

Mi Historia Obstinada.
My Obstinate History
An Inter-Cultural Testimony of My Own Diaspora

A Thesis Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts in the Department of Art and Art History.
University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon.

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DEDICATION

I once heard something that has stuck with me until now. It simply stated “If you want God to laugh at you tell him your plans” What I’m referring to here is that this work did not come as easily as expected, and life as always, took its desired course taking me along for the ride. Therefore this manuscript came to fruition over a period of time that was both incredibly amazing as well as quite trying. Along the way I made new memories and learnt a lot about myself.

I dedicate this work to my parents Mario Carmona Miranda and Lucy Rodriguez Parra that throughout my life have been an incredible source of encouragement, inspiration and direction.

This work is also dedicated to the love of my life, Esmeralda Carmen Gonza Mamani. Thank you for listening to me and my endless stories. Your story also resonates profoundly within these pages.

Lastly, this work is dedicated to those that have no voice in the matters that are discussed in these few pages. These are the countless faces that have come before me, that have fallen silent by way of the censors and keepers of history.

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"Between reality and nostalgia was the raw material for my work".
—Gabriel García Márquez

Preface

My name is Mauricio Carmona Rodriguez and I was born in Viña Del Mar Chile. I came to Canada in October of 1982 when I was 12 years old along with my mother and sisters. My father, like many other Chileans, had traveled to Canada three years earlier in 1979 hoping to find a better future for himself and his family. And, like many other Chileans he was also escaping the repressive political and social reality that Chile was going through at the time.

When I arrived in Canada I did not know a word of English. Learning the new language was not easy, but after a period of time I understood a lot and was well versed in the communicative aspects of the English language. Yet, in spite of my knowledge of the language I refused to speak it. It would take around three years for me to venture out on my own and to stop using my sisters as translators. Mostly, it would take three years for me to stop resisting this major "adjustment" and accept my new reality.

I am Chilean/Canadian and Canadian/Chilean, and whoever I am and wherever I am I am neither here nor there. In other words, the idea of *home* has become an experience that is encased in ephemeral words and transitory memories as well as constructed and imagined realities. Not to say that I don't know fact from fiction or the differences between past and present, but it is as if the present and the now are in constant conversation with nostalgia and the self that I left in Chile so long ago. It is from this

reality and out of this paradox that my voice emerges and materializes. This dual history with all its entanglements and all of its complexities is the foundation for my voice and identity as a writer, artist and individual; and most of all it is the source from which this thesis emerges.

In this thesis, I explore the journey between my worlds, the North and the South, examining the politics and poetics of diaspora. In this process I've assembled an archive of memory that has been compiled over many years. This archive is a collection of memories and artefacts, of items that I still keep as well as items that were left behind a long time ago, and whose imprints are still very much alive in me. Furthermore, this thesis deals with art in Chile that arose out of the tumultuous period of unrest and unbalance following the rise of the dictatorship in 1973.

In this thesis, I deal with artists such as Alfredo Jaar, Lotty Rosenfeld, and Eugenio Dittborn, among others. The work of these artists during this artistic period of resistance is constantly imprinted with signs and codes, as well as staunchness and obliqueness, marking a pivotal role in the continued resistance to the oppressors. Likewise, throughout this thesis I examine the ideas and the prevalently latent *shift* or "*in-betweenness*" that exists in the narrative of diaspora and in my own narrative as well. Here, I examine the works of artists, cultural theorists and writers including Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Nelly Richard, James Luna, and Salman Rushdie (among others) to reflect on how their work has influenced, shaped and directed my study of Diaspora, and to a greater extent, my understanding of the politics of it. Likewise, throughout his thesis I work to understand of the heterogeneous yet situated bodies of knowledge and experience

that make up the contemporary cultural archive of diaspora. This includes various definitions of diaspora that both interrupt the text as well as enrich it.

In Chapter One: I present and discuss in some detail my personal story. I journey through memory and time in the development of my narrative. I discuss the issues of a child that is born into a fractured nation and that at a specific time leaves his place of birth, Chile, for his new nation Canada. I also discuss the rise or birth of *My Diaspora*. My personal narrative of diaspora occurs over a period of time, but, has a clear beginning in 1979, when my father left Chile for Canada, and it continues till today.

In Chapter Two: I develop an argument for the multi-generational differences between expatriates that share in the Chilean diaspora/immigrant experience. This argument was primarily developed in conversations that I had with Edison del Canto, an artist, mentor and fellow compatriot. These conversations helped me to understand the multi-generational differences to the immigrant/diaspora experience adding both complexity and richness to my own experience. Likewise and of most importance to this thesis these conversations gave me a multilayered perspective of what the dictatorship years meant to so many Chileans in both understanding and experience. Chapter two also deals with differing approaches to art in the time of dictatorship. These approaches, which often included obliquely-positioned art so as to avoid the censors, helped to maintain an artistic front of resistance against the dictatorship and its atrocities.

In Chapter three: I present an assemblage of selected writings and art projects that have been amassed over a period of time. Some of these writings and art projects are personal meditations on the immigrant experience. Likewise; this chapter develops as

pulsated interruptions that reflect on broader cultural ideas and narratives of the diasporic experience that cannot be encapsulated in singular philosophies of understanding and expression.

Throughout this thesis I work around a set of questions that have helped me to frame this dialogue and narrative. These questions are:

- How does diaspora re-shape identity politics? This is an important question since it relates directly to my own story. It deals with the beginning, middle, and unremitting momentum of the present, and the “here and now” moment of my story.
- How is identity articulated in diaspora? What does diaspora culture, both written and visual, enable or repress in its re-presentation?
- What are the critical frames that writers, theorists and artists have developed to think about and visualize the lived experience of diaspora?

Furthermore, this thesis also reflects on the lack of representation about the experiences of *my generation* in the Chilean diaspora. This is the generation of children that was born or grew up in the dictatorship, whose first recollections are of soldiers in the streets, the dictator on TV, and disciplining of school bodies and curricula. These children that exist in two places, that grew up in silence and that like myself left Chile at a young age and were scattered all over the globe, still remain for the most part silent. In my opinion, this generation that I’ve referred to in the past as “*Los Hijos de la*

Dictadura” (*the Children of the Dictatorship*) – which I consider myself a part of - still remain in the background and in need of a voice.

Definición

Exilio, es vivir donde no existe casa alguna en la que hayamos sido niños...

Definition

Exile, is to live where no house exists In which we have been children...

Lourdes Casal, *Palabras Juntan Revolución* (1981).

1. Personally Speaking – Locating the Self

I grew up in a world of stories. These stories were told to me from various sources, but most of all they came from the patriarchs and matriarchs of my household: my father, mother, grandfather, and to some extent my grandmother. These stories that related everything, from the arrival of the Spanish in Chile, to personal accounts of adventure, misadventure and (sometimes) super-human courage, created in my mind a world of magic and wonder. I think that it is because of these stories that I see many things around me as strings of related stories and of ideas that converge and separate in pulsated intervals of chaos and order creating an understanding of life, and for the most part, *my life*.

As I began to work on this thesis I tried writing some bits and pieces about myself, and how I saw the streams of *my history* in relation to Western North American history, Art History and cultural and social criticism. I also thought about the complex relation of the West to the Pinochet regime and my eventual history of how I ended up living in Canada. I typed many beginnings and found many possible routes. But during this initial period of research my father suffered what was believed to be a mild heart

attack. This life threatening medical condition changed the direction of my research. It changed how I wanted to tell my personal story of diaspora in these few pages. More than anything, I realized that this personal story does not begin with me. Rather, I am just another string in this continuous steam called diaspora.

Therefore I had to start at the beginning; that is to say at the beginning of time, going as far back as I could think of. By no means do I want to appropriate this process of story-telling, because I am not the first or the best at it. But more than anything I recognize now that I am not alone. That is to say that I realize that others have come before me, and that many others will come after me.

I once heard a story that went something like this:

On the first days, God created the heaven and the earth and he was pleased with himself. The earth was round, filled with water and land, overflowing with animals, plants and the basic building blocks for people and society.

Needless to say this recounting and reworking of the book of Genesis and eventually the history of Chile has been reshaped and retold by many. This includes myself as well as those that came before me. With idealized stories and softened plots it made all of the actualities and issues (both political and religious or social) easier to digest.

God populated the earth with various peoples. He looked and saw the end of the earth, there he populated it with its first people's, which he called Inca, to the north; and Mapuche, in the south; there they developed complex relationships between the land and themselves. Over time, complex systems of government, religion and knowledge arose.

War, peace, raids, alliances, periods of pestilence and times of plenty were all part of the life and times of these people. Likewise, within their midst existed some of the most skilled mathematicians, surgeons, astronomers and engineers of their time. (Galeano 42-45; Rector 28-30) The Mapuche knew that they were at the end of their known world, as such they called their land Chile, which feasibly means in their language “where the land ends” or “the deepest point of the earth.”¹

Spaniards arrived with their horses, language and religion in the early 1500s to begin the colonization of Chile (Rector 29). For close to three hundred years the Spanish battled the Mapuche but the Mapuche never waivered. When the Spaniards gave up on their attempts to subdue the Mapuche they remained an unconquered, autonomous people, one of the few in the Americas to have resisted the colonial empire through conflict.

The Spanish brought their style of bureaucracy filled with laws, terminology and most importantly the division of land for ownership. The Mapuche, having no place in this kind of land redistribution, were herded up and placed in reservations at the south of Chile where this population still resides today (Rector 14). It is from this people that part of my ancestry comes: my maternal grandmother and grandfather are both of Mapuche ancestry.

The rise in nation-state identity was inevitable giving rise to the varying countries. Each country contested for land; at times several nations contested for the same area and conflict arose. Between 1879 and 1883 Chile, Peru and Bolivia were at war over land that

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chile#cite_note-22. Web. 8 July 2012.

resided in the dry desert areas where these three nations converge; each nation wanted this territory for themselves because of the rich nitrate deposits, that at this time were a highly priced commodity. What ensued is a war known as “*La Guerra del Pacifico*”(the War of the Pacific), in which three nations contested for this land, with Chile ending up as the victor.

With this victory, Chile became a regional superpower, supplying rich nitrate fertilizer to its farmers as well as to the world. This era of nitrate mining brought great prosperity and foreign investment for Chile and led to the rise of a strong middle class. It is from this mining sector that my father’s family can trace part of its history. My father’s father was a superintendent in one of the American owned mines in northern Chile. My father recalls his father dealing with the “Misters” and seeing the American boarding schools for U.S. kids. Also, one of my dad’s greatest memories was eating *Cornflakes* brought in for the “Misters” and their families through the general store that was owned by my father’s extended family. Some of these foods were strictly for the Misters - the *Gringos* - and they were both restricted from, and financially out of reach, for the regular miners and their families.

In the 1930s or 1940s, synthetic fertilizers came into the scene and the nitrate mining industry collapsed quickly. By the 1950s, the Chilean middle class became restless with the empty promises of reviving the economy that the Right was unable to produce. Emerging leftist parties (that up to a short time before had been outlawed) began to take greater prominence in the political stage. These parties played on the inability of the Right to produce results for the middle class, as well as their inability to help the lower (poor) classes by finding solutions to the country’s social and financial ills. Many

failed attempts at the presidential race occurred, but in 1973 a coalition of leftist parties were able to produce not only a viable candidate but also a winning candidate for the presidential race; his name was Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens.

My mother recalls campaigning for the *Unidad Popular*, a political party that was led by Allende. This political party was a coalition of left-of-centre parties that included the Communist Party, Socialist Party, Christian Left, United Popular Action Movement (MAPU) and the Radical Party. Part of their political agenda was to further agrarian reform and expand public housing, health care and education (Rector 170). This was a time where actual changes were foreseeable and many people mobilized to help it happen. The day that Allende was elected many people were happy and relieved that a new era was commencing. This was a radical era, it was an era of change of social reforms and as Edison Del Canto has pointed out; this was a never-before-seen “social experiment” in Chile, because a Socialist president, leading a left-of-centre coalition had been elected by the people in free and democratic elections.

That day my grandfather cried, he cried for his country that as he would say: “was on the brinks of going communist.” Needless to say, I think his tears also echoed throughout the nation in many circles. For Edison Del Canto, a Chilean artist and my mentor, this time of change was also a time of political pressures from the “right” since, as Edison puts it: “The Chilean Socialist Road” was a unique socio-political and cultural process that contested the world-wide economic model of capitalism and American Imperialism, particularly American policies and doctrines in Latin America.”² Therefore

² Critical Feedback from Edison del Canto. September, 2011.

according to Edison this process of vilifying the “left” was a tactic to introduce fear in the Chilean population about the installation of an eventual communist state.

The US took note of the changing face of Chile and moved in to stop these changes: as Henry Kissinger famously commented: “the US would not stand idly and watch a country go communist, due to the lack of responsible citizens.”³ The tactics used to remove the Allende government were many and they all worked to undermine the authority of the ones in power. This moment in Chile’s history became known as the time of scarcity and instability followed by civil unrest.

1.1 Culture of Fear

It is hard to conceptualize the span of such a day and also to paint a clear picture in just a few words, but September 11, 1973 marked the end of the Allende government. This day my grandfather cried once again, because according to him, the country had finally been freed from the “communist tyrants”: this time these were tears of joy. Years later my grandfather would once again cry, this time he cried for the many atrocities that were occurring all around us, from the very people that had freed Chile from “communism”. This was a time of conflict. Conflict for the soul of Chile all fought in the political arena of fear mongering, manipulation and ultimately a military coup d’état. Chile would become a divided entity that up to today has been unable to reconcile itself.

The new military moved swiftly to end the Marxist and Leftist Movement that had taken over the national spirit. Many individuals were rounded up and mass torture, killings and disappearances became part of the daily unspoken language of whispers and fear. I think that this period also marked the beginning of the Chilean diaspora because

³ *Obama in Chile: No apology for 1973 coup*. World Socialist Website. Web. 1 October 2011.

during this time government-forced exile commenced; this is also the time of self-imposed exile where many people fled the country to escape the repressive regime. I personally have family living in Spain, Australia, Germany, USA, Switzerland, and Canada (Saskatchewan, Montreal and British Columbia). Speaking with Edison about this issue, he also refers to this time in Chilean history as the “time of the Chilean genocide” because during this time the Chilean military moved systematically to eliminate any and all traces of an ideology that contested the Capitalist model of economics and development. I believe that his words are correct. Many people suffered and many others died; and as much as one can try to understand this period it is hard to do so.

The stories that are told about though this period of time are stories that both break the heart and show the human spirit of survival and persistence in dire situations. A large part of who I am also rests in a past that is both hard to see or understand, and yet is still vividly present. This is because the dictatorship and its legacy is still impacting many of the ones that surround me. Be it friends or family: many still wear the colors of mourning for lost family, even after 30+ years have passed. Others simply choose not to mention - not to remember.

I once spoke to a peer that I have known since I came to Canada. He is of my same age and his father was imprisoned for three years in one of the many detention camps in Chile. Like many he had never known what had actually happened to his father during those three years; all that he remembered was soldiers coming into his house in the middle of the night and taking his father away.

As we spoke, he told me that a few years ago he had gone to his parents' home for a visit, but there was no one there. As he wandered through the empty house he came across the draft of a letter that was intended for the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in Chile, that had been formed in May of 1990 by then president Patricio Aylwin (TRC Report 27) in order to come to grips with the full spectrum of the Pinochet years and the abuses of human rights during his regime. He told me that he picked up the letter and began to read it. He soon realized that his father's letter began at the exact moment that his own memories of his father end; the moment in which he is taken away. The past came alive for him and he started to re-live all that had happened to his father. Only it was done thirty years later. He told me of his hardships and the physical as well as emotional pain that his father had to go through. This story speaks for many.

I grew up in a military regime and I knew nothing else; hearing military marches instead of children's songs, intermittently seeing the dictator on television instead of *Plaza Sésamo* (Sesame Street), going off on one of his popular rants. Yet socially all was fine, all was calm. No one spoke of the disappearances and when it did happen it was always in whispers and low toned voices. But, every once in a while, we attended funerals for friends that had passed on from mysterious illnesses after they had returned from a period of absence. I remember a neighbour, the owner of a local corner convenience shop, who disappeared, only to reappear on his doorstep beaten and battered. He died days later. There was nothing to do since his internal injuries were too severe. I understand that this was a tactic of the military, to leave their victims to die in someone else's care because they didn't want their death linked to them.

The military also dictated the education curriculum that taught me that the Fatherland was above all the utmost important thing in our lives. The military led curriculum re-arranged the national anthem to include verses that exalted the army: their valour and nation-building spirit.⁴ This patriotic spirit still resounds within the voices of Chileans, many speak of nationalist ideals of grandeur and land and sacrifice and they don't even know why - I guess indoctrination works.

Speaking with Edison Del Canto over several meetings he suggested that I should place greater stress on the moments that have defined who I am. Edison stated that it is all those little details that one edits out that are of importance, of context and essence. Therefore I will consider Edison's insight as I continue with this work. I hope that I can make sense of how - step-by-step the diasporic individual came to be within me.

1.2 Aladdin and 'Becoming Diaspora'

The house that I grew up in was a modest house, and for all intents and purposes it was a good house. My father Mario, my grandfather Enrique and my uncle "Lucho" built this house from the ground up during the hot summer months of 1968. The house had a solid foundation, straight walls and a corrugated tin roof that rarely leaked during the cold and stormy winter months of July and August. My parents, Mario and Lucy, with my grandfather Enrique lived here along with my older sister Marjorie, my younger sister Janet and baby sister Luciana who would come years later. Uncles, cousins and my

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Anthem_of_Chile. Web. 3 April 2013.

grandmother all lived within walking distance, except for those that lived in other housing developments such as Gómez Carreño or the picturesque hills of the port city of Valparaiso. This house was house number 2984 and I lived there since the day I was born - this was my house, this was my home.

