given the historical coordinates of the novel, the 1968 student movement, the narrative is profoundly marked from the beginning by that *vocational orphanhood*, by an aim to abandon the secure coordinates of the paternal.

could be read in relation to Cesárea, in the case of Auxilio the text seems to particularly focus on her toothless mouth and its relationship to finitude.¹⁷⁵

After taking the decision to endure the military occupation inside the bathroom, Auxilio begins to think about her past: “me puse a pensar en mi pasado como si pensara en mi presente y en mi futuro y en mi pasado, todo revuelto y adormilado en un solo huevo tibio, un enorme huevo tibio de no sé qué pájaro interior (¿un arqueopterix?) cobijado en un nido de escombros humeantes” (35).¹⁷⁶ From that “huevo tibio”, and egg of an extinct genus, that shelters a disjointed temporality that promises life, Auxilio starts to recall the origins of her toothless mouth. “Me puse a pensar (...) en los dientes que perdí, aunque en ese momento, en septiembre de 1968, yo aún tenía todos mis dientes” (36).¹⁷⁷ This allusion to the loss of her teeth repeats itself throughout the novel. Her mouth becomes a wound, “herida que ardía”, that Auxilio exposes to others, just covering it “coquetamente” in her exchanges so that no one could say “yo he visto la boca herida de la uruguaya, yo he visto las encías peladas de la única persona que se quedó en la Universidad cuando entraron los granaderos, en septiembre de 1968” (37). The

¹⁷⁵ I am working here in closed lines with the work of Kate Jenckes who has explored the notion of bucality in the work of Roberto Bolaño. See *Witnessing Beyond the Human: Addressing the Alterity of the Other in Post-coup Chile and Argentina* (SUNY Press, 2017).

¹⁷⁶ There is in these lines an interesting allusion to an alternative genealogy, one that dislodges the order of time and engages with a prehistoric understanding of time, a pure time, as the possibility of a *new genius*.

¹⁷⁷ In her article “Fragmentos del futuro en los abismos del pasado: *Amuleto*, 1968-1998” published in *Fuera de quicio: sobre Roberto Bolaño en el tiempo de sus espectros*, Susana Draper explores this tendency to “imaginar “encuentros que nunca sucedieron” (*Amuleto* 58)” as alternative genealogies that never had the opportunity to materialize themselves. Hence, for Draper, in *Amuleto*, Bolaño seeks to “imaginar el recuerdo de *lo no sido*, su promesa incumplida, y por tanto, su potencialidad” (56). Thus, for Draper *Amuleto* would be “abriendo la insistencia en una genealogía también imposible, que en el texto viene cargada de voces acalladas en la historia” (65).

mouth of Auxilio, the exposure of her vulnerability, only slightly covered in front of others, seems to be at the core of Auxilio's discourse. Auxilio knew, for a fact, that "ese hueco iba a permanecer hasta el final en carne viva" until the end (37).¹⁷⁸ Yet, Auxilio is able to laugh with others protected by her hand. That gap, "hueco," which cannot heal and is doomed to remain tender and open, epitomizes in a way the birth of a different discourse, as establishing a different relation both to the void and the presence of the other: one marked by finitude.

In the opening pages of *Amuleto*, Auxilio Lacouture, "la mujer invisible" (14), devotes herself to the care of two old Spanish poets who in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War went into exile to Mexico City: León Felipe and Pedro Garfías. She lives "[a]l calor de esos prohombres de las letras castellanas" (22), taking care of the domestic chores, cleaning the dust of their old books, "ocupándo[s]e de la intendencia" (19). Auxilio retells here several moments of encounter with the *florero*, the flower vase of Pedro Garfías, an object that intrigues her precisely for the poet's fascination for it. The "prohombre(s) de las letras castellanas" a man that "perdía la mirada en determinados objetos al azar", "miraba el florero con una tristeza que parecía abarcarlo todo" (18), withdrawn in some sort of melancholic paralysis.¹⁷⁹ In Auxilio's

¹⁷⁸ "[A] mí me traía sin cuidado" she claims "carecer de los cuatro dientes más importantes de la dentadura de una mujer, y por otra parte el perderlos me hirió en lo más profundo de mi ser y esa herida ardía y era necesaria e innecesaria" (36).

¹⁷⁹ Gareth Williams has explored this question of melancholic paralysis in the work of Bolaño. Williams finds in novels like *La literatura nazi en América Latina* (1996), and *Estrella distante* (1996) a strategy of 'enemy recognition' tending to "remain politically entrenched in the Schmittian sovereign geometry of hostility" (138). He suggests that both texts developed a representation of the friend as "just the parallel reflection, mirror image, or 'Siamese twin' of the trenches and fortifications occupied by the enemy" (138). This is a space of melancholia. William suggests that this gesture allows to glimpse the "political affect and solidarity" of Bolaño's work, and outline what he identifies as Bolaño's melancholic paralysis, an "inability to contemplate the political from a place other than the friend/enemy divide" (129) See "Sovereignty and melancholic paralysis in Roberto Bolaño" and "Sovereignty and Melancholic

eyes the object causes a blinding and hollow fascination in the exiled Spanish poet that she attempts to understand prompting her to study those “objetos aparentemente tan inofensivos” (15). Given the poet’s withdrawal upon exposure to them, Auxilio concludes that in them “se ocultaba el infierno o una de sus puertas secretas” (15). This link between melancholic paralysis, evil and the aesthetic object seems important here; a relationship that is moreover tinged with the characterization of the poets as the “prohombres de las letras castellanas,” that is, by a centralized, “castellana”, and hypermasculinized, “prohombres”, articulation in relation to the production of language.¹⁸⁰

The relation that Auxilio establishes with the *florero* of the exile Spanish writer condenses in a way a relation with the aesthetic object itself, one impregnated by a sort of paralysis that threatens her as well. Auxilio’s study of the vase, is one more of the splitting episodes that Bolaño presents in his narrative, another instance of rupture in experience that takes place this time, perhaps in an allusion to Cesarea Tinajero, *la hacedora de tinajas*, around the figure of a vase. I would like to quote here at length from the novel:

“[U]na vez, esto lo recuerdo y me da risa, en que estaba sola en el estudio de Pedrito Garfias, me puse a mirar el florero que él miraba con tanta tristeza, y pensé: tal vez lo mira así porque no tiene flores, casi nunca tiene flores, y me acerqué al florero y lo observé desde distintos ángulos, y entonces (estaba cada

Paralysis in Roberto Bolaño.”

¹⁸⁰ This reference to a surplus of masculinity glides over the whole novel. In different moments Auxilio refers to the poets that surround her as “machitos latinoamericanos.” The English translation by Chris Andrews reads here “basking in the globe of those luminaries of Hispanic letters” (*Amulet* 15). In my view the translation diverts too much from the original and introduces different nuances not present in the original.

vez más cerca, aunque mi forma de aproximarme, mi forma de desplazarme hacia el objeto observado era como si trazara una espiral) pensé: voy a meter la mano en la boca negra del florero. Eso pensé. Y vi cómo mi mano se despegaba de mi cuerpo, se alzaba, planeaba sobre la boca negra del florero, se aproximaba a los bordes esmaltados, y justo entonces una vocecita en mi interior me dijo: che, Auxilio, qué haces, loca, y eso fue lo que me salvó, creo, porque en el acto mi brazo se detuvo y mi mano quedó colgando, en una posición de bailarina muerta, a pocos centímetros de esa boca del infierno” (16).

El florero, in which the old Spanish poet rests his gaze, is portrayed here as a limit, as an enclosure of the void, a space that offers an overpowering magnetism, but one that Auxilio success in escaping. Undergoing some kind of hypnotic trance, she approaches the vase through an indirect, spiral trajectory that brings her closer and closer to its center. This moment of contact with the vase is characterized by a strong division, a splitting, between voice and body. She observes her hand dangerously approaching the black mouth of the vase. It is then that a voice, “una vocecita,” which despite the indefinite article “una” is her own voice, prevents Auxilio from introducing her hand in “la boca del infierno” (16).

The dissociation that Auxilio experiences in front of the vase, understood as an aesthetic object, manifests itself hand in hand with that sense of splitting between body and mind, form and content. The contact with the *florero* becomes a moment of dissociation—the withdrawal of the poet could be understood this way—but this is a dissociation whose effects are very different in nature to the kind we encounter in the pages of *2666*. The emptiness of the vase, the void that it encloses, seems here key. Contrary to the cases of Liz Norton or Laura Esquivel, this moment

of dissociation, of splitting, prompts in Auxilio a moment of creation of agency and not of dissolution like we see in the cases of the *Hotel México*. If the encounter with the mirror of both Norton and Esquivel symptomatizes Levinson's dissociation, as a crisis of agency, this rupture appears to generate the opposite effect, a possibility of agency, a moment of reintegration in the imaginary, to put in in relation to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, that allows Auxilio to escape the spell of the vase.