My parent's new home was built at a time in Chile when housing had been made possible. This was the late 60s and early 70s, and Chile's ideological and political shift had brought about change and opportunity, and because of this my parents made the dream of owning a new home a reality.

The house sat in the middle of an unpaved narrow street known as a *Pasaje*. This *Pasaje* cut through the middle of a block creating further development within the block. That is to say that there were houses around the block as well as within it. Since the street lay at a slight slope, during the rainy days of winter entire areas of the street would become bustling streams of muddy water flowing freely, looking for ways to get back to the lower mainland and eventually out to sea.

The block always had something going on and there were few times of isolation from the community. From the fisherman that brought and sold the daily catch from the back of his small truck, to the gas-man banging on the sides of the gas barrels to get the attention of the housewives that were running low on gas, to the drunk man laying on the corner waiting for his spells to go away, there was always something happening. School, the soccer field and friends were also a stone's throw away.

The backyard of the house was small but had all the necessary items to make my life interesting. In one corner grew an apple tree. This tree was large enough to climb and

big enough that it was able to yield an abundant yearly crop of red apples that I would enjoy during my summer holidays. On the other side of the yard grew an unaccomplished grapevine. I say this because Chile is such an abundant land of grapes (and wine), that one knew that this grapevine was the saddest one of them all. It would give off some grapes in the summer but it never quite took off as the magnificent grapevine that one sees in postcards - covering entire areas, shading patios from the sun and giving off abundant bundles of grapes. In all fairness to this plant the ground in this backyard was almost pure clay and it was a miracle that anything grew at all. Lastly, on the other side of the yard sat a workbench made of heavy wood, aged by years of constant use. It was a heavy piece with thick legs and a heavy wooden top that was well oiled to keep the elements from eating it alive. There, I had my first impressions of how my grandfather Enrique, a carpenter and craftsman, worked and how he would shape an idea into reality from a block of wood. Those were truly magical moments seeing a raw piece of lumber become something useful.

Thinking about this house from this distance, I also see that it reflected a strange mix of influences that a lot of houses in the neighbourhood did not share. For a start I grew up in the Mormon religion, a religion that none of my friends shared, a religion that had been adopted by almost everyone in my family many years before. This was the religion of the *Gringos* but it was my religion and it is all that I knew. Yet my grandfather was a devout catholic who said his nightly Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary's unlike no one that I had ever seen. At night, one could hear him quietly whispering his prayers; possibly he was trying to make up for all of the escapades that he had had in his younger days, including a stint as a male stripper, which I later found out to have been quite a "happy

and successful time” for him. Possibly he was praying for forgiveness, or for my family’s safety, or for his beloved motorcycle-riding playboy of a younger brother that had died well before his time. I’d like to think that it was a bit of everything.

On the other hand, Enrique’s stories of practicing witchcraft as a young man sent a chill to the bone. To him it was not taboo what he had done, but it was serious and he treated it all with a certain type of ceremonial respect. His belief in evil had pushed him to practice witchcraft, yet his fear in God had prompted him to stop before his final trial of physically hurting someone for the sake of the black religion. Thus he never quite reached the final goal of becoming a ‘witch doctor’, but he was able to live in peace, or at least he was able to make peace between both worlds—maybe that is why he prayed so much. I heard stories laced with the foreboding yet tantalising aura of the dark arts several times, these stories fuelled my imagination with apocalyptic images of good versus evil, even to this day.

According to Enrique, a strange noise in the middle of the night meant treasure was buried near by, and that someone with a pure heart and with good intentions could extract this treasure. I also learnt that gusts of wind were spirits passing by, and that the devil himself would teach anyone to play the guitar in the middle of a moon-lit night in exchange for one’s soul. According to Enrique, ghostly witchdoctors transformed in the shape of black birds named ‘Tue-Tue’ would come to his windowpane at night. They would sing expecting him to give them something or a terrible curse would follow. According to Enrique if he defeated them by toppling them their visitations would end, but since he was not able to, he believed that we had a curse placed on us.

This is the place where I grew up, with powerful images of Jesus as the only saviour in the Mormon tradition brought by the *Gringos*, the Virgin Mary as the giving mother of the Roman Catholic faith; and the ghostly stories of the Black religion that sometimes sounded more real than what any other ideology had to offer.

1.3 December 7, 1979

It was my ninth birthday and my father was leaving the following day for “*el extranjero*” (abroad), all of our belongings had been piled into a single room of a relative’s house, in it stacked to the roof were piles of boxes of clothes and the idiosyncrasies of life that up to this point had made my house into a home. Three beds were placed in the room so as to make the best of the extremely minimal space provided for the next few years I would share the same type of accommodation, a family of five in one room.

Outside it was a warm summer evening and my father was standing on a dimly lit corner of the street that I can still see in my mind’s eye. As a birthday gift he gave me a comic book, a pen and a watch with a blue dial that diffused the light of the street lights above in varying patterns of blue - he apologized for the rather poor gifts that had not even been wrapped; I told him that I understood, in all truth I was saddened by the hastily and inattentive way that they had been presented, but that was the overarching reality of the moment – a moment of haste and quick actions so as to not lose the chance to flee the regime.

The comic book was an American comic book that followed and satirized the genre of Spaghetti Westerns and shows like *The Lone Ranger*. This comic book was

called “Tiro Loco McGraw” (Quick Draw McGraw) and it was one of my favourites. The pen had a unique triangular shape with the logo of a travel agency where the plane tickets had been purchased stamped along the side of the pen. The watch, from what I can remember, was considered as a right of passage, somehow symbolizing an important time of change and growth – this watch echoed the watch that my father had received from his own father at the age of 12 prior to his untimely passing that had sent my father’s life into complete chaos. For me it would come to symbolize the memories of an unknown time where everything would change in a chaotic shift – it is interesting how life tends to repeat itself, even as we try to run from it.

It is at this moment that my father told me that I was now the man of the house and that I had to take care of my family. I honestly don’t remember much more than that but I do remember that it was a tough moment for me. I kept those three things for as long as I was able to. I think that I kept them so as to maintain that moment alive where my father had also made a promise of reunification. But with all of the turmoil that would soon ensue these three items were lost among the many items that I could not take with me as we moved from place to place, from house to house.

The following evening my father was gone, it was surely a moment of turmoil and sadness, all of my sisters cried, my mother cried as well; she cried in desperation and uncertainty and of course, I can safely assume, for the loss of her husband. I, on the other hand was now the man of the house and I did not cry. I said my goodbyes and I let go of my father in the dignity and strength that a nine year old man shows seeing the plane vanish into the dark abyss of the night sky. We returned home the same evening on a sombre and speechless two-hour bus ride, in the darkness and solitude of that bus ride I

was missing my father already and I silently cried all the way home.



Figure 1. *Paz y Amor* (Peace and Love) First postcard from Canada, Front. December 9, 1979.

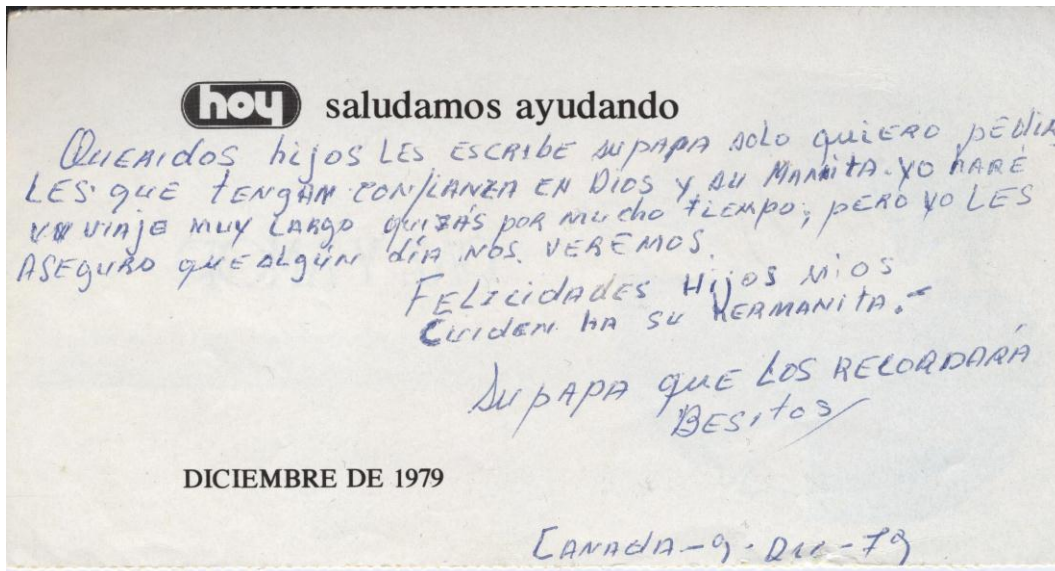


Figure 2. *Paz y Amor* (Peace and Love) First postcard from Canada. Back. December 9, 1979.

Weeks later we received one of the first correspondences of what would be many (Fig 1 & 2). This correspondence included a small postcard that read: “Dear Children, it

is your father writing to you. I only want to ask you to have faith in God and your mother. I will travel a long distance; maybe for a very long time. But I assure you that some day we will see each other. Cheers My Children. Take care of your little sister - Your father that will remember you, Kisses. (Dated) Canada – 9th of December '79." This ominously written piece would encase so much truth and vision of the future, since three years would pass until we would see each other again as a family.

Years later when I had a chance to reflect on the events that led me to live in Canada and of all the sub-plots of my life and that of my family, I began to ponder and wonder if any of it could be made sense of, since much of it had not made any sense to me. Needless to say, I turned in many directions for answers and for the life of me I could not make much sense of the chaos and instability that this change had brought. I felt lost and displaced in this vast land, just as much as I had felt lost and displaced in my own country and somehow I could not understand my own circumstance.

One of the texts that brought some clarity and understanding of what I was going through was a book of selected poems by Pablo Neruda. Reading through this work I came across a piece titled *La Soledad* (Loneliness). In this poem I found a narrative that spoke to me in so many ways that it became a bit of an anthem and beacon for many years as I tried to decipher its mysterious appeal. Not so much because of the answers it provided but because in this piece I heard the voice of someone that was asking the same questions that I was asking.

La Soledad

Loneliness

Lo que no pasó fue tan súbito

The not- happening was so sudden

*que allí me quedé para siempre,
sin saber, sin que me supieran,
como debajo de un sillón,
como perdido en la noche:
así fue aquello que no fue,
y así me quedé para siempre.*

*that I stayed there for ever,
without knowing, without their knowing me,
as if I were under a chair,
as if I were lost in the night –
so was that which was not,
and so have I stayed for ever.*

*Pregunté a los otros después,
a las mujeres, a los hombres,
qué hacían con tanta certeza
y cómo aprendieron la vida:
en realidad no contestaron,
siguieron bailando y viviendo.*

*I asked the others after,
the women and the men,
what they were doing with so much confidence
and how they had learned their living;
they did not actually answer,
they went on dancing and living.*

*Es lo que no le pasó a uno
lo que determina el silencio,
y no quiero seguir hablando
porque allí me quedé esperando:
en esa región y aquel día
no sé lo que me pasó
pero yo ya no soy el mismo.*

*It is what has not happened to one
That determines the silence,
And I don't want to go on speaking
Because I stayed there waiting;
In that place and on that day
I have no idea what happened
But I know that I am not the same.*

(Tarn 474).

What interested me most about this piece by Neruda was the narrative of movement between *situation, location* and the *individual*. "...I stayed there waiting...I know I am not the same..." Neruda references place and its effect on the self three times in this piece. Yet by the last line in the third stance he is quite aware that no matter what happened he is not the same. To me this is not a moment where the narrator lacks momentum or inertia or what could be considered a moment of defeat; rather it is a

moment of clarity and understanding about his changed world. Over a period of time I too would come to that moment of clarity where I knew that my world had changed, and no matter how much I tried to look back it would never be the same. Salman Rushdie, a British-Indian novelist, writes of this struggle of the individual trying to reconcile with a lost past when he describes his own struggle as an Indian writer living in exile in the book, *Imaginary Homelands*:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost....(10)

To this day, I've tried in some way to recapture, to reclaim those lost moments that I can no longer have. This, as Rushdie asserts is truly an impossible feat. What followed after my father left were years of turmoil and restlessness. It all started well, as it had been planned, we would live with family and in a few months my father would be able to send for us and we would be reunited once again. This would be a fairly painless process that would take no more than six months. But, within the next few months the money that my dad left for us ran out and by February we were “on the move” looking for a new place to stay due to financial issues. Our father, unable to work could not help us and my mother had to take a job to feed us: my grandmother's house, our second stop, would not be an easy place to be either.



Figure 3. *Mauricio and Grandmother Orlanda Parra. c1970. Photograph.*

Living with my grandmother was not easy. Her personality was that of a person that had lived a tough life and all of her actions accounted for the same. As a child she had been orphaned by a mother that had passed away during the birth of her ninth baby and a father that had been unable to cope with her death. It is said that he “simply went crazy” and one day in one of his bouts of depression and inconsolable pain and sadness he simply disappeared never to be seen again. At the “mature age” of twelve

my grandmother being the oldest of eight brothers and sisters was given the task of taking care of the four oldest siblings while childcare services took the younger ones into its care. These children would be adopted into various families: two remained in contact over the years, the other was never heard of again. This loss would torment my grandmother for the rest of her life.

As a child my grandmother took on the responsibilities of an adult, she would soon become a live-in-maid, making enough for her siblings to make do in a house that was theirs, an inheritance from their dead mother. In spite of her attempts to keep her family together, her immaturity and inexperience would be her biggest enemy. Over the

years my grandmother took much heat from her brothers and sisters and their relationship was always explosive. That is to say that as soon as they were in a room together their scars from the past would resurface and she would be blamed for much of their pain.

As a mother, my grandmother did not fare much better, her impatience and lack of tolerance always got the best of her, and her kids were at the receiving end. Over the years, the relationship of mother and children became that of a difficult and forced rendition of what a family should be, driven mostly by fear and compliance: these moments would be broken every time by a mother that would explode into one of her bouts of anger and release. As my mother recounts, *“her rage would always be taken out on us kids”*, a messed-up past or a cheating husband or an inability to do exactly what she wanted, always resulted in being struck with whatever was within an arm’s reach; this included pots, pans or broom-sticks broken over one’s head or back. I was also a witness to some of these moments of rage and I also paid for the mistakes and events of a past long gone.

In spite of what has just been recounted, I always think of my grandmother highly and dearly, her life was tough and she dealt with things the best way she knew how. Her life was not ideal from day-one and she had to learn at a very young age the lessons of life. My grandmother was not able to read or write, she could barely write her own name on a piece of paper, but she had been able to make a life for herself and her children and I admire her tenacity, strength and spirit. Her name was Orlanda Raquel Parra Fernández

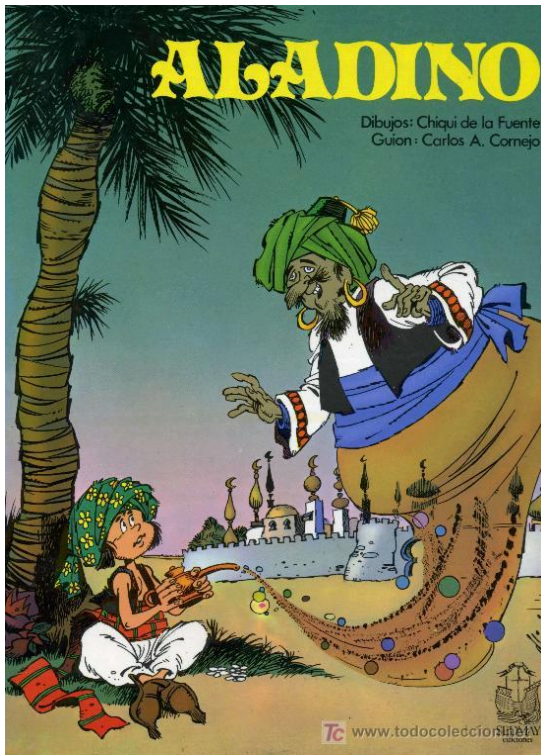


Figure 4. Aladino. (Aladdin). Children's Story Book. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Planeta. 1977. Front Cover.

In my grandmother's house I found myself once again living in a cramped space sharing a bedroom with four individuals. The house sat at the side of a cliff and I could see that side of the city melting into the far ocean with many subdivisions of streets and houses spreading into the distance in a balanced choreography of chaos and survival. At night, the hillsides that faded into the distance lit up like a dream of stardust that went on for miles moving from cliff-to-cliff creating an undulation of light and life. Years later I would find myself

yearning for those nostalgic moments of place and location. In the vast Canadian prairies the visual landscape was far from the same and the flat landscape, for me, left much to be desired in terms of connection and belonging.

My grandmother's house had been built at the edge of a cliff, known as a *quebrada* that ran down the entire side of the hill for what seemed many Kilometres. This was a small lot that was filled with plants and fruit trees of all kinds. These plants were abundant in her lot and they were well taken care of by her strong back and agile hands. Watering and weeding the plants was something that she did often and in turn these plants paid her in-kind with fruits and flowerings that could satisfy the cravings for

sweets on a summer afternoon. The *quebrada* is an interesting strip of land that usually remains untouched by development due to its steep sides and fragmented or jagged layout. This is where the land breaks open to reveal its innermost secrets to those that wish to see them. In the quebrada friends can find a place to play and discover new things: it is a place where streams appear out of the ground running quietly down the cliff through paths of least resistance. This is also a place where young lovers go to find privacy in an amorous encounter and where criminals and crime often happens and hides. But, unlike the North where “the hills” are often reserved for the wealthy, the hills and the *quebrada* in my story are typically reserved for the poor.

It is during this period that I was introduced to the world of literature. My grandmother had a library of sorts and I was forced to read dusty archaic books with yellowed pages that screamed out loud their age. These books had sat on someone else’s shelves, and when their use and knowledge had been exhausted they had been handed over to my grandmother where she would put them to use somehow, in this case me. In her house I was persuasively encouraged to read old Reader’s Digests with pages full of nonsense about heroic stories that I can’t even remember. In her house I was also introduced to the never-ending romantic dreamer of Don Quixote and his horse Rocinante; to the writings of Jules Verne, Charles Dickens and *Las Maravillas de la Literatura Universal* (The Wonders of Universal Literature); such as *Aladdin* (Fig. 4). While my grandmother patiently knitted I was asked to read out-loud - to retell the story to those present in the room that could not read. I was simply told that it would make *me* a better reader. I now wonder if it was done for my sake or her sake, maybe it was a little bit of both.

Reading through Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, placed me in a constant back and forth between reality and magic, truth and fiction. Because of my current situation, I too wanted a ghost that would come and change my life and make things better. I often read and re-read the passages where the "ghost of Christmas present" leaves and Scrooge screams out-loud "*Don't leave! You've made me happy!*" But this was a story, it was fantasy. Interestingly, I have read the English version of Dickens' work and this section of writing that impacted me so much does not exist. The ghost simply disappears leaving Scrooge to face the last spectre. I can assume that the translator took some artistic liberties when translating the version that I read in Spanish. Funny enough it is this addition, or this interruption and mistranslation of the work that impacted me the most in Dickens' work.

The writings that I was introduced to by my grandmother also included further fantasy and I found myself projecting these narratives into my life. As we moved from place to place, I found myself inscribing my name in the places that I had been. This I borrowed from Jules Verne's, *Voyage to the Centre of the Earth*, where the Icelandic alchemist Arne Saknussemm leaves a trail of markings through his voyage to the centre of the earth for others to find and follow. I too wanted to tell my story, my journey: I too wanted others to see that I had been there.

Shedding

The letters I wrote to my father at this time also reflected the anxiety of this journey and the need for closure - all filtered through the fantasy of a child. I would reinterpret or interrupt old stories, appropriating them as mine, and would reintroduce

new dialogues between characters (Fig 5). Such is the case with Aladdin and the Genie, where rather than asking the genie for a wish of fortune and riches, Aladdin would simply ask “*When will I be reunited with my father again?*” and the Genie in all his wisdom would simply respond: “*Soon...very soon.*” By this time over a year had passed, we had bounced around the city of Viña del Mar at least five or six times. This constant moving

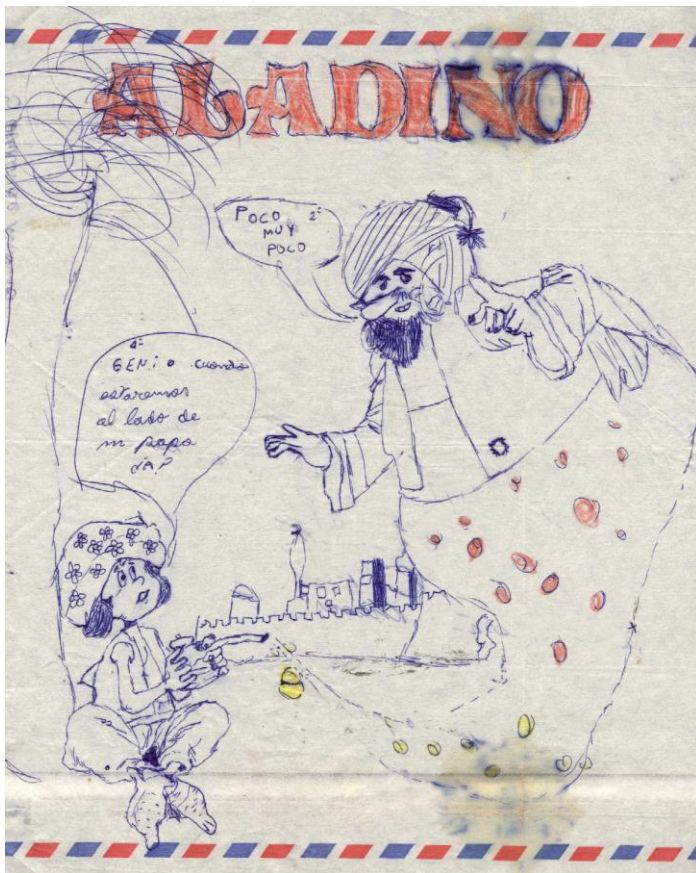


Figure 5. *Reinterpreting the dialogue of Aladdin.* c1981. Letter by Mauricio sent to Mario (my dad) in Canada.

would not end for another year and a half, or so.

One of the issues that we had to contend with was the material things that we had to carry along with us each time that we moved. Through our many moves and interruptions we became quite efficient at the moving experience; along the way we discarded those things that were not considered essential. These discarded

items included a lot of personal items that created too much bulk to allow for another smooth transition. Along the way we became a team, all knowing what their role was when moving time came. I often wonder about this bulk of things that we, that *I*, slowly shed as part of this great trip that took so long to materialize. How much we lost both

materially as well as emotionally and spiritually. In *The Mind of Winter*, Edward Said writes: Exile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home.”(49) This process of “becoming diaspora” and the process of change that goes along with it stripped us of so much — and it is hard to conceptualize how it all slipped one-day-at-a-time from our hands, hearts and minds into the back shelves of our daily lives - and ultimately into the sole experience and realm of memory.

In our final destination in Chile we ended up living in our original house for the last few months before leaving for Canada. By this time, I think that our spirits were broken: we were no longer celebrating “Our last New Year’s in Chile” or “Our last 18th.”⁵ By the third year, we, as kids were asking “*Do we have to go?*” While my mother would preserve her un-ending optimism for a trip that with each passing day looked so far away, and she would simply say: “*Yes! we have to go, this is our last...(insert holiday here)...in Chile.*” This became one of our family’s jokes for many years to come.

Arriving....Oh Canada!

The day came to leave Chile and arrive in Canada. The greeting that I had wanted and expected for so long was not there. I saw my father for the first time not as the “superman” that I had known, instead I saw a human being almost beaten and battered to oblivion by the Canadian government and system. This was because in the three years that I had waited for the trip to Canada, he had spent those same three years fighting for his place within Canada. When he came to Canada as a refugee, one of the first communications he had from the government of Canada was a letter requesting his

⁵Referring to September 18th, Chile’s date for celebrating its independence.

presence for a preliminary hearing at a certain place and time. Speaking no English he asked a “friend” to translate it. His friend told him (that the letter said) anything but what was really on it. So my father went about his business without realizing that by not showing up to the important meeting mentioned in the letter he had now become an “illegal-alien” within the Canadian system. It would take him all of those three years to clear up this mess.

In 1982 on our arrival to Canada, I saw my father as a mere fraction of who he had been before. Now he was much slimmer, much older, and almost looked smaller, as if he had shrunk. I think that was because I was now 12 and not 9 years old, and as such, I had grown. My youngest sister who was 18 months when my father had left Chile was now four and a half years old and had no recollection of him: it took her many years to know and understand who he was and what role he played in her life.

Soon enough I realized that I (and the rest of my family) would not just pick up and continue where we had left off. This was because time and distance had truly made us different people. Likewise, the different experiences that we had lived as individuals and as a group had separated us rather than brought us closer.

The Canadian experience was absolutely not what I had envisioned in those many times of despair during our three-year wait. This is because I had not taken into account the important issue of “language” and communication. I could not communicate with anyone other than with my immediate family. In school I quickly became an oddity that my teacher had no idea what to do with, thus I would be left sitting in class doing absolutely nothing. I would just stare out the window wondering what I was doing in this new-found hell. It would be about 4 or 5 months that I had to endure the state of what I

would come to call “being invisible.” This state of affairs lasted until my parents found a school that had an ‘English as a Second Language’ program. This transitional time at school, was an incredible time of disillusionment, my salvation had become my new nightmare, and I had no one to talk to.

Speaking with many other individuals who went through the same ordeal of being an immigrant in a strange land, I have found that we all share similar stories of despair and dislocation. After I landed in Canada, I spent many years wondering what my place was within this country. I rejected Canadian ideals and, for the most part, I thought that my identity was purely Chilean (whatever that means). Incredibly, it would not be until 1993 on a trip that took me back to Chile, that I realized that I was neither Chilean nor Canadian. This is because in this trip to my “homeland” I was called-out for being too Canadian or too North American in my ways. I guess I had not taken into account that my many years in Canada had fundamentally changed me, changed my identity, and most importantly my world-view.

After this trip, I quickly began to realize who I really was, a hybrid individual: belonging somewhere in the middle and at the same time no-where at all. This post-colonial migrant had finally come full circle, yet, had not been able to land in the same place, since that place was gone and did not exist anymore. Instead I had come full circle in the *understanding* that my place was the same place of many others, including such writers as Said or Rushdie; where the individual resides in two worlds or more, built around reality and memory, nostalgia and a personal narrative of self that shuttles back and forth between the self and the social. This was my moment of clarity, my moment of understanding, about the ongoing process of “becoming diaspora.”

I find now that reading these pages that I originally wrote in the span of a few months I have created my own testimony, yet I had not originally looked at it that way. I had wanted to give an account of truth not only for others to read but also for myself. As I revisited this “manuscript” after an interval of about a year I began to reject it, not as a material artefact, but rather for what it contained. I found that this “truth” was too painful or too personal at times. This caused me to reject it, mostly because it “looks back at me”, it bears witness to who I am and what I have gone through, something that I had never really done before. Overtime these feelings faded due to the process of understanding.

From what I can see my testimony works in several ways. Most importantly it looks back at me through my own eyes and the landscape of my childhood: this testimony is both disruptive and unsettling, but most of all it attests to my journey. Originally, I didn’t want to censor myself too much thus allowing my past to “come back to life”. But this process of staring back at myself, is difficult to digest, because many times it is too difficult even to accept. Just the same, this testimony has revived memories that I thought of as lost or at least tucked away far enough that I could not reach them, allowing me to avoid the echoes while accepting the silence.

But now, I read these pages with contentment, gratification and even admiration. Much of my story is a unique account, yet it is also part of a much larger history and narrative that could go as far back as history itself. This history is the history of the immigrant, the migrant, of the displaced and the silenced, and most of all, of the diasporic individual and I am proud to be a part of it

2. Art in the Time of Fear: Chile 1973

2.1 Meeting Edison del Canto

My first meeting with Edison del Canto was a meeting that lasted for over four hours. Edison Del Canto is a Chilean born artist and intellectual from Lethbridge, Alberta; who is currently working on his PhD at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. We met at Amigos Restaurant in Saskatoon, and having never met each other before we had to get to know one another from scratch. My first impressions of Edison were that of a cool bohemian intellectual - of someone that had a strong opinion, and of someone that I could relate to. I think that I was right in all of my first impressions. But what has become one of the greatest gifts in getting to know Edison is that he is, as he once called it, “*De la guarda vieja*” (from the old guard), the first generation of Chileans to land in Canada, that wave of Chileans who had seen and experienced first-hand the culture of fear and repression of the dictatorship in Chile.

This clear generational difference and distance between what we could call *my* generation vs. *his* generation is something that I came to see and understand as both important and problematic. This is because people, even within our very country; with a shared history and a shared physical space have had drastically different experiences, reactions and interactions with the Chilean regime pre-and-post dictatorship. This issue, that of thinking about *Us* (and also the *Other*) as monolithic or universal entities can be problematic both within as well as without the Chilean diaspora. As individuals we are part of a larger cultural entity and are in constant flux, simultaneously, and in a constant shift. For Stuart Hall this issue of *misleading universalities* (3) is something that has to

be taken seriously since we tend to think of each other and our varying cultures as entities that are quite solid and rigid. Hall writes:

There are at least two different ways of thinking about ‘cultural identity’. The first position defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’ ... the second position recognizes that, as well as many point of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’

Furthermore, Stuart Hall argues that:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 435).

For Hall it is these universalizing frames or narratives of understanding that must be broken and disrupted to see the larger scope of culture and its heterogeneity. Meeting Edison was one of those moments of understanding and disruption, since up to this point I had not heard or interacted with someone outside of my immediate family. Edison’s story and history was different than mine, but it was, and it is, part of the Chilean cultural and historical identity.

Edison’s generation fought for what they considered and saw as the pressing questions and issues of the time, they lived and died for this cause and most importantly they set up a road-map for many to follow. On the other hand my generation – that of the children born into the Military Regime, having no understandings of what civility meant other than what was handed to us through indoctrinating scholastic systems – created

children and eventually adults that were (up to a certain point) compliant with what happened. There are countless examples that point to a society relatively accommodating to the atrocities because they were for “the good of the nation.”

To add to the complexity of things, there is the other sub-generational cross-border culture – that generation which I think I belong to - which is the generation of children that at one point left Chile to be raised in a foreign land becoming mixtures and amalgamations, speaking multiple languages, understanding and questioning their situated realities, and, also being both lost and found at the same time. Edison helped me to name this; he called it *Hybrid*. Even though I had used this term before and understood its meaning, I had not really processed it until this first meeting at Amigos Restaurant. “*Mauricio*,” he said, “you are a hybrid individual.”⁶ This was one of those eye-opening moments that become part of one’s lexicon for a long time, if not for the rest of one’s life.

Ultimately, meeting Edison helped me to make things clearer, to push myself to understand this complex multilayered history as more than just something to be understood and filtered primarily through my lens and that of my family, and, even though I knew this and understood this, Edison helped to add layers of both complexity and clarity to my understanding of the dictatorship. I say complexity, because I can see now that Chileans experienced the regime from many social, political and generational angles both in Chile and abroad, and I say clarity exactly for the same reasons.

Our conversation went relatively quickly from the superficial to the personal all laced by the powerful forces of verbal communication in Spanish, English and also

⁶ Critical Feedback from Edison del Canto. September, 2011.

Spanglish. Edison was well spoken, calm mannered and had many answers to the many questions that I had. As part of this conversation we spoke of Chile as a foreign land, and of the self as a hybrid person, and, we spoke of the reading material that I should pick up to further understand the language of diaspora, both from a Chilean historical context, as well as from an angle of immediacy, to help me build a strong foundation. Speaking with Edison was the first time that I had had the chance to speak to anyone – even after all this time – about my experiences and have some strong and directed feedback. Likewise, this was the first time that I had had the chance to speak to an artist that came from where I came from. Perhaps our generational differences were apparent, but I am glad that I had this exchange of not only ideas but also of something that resembled a mirror talking back at me.

In our conversation the overarching subject was Chile. We moved in and out of the Chilean experience as immigrants from the good times to the bad ones, while always maintaining the common thread of our diasporic experiences as post-Chilean individuals and artists. This helped me immensely since it shed some light on the direction that I must follow to complete this thesis.

In addition, Edison opened my mind to what it means to be truly someone who is informed in his world-view by more than one historical and social context and cultural experience, in other words, to inhabit the process of becoming “diasporic” and “hybrid”. This condition according to Edison allows the individual to see culture from various perspectives affecting “both subjectivity and the relationship to the symbolic order of things”⁷. That is to say, the many stereotypes, names and understandings that one has

⁷ Critical Feedback from Edison del Canto. September, 2011.

received or inherited over a lifetime must be inventoried; so as to understand, in this case, *Mauricio* the diasporic post-Chilean individual, and what that means in Canada today.

This is of most importance, according to Edison, if one is to find his (or her) way through this time of study, and, to the greater extent life!

Edison and I also spoke of our hard acceptance of Chilean cultural identity within Chile - which can only be constituted as “culture shock”. That is to say that many of the Chilean customs and cultural norms are not completely mine anymore, and being in Chile just made it more clear. Just the same, Edison and I have a distaste for many of those little things that make our culture what it has become: foreign. By distaste, I mean that some issues around sexuality, gender roles, cultural norms, political discourse, (etc.) are just some things that one would rather forget about since they go against the grain of the person that both he and I have become.

Of importance, Edison spoke to me of his own struggles as an immigrant in exile. This he coined as a time of finding himself in a foreign land that was absorbing him as person and as an unwilling participant in the exile experience. Yet Edison refused to see himself as a mere *refugee* without a voice or say: rather, he chose to see himself as a *protagonist* in this experience. This subject-position empowers him: to make choices that give him agency rather than casting him in the role of victim. As Edison explained in one of his invaluable engagements with my writings:

My use of the notion of “victim,” is not to negate the concrete fact that we are all the product of mass painful experiences imposed on us. It is more a reflection about the relationship between subjective and objective contexts.

Subjectivity as framed by social and cultural contexts and self-awareness of the contexts framing us.⁸

This was a moment of amazing discovery for me since I was able to correlate his “resistance” with my own “resistance” as a recent immigrant in Canada in the early 1980s. For me the experience was that of an immigrant child and my way of resisting revolved around refusing to integrate, in many ways, into mainstream Canadian culture. I wonder if I would have made similar decisions to those of Edison had I arrived in Canada a few years older. I mention this since my resistance to the process of diaspora was more physical and raw. I accepted my role as immigrant but I resisted those that had given me that label. On the other hand, Edison’s resistance was more adult, aware and focused: he too accepted his role and label as immigrant but had not allowed those that had given him that label to define him.

I found Edison’s concept of being a protagonist in one’s own experience rather eye opening, not because I had never heard of it before, but rather because I had not looked at the specific experience of diaspora as being controllable or at least manageable from a personal angle. This idea of being a protagonist really struck a chord and I have thought about it often. I must say that I don’t think I ever saw myself as victim of circumstances. Rather, I saw myself as an individual who once transplanted was not able to find a place to call home. As such, I was not a protagonist in this country, and as consequence I was also not a protagonist within myself and my own experience.

⁸ Critical Feedback from Edison del Canto. September, 2011.