In his seminar XXIII, *The Symptom*, Jacques Lacan understands the aesthetic object as a product that surrounds "el vacío de goce" enclosing it. The aesthetic object could therefore be thought for Lacan as the materialization of a symptom, and the relationship with it. For Auxilio, the relationship with the *florero*, this contact with "la boca del infierno" becomes before all a matter of responsibility. First, she wonders about the complicity of the poets regarding the vase: "¿Pedrito Garfías sabe lo que se esconde en el interior de su florero? ¿Saben los poetas lo que se agazapa en la boca sin fondo de sus floreros?" (17). After wondering about the poets' cognisance, she asks: "¿Y si lo saben por qué no los destrozan, por qué no asumen ellos mismos esa responsabilidad?" (17). "Me preguntaba a mí misma" she says "por qué razón él no hacía nada al respecto. Por qué el poeta se quedaba mirando el florero en vez de dar dos pasos (dos o tres pasos que resultarían tan elegantes con sus pantalones de lino crudo) y agarrar el florero con ambas manos y estrellarlo contra el suelo" (18). I suggest here that the relation with the vase in the scene could be understood beyond the specificity of the effect of the object as such, and might refer us as well to the conception of the poetic praxis itself. Not assuming the responsibility of shattering their *floreros* against the floor, that is the reproach that Auxilio makes to the poets. The production of language, and the exposure to it, can engender, as we saw in relation to *La parte de los crímenes* in 2666, a similar allure and dissociation to the one created

by the vase. The shattering of the vase that Auxilio demands could then be thought in relation to the production of language, and hence to the articulation of Auxilio's discourse itself, as a responsible taking action beyond the symptom: as a splitting from the symptom itself. This act of responsibility would be related to a *shattering* of that principle of *general equivalence*, as a modality of relation to the void that, as we saw also in the case of Juan de Dios in 2666, generates a paralysis, melancholic in nature, the very same one that Pedro Garfias suffers and which threatens Auxilio as well.

Among the characters that inhabit Bolaño's textual geography, Auxilio Lacouture is perhaps the one who develops a more intimate relation with Bolaño's open void, with a threatening abyss. The closing pages of the novel in which we see a group of young people "caminar inexorablemente hacia el abismo" are testimony to it. Hidden in the bathroom of the UNAM, Auxilio, "la buscadora de matices" (13), delivers what some have understood as a pure psychotic discourse; one produced by a seemingly decentered subject, engaged in ceaseless self-contradiction and apparent non-sense. Auxilio is unable both to account and give an account of the event Auxilio is a figure situated outside of the account of history, By centering the memory of the event in the toothless mouth of Auxilio, Bolaño presents the dislocation of a whole symbolic order and of the coordinates of representation associated with it, but this is far from being a mad discourse.¹⁸¹ In his seminar *The Psychoses*, Lacan states that there is poetry

¹⁸¹ Within Lacanian psychoanalysis, the production of what would be called a psychotic language is considered, a priori, or simply external, to the entrance in the paternal universe of the law. From this perspective, the production of psychotic language remains somehow always entrapped within the limits of the maternal domain, a language outside the regulatory realm of the law of the father. Language, made law, allows the enactment of a social order, of a social reason that generates order, and beyond which, law itself, the paternal reason, proclaims the existence of a universe without meaning, of a universe of pure madness.

whenever writing introduces us to a world other than our own and also “makes it become our own, making present a being, a certain fundamental relationship” (78). Thus, poetry would entail the creation of a subject who not only has successfully adopted a new order of symbolic relations to the world but who does so by making the other participate of it. And this is the dimension that Auxilio Lacouture opens for the reader.