2.2 Bearing Witness to the General Through His Dismembered Bodies

Dismembering a body

To dismember a body takes a lot of skill. Detailed knowledge of its working parts makes it easier to disassemble and dispose of it. A skilled hand lacking remorse or compassion can accomplish the task quite easily and with little reaction. Countless times

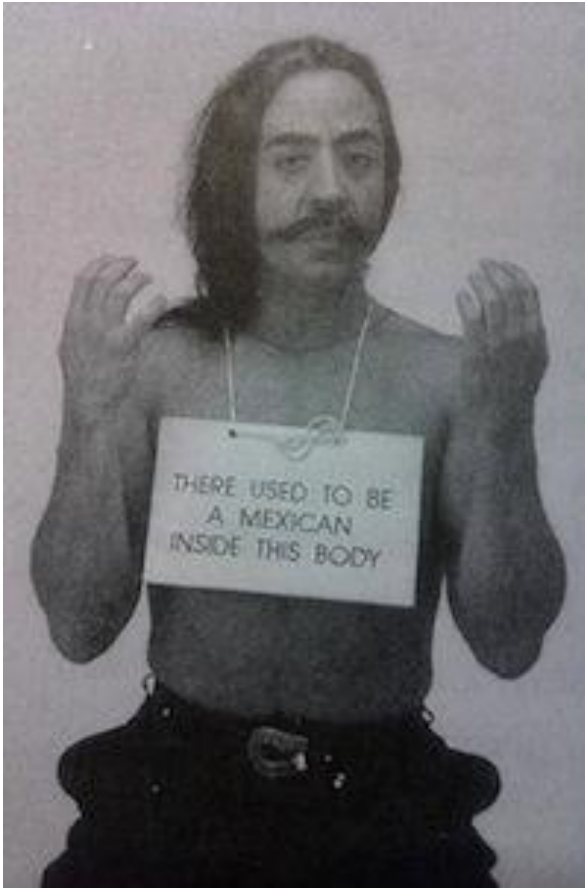


Figure 6. *There Used To Be A Mexican Inside This Body*. Photograph. Guillermo Gómez-Peña. *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems, & Loqueras for the End of the Century*. 1996.

bodies have been dismembered with their many parts scattered across deserts, buried in deep forgotten places and thrown into the many seas — never to be found again. These bodies — physical bodies; diasporic bodies; bodies of memory; and remembering bodies, — may no longer exist in their past tense but there is always a residue of some sort left behind. As such, something, even if miniscule reminds us that there was, and in fact, that there is something there.

At times, there is nothing physically present to work from, no artefacts or remains to search and excavate for meaning, but the mind and the body and even shadows preserve information that can be exhumed in an inconsolable dance of silent commemoration.

In my case, the body that is no longer there is the body of the child that I left behind, this body resides somewhere between my actual childhood and my arrival in Canada. There are remnants of the child still in me enshrined between many crystalized layers of memory and nostalgia. My body was dismembered both swiftly and slowly over a period of years during the General's regime and I am no longer the same because of it. As Gomez-Peña stated it in one of his works: "There used to be a Mexican inside this body" (Fig. 6). I make the same statement now "There used to be a Chilean inside this body." Here I am thinking of the nationalistic-ethno-centered construct of what it means to be Chilean.

Fragmented Bodies Talking Back

In thinking about this figure of the fragmented or dismembered body we can see that it does not speak from a singular position: it speaks from positions or places that are not of the centre but from the peripheries looking in. For Nelly Richard it is this action of working from the fringes in, of looking in; with what she calls the "oblique gaze" that allows dismembered bodies, or, in this case artistic communities or bodies of resistance in Chile, to remain active and in the Chilean case, to sustain the cultural, artistic and social struggle against the Chilean dictatorship during the 70s, 80s and 90s. ("Insubordinations" 4-5).

The violent military coup of September 11th 1973, brought about the end of the Socialist Unidad Popular (Popular Union) government led by Salvador Allende. This abrupt and bloody end to what had been a democratically elected government also brought an end, through censorship, repression and fear, to many social and cultural

communities in Chile for many years to come. What followed were years of silence and *self-imposed amnesia* (Dorfman 147) that was forcefully controlled with both overt language and actions as well as the ever powerful panopticonian beliefs of what *could* happen if one strayed. As Richard explains: "...self-censorship was often more restricting than the administration's own censorship. The extreme precautions adopted fell short of the real, and as such uncalculable, boundaries of interdiction." ("Margins" 23)

This period in Chilean history also became a time of extreme *interrogations*. Citizens could be detained at any time of the day, and in any occasion to extract information; essentially Chile become a "nation of enemies".⁹ But, what also followed were *interrogations* that went in the opposite direction as well. That is to say, that as the repressive regime was detaining its citizens for questionings, incarceration, disappearances and at times death, others were also questioning and interrogating the regime, its practices, and the General himself. In the art world, these interrogations came in the form of art actions and interventions from various sources and arenas. Artists working in many sites and in many fields continually questioned the regime's tactics and the impact they were having on the population and the social fibre.

Socialist ideas and ideologies that surfaced in the Americas in the 1960s and 1970s as the voice of not only opposition to western capitalist ideology, but also as a viable alternative to it, also infiltrated Chilean popular culture at the same time as well. And as it happened in many other nations following these events, Chilean artists and activists used popular culture as a tool for creating social change and for articulating the

⁹ See Constable and Valenzuela's *A Nation of Enemies: Chile Under Pinochet*. Chapter 6: The Culture of Fear. pp, 140-165.

subject-position of the “new man” In following these ideas of the “new man” artists felt duty-bound to use their creativity to serve the people and the revolution.¹⁰ As Richard explains:

El “arte del compromiso”, que responde al mundo ideológico de los 60 en América Latina, le solicita al artista poner su creatividad al servicio del pueblo y la revolución. El artista no sólo debe luchar contra las formas de alienación burguesas del arte y la mercantilización de la obra. Debe, además, ayudar al proceso de transformación social “representando” (hablando por y en lugar de) los intereses de clase del sujeto privilegiado de la revolución: el pueblo.

(The “art of compromise” that answers to the ideologies of the world of the 60’s in Latin America, asks the artist to put their creativity to the service of the people and the revolution. The artist not only has to fight against the alienation and mercantilization of bourgeois art, but must also help in the process of social transformation representing (speaking for and in place of) the interests of the privileged class in the revolution: the people.) (“Politico” n.p.)

2.3 The Rise of Refractory Art: The Escena de Avanzada and Colectivo Acciones De Arte (CADA)

¹⁰ Such ideas, as that of the “new man” and the artist as “educator and revolutionary” can be seen in the works of the Chilean muralist group Brigada Ramona Parra, as well as in the Chilean musical movement of the 60s known as Nueva Canción.

It is argued that when the dictatorship came into power most if not all of the idealist notions within the art scene from either a leftist ideology or otherwise were in near complete remission. For a period that lasted about three years, few artists dared to present work that questioned the regime as these attempts were silenced rapidly (Honorato and Muñoz n.p.). What is of most importance here, is the fact that politics and art, and politics in art, were at odds with each other: neither the *Left* nor the *Right* were camps to directly side with. As Robert Neustadt argues in *Arte no es Vida*:

...the enemy could not be Pinochet, because the dictator was everyone's enemy and he was untouchable. As a consequence many identified traditional art as a symbolic enemy because they associated traditionalism with authoritarian order (Cullen and Bustamante 163).

Likewise, as Richard explains:

...for these Chilean artists, it was also apparent that neither the official history of those in control nor the unofficial history of those brought under control, whose mirror of suffering was often just as inverted or righteous, could provide any logical coherence or useful interpretation ("Margins" 18).

This uncertainty and ambiguity about what exactly constituted an acceptable discourse led to the creation of new dialects of expression and new narratives of counter-discourse that had to be constantly re-codified for the art scene to survive.

It is from this discourse and circumstance of the politically and socially repressive arena of the 70s in Chile that the art collective CADA and the larger grouping of artists that came to be known as *Escena de Avanzada* came to be. Working from the same

“closed country” the differences between these two participants in the art scene had more to do with scale and focus than anything else. CADA tended to focus more on the social issues, while *Avanzada*, explored private and marginal spaces. (Cullen and Bustamante 163). The *Escena de Avanzada* (The Advanced Scene) emerges in 1977 during some of the hardest times in dictatorial Chilean history so far. Nelly Richard coined the term *Escena de Avanzada* (or “Avanzada” as it comes to be known) in her publication titled *Una Mirada Sobre el Arte en Chile* (Varas 54). The *Avanzada* was more than just an organization, grouping, or movement of artists and theorists, rather, it was a “convergence of ideas, strategies and practices arising from the rapture that the dictatorship entailed” (Mosquera 31), and as such covered a large grouping of individuals, ideas and tactics that spanned over many years. In addition, Richard discusses the naming of the *Avanzada* as a way to refer to the unique Chilean experience and discourse, while distancing the movement from the nostalgic connotations of the word and label “avant-garde” (“Margins” 21).

In this politically and socially charged period in Chilean history, artists had to constantly struggle against the absorption and domestication of their artistic language and codes by either the Left or Right political camps: this became a persistent struggle that artists had to continually contend with. As Richard explains:

Caught between the risk of official absorption of their meaning by the dominant apparatus, and the danger of their forms becoming an instrument of the opposition’s progressive ideology, these practices in fact insisted on an equivocal type of message and resisted any totalisation of sense. Thus they proliferated

signifiers in order to prevent a reductionist interpretation, they offered many possible readings through the use of multiple, fluctuating referents (“Margins” 19).

In other words, the Avanzada was, among many other things, a way of keeping one step ahead of the censor by fluctuating and multiplying the genres, media and contexts of visual resistance. The Avanzada was also a way of examining, by visual means, the unthinkable direction that politics had taken (Mosquera 52). Some of the artists generating art and visual culture under what was constituted as the Avanzada were: Eugenio Dittborn, Carlos Leppe, Colectivo Acciones de Arte (CADA), Lotty Rosenfeld, Alfredo Jaar and Juan Davila – among many other artists writers, and cultural theorists.¹¹

Art in the Avanzada

2.4 Eugenio Dittborn

Eugenio Dittborn is a Chilean visual artist who in 1976 began to incorporate found photographs, news-clippings, children’s drawings and various magazine items into his artwork that contemplates the narratives and histories of individuals that, in the Chilean case, were ‘forgotten’ in the repressive intimidation of the official history machine. As Richard points out: “Dittborn’s work continually challenged the regime by persistently unearthing and piecing together the individual and collective portraits of the forgotten or disappeared by reassembling many disassembled pieces of identity” (“Insubordination” 10-11).

¹¹ For a fuller listing of artists in the Avanzada see: Paulina Varas: *De La Vanguardia Artística Chilena a la Circulación de la Escena Avanzada*. p61.

Dittborn's most notorious set of works is his series titled *Airmail Paintings*. These works span many years and include up to 75 individual mailings to various galleries



Figure 7. *To Return (RTM.) Airmail Painting No. 10*. Eugenio Dittborn, 1993. Tate.org. Web. 2 April 2013.

around the world from 1984 to 1992 (Zamudio-Taylor 48). It has been argued that one of the most important things that the *Airmail Paintings* do is that *they travel*, moving from place to place disseminating and re-codifying their meanings as they move along. Measuring more than 2x3 metres and touching on multiple subjects and using multiple media (paper, cloth, yarn, string, photographs, feathers, stenciling, found objects, etc.) in a form of minimalist collage and assemblage, Dittborn's work often underscores the difficulties of movement, travel and cultural distance (Cullen and Bustamante 165). This process of folding and unfolding – of packing and unpacking - gives the paintings “scars”

that signify both metaphorically as well as physically the impossibilities of a fractured and oppressed country (Chile), and to a further extent - a fractured continent. The Airmail Painting titled *To Return (RTM)*, deals primarily with travel and the idea of returning (Fig 7). It uses a combination of text and images to narrate issues and ideas involved in the possibility and impossibility of returning to a place of origin. Included as part of the images and text in this Airmail Painting, is the image of Jeremy Button (also known as Jemmy Button), a Tierra del Fuego Aborigine whose name was acquired when he was “paid for” with a mother of pearl button. His travels took him to England in 1829 where he was educated and lived there only to return to Tierra del Fuego on the famous voyage of the Beagle, whose passengers also included the young naturalist Charles Darwin. Another story that resides within this Airmail Painting is that of British sailor John Torrington, a member of the Franklin expedition that set out to find a Northwest Passage. Torrington’s frozen body was found in the Arctic in 1984, 138 years after the failed expedition.¹²

Dittborn’s Airmail Paintings continually reverberate the narrative of marginalized and muted stories and identities while simultaneously working in a subversive manner as they challenge official histories. Folded neatly and packed in specially made envelopes the paintings have been mailed across many continents and to various art institutions – to be unfolded and exhibited along with the envelopes that they came in. Through this process of packing and unpacking, the works, unlike a stretched canvass, bear multiple scars where they have been folded, invoking a clear push-pull narrative of place and displacement; and journeying between places distance and dislocation.

¹² <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dittborn-to-return-rtm-airmail-painting-no103-t11828>. Web. 15 May 2012.

2.5 Alfredo Jaar

Alfredo Jaar is a Chilean artist that has been active in the art scene since the military regime in Chile. His work is complex and at times allusive and ambiguous since it does not always address the overarching narratives, but rather focuses on a single issue or incident. For example: as part of the *Rwanda Project 1994-1998* Jaar focused on a single witness in one of his pieces titled *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*.¹³ Jaar uses a multitude of delivery tactics, methods and materials to present his work, since according to Jaar, the image and its representation of reality does not do justice to actual events. He is also intent on capturing the attention of spectators who are always entitled to switch off or look away, distancing themselves from the very mediums that are bringing them the news and images (Bricker Balken 19-20). Jaar is an architect by profession who studied cinematography as a minor while a student. He considers himself an unaccomplished artist and photographer since according to him he has been unable to fully express in his work the problems at hand. Yet, Jaar is a highly accomplished artist in all aspects of his field and it is part of his process to reveal the difficulties and limitations of any media genre or context he is working on.

In *The Insubordination of Signs* Nelly Richard writes of varying tactics used by artists during the Pinochet dictatorship to avoid the strong arm of the military while still addressing the problems that were affecting so many. One of these tactics is the use of what Richard calls the “oblique gaze”. For Richard, this oblique gaze is an empowering tool used by the “vanquished” to regain power and give meaning to those things that have fallen by the wayside (21). The works addressed here are concerned with pressing issues

¹³ alfredojaar.net. Web. 22 January 2013.

in Chile: torture; disappearances; and killings.



Figure 8. *Es Usted Feliz?* (Are You Happy?) - *Studies On Happiness*. 1979-1981. Digital Image. Alfredo Jaar: Reflexiones Sobre Su Retrospectiva en Berlín. Web. 7 March 2013.

Studies On Happiness for example, is a seven-part public intervention that occurred between 1979 and 1981 in Chile. These interventions confront the oppressive regime of the dictatorship through the use of subtle yet astute uses of both performance and installation. Through *Studies On Happiness*, Jaar presents an incredibly tough issue, that of ‘happiness’ and all of its implications to a population that felt itself to be ill-fated while living through some of the toughest times of the dictatorship. The works created a good space for interaction and discussion while obliquely challenging the authorities.

One of the interventions that is part of the *Studies on Happiness* is a set of billboards and signs that simply ask: “*Are you happy?*” (Fig 8). These billboards set

about to ask a rather naïve and understated question. It is said that through this work Alfredo tested the authorities as far as he could, coming quite close to imprisonment (“Fire” 13).

As Jaar writes: “*Studies on Happiness*, was born in the midst of a desperate situation: Santiago de Chile, 1979. It grew out of my utopian idealism, which I tried to combine with poetry, an activity that was ingenuous but highly necessary at that time” (“Happiness” n.p.). During this time, the population was also under an enormous amount of stress due to the fact that the mere association with a targeted individual could also land someone in the hands of the authorities (where anything was possible). As such, an incredible sense of isolation as well as fear hung over the population. Thus the work reflected this tension and fear in its oblique question about happiness, and also of the factors leading to unhappiness.

In 1981 Jaar left Chile to work in New York City, only to return 25 years later in 2006.¹⁴ As part of his return to Chile Jaar reprised the *Gramsci Trilogy* an exhibition that he had previously presented in Italy in 2005. This exhibit was a tribute to Antonio Gramsci and Pier Paolo Pasolini, both of whom were thinkers that questioned the role of culture in the formation of social attitudes, and its impacts on political change.

Let 100 flowers Bloom (Fig. 9) is an installation that is part of the Gramsci Trilogy. It is based on Mao’s poem, *Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom*; from the 1950s. This poem calls for intellectuals and thinkers to question or interrogate the revolution.

¹⁴ <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/alfredo-jaar>. Web. 5 April 2012.

Yet as Jaar points out, most of those that questioned Mao's regime were imprisoned, tortured and quite a few were killed.¹⁵



Figure 9. *Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom*. Photograph of Installation. 2005. Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma. Art21. Web. 7 November 2012.

The work, *Let one hundred flowers bloom* is composed of a beautiful garden with 100 flowers in a closed environment that feeds the flowers with light and water, while simultaneously subjecting them to cold and forceful winds. Thus, there is a back and forth, or a push and pull, between what is needed for life (water and light) and what destroys life (wind and cold); this use of contradictory forces provides a powerful metaphor to what some societies and persons are subjected to. For Jaar this is a direct metaphor to what intellectuals and artists go through when bearing witness to difficult events.

As part of the installation in Italy there was a projection of Gramsci's grave which exist in Rome, giving direct homage to his life and work. When Jaar installed this work in

¹⁵ <http://www.pbs.org/art21/images/alfredo-jaar/let-one-hundred-flowers-bloom-2005>. Web. 5 April 2013.

Chile he had a window built in the installation that directly overlooked the public roadway in Santiago known as *La Alameda*. This public space was central to marches and protests in Chile both before the Military dictatorship as well as afterwards. By opening the window to the outside, Jaar opened up a window into history. He opened up a window where the present and the past meld into one, where streets filled with tanks, soldiers and death are juxtaposed with a “modern” society that partly wants nothing to do with the past, and at times, does not even know exactly what happened.¹⁶

This issue of forgetfulness or oblivion exists for several reasons in Chilean culture. Some of the central issues that fuel this cultural amnesia is the fact that fear and self-preservation, drives the silence. A culture of fear was created by the regime’s policies of official censorships and restrictions. This led to an internalization of the military’s “rules” and the development of a personal censorship that was greater than what was called for. Also, another reason for the seeming lack of interest in a past that still bears open wounds in Chile, is what Richard and others have pointed out as the over-mediated nature of Chilean society, leading to the marginalisation and erasure of history into oblivion (“Residues” 5). That is to say that with an overflowing or oversaturation of all forms of media and the production of a sanitized official history, a shift has occurred, from defamatory to a marginalized form of the “other;” situated in a distant past that has now become fodder that feeds that same media circus. This re-presentation resituates the *detenidos-desaparecidos* into media driven montages that deal in an informative currency, rather than seeking a restoration of memory or truth. Ultimately this delivery of information destabilizes history, due to its incomplete and fragmented delivery and

¹⁶ <http://www.art21.org/texts/alfredo-jaar/interview-alfredo-jaar-the-gramsci-trilogy>. Web. 1 April 2013.

consumption. As Marcela Pizarro Coloma states: “In this scenario there is no outside — there is no real to speak of — just a flow of mediated representations where History is rendered obsolete. There is no Truth, just endless re-presentations of possible truths” (333).

Alfredo Jaar’s *Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom*, opens up, and returns to this media-driven semi-diluted debate about forgetting and remembering. And even though the work was not originally intended for Chilean visual and cultural consumption, once installed in Chile it took on a site specific significance that a lot of people could identify with. Thus, much like the work of Dittborn and the traveling paintings the message of this work can be transported across physical barriers and move fluidly from one place to another, shifting and re-signifying itself in both time and place.

2.6 CADA - Colectivo Acciones de Arte (Collective of Art Actions)

CADA (Colectivo Acciones de Arte - or - Collective of Art Actions) founded in 1979, was an association of artists, writers and cultural theorists in Chile. CADA was composed of Raul Zurita, Diamela Eltit, Fernando Balcells, Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo (Richard, “Insubordinations” 25); with Castillo and Rosenfeld being the visual artists in the collective. This group was set on maintaining a constant production of information in the resistance to the dictatorship. This cultural front would question the current situation that the country was, in by utilizing in the space where art and politics converge — the public sphere — as its main stage (Cullen and Bustamante 165). As Richard notes, their works registered at three basic levels in Chilean society: cultural (art and literature): social (the urban body as a zone of intervention in the collective

biography): and political (links with forces of social change mobilized by the left) (“Insubordinations” 25).

This “refractory” approach to art, which included both meanings and implications of the word, including: staunchness and obliqueness, allowed these artists theorists and writers of CADA, and to the greater *Escena de Avanzada*, to create art that directly criticized the dictatorship. Simultaneously circumventing a confrontational stance to the overt threats and symbols of repression, which included: disappearances, the “gun-toting army”, and a population that feared for its life. (Richard, “Insubordinations” viii).

CADA - Public Interventions

Para No Morirse De Hambre en el Arte. (So As to Not Die of Hunger in Art)

Para No Morirse De Hambre en el Arte is the first of a series of public interventions by CADA that formed the core of the work that this collective produced during its time in existence. *Para No Morirse De Hambre en el Arte* was composed of several interventions all choreographed simultaneously both at the national level as well as internationally.¹⁷ This series of interventions dealt with the direct and pressing issue of hunger in the Chilean population and in a more indirect way the disappearance of Allende’s government and of democracy in Chile (Cullen and Bustamante 166).

Para No Morirse De Hambre en el Arte was composed of the following interventions and actions:

- The distribution of one hundred liters of milk to a Santiago shantytown.

¹⁷ International collaborations included Colombia and Canada. With each country’s artists adapting their approach to their pressing issues. (Cullen and Bustamante, p 167).

- A one page ad in the news magazine *Hoy* (Today) with the following text:
 “Imagine this page completely blank / imagine this blank page as white as milk for daily consumption / imagine all corners of Chile deprived of milk for daily consumption as blank pages to be filled;”
- A text in five languages titled *No Es Una Aldea* (It Is Not a Village) that was read in front of the United Nations building in Chile - Placing the Chilean situation in the same precarious context as many other nations;
- The placing in a museum of a transparent sealed box containing undelivered milk, a recording of *No Es Una Aldea*, and a copy of the news magazine *Hoy*. All this was accompanied by a text that read: “to remain here until our people are able to gain access to basic food consumption. To remain here as the symbolic inverse of a lacking, inverted, plural body;”
- Ten milk trucks parading through the city departing from a factory and arriving at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Fine Arts Museum);
- Lastly, the covering of an entrance to the museum, symbolising the metaphorical closure of social institutions (Richard, “Insubordinations” 25-27; Cullen and Bustamante 166-167)

As Richard points out: *Para No Morirse De Hambre en el Arte* was a work that resignified both public and private spheres. It allowed for the institution — the Museum — to be symbolically blocked or marginalized rendering unattainable. These interventions and actions turned the gaze and spectacle on the public sphere, where much

more of greater value was going on, in terms of what was of importance to Chileans. This reclaiming of the street as the “true Museum” highlights the brutality of the Chilean streets that were usually devoid of art (“Insubordinations” 27).

The powerful image of the milk trucks parading through the city streets recalled the image of tanks on the streets, in some type of military manoeuvres, looking for strategic positions. Accomplishing this parade of trucks did not come easily, it required a sleight of hand and mischievousness on the part of CADA members who tricked the milk factory, *Soprole*, into allowing their trucks to be paraded on the streets. During this time, looking at something public was always dangerous: participating in an action or event that was public and defiant was even more dangerous. Therefore, once the *Soprole* factory found out about the reasons for the use of their trucks, they went to extreme measures to remove themselves from the public intervention, culminating in a change to the *Soprole* logo for the entire fleet of trucks (Cullen and Bustamante 168).

No + (No más or No More)

No + Is an additional public intervention that was spearheaded by members of CADA along with additional collaborators. No + is considered to be the most powerful and important public intervention that CADA created (Fig 10) (Cullen and Bustamante 171). After its original inception this action virtually took on a life of its own, allowing the population to continue propagating the simple yet powerful message.



Figure 10. *No +*. c1983. Video-still, CADA Public Intervention. Hemispheric Institute: Digital Video Library. Web. 14 July 2012.



Figure 11. *No Más Miedo* (No More Fear). Santiago, Chile. 1988. Photograph. Oberlin.edu. Web. 7 January 2013.

Between the end of 1983 and 1984, members of CADA began a simple graffiti campaign in Santiago when they wrote on the walls “No +”. No +, this simple yet effective meme, was a narrative that spoke of a citizenry that had had enough. Within it, the message was clear: “no more” of the current situation. Within a short period of time

many renditions of 'No +' began to be completed by unknown citizens. Soon declarations of "No + dictatorship, No + torture, No + weapons, No + disappeared, No + fear (Fig. 11) and No + death" began to appear in the walls of Santiago (Cullen and Bustamante 171).

The meme had quickly moved from the hands of the artists and authors (CADA), to that of the citizens. Once again art had been moved from the confined walls of a museum or gallery to the public spaces of the street, forming a collective counter-dictatorial movement within the streets.

2.7 Lotty Rosenfeld

Una Milla de Cruces Sobre el Pavimento (A Mile of Crosses on the Pavement) (Fig 12) by Lotty Rosenfeld, a founding member of CADA, is considered one of the most radical and critical works to come out of the Escena Avanzada (Mosquera 117). *Una Milla de Cruces Sobre el Pavimento* re-signifies the semiotics of dictatorship, recoding them to subversively signify defiance and the many atrocities perpetrated during this period. As Richard explains: Rosenfeld's work explores the transgressive relationship between body, signs and power in a city under military control (Mosquera 117).

Rosenfeld's *Una Milla de Cruces Sobre el Pavimento* consists of a simple act that alters the dividing markings on the pavement, or roadway by superimposing a white strip of cloth in the opposite direction of the painted marking on the street. In its most basic form this simple act disrupts the order of things. Yet it also works to disrupt the daily regulated habits of a society under siege.



Figure 12. *Una milla de Cruces Sobre el Pavimento*. Lotty Rosenfeld. 1979. Photograph. Artnet. Web. 30 November 2012.

As Richard observes:

“The act of disrupting a subsystem of traffic in an entirely regimented country goes way beyond what is visible on the pavement. Rosenfeld’s gesture extended its metaphoric potential to the syntaxes of power and obedience illustrated in different ways within the social landscape.” (Mosquera 117-118)

3. Obstinate Memories; Art Projects Y Otras Locuras

This last chapter came about as I began to assemble the workings of the main body of this thesis. Looking back at the material that I had written over many years, I realized that diasporic narratives of nostalgia and memory had constantly been present in my work. Some of these ideas I've incorporated into the main body of the thesis. But, I had a certain amount of relevant 'left-overs' that had no place other than among themselves. That is, as I began to compile ideas and writings into sections and subsections there was this constant amount of material—ideas, thoughts, art projects, memories and other odds and ends — that really had no place but among each-other . These "left-overs" come in the form of interruptions that at times may seem incomprehensible, unfinished or at least completely out of place. But somehow they fit into this chapter and most of all into the interrupted story of My Diaspora.

3.1 Nerón y Yo (Nerón and I)

Note: This piece was originally written in Spanish in 2003 as a writing exercise for a Spanish course. This exercise was to be written in the style of Juan Ramón Jiménez's "Platero y Yo" (Platero and I, 1914). In Platero y Yo, a boy relates the stories and adventures of himself and his donkey Platero; hence the name and theme for this piece.

I

He walked as if he was a true Roman emperor with his many subjects following him through the streets of his empire. His hair was long and gold with accents of black and brown, which was also part of his unique personality. His legs were strong and agile that in more than one occasion had helped him flee from the dangers of the battlefield. Nerón was truly an incredible "person" and faithful friend, yet in all reality he was nothing more than the emperor and ruler of my street, because he was only a dog.

His mane was composed of at least five different colors, not because he was a purebred dog, but rather and in complete opposition, he was a combination of multiple breeds, in other words he was what is commonly known as a mutt. It can probably be said that he was closely related to the vast majority of the Chilean street-dog population since this was his origin. But in all truth this little bit of information did not matter, Nerón was my friend and we spent countless days and evenings playing and having many adventures together only to be conquered by exhaustion and sleep. This was my faithful friend.

Nerón knew between right and wrong, and since his eyes contained an infinite vocabulary, and they spoke without him having to say a single word. In our silence he and I had many conversations about life, our friendship and other things that I can't speak about right now.

II

I imagine that for him his life was filled with adventures that he probably thought would never come to an end. But because of the twists of life and fate, I along with my family had to leave the house where I grew up and could not take him with us. The house where our friendship had flourished was rented to someone else. Nerón was not able to understand this, but worst of all he was not able to accept it and he refused to leave this place and space that had been his home for many years. Nerón would search for familiar faces only to be met with strangers that did not want him there. Slowly Nerón's demeanour changed and he became more aggressive and less tolerant.

Nobody understood what was going on inside of him. He was only searching for his friend and the family that he had lost but for the new tenants he was only a scary and angry dog that had to be eliminated.

Nerón must have known that he had become a problem, since he was not desired by anyone. And by not having a place to call home anymore he must have known that there was no need to continue.

III

Don Emilio arrived in the morning. He was a quiet man that had been assigned to “take care of the problem.” Don Emilio knew of a far away place where Nerón could spend the last of his days without bothering anyone. This place where Nerón my faithful friend ended up was a garbage dump. I can imagine him accepting his new and sad reality knowing that there would be no more adventures with me.

I arrived just in time to see Nerón being taken away by Don Emilio. This image I carry with me with a lot of pain since this dog turned his head one last time to say his last farewell. I know he said goodbye because I saw it in his eyes.

After that day I never saw him again. Soon after I left for Canada to start my new life. I had many new adventures, and just the same many misadventures. Maybe, just maybe, if I would have had my friend near me my life would have been a little easier.

The End.

Afterword/afterthought to *Nerón and I*.

During a public reading of this piece I was asked to consider the idea of Nerón finding itself (himself) in a new kingdom of sorts when he arrived in the garbage dump. I was asked to consider that in this kingdom he would once again find comfort and happiness. That is to say, that the idea of Nerón moving-on away from his known place of residence to a new and possibly better location, that was in fact a garbage dump, would or could be reconsidered as a positive outcome to this story and *his* history.

As much as this short story is a piece of stylised writing following the pattern of prose that belongs to someone else, where the animal is given anthropomorphic qualities which include a conscience and thought process, I cannot consider the idea of Nerón as being able to find solace and comfort in his new reality of the garbage dump because this story is based on factual events. Also, this idea of the garbage dump as a micro-kingdom with a positive outlook is built on fantasy and I cannot consider it for a happy ending of sorts. Living in a garbage dump is quite a real situation for some, which for us is most likely based on a reality of the “Other” that is quite removed from our mind and sight. Yet for some, including my dog Nerón the “Other” became the “Self” and he spent his last days there.

This short story with its anecdotal afterthought or addendum of an impossible “what if” brings to mind a work of fiction by Fernando Contreras Castro a Costa Rican writer. His highly regarded piece titled: *Única Mirando al Mar* (Única Looking at the Sea) deals with the realities of what it means to live in a garbage dump. The title of the work clearly evokes a passion filled image of a woman looking out to a sea extending out into the horizon. But, soon after the first few sentences of the book we learn that she is looking out into a *sea of garbage*. It is in this realm of garbage where she lives, and as much as she is Única or Unique (as her name translates), her individuality and uniqueness do not matter for she is just another face in this forgotten place - that is the garbage dump. Just the same, I think that Nerón became another “Other”, scavenging for scraps and refuse. And, most of all finding *survival* as his new best friend in this antithesis of a kingdom made up of refuse — the remainders of our shared existence of material consumption — and the impossibility of happiness.

3.2 Art Project I: Cultura Exótica

I was reading a Massey lecture by Carlos Fuentes; a Latin American writer, novelist, art critic and diplomat. This lecture, titled "*Latin America: At war with its past.*" is a book that deals with the varying differences between the North and the South; and as the title states, the destructive Latin American experience.

Within this book I came upon a small section of text that spoke of the Spanish era of conquest known to some as the Golden Era of the Spanish Empire. During this time the Spanish empire tried to expand its breadth as a global superpower, and absorb as much territory and riches as possible. But its power was not unlimited, and as such, its expansionist endeavours eventually began to fail, and the era of empire building slowly come to an end.

As Fuentes mentions: the war with England over control of the high seas was not won by Spain, in part due to the greedy exhaustive and expansionist approach they had held over the Americas. This over-extension of power ended the Golden Era of Spanish conquest, and with the rise in discourses of nationalism elsewhere in the Americas, many regional governments began to claim independence from Spain, and the rest is history.

As Fuentes points out, and what really caught my attention, is the fact that as the Spanish colonial strength was failing, many investors saw a need to move vast amounts of money to the more stable English banking system (as well as other European nations). As Fuentes mentions, the large sums of gold that were being stolen and moved

out of the Americas and into Spanish banks were quickly diverted for investment to England.

This bit of information came into play in 2009 when I was asked to participate in an MFA exhibition titled "*It's Not About The Landscape*". This exhibit, required to work, in part, with the idea of landscape and how it has shaped or has impacted my personal view, as an outsider. As I read the Fuentes manuscript, I realized that the Spanish gold that had ended up in English banks had (in part) also helped to change the Canadian landscape. I realized the importance of this information. Much of what we are taught is the catastrophic impact that colonization had in this part of the world, but, in this case I had also found additional information that enriched my understanding of the colonial process. As Mary Longman points out we are still in a colonial period. Whether we call it post-colonial or neo-colonial, ideas of the colonial "social state" still reside and are exchanged freely.

***Cultura Exotica* (write-up for the exhibit).**

Composed of two main sections (Figs. 13 & 14), *Cultura Exotica* speaks about the relevance and relationship of a circular and complex history between Latin America, Spain and England and to a further extent Canada.

Part one of this piece relates to the long and multifaceted history between Latin America and Spain: a history that exoticized and romanticized an entire continent as a means to exploit it. Vast amounts of gold and silver (among many other resources) left Latin America for Spanish royal courts and banks. These hoarded treasures helped to feed and fuel the Spanish empire. Simultaneously, the people and resources of Latin America



Figure 13. *Cultura Exotica*. Right View. Photograph. 2009. Mixed media (Acrylic on hardboard, photograph collage, paint pen, paper and vinyl).



Figure 14. *Cultura Exotica*. Left View. Photograph. 2009. Mixed media (Acrylic on hardboard, photograph collage, paint pen, paper and vinyl).

were exploited to levels of near extinction. This romantic and exotic view of Latin America endures till today, creating a paradox where the idea of paradise is sold for a few dollars, and Latin America still yearns for real economic solutions. (Fig 15)

Part two communicates the history of Aztec, Mayan and Inca gold (and silver), and its trajectory from Latin America to Spain and eventually England.

Following the era known as the Golden Era of Spanish Colonization (1521-1643), The Spanish Empire was weakening in all fronts, due to its overextension as a colonial

superpower. As Carlos Fuentes, a Latin American writer, art critic, theorist and politician explains: Much of the gold that continued to flow out of the Americas ended up being filtered through Spanish investors into British banks (32-36).