The moment in which Auxilio herself claims to take the responsibility to defend “moral y físicamente, (...) el último reducto de autonomía de la UNAM” (33), appears closely related in the novel to the work of the Spanish avant-garde leftist poet, Pedro Garfías.¹⁸² With her skirt hitched up and her underpants down, Auxilio reads his poems in the bathroom of the UNAM, oblivious to the fact that the university has been taken by the *granaderos*. Sitting in one of the stalls of the bathroom her “pupilas recorrían los versos de aquel español muerto en el exilio” (28) while “the soldiers and riot police were arresting and beating up whoever they could lay their hands on” (23). It is here, when “la burbuja de la poesía de Pedro Garfías hizo blip” (29), when its spell breaks, that Auxilio realizes that they have taken the university. She attempts then to continue her reading: “me puse a leer, lentamente al principio, palabra por palabra y verso por verso, aunque poco después la lectura fue acelerándose hasta que finalmente se hizo enloquecedora, los versos pasaban tan rápidos que apenas me era posible discernir algo de ellos, las palabras se pegaban unas con otras” (31). Auxilio engages in “una lectura en caída libre que (...) la poesía de Pedrito Garfías no podía resistir” (31). This inability of Garfías’s poems to withstand a free-fall reading, the words sticking to one another as if they had lost all their signifying weight, transmuted into an unintelligible verbal amalgam, seems to speak to the

¹⁸² The section is framed through Auxilio’s decision: “Decidí no morirme de hambre en el lavabo de mujeres. Decidí no enloquecer. Decidí no convertirme en mendiga. Decidí decir la verdad aunque me señalaran con el dedo (142).

poems' failure to connect to the specificity of the event, to the *vértigo* of the open temporality that it generates, and therefore to their failure to capture the rupture in experience that the event creates. Auxilio gives herself then to the task of writing and producing her fragmented discourse.

In a scene clearly marked by the shade of sexual difference, Auxilio hears at this point a “florear de aire y agua” (33), and lifts her legs, like a Renoir ballerina, as if she was to give birth— “alumbrar algo y ser alumbrada” (33). She perceives then “un silencio especial (...) como si el tiempo se fracturara y corriera en varias direcciones a la vez, un tiempo puro, ni verbal ni compuesto de gestos o acciones” (33). It is here that she confronts the presence of a soldier entering the women’s bathroom in which she takes shelter. Despite the tension of the moment, Auxilio feels protected by the tyrannical laws of the cosmos and knows that “el soldado se miraría arrobado en el espejo” and she would hear and imagine him “arrobada también, en la singularidad de mi water, y que ambas singularidades constituían a partir de ese segundo las dos caras de una moneda atroz como la muerte” (34). This encounter between the soldier and Auxilio, which takes place once again, like in the case of Laura Esquivel and Liz Norton around the powerful magnetic field of a mirror, might be taken as a moment of face-off of two different approaches to the production of language: the two faces of language understood as an exchanged coin. If Auxilio remains protected in the scene this is due to this full identification of the soldier enchanted before the image that the mirror reflects.

In his *Discourse de Rome*, Lacan distinguishes between two modalities of speech, two positions regarding the production of speech: empty and full speech, what he names as *parole pleine* and *parole vide*. Being fully identified with oneself, *arrobado* in the mirror as the soldier, entrapped in a narcissistic self-admiration, leads to the production of an empty speech, a *parole*

vide, a modality of speech that does not allow for any opening towards the other or towards the future.¹⁸³ In contrast, true speech, *la parole pleine*, would entail the production of a speech that allows for that opening towards the other and towards the future, and would entail a different relation to emptiness. True speech would be characterized by “a commitment with a perspective on the future, based on the past. And the core element in this commitment is desire in relation to the Other, meaning that the core of true speech might be characterized as empty” (Verhaeghe’s). It is precisely that emptiness in true speech that opens possibility for change, that *Amuleto* inhabits.

The final pages of the novel reopen once again the intimate relation between the abyss and the production of language present throughout the work, when Auxilio, in a scene that could be thought of as a direct reference to the students’ deaths in Tlatelolco, witnesses a group of young people walking towards “un abismo sin fondo” (150). “[c]omo si no fueran de carne y hueso, una generación salida directamente de la herida abierta de Tlatelolco” (69). In her account of the event, Auxilio shatters the order of language, generating an unstable iteration of the event, one characterized by a temporality out of joint, beyond, in a way, the regulative *law of the father*. In her account of the event, she produces a discourse of excess, an inapprehensible and disorganized verbiage situated in a different economy of language.¹⁸⁴ And it is through it that Auxilio exposes the reader to the birthing of an alternative symbolic order, and with it to the birthing of the possibility of a new History, to “el parto de la historia” (*Amulet* 152), the labor of

¹⁸³ The emptiness here has to do with the complete identification with a number of signifiers.