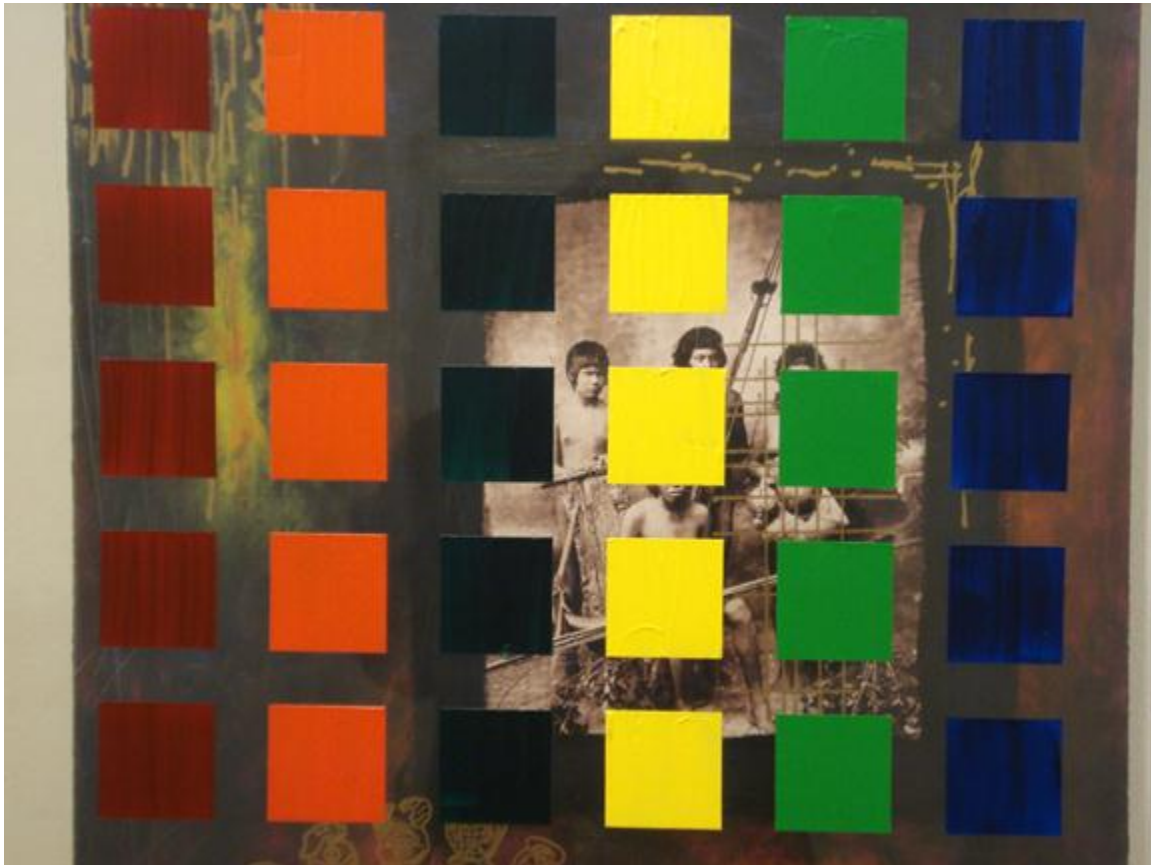


Figure 15. *Cultura Exotica*. (detail). Photograph. 2009. Mixed media (Acrylic on hardboard, photograph collage, paint pen, paper and vinyl).

As such, the British pounds (£s) that helped create the nation of Canada with its beautiful cities, majestic buildings and landscapes, can be in part, traced to the exploitation of Latin America and the era of Spanish conquest.

The Canadian twenty-dollar bill, is adorned by Tupac Amaru (d. 1572) (Fig. 16). Tupac Amaru is known as the last leader of the Inca Empire, an empire that reached what are now Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina and Ecuador; and managed up to

20,000,000 people.¹⁸ Ultimately - the Spanish conquistadors hung Tupac Amaru for defending his people and his empire.



Figure 16. Cultura Exotica. (\$20 bill detail) Photograph. 2009. Mixed media (Acrylic on hardboard, photograph collage, paint pen, paper and vinyl).

¹⁸ 1527 estimate. wikipedia.org. Web. 5 April 2013.

3.3 Indigeniety and Marginality; and the Question of Situated Spaces and Diaspora.

In the introductory preface to the book *Margins and Institutions* by Nelly Richard, the writers, Juan Davila and Paul Foss, speak of the specific pressing circumstances and realities in which Chilean art was created during the military regime of the 1970s and 1980s in Chile. They speak of and contrast those realities to those of Australia at the time of the book's publication. In it they contextualize and situate the book's core themes as those that could only have risen out of and in reaction to this *specific time and context* of Chilean history, and where specific similarities and connections could be made but could *never* truly repeat themselves in Chile or anywhere else.

This idea of *specifics* in the context of time, space and also *place* has been something that I have often pondered about. But, I now see that I overlooked it for many years, since up to a certain point, I considered myself as someone from the margins. But I did not truly consider that there are *many margins*.

For years I have pondered the idea of Diaspora and Indigeniety. I have often contrasted and compared the many variables that make them similar as well as different. I have often found some kind of comfort in the idea that so much of the idea of Indigeniety resides in a strong past (historically) that can closely resemble that of Diaspora, and to a greater extent my history. I have often compared ideas surrounding dislocation, separation, trauma and all other issues that tend to meld together – or that at least, tend to share similar planes of both experience and expression and also consequence.

James Luna

One of the artists that I have always tended to gravitate towards is James Luna. Luna is a Luiseño man from California. His mother is a First Nations woman and his father is of Mexican ancestry. The scope of his work engages and interrogates the ideas of representation/misrepresentation and static notions of subjectivity and stereotype interpretations of what a first Nations man or person is all about in the mind's eye of today's mainstream culture. I have always understood the work of Luna and have always considered his work to be quite straightforward and powerful, with relatable themes to my own work and experience.

For Luna, misrepresentation is one of the most pressing issues. Luna noticed that First Nations people had their designated spaces in museums, but he also noted that these spaces had been relegated to mere representations of the past, a past that had been mostly constructed by the dominant settler society. These museum spaces also repositioned indigenous individuals in a constant state, as never changing, and always in a position where modernity had little impact on them. Regarding the First Nations individual in popular culture Luna stated:

That's why I dislike the movie *Dances With Wolves*. It did nothing but glorify all the good stuff. It didn't show any Indians mad, or any Indians upset. It didn't show any Indians cry. It didn't show any Indians fucking up. We're still beautiful, stoic and pretty. You see the movie and you go out and see a fat, overweight, acne-covered, poor, uneducated person — is that the real Indian

you want to see? Not that we're all either one of those. But it just isn't one way (Durland 34).

First performed in 1987 at the San Diego Museum of Man by Luna (Fig. 17) the *Artefact Piece* brings this issue of misrepresentation to the forefront as part of the post-colonial narrative.¹⁹ Noting that First Nation societies were not dead, Luna also wanted to point out that the static curatorial system had created a vortex in which the current First Nations cultures were being trumped and absorbed by constructed notions of a static indigenous culture.

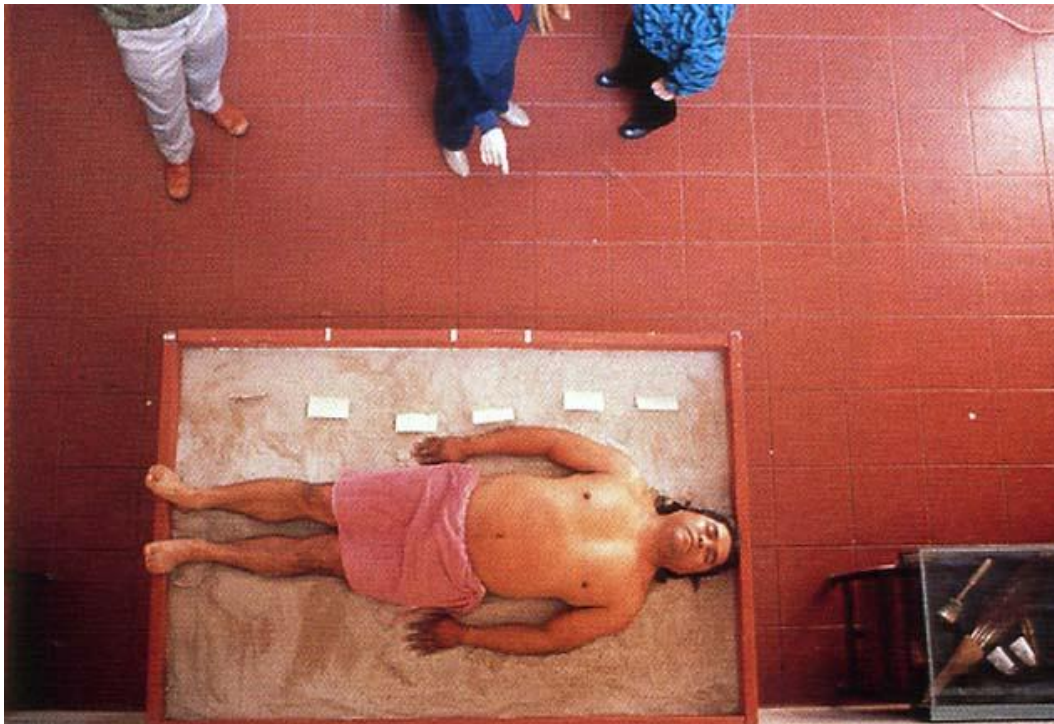


Figure 17. *The Artefact Piece*. 1987. James Luna. Performance/ Installation. San Diego Museum of Man. Looking NDN, Contemporary Native American Self-Portrait Project. Web. 3 March 2012. Digital Image.

¹⁹ Emory University. James Luna Artefact Piece. english.emory.edu. Web. 4 April 2012.

In response, Luna realized that the only possible answer to such a reality was to place a modern “Indian” on display. This “Indian” had to be represented as a normal person, with faults and issues like the rest of society.

Mimicking the museum system of displaying artefacts, Luna lay on a display case clothed with only a towel. As part of the display, Luna exhibited some of his personal possessions, such as cassette tapes, his university diploma as well as his divorce papers. All of which were clearly labeled letting the viewer know small facts about each item. Likewise, alongside his half nude body lay several placards describing the various imperfections that could be seen on his body. One of the placards read:

The burns on the fore and upper arm were sustained during days of excessive drinking. Having passed out on a campground table, trying to walk, he fell into a campfire. Not until several days later, when the drinking ceased, was the seriousness and pain of the burn realized.²⁰

The second time that *Artefact Piece* was shown it was in 1990 in New York City. Here, Luna repeated his method of exhibiting himself alongside personal artefacts, but this time he deleted all placards from the show. According to Luna, this removal was done to further instil his point that this was a live person and that the objects being exhibited were still in use (Kiendl 150).

The presence of Luna in the exhibit made viewers uncomfortably aware of their own implications in the process of objectification. Likewise, it created a sense of uneasiness due to the fact that the power relationship between viewer and viewed was not

²⁰ Blocker, Jane, Failures of Self-Seeing. *A Journal of Performance & Art*; Jan2001, Vol. 23 Issue 67. p 21

entirely clear. That is to say that Luna was not an inanimate object, and as such it felt intrusive and voyeuristic to be standing in front of his body. As Jean Fisher puts it in her article *In Search for the "Inauthentic"*:

Luna's work did not simply threaten to return a controlling gaze: rather, the presence of the undead Indian of colonialism...and the possibility that he may indeed be watching and listening disarms the voyeuristic gaze and denies it its structuring power (48-49).

As part of the exhibit, Luna lay in a bed of sand that had been spread in the display case. This sand held an imprint of his body after he left. This sand imprint was also an important part of the exhibit since it allowed for a continuation of his presence even after he was gone.

Understanding what Luna's work is all about, is about more than just realizing that images and displays in a museum need to be more dynamic. Luna's work is far reaching, because the entire world's history is an ever-occurring wave of histories and memories being told and retold through the pen of those in power. In *The Insubordination of Signs* Nelly Richard mentions that:

History's continuity is that of the oppressors while "the history of the oppressed is discontinuous": an unfinished succession of loose fragments unleashed by cuts in meaning, and wondering about, without a guarantee of sure connection or an exact end (13-14).

Luna's work is constantly disrupting constructed stereotypes of what a First Nations person is considered to be, while, simultaneously presenting what a First Nations

person is not. Thus Luna is constantly showing a complex and fluctuating human being that is far removed from Edward Curtis' image of the stoic and unchanging Noble Savage. This *complexity of self* in the First Nations community is what Luna brings forward as the lexicon of his practice and it is what I have embraced as part of my own experience as a Diasporic Hispanic male living in a foreign land.

Luna's work around marginality and subjectivity creates a good grounding for studying some of the differences and similarities in the narratives of diaspora, marginality and indigeniety as converging (or parallel) narratives, something that I have thought about often in the past when expressing my own pressing issues surrounding the narrative of Diaspora. But, when thinking about where the similarities reside in parallel histories, such as between Luna's work and my own experience; is the importance of maintaining a vigilance of sorts so as to not collapse the argument, as Stuart Hall notes, into singular denominators of what is a much larger equation (8). Likewise, in terms of the First Nations' experience of what could be loosely termed the horizontal diasporic dislocation of internal colonization – in Canada, and, that of my own diaspora's vertical dislocation from South to North America, the argument must be sustained that: "Not all elsewheres are equal, and not all dislocations are the same...part of the commitment...is to think through the relations between diasporas as well as those between majoritized and minoritized communities" (Cho 100). Thus, vigilance must be maintained so as to not collapse the argument and concerns of differing an situated experiences into a unified multicultural experience of 'the other' as springing from a similar source (Fleischmann, Van Styvendale, and McCarroll xxvii).

3.4 Art Project II: Undressing the General and the Rhetoric of Control

These next few pages began as a write-up for an art project. For a long time I explored the idea of the General as a person. Not because I wanted to give attention to the fragility and subtleties that he as a human being may have had, and that we all have, thus giving a type of humanity to this monster; but rather because I wanted to give meaning to the many atrocities that had occurred in Chile because of *him*. I pondered on the idea of undressing the man, thread by thread, layer by layer — only to find further culpability embedded even in the seams of his own clothing and the natural folds of his skin. These traces of culpability, in the form of his own memory sewn into his clothes would surely be part of his dark story and would speak to me as the testimony of all those who became the victims of his regime. Thus the idea of undressing him came about as a means to accentuate or at least explore the General's culpability through my eyes and the testimony of others as well, while simultaneously rejecting the stories and narratives of those that speak of him as a hero and national saviour of democracy.

Therefore, undressing the General, has become a metaphoric exercise of exploring the imaginary of power, where expressions of power further the state's cause, and in this case the General and his creatures need for legitimacy even after his death.

Augusto Pinochet was born in 1915 in the port city of Valparaiso, Chile. His parents were both of working class: his mother was a housewife, and his father a customs officer for an insurance company. It is said that Pinochet received most of the attention from his mother even though there were five other siblings (Burbach 21). During his childhood Augusto Pinochet was known as a bully by the neighbourhood kids as well as

his brothers and sisters. He is also known to have explored his future calling by investing in many hours in war games with friends as well as toy soldiers (Burbach 22- 23). As an interesting aside: Burbach also correlates Pinochet's Life with that of Hitler. Both men had mothers that adored them, as well as fathers that were customs officials. Also, Pinochet admired Hitler, and it is said that as a youth he passionately followed on a wall map the advancement of the Third Reich through Europe (Burbach 24-25).

By the age 17, Pinochet was enrolled in military school, and through upward movement within the military ranks he was able to become a powerful general, with Allende himself assigning Pinochet to be commander-in-chief of the armed forces. According to Edison del Canto, this idea of Pinochet being a "powerful general" may or may not be entirely correct. Rather, he was considered someone that was neutral or undecided, and because of this fact, he was appointed head of the armed forces.²¹ As an aside, Allende performed this act of appointing Pinochet as general-in-charge of the armed forces trying to make peace with the continuingly unhappy military forces and the right (Burbach 38-39). In turn, and as history showed, Pinochet allied himself with disgruntled generals and foreign powers to overthrow Allende.

In his work *The Prince*, Machiavelli wrote that: "for war is the sole art looked for in one who rules, and is of such efficacy that it not merely maintains those who are born princes, but often enables men to raise that eminence from private station..." (qtd. in Bowers 39). Unlike Machiavelli, Pinochet was no prince, yet he was able to move into a position of power that he fought dearly to keep. I believe that it is also important to note the role of the U.S. in this act of social and cultural genocide in a foreign land. This is

²¹ Critical Feedback from Edison del Canto. September, 2011.

because the United States of America took part not only in this criminal and unsettling act of intervening in the affairs of another nation, but also in the affairs of many other nations around the world. The removal by force or coercion of leaders from nations around the world that did not favour US policy, and the installing of puppet regimes, was a common act for the US. This idea of social manipulation and global polarization was a trait of the Cold War where proxy wars were fought between the USA and USSR in lands far away from their own, and Chile was no different (Constable 46-47).

Pinochet became dictator or president as he liked to be called, through a complex sleight of hand. And, like a thief in the night, a well-armed thief at 8:00am in the morning in this case (Burbach 42), he was able to take what was not his and begin to move the nation back into ‘democracy’ or away from what had been viewed as the constructed evils of socialism. Pinochet’s regime can be divided into several sections of time. Each one is characterized by varying acts that marked the formation of social consciousness in Chile. For our argument we will omit or at least skip over certain aspects of the military regime due to the lengthy amount of information that may be required for a reasonable explanation: my focus here is on Chilean art history and Chilean diaspora.