¹⁸⁴ With this reference to the economy of language I am thinking in terms close to the first chapter of this dissertation with the character of Susana San Juan.

history, which she herself witnesses in the pages of *Amuleto*.¹⁸⁵ History as a process of labor. Auxilio does not attend therefore to the end of history, to the lack of alternative as the autosacrificial motto, but to the possibility of birthing, to the labor of history and perhaps to a certain partage, a *parto*, to the exilic and orphan condition of Bolaño's texts, in which the sense of origin is always put in question. Auxilio engages therefore with the possibility of birth in relation to language.

The title of the novel, echoed again in its last sentence: "Y este canto es nuestro amuleto" (154), points towards a particular economy between desire and language that Auxilio inhabits. In the final pages of the novel Auxilio hears a group of young people approaching unstoppably the abyss, she listens to "su canto fantasma o el eco de su canto fantasma que es como decir el eco de la nada" (154). She attends to an almost imperceptible unintelligible and desirous chant, one that does not offer however protection against evil. With *Amuleto*, Bolaño sets in motion a very different relation to the production of language, a discourse that, as the gap in her mouth, is destined to remain "en carne viva" always exposed to the other, without possible closure, open to the void. In *Poetics and Politics of Witnessing* Derrida states that "all responsible witnessing engages a poetic experience of language" (*Sovereignties* 66); giving testimony of the exceptionality of an event, entails a unique experience, an open relationship with the present, within language: a poetic experience of language.¹⁸⁶ If language is used to give account of this

¹⁸⁵ In the English version Chris Andrews translates "el parto de la historia" as "the birth of history" (*Amulet* 152). I believe that this translation misses the labour component associated with the term "parto".

¹⁸⁶ Referring to a poetic experience of language, does not imply necessarily talking about poetry, but to a poetic engagement with language, to the production of a language which is, borrowing Ross Chambers term, able to escape the *spell of a genre*. Escape a genre then, as a normative use of language, to create an experience in language that breaks the continuity of language.

singularity, of the accident in time that the event constitutes, it needs to be able to perform that cut, that fissure, within discourse itself; language turned into that accident in history. In exposing the fissure, the wound in experience, created by an event in a poetic language, we are not facing an aesthetization of experience, but using a language that can give account of the accident that the event entails.¹⁸⁷ It is this accident, this gap in experience, this textual disruption, as an encounter with the limit that Bolaño narrativizes, and that implies, echoing Derrida, and act of responsibility in relation to the symbolization of trauma. With *La parte de los crímenes* in 2006, Bolaño exposes his readers to a production of language that operates in a sense under the logic of the *automaton*, to the production and reproduction of a discourse that names the event, but which does so as a mere act of foreclosure. A machinic discourse, that as Derrida puts it “is destined, (...) to reproduce impassively, imperceptibly, without organ or organicity, the received commands. In a state of anaesthesia, it would obey or command a calculable program without affect or auto-affection, like an indifferent automaton” (*Without Alibi* 73)

In her witnessing the mouth of Auxilio is the proponent of a different logic. Poetry as a sensitive relation with the limits of the symbolic. Her shattered account of the event, as the act of responsibility that she demands from the poets, a call for responsibility regarding the production of language itself.

Conclusion

¹⁸⁷ This idea of accident contrasts with the notion of perfect fluency presented by Chambers: a social ideal of perfect fluency, as a normative use of language “in which everything works smoothly” as in a “state of seduction that arises under a perfect functioning genre regime,” that is, language itself “seduced into a seamless efficiency.” An accident expressed in a poetic language as opposed to a seamless experience in non-poetic discourse. try to give account of that accident by escaping that language of the “spell under the effects which the society lives” (Chambers 108).