It is important to note that the military has always assumed a large presence in the Chilean social and cultural imaginary. Historically, the military was an integral part of the foundation of Chile and its independence: Since then, the armed forces have been ever-present with military parades taking place at least twice a year. These parades honoured fallen soldiers and the “Glory of the armed forces.” With Pinochet’s installation as military leader of the nation — and the many atrocities perpetrated by the military forces — the representation of power within these parades took on a completely different

role. This is because the military no longer stood as a symbol of protection for the nation and its inhabitants, but, rather it became a sign of repression. Just the same, ever since his first advancements into the role of leader, Pinochet did not fear to use power as means to enforce the changing laws.

Burbach presents this argument, that of power and its abuse, as something that was an intrinsic part of Pinochet's regime. According to Burbach, Pinochet was not only at war with socialism, as Chile's "internal enemy", but also he was at war with "international Marxism" (47). This, coupled with Pinochet's sociopathic tendencies, and the formula for disaster in a grand scale was complete. Edison also adds to this argument by stating that: "Most officers from the Chilean army went for training in Panama and the West Point Military Academy in the US: in these military academies, the central doctrines were national security, the containment of revolutionary movements, and communism."²² This situation of a military turned against its citizens creates a situation of not only fear, but also a situation of repression in which social frameworks of direction and trust are lost. Most notably the citizenry ignorant of where the next strike may come from, becomes notably susceptible to auto-control and self-censorship. Therefore: fear through repressive armed control creates a sub-field of personal, familial, and communal censorship that can rival some of the most complex systems of surveillance.

This panoptical, self imposed, self regulated system becomes self-feeding and also self-serving, since up to a point the forces in power must only suggest or hint to some things and they become self evident without much intervention. "Seeking control not of the body but of the soul." Focusing not on the "seen but the unseen...the great

²² Critical Feedback from Edison del Canto. September, 2011.

virtue of panopticism was that it regularized and homogenized” (Cooper 79-96).
Likewise the lasting effects of this issue are still present today in Chilean society.

3.5 A Question of Invisibility

“I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination - indeed, everything and anything except me.”

Ralph Ellison. *Invisible Man*, (1952).

The arrival was exciting, emotional, new, and scary. I was now in a new land. I was in Canada. Chile was behind me now, I was here to be a new citizen in a new place. Soon I would be partaking in the many riches that this country had to offer. These riches, built on the backs and histories of others would allow me to be a new person. But nobody had told me about *the gap*, the gap that exists between immigrant and non-immigrant, between skin colours, and most of all, the gap that now existed between my new country and the old. That old country that was now so far away was still the closest thing that I

had in my life. That is where all of my friends were, where my grandparents slept and where all of my memories lay.

In Canada everything was new; the food, the markets and the over-scented spaces were all new. Likewise, it seemed as if everything was in its place, and everything had a place, a designated suffocating overregulated place and space.

Schools were inadvertently and even accidentally segregated by colour and race. This was very apparent especially between Natives and non-natives, and the older the students were and the higher the grades that they were in, the greater the separation was. Philippinos on this side, Chinese on that side, Hispanics on the other. Just the same, sub-divisions occurred: Hispanics for example; were broken down into further sub-divisions based on country or nationality. More notably these differences occurred mostly in “the new arrivals.” These were kids that had recently arrived. As time passed they slowly integrated into the less segregated masses as they learned to be Canadian, to be Western.

For the most part all students minded their own business, stayed out of each other’s way, and lived life as they knew best. Lunchtime was an interesting example of this social experiment. As we all congregated into the communal space of the lunchroom our community of students would once again break into their relegated areas each with their own meals and customs, all under the ever-observant eye of the teacher in charge of peace and security of the lunch area. It was not uncommon to hear, “*what is that?*” and “*that smells funny!*” when commenting on each other’s lunches. I think of these lunch hours now with a lot of fondness. My mother would pack large “Chilean” type lunches for us three siblings in a handbag that had belonged to our grandmother that now resided

half-way across the world; while we remained relatively unaware of the classic Canadian juice box, fruit and sandwich.

Soon after arrival in Canada I learnt that I had no place in the classroom where I had been placed. The teacher, a man with a name that I can't remember for the life of me, would simply carry on with the class as if I simply didn't exist. He had no clue what to do with me, and I had no clue what to do in this new environment.

Between classes a busy rumbling sound would be heard in the large hallways of the old structure that was the school as students moved barefoot between classrooms and assemblies I would just follow wondering what was happening. There was a girl in my classroom that spoke Spanish and she would translate whenever needed, but she chose not to associate with me, *probably* I was too much of an *immigrant* for her, and she was probably much too cool to associate with the likes of me. After-all, this was grade 7 and the coolness factor mattered. A few years later I found out that this girl died due to an overdose of some kind of diet-pills. I assume she was trying to maintain a figure that was dictated by fashion, fads, peer pressure and the Western way of life. Her name was Maria.

Over time one learns to deal with invisibility. It is not something that is outright and overtly apparent, or something that is constantly there, but much like Ralph Ellison notes, this invisibility was something I share with many, and I also experienced many times over.

3.6 Art Project III: *Invisible*

The *Invisible* art project (Fig. 18) came about as an extension of this idea of cultural and social invisibility that I experienced in certain sectors of society. As I explained above, I had dealt with this idea of invisibility in society in many situations and for many reasons ever since I took my first steps in this land. Much like many immigrants that have a need to not only survive but also recreate a life from scratch, my father took on whatever employment came his way. This included for the most part a job cleaning. I think of my

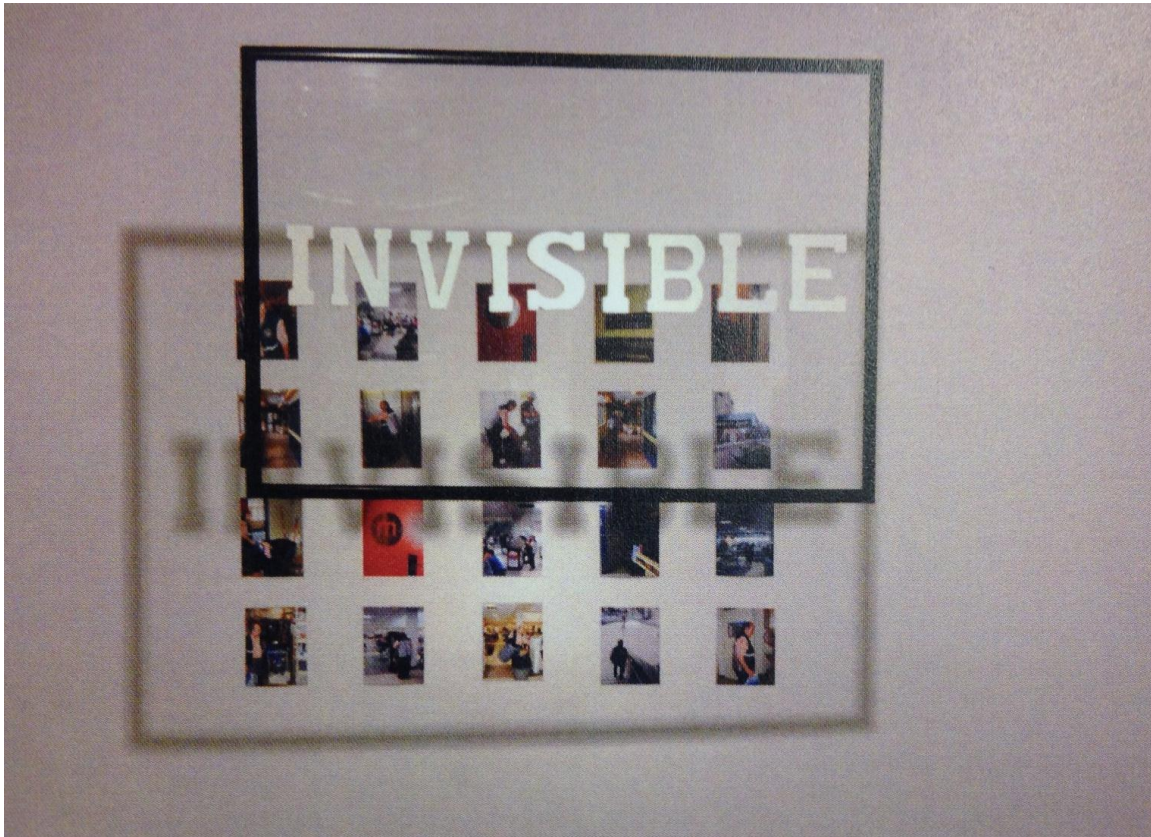


Figure 18. *Invisible*. 2010. Mixed media Installation. Work presented at *May Works Exhibition*. University of Saskatchewan. Catalog Photograph. Image Courtesy of Edison del Canto.

father as a man of incredible drive, for he was able to re-build a life for an entire family doing what others would most likely despise - and also being triumphant in an area where some have failed; honest work and providing for a family at any cost.



Figure 19. *Mario at Work*. Detail of *Invisible* Art Piece. Photograph. 2010. *May Works Exhibition*: University of Saskatchewan.

Regardless of what I've mentioned above, the work that my father took on is that of an invisible person (Fig. 19). His duties and relegated spaces are not in an office or in front of a computer and they are not considered high ranking in terms of importance and desirability. Thus his duties fall into the category I've often described and seen as invisible since it is labour that is socially present but always on the fringes of social recognition or even

acknowledgement. This invisible work force is not something uniquely mine or that of my family's. As a student, I've experienced many late nights in libraries and classrooms where the evening workforce comes out at specific times to rid the academy's teaching spaces of the day's human footprint. Interestingly enough this 'invisible' workforce leaves behind no trace of their own.

3.7 Mine Rescue

'Mine Rescue' is an 'internal dialogue' that occurred October 13, 2010 when I experienced through live television the triumphant rescue of the 33 miners that had been trapped for 69 days in a mineshaft underground. This dialogue came about as a series of almost instantaneous emotions, recollections and memories when the rescue of the miners was occurring. Somehow the emotions and feelings were transposed and juxtaposed between myself as I departed Chile in 1982 - and the 33 miners' rescue in 2010.

As I saw the first miner come to the surface after 69 days I was astounded at the feelings of happiness that surrounded my heart, but most interestingly I had an eerie feeling that I have lived these emotions before. As I sit here and look at the rescuing process live on TV my senses, story and narrative of then and now becomes transposed and juxtaposed; and time bends and blends into a singular occurrence. I soon recall that these emotions long held deep within me are the emotions I felt as I left Chile, as a child, and interestingly enough I am now re-living them in this moment of Chilean and human triumph. Thus a dialogue begins to emerge from my past and present experience of witnessing history.

October 5 1982- October 13 2010

After a long time of preparation the rescue is under way:

Prepare the things, get ready the clothes, take what we can, and leave behind what we don't need. Do they have clothes that will fit me in Canada? Why can't my friends come with me? The house looks so empty... our world is going to change and it will never be the same. Our clothes are new, we just bought them for our journey; we will see our father after such a long wait. I will never see my grandmother again. The house looks so empty.

The miners get ready and after such a long time under ground they are ready for the ascent. The TV reporter comments live on air how this experience will change the world and their lives, *I look around me and realize how my world will never be the same, just as they are getting ready to leave so am I.*

The news comes quickly, preparations are swift. I am finally leaving after such a long wait. Days become turbulent. It becomes irrational to think of Chile and myself in future tenses since I no longer know where I stand.

At the airport family say their last goodbyes I sit here wondering why they are crying, why does my grandmother cry? If I only knew that I would never see her again, maybe I would have cried as well and I would have mourned our last farewell – she asks me for forgiveness for specific moments in our common past – I had already forgotten – I had already forgiven – I guess it was true what they say - and it did hurt her more than it did me.

I hear the TV, the reporter, he mentions the sacrifice of this endeavour and how their lives will never be the same. The miners get ready - their lifeline has arrived in the form of a capsule. *I sit here in the waiting area, outside is my capsule only slightly bigger yet the journey will be the same, inside the cramped space will be suffocating, obtrusive and even exasperating. Time will sit still and for the moment I don't want to go but I must.*

The miners wave a triumphant goodbye to their comrades and away the first one goes, he says a quick prayer and the capsule disappears in the darkness of that abysmal pit. *The plane leaves into the same darkness of the night sky my journey has begun as well...*

Time passes and I wait... the plane has taken off to a different place, an unknown place in the dark abysmal night. I wonder many things, I feel nothing – and expect everything from the new place – yet all I know is that my father awaits on the other side. I look next to me and he is here standing next to me years later looking at the TV watching the miners being rescued, a long time has passed, but once again I cant wait to see him again.

First miner is out! The world cheers, *I come out of this machine and I am in a different place, my mother and sisters follow; which way? This way, no that way... no entiendo nada...I see my father, he sees all of us, he looks tired.* The rescuers greet the first man out, he sees his family they hug him and welcome him back to the surface. The world rejoices, my father cries and hugs my mother they are happy to see the first man

out. I look and see my father hugging my mother, they have not seen each other in years, they are happy to finally be together.

I have left so much behind, more than just friends and family I have left a livelihood that will remain in that constant transition of my memory, in a place that no longer exists and a time that will never return - from that moment on and for the rest of my life, I will always remain in that time capsule, crossing the earth above the vast oceans - in the middle of the night – leaving behind my old world dividing my identity and giving rise to a new one.

4. Conclusion: Returning to a Conclusion

While riding on a bus with my father on a road that winds its way between the new city of Viña del Mar and the old port city of Valparaiso, my father points out a structure nestled between the rocks and the ocean. He says: “*Mira; eso es lo que queda de la Piscina Recreo*” (look; that is what is left of the Recreo swimming pool) (Fig. 20).



Figure 20. *Piscina Recreo* (Recreo Swimming Pool) Viña Del Mar, Chile - c 2010. Web. 1 April 2013. Digital Photograph.

The Piscina Recreo was part of an entire swimming/leisure complex built in the early years of the 20th century by European immigrants. This swimming complex that at one point included a swimming pool, thermal baths and beach-front sun-bathing spaces successfully became the “place-to-be” for many years (Fig. 21).

When I was around three or four years old, I recall swallowing mouthfuls of water as people swam and splashed water around me in that swimming pool. These are not necessarily the most pleasant of memories, since no child wants to be swallowing water while hanging on to the edge of a pool by his fingertips, while thinking about the possibilities of an abysmal death in what I considered to be a bottomless entity.



Figure 21. *Piscina Recreo* (Recreo Swimming Pool). Viña Del Mar, Chile – c1960. Web. 1 April 2013. Digital Photograph.

But as I looked at the spot that my father was pointing to, I did not see the swimming complex that I remembered as a child. Instead, I saw remnants, in the form of ruins, of what had been the swimming complex many years before. “*That’s it?*” I exploded in a loud exclamation that questioned both the passing of time and the very existence of the pool itself. As if time should not have the daring audacity to spoil my

memories. Instead, time tends to be an expert at changing things—including myself, my memory, and the memory collective of this entire nation that is Chile.

But this place, made up of what was now rusted steel and broken concrete, was actual and factual, since I was looking at it with my very eyes, and not those of my mind's eye of memories past. This was definitely not what I remembered. As my father explained, the passing of time and the lack of attention had dealt this pool –and the entire complex - a bad hand, as it had fallen into complete disrepair and slowly faded into the back-pages of the collective history of the city, and of those that had spent many hot summer days there in years past.

This situation of questioning the present reality versus what I remembered as past reality—became a recurring situation when I returned to Chile in January of 2013. In this trip, I encountered so many instances where my remembered *reality* of *then* did not match my current reality of *now*. In many aspects this is the narrative of diaspora—living in a constant back-and-forth in which the lived past cannot easily reconcile with the lived present.

In this case, the act of movement between a *then* and *now* that are at odds with each other creates a sense of dislocation. This reality of the diasporic individual rises and resides in the lived contradictions of this state of ‘in-between-ness’, moving between *then* and *now* and *here* and *there*. This in-between-ness gives birth to cultural narratives of identity and hybridity; of difference and constructed one-ness; and the lived and imagined spaces of then versus now. Articulating the narrative of exile/diaspora and the immigrant

is problematic, as one must look intensely at a complex set of issues that arise when one is contemplating diasporic identities and diaspora aesthetics.

Simply defined the concept of diaspora refers to the scattering of people through movement, forced or voluntary. The term diaspora was initially used to specifically reference the scattering of Jewish people (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 425). In post-colonial studies, cultural critics and activists, such as Edward Said and Stuart Hall have engaged in the difficult work involved in generating discontinuous and plural narratives of Diaspora. These thinkers agree that at its core the experience of Diaspora is about the lack of a native geographical space to call one's own. A situation that is further compounded by complex dialogues of power and resistance (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 437; Said, "Winter" 91). Today, cultural narratives of diaspora go much deeper than just the idea of a particular immigrant population 'on the move'; they also include references to diverse global and local narratives of movement, dislocation and separation. Ashcroft argues that the concept of diaspora highlights the global trend of creating, constructing and reconstructing identity through the very process of movement and travel (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 427). Ultimately these issues create lived contradictions and major rifts in terms of belonging and identity for many diasporic subjects.

Throughout this thesis I have referenced issues surrounding diaspora and national identities; sometimes willfully, at other times unintentionally. Nationalistic ideas are often an essential part of the diasporic/exiled individual's imaginary, since they assert a place for belonging and create a place to call home; keeping the issues of separation and dislocation at bay (Said, "Winter" 50). Vijay Mishra adds to this complex dilemma by referring to the constructed diasporic imaginary - as an imaginary that defines itself

within its own self-interested perspectives, at times consciously at others unconsciously. Thus, the construction of a nation-state, or national identity, within a geographically distant diaspora, tends to be very different to the national imaginary of people who live in their ancestral homelands (Mishra 423). The constructed imaginary of a national community is quite powerful in how diasporic individuals navigate their memory and sense of themselves within diaspora. For Mishra a type of 'primitive theorization' of the former nation-state occurs, ultimately simplifying and essentializing narratives of national identity (Mishra 425). This is something that I can clearly attest to because my perspective of what Chile is, is not built on current information; rather it is built/constructed on ideas of long ago, that have been essentialized and processed to fit a wide range of emotions and situations. But ultimately most of these ideas of my Chilean homeland are constructs made in diaspora. Furthermore, Stuart Hall argues that such essentialized constructed notions of the self can create ideas around 'oneness' within diasporic communities (5). For Hall these ideas of homogeneity are problematic, to say the least, since they simplify or essentialize definitions of diaspora. And, as Hall mentions, diasporic communities are far from unified, monolithic or unchanging; since they too, like the rest of culture and society, are in an ever evolving state (6).

Ultimately, as James Clifford mentions, diasporic individuals and communities repeatedly maintain, revive and re-invent connections with former homelands (310). These connections are built on ideas of looking back and on returning. Sometimes returning becomes just as much a product of diaspora, since the individual wants to return to a land of years past, that is mostly real in the individual's memory. Most of the time this idea of returning becomes a futile endeavour since the remembered nation and the

individual person have changed too much (Muñoz 46; Wright and Oñate 198-200). Ultimately, the very notion of returning (or looking back) has more to do to do with reclaiming something of the past, something that was lost, than anything else (Rushdie 10).

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, I left Chile with my family in 1982, with the semi-certain idea that returning was not an option. Returning was doubtful and unclear, to say the least, since the new life in Canada was to be a new beginning, where looking back was, for the most part, unnecessary. Up to this point, Chile had suffered from the heavy-hand of the military Junta for nine years and it seemed like the regime was in it for the long run. In fact, it would be another eight years before Pinochet relinquished power. Thus, this idea of returning or even looking back was something that I had not considered much. All I knew was that Canada was now my home and whatever I had in me regarding my 'Chilean identity' was to be put on the back-burner for an indefinite amount of time; perhaps for-ever.

But, as I discuss earlier in this thesis, the time to return to Chile came in 1992. This trip quickly transformed itself from a mere pleasure trip to that of a lifeline for an individual that was surely suffering from an identity crisis due to the forces of dislocation and the passage of time. Much like the sea, that had eroded the structures of the swimming pool, creating new and interesting landscapes, time had done pretty much the same with me, since I was not the same as before.

This first trip to Chile in 1992, set in motion what would eventually become this thesis, as I became aware that I was now part of a new narrative, or at least a different

narrative to those which surrounded me both in Chile and in Canada. This was clearly the narrative of diaspora.

Returning for a second time to Chile in January of 2013 was in itself a unique experience. Twenty-one years had passed since my first trip. Needless to say that was a long time. I had matured in many ways, including the way in which I now saw Chile and my place within this land. I was no longer ‘lost’ in terms of my identity. I now had a very clear understanding that my identity resides somewhere in-between geographies and nations; in-between cultural narratives and images of *then* and *now*; and social and cultural constructs of *them* and *I*, both in North America as well as South America.

With this in mind I was able to explore the spaces – of Canada and Chile – both imagined and lived much better. I allowed myself the satisfaction of dialoguing with the past and the present. Chile and my city had changed; just as much as I had.

On returning to Chile in 2013, one of the first things that jumped out at me were the mega-malls and shopping centres that littered the landscape as if they had been part of the city for a lifetime. This process of mega-construction, which invariably leads to cultures of mega consumption, is not something that I was aware of, since it is a rather new phenomenon in Chile. I had read about it in books such as *The Shock Doctrine* by Naomi Klein where she theorizes on the introduction of Western ideals and ideologies (especially ideologies around Western development and consumption) during moments of “stress and/or shock.”²³ Such had been the Chilean case when the 1973 Coup had changed Chile both politically as well as economically. Likewise, in this trip I saw the

²³ See: Naomi Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine*. pp 76-78.

over stressed ideas and ideologies of a new Chile, where all forms of media take precedence in the daily lives of Chileans. This issue is not easy to explain or understand. On the one hand, consumption is at its core, but on the other '*being like*' or '*being up to speed with*' the rest of the western world seems to be a driving force that ultimately leaves Chileans in debt beyond their means of what is economically sustainable. All of this consumption is being filtered and fed through various modes of media dissemination in which the (new) mode of living is represented as a standard rather than an option. As Chilean curator and author Alberto Madrid Letelier explains: the ideological violence of yesterday has been replaced by the violence of consumption. (Madrid Letelier n.p.)

Passing through this over-mediatised space of Chilean culture, I realized that Chile has little desire to embrace its past – the road to development has come with an expensive price that still divides the nation. Not many are willing to openly speak of the changing forces that have brought about this new Chile; namely, the 1973 coup and all its implications. Chile is a 'new' nation, embracing the world and all it has to offer. At least that seems to be the rhetorical language of most but this is surely done with an air of *olvido* (forgetfulness/oblivion) as to what Chile was all about (Richard, "Residues" 15-18). Likewise, Rodrigo Karmy argues that: much like the *detenidos-desaparecidos* (detained and disappeared) of the 1970s, Chile as a nation and like a body, has also become another victim of the regime, and now has become a country that has been *detenido y desaparecido* (detained and disappeared) (Karmy n.p). Ultimately, Chile has become a ghost within its very borders.

Perhaps I'm asking for too much. Perhaps the past should remain in the past and Chile should move on with the new tools that it has been given. Perhaps places, spaces

and memories of a time of stress and fear should not exist; after all, wounds heal, time forgets and the soft earth that encases so many forgotten corpses, histories and identities slowly consumes them as well, eventually erasing them from existence; or does it?

Yet it is quite clear that this idea, that of memory and places of memory should have a place and a space within Chile. Chile, as strong as it looks from an economic point- of-view remains in some respects, a fractured nation, since it is a nation where Left and Right ideologies are still latent and at odds with each other. One of the biggest existing symbols to this issue of memory, memory erasure and memory control, in my opinion, is the Presidential Palace known as *La Moneda* in Santiago (Fig 22). This place of memory is a magnificent building in the neo-classical style that also serves as both a residence to the elected president and also as a collective symbol for national stability, unity, and the many other overarching themes surrounding national monuments and structures.



Figure 22. *La Moneda*, Santiago Chile. February 2013, Digital Photograph.

Visiting *La Moneda* in a hot summer day, where temperatures usually exceed thirty degrees centigrade, was an interesting experience. Santiago is a city with six million inhabitants that all seem to be out and about at the same time. The air is barely breathable; streets are congested and needless to say, so are all modes of transportation.



Figure 23. *Flag Facing La Moneda*, Santiago Chile. February 2013, Digital Photograph.

The magnificent structure that is La Moneda sits facing a vast open space as broad as the building itself and as long as a city block, made up of both grass, water fountains and glass floors (the glass floors give light to a modern and vast art gallery that sits completely below ground in what would be the front of the building). All of this open space is faced by a gigantic flagpole that sits at the opposite end (Fig. 23). This mast holds the biggest symbol of Chilean identity, the Chilean flag. And in this case, the biggest Chilean flag that one can imagine.

As I stood there, looking at and contemplating the historical context of this space, it was not hard to see, even if only in my mind's eye, the collection of images that arise

around this historical space. This site, which became a highly significant and contested space on the morning of September 11th, 1973, still holds a trace of what happened that day (Fig. 24). Surely, gone are the broken windows and the bullet holes of various sizes that littered all faces of the building.



Figure 24. Ruins of La Moneda. September 16, 1973. Corbis Images. Web. 1 April 2013.

Likewise, gone are the traces that this building was completely gutted through constant aerial bombings on that fateful morning. But it only takes a moment of recollection, and the simple closing of one's eyes, to bring it all back. In an instant I am surrounded by tanks, soldiers and the excess of emotions and adrenalin that was lived by so many that day. In an instant, barricading men take their places, for this battle will go down to the last man standing. In an instant, I'm part of it all.

I was not there that morning of September 11, 1973; I was a baby at home. But, being there in 2013 surely “brought it home,” in terms of what happened, and how it must have gone down for those inside that residence; inside that home—for after all that is what it was—a home.

Walking down the streets of Santiago was an interesting experience. I don’t recollect going there as a child so everything was new. My mother tells me of her experiences in Santiago as a child. A child that was sent to live there with unknown people, simply because her mother was unwilling to deal with a thirteen year old anymore. I understood -like never before - that Santiago with its broad streets and tall colonial buildings is a place of much pain for my mother. This pain, resides somewhere in the still open wounds of her memory, and I saw a level of emotion and expression that I had never seen before. Interesting thing that of memory; it is quite resilient and it tends to take a step forward when we least expect it.

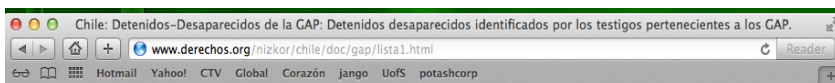
We arrive at a river crossing with multiple bridges that is bustling with people, cars and street vendors. This is the *Rio Mapocho*; it is an important thoroughfare for the water that comes from the snow-capped Andes Mountains that can be seen in the far distance. The river sits in a rather deep channel with tall walls made of stone and cement designed to keep the water under control, especially during the rainy seasons. Yet, in spite of the many precautions, the water, from time to time, still overflows its banks.

As we are crossing the river, my mother stops me in the middle of it and tells me to look at the river that sits below us, and says: *‘In times of the dictatorship, this is where corpses would sometimes float down-stream.’* I freeze, stare in awe, and take it in;

because for me this is new visual information. The river moves fast, and the strong current carries with it many things, mostly mud and debris, yet at one time, as I have just been informed, it also carried corpses.

In their haste and their desire to remain anonymous, the military would make clandestine dumps of corpses in many places, including the ocean, deserts and rivers. Sometimes when the corpses were dumped in the river they would float down-stream as if they had a second life or a will of their own. As they floated down the *Rio Mapocho*, they publicly denounced the atrocities and despairs that other corpses could not attest to, and bore witness to the reality that Chile was living through, even if many were choosing to ignore it.

Furthermore, this bustling river that still echoes those days of so long ago, becomes another monument to the past that asserts itself and gives further testimony to the atrocities of what the dictatorship did. The floating corpses are gone and the blood-stained water washed out to sea long ago; yet, this river is still a powerful living monument of testimony; and I am glad I was there to see it. Funny thing, that of testimony, it can be silenced but never erased, for it will echo and resonate one way or another.



Detenidos desaparecidos identificados por los testigos pertenecientes a los GAP.

Apellidos y Nombre	Fecha Detención	Fecha Encontrado	Hora Encontrado	Lugar	Procedencia	Protocolo Autopsia 1991	Protocolo Autopsia 1973	Número Sepultura
Avilés Jofre, Oscar	11sep73	22oct73	22:30	Puente Lo Espinoza	Comisaría de Rencá	2873	3492	2701-1
Carreño Calderón, José Belisario	11sep73	19sep73	21:00	Río Mapocho. Puente Bulnes	Fiscalía	2912	2727	2719
Castro Zamorano, Manuel Ramón	11sep73	18sep73	22:00	Vía Pública	Fiscalía	2853	2681	2706
Cruz Zavala, Carlos	11sep73	19sep73	21:00	Río Mapocho. Puente Bulnes	Fiscalía	2907	2725	2691-1
Freire Medina, José	11sep73	26oct73	03:00	Canal San Carlos	Tenencia Peñalolen	2975	3570	2562
Gamboa Pizarro, Luis Alfredo	11sep73	19sep73	00:30	Río Mapocho. Puente Bulnes	Fiscalía	2889	2722	2690
Gutiérrez Ayala, Daniel Antonio	11sep73	11oct73	11:00	Sector Pudahuel	Fiscalía	3036	3263	2388
Jorquera Leyton, Gonzalo Mario	11sep73	20sep73	08:30	Río Mapocho. Puente Bulnes	Fiscalía		2731	
Marambio Araya, Oscar	11sep73	19sep73	21:00	Río Mapocho. Puente Bulnes	Fiscalía	2836	2728	2705-1
Montero Salazar, Edmundo E.	11sep73	19sep73	21:00	Río Mapocho. Puente Bulnes	Fiscalía	2887	2724	2696-1
Ramírez Barría, Williams O.	11sep73	19sep73	05:30	Río Mapocho. Puente Bulnes	Fiscalía	2888	2726	2696-2
Rodríguez Riquelme, Luis F.	11sep73	27sep73	11:00	Departamental Macul	Retén Macul	3015	2943	2353
Sotelo Ojeda, Jaime Gilson	11sep73	20sep73	09:30	Río Mapocho. Puente Bulnes	Fiscalía	2848	2723	2695-1

Figure 25. *Detenidos-Desaparecidos – Muertos del Rio Mapocho.* (Detained-Disappeared -- Corpses of the Rio Mapocho.) Digital Image. Web. 1 April 2013.

Looking for further evidence of the “corpses of the *Mapocho*,” I did not come across photographic evidence of such atrocities. But I did come across interesting markers that testified to such events. One of these markers is a list that I found on the internet (fig. 25), that testified to the finding of corpses on the *Rio Mapocho* banks. Among other statistics, the list shows names of the detained, dates of detention, places of detention, and also the places where the corpses were found. In the table the “*Rio Mapocho*” is mentioned several times as the place (*Lugar*) where corpses were found.

As I walked next to the Mapocho riverbanks, I found an additional marker in the form of graffiti art that pointed me to other ‘*Corpses of the Rio Mapocho*’. On the sides

of the channel one can see that the steep walls are also places where graffiti art lives— under the direction of the subversive urban terrorist. (Fig 26)



Figure 26. *El Muerto del Rio Mapocho* (The Corpse of the Rio Mapocho) Digital Image. 2013. Digital Book. Anibal Ortizpozo. Web. 1 April 2013.



Figure 27. *El Muerto del Rio Mapocho*. (The Corpse of the Rio Mapocho) Digital Image 2013. (Detail) Digital Book. Anibal Ortizpozo. Web. 1 April 2013.

El Muerto del Rio Mapocho (The Corpse of the Mapocho River) is a mural that commemorates the many bodies that washed down river and that landed in the many banks of the river. *The Corpse of the Mapocho River* sits on the shore waiting to be found. While it waits; it dreams (left). On the right of the mural stand two executives, discussing important daily business. While above his legs and feet a society speaks, sees and hears nothing. Perhaps they can't, are not allowed to, or simply don't want to be aware of what is going on around them (Fig. 27). Above the corpse it is written, *El Alambre!* (The Wire!). Possibly, this makes reference to the precarious situation that the

corpse finds itself in – or possibly the precarious reality that the nation found itself so long ago, and today as well.

The walls of the Mapocho testify to some of the realities of Chile's history and present it for those that want to see them. And, much like the issues surrounding collective and individual memory, they are there if one is willing to look. Returning to Chile, a country that I left at a young age, allowed me to encounter these issues head-on, or at least I was in closer proximity to them than I would have ever been to before.

This process of looking back, both in the literal sense of returning to a place of the past, as well as in the metaphorical sense of 'looking back' in one's memory, is the constant process of the individual that lives in exile; separated and in most cases looking-in and looking back from a constant outsider's perspective. In my case this activity of looking-back has taken place, through the process of writing of this thesis, as well as through actually travelling back to this relatively foreign place - that is Chile. Both processes have allowed me to bridge so many gaps and ideas. But I find it impossible to think that I would have been able to come to any kind of resolution, or more whole conclusion, without actually travelling back.

Though this process of looking back I was able to see the value and importance of the artist-as-witness in the Chilean context, both then and now. It was the artist that worked tirelessly during the dark days of the dictatorship to sustain, not only a front against the atrocities of the dictatorship, but also a mode of communication as to what were the things that the dictator was disseminating as 'the new mode of cultural production' that normalized or made acceptable the production of fear, the *detenidos-*

desaparecidos, the vilifying of the Left and the many instances when amnesia was a lifesaving reaction. Here I am thinking of artists such as Jaar, Rosenfeld, and Dittborn who worked in what we could argue to be different media, genres, and modes of production and dissemination. As presented earlier in this thesis, Jaar worked in photography/installation; Rosenfeld in the public sphere of site specific interventions; and Dittborn who is specifically known for his world-travelling Airmail Paintings. Yet together, along with many other artists, they were part of an internal, subversive and oblique system that stood up to the government, the dictator, and his far-reaching shadow.

Today, this far reaching shadow of the dictator is still quite present in the national imaginary and daily lives of Chileans. The Dictator was able to cast a shadow that, with the aid of foreign powers, was able to change the political and financial landscape in Chile, perhaps forever. Furthermore, this shadow has literally cast a new form of amnesia, and has created a new form of *detenidos-desaparecidos*, which for some thinkers, includes the entire nation. Yet the artist continues to steadfastly look for venues to disseminate and dismantle the Dictator's shadow. In the case of the artists mentioned above, their works made back then, during the dictatorship, have taken new meanings, since they can still question quite strongly what has become acceptable and normal in the new Chile.

For Diaspora, looking back is just as important as breathing, and as much as it takes emotional energy to do so; looking back is essential. It keeps the diasporic individual in contact with what was left behind, with what was lost, and that which can

never be re-acquired. It also helps to define who they (*we, us, me*) are in terms of *then* and *now; here and there*; as well as *them* and *us*.

Sometimes I ask myself what was the ultimate effect that the dictatorship had on me. I have come to the understanding that I too am part of the *detenidos-desaparecidos*. Perhaps not in the most literal sense; but sometimes I find myself asking *Donde Estoy?* (Where am I?), much like the mothers of the disappeared do, when they ask about their loved ones: *Donde Estan?* (Where are they?)—and at times, I don't have an answer. Surely my sense of self, and the idea of me, was at the very least detained and arrested when I left Chile that evening in October 1982. Surely I found a new place to call home, but it will never be the same, for I am no longer the same.

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