“a cemetery in the year 2666, a forgotten cemetery under the eyelid of a corpse or an unborn child, bathed in the dispassionate fluids of an eye that tried so hard to forget one particular thing that it ended up forgetting everything else.” (86)

Amulet. Roberto Bolaño.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to return to *2666*. *2666* is a novel that directly addresses our contemporary condition of orphanhood, an orphanhood from the symbolic systems of modernity. His work portrays these conditions, but also raises questions about how to name that experience of void. Going back to the position in relation to the limits of the symbolic that Lacan understands as sexuated, masculine and feminine logics, *2666* struggles on the border of the two. *2666* occupies that separation, that analytic breach between a masculine and a feminine logic, but avoids any disciplined opposition between the two. That is the economy of language that Bolaño puts in circulation. Bolaño confronts the reader with the dissociated madness of modern reason, with the limits of the symbolic. *2666*, however, is also a work that attempts to resignify this condition. Bolaño expels us from history, taking us to an empty signifier: a possible future.

In his preface to *Dieci Pensieri sulla politica*, Roberto Esposito rescues a key proposition of Simone Weil in which she suggests that if we were to take all the expressions of our political vocabulary and open them we would encounter only emptiness at the center.¹⁸⁸ The question of the *impolitical* lies for Esposito in the meaning that we attribute to that emptiness, to the chaotic dimension of reality.¹⁸⁹ This question of how to name that emptiness, that chaotic dimension of

¹⁸⁸ Thus, for Weil our understanding of the political is based in empty categories, empty conceptual boxes.

¹⁸⁹ See *Dieci pensieri sulla politica*.

reality is at the very center of the encounter between *2666* and *Amuleto*.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Jean Franco has claimed that “[i]n the post-political world of Bolaño’s novels, politics as such are always completely absent” (*Questions* 210). However, in keeping opening the question of how to represent horror, that is a question about politics of representation, his work addresses in fact a fundamental political question. Considering Bolaño’s work as post-political fails however to account for the exhaustion of the articulation of the political as a purely antagonistic field, and to recognize the need for a reconfiguration of political imaginaries given our present inability to generate new epistemologies.

Conclusion

The photograph of Enrique Metinides (figure 1.) which opened this dissertation marks the tension between the representation and the erasure of death. In the photograph of the woman carrying the white coffin, Metinides captures the atemporal principle of obliteration that continues to generate a massive production of death. Whether we think about the death trail left behind by the economic realities of people- and drug-smuggling imposed by the US-Mexico border, the violence of *narcotráfico*, or the different faces of gendered violence, these forms of violence are generated in the wake of the needs of capital. Metinides's image depicts this operational logic of the violence of capital, exposing in this way the dynamics of exclusion and lack of rights, burial rights in this case, central to an economic system focused on the accumulation of capital. Similar to Margolles's installations, Metinides's photograph touches on the formation of the *homo sacer*, as the subject who possesses no funeral rights, remains outside of memorialization, and can be killed without legal punishment. This is the precise logic revealed by the figure of Antigone. The pilgrimage with the remains of the 'founding fathers' in 2010, another image that opened this dissertation (figure 2.) exposes an insurmountable gap in national filiation. The celebration of 2010 aimed for the construction of a national history, a call to join

the symbolic economy of the nation in the name of progress (“la patria en construcción”). What it is at stake in the celebrations is the formation of a narrative of mourning that allows for the perpetuation of a national collectivity tied to the state: a means to repair the discourse of symbolic filiation. Rather than signifying historical unification, against the background of violence that the country was living, the performativity of the celebrations suggested a deep need to navigate a growing rupture in national filiation. One year earlier, Margolles's exhibition representing Mexico in the Biennale had already laid bare this rupture separating national narratives of filiation and the experience of violence in Mexico's social tissue. Her work disrupted national discourse around mourning, which in turn exposed a crisis of meaning in relation to the nation as a filiative category.

The all-pervading violence embodied in Margolles's work appears, both in Mexico and at a global scale, in very different manifestations; from state and parastate violence to violence against collectives, or violence related to migration. This is a violence closely related to a gap in filiation, to a crisis of state sovereignty, understood as an absence of law.¹⁹¹ This dissertation has explored cultural productions from twentieth-century Mexico that face this gap, this void, focusing on various tensions around issues of national formation and rupture. The question of the legibility of death and violence, of how to mediate in their aftermath and of how to witness their horrors, has been at the heart of this dissertation. I have focused on the theme of grievability, understood as the tension that signals which lives matter and deserve

¹⁹¹ Contemporary psychoanalysis has understood this moment as the crisis of the paternal function. After 1968, Lacan spoke of the “evaporation of the father” as a moment of disappearance of the father as the symbol of the law. The evaporation of the father, the crisis of the paternal function, brings with it as well the “evaporation” of its law. The law establishes a limit to *jouissance*. In the absence of the regulatory principle the subject enters a universe of *jouissance* without limit. This is the structure of the capitalist discourse.

memorialization and which ones do not. I have done this by exploring both logics and breaks of filiation, and the articulation of alternative filiations (especially in relation to the filiative structures of the nation-state), as forms of collectivity that transcend sacrificial logics.

These elements resonate perhaps with the character of Auxilio Lacouture who, while witnessing the self-sacrificial march of young people walking towards the abyss, observes the birth of history, “el parto de la historia.” In this scene, we can understand 'natality' as a way to rethink history. In the aftermath of the Second World War, in the face of both the slaughter of humans under the Nazi regime and the massive displacement of populations across the European continent, Hannah Arendt suggests that “[n]atality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political as distinguished from metaphysical thought” (*Human* 9). The contact with the horror of violence on which Arendt reflects helps us to unravel the knot of our contemporary experience of violence; one that, as Margolles's installations suggest, might be disembodied. As Robin May Schott points in *Birth, Death and Femininity*, unveiling our obsessive fascination with death, “[t]here is a long history of philosophers reflecting on the problem of mortality but most philosophers have ignored the problem of natality” (8). Mortality provides the “internal limits on human existence, which enables humans to exist in the dialectical relation between finitude and infinity, and between and eternity” (Schott 3). In the aim to refocus attention on birth, attempting to displace the necrophilia of western culture, Schott suggests a “natal turn,” in which “[n]atality implies the birth of an embodied individual.” She continues, noting that “an understanding of natality undermines the mind-body dualism, and the concomitant valorization of the mind or soul and the devaluation of the body” typical of Western philosophy and religion (9).¹⁹²

¹⁹² This natal turn could be seen in relation to what Esposito terms affirmative biopolitics.

Rethinking concepts such as collectivity or history in terms of birth rather than death would allow us to analytically leave behind a notion of sacrificial politics and to re-imagine a politics of life. This "natal turn" entails a revisiting of origins that speaks to the possibility of community formation articulated towards life.¹⁹³ It is in line with this natal turn, that this dissertation has attempted to think.¹⁹⁴ As I write, a migrant caravan crossing Mexico embodies a form of collectivity that, in its mobility, embraces different identities and political subjects affected by violence and it does so in search for conditions of possibility for a better life. Fleeing from conditions of violence and terror in Central America, the caravan disregards the crossing of state borders, the territorial logic of rights and origins based on the filiative histories of the nation-state, and in doing so it questions the condemnation of life to closed, bordered spaces. In its movement, the caravan confronts nationalist discourses and the threat of state violence. It thus rejects the logics of both the nation-state, the symbolic burial of the father, and the vaporized silence and invisibility that Margolles forces her audience to inhabit, both consciously and unconsciously. We see here a production of collectivity that moves beyond the symbolic burial of the fathers, as *Patria*, and that instead operates with the ideal of protecting the possibility for life beyond the framework imposed by the nation state. It articulates an impulse that demands a different relation with life and the conditions of life.

¹⁹³ We could say that movements like #Ni una menos attempt to position themselves here. The motto of the movement "Vivas nos queremos" and complicates the relation to violence expressing an insistence on life mediated by desire.

¹⁹⁴ The natal turn can be understood in line with what Esposito terms affirmative biopolitics. Also, this natal turn seems concerned with a shift not only in the conceptual framework, but also the very coordinates of representation of that conceptual work.

Appendix



Figure 3. Celebrations of the *Bicentenario* (2010).
<https://www.elsiglodetorreon.com.mx/noticia/fotos.php?nota=647586>



Figure 4. *Lavatio Corporis-1*. (1994).



Figure 5. *Lavatio Corporis-2*. (1994).



SEMEFO, Lengua, 2000. Cortesía Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, México DF

Figure 6. *Lengua*. (2000).



Figure 7. *Entierro* (1999).



Figure 8. *Vaporización* (2002/2018).



Figure 9. *En el aire-1* (2003).



Figure 10. *En el aire-2* (2003).



Figure 11. *Limpieza* (2009).



Figure 12. *Ajuste de cuentas* (2009).



Figure 13. *Narcomensajes* (2009).



Figure 14. *Bandera* (2009).

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