


CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TESTIMONIES OF CHILEAN EXILE:
BETWEEN PUBLIC PROTEST
AND THE WORKING THROUGH OF TRAUMA

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The extreme violence unleashed by the Chilean military regime following the coup d'état in 1973, which soon materialized into a repressive system of concentration camps and torture, was perfectly in harmony with a series of structural reforms in Chilean society promoting the realization of a truly capitalist revolution.¹ This revolutionary transformation, which inscribed Chilean society into the most orthodox ideology of the neo-liberal program, required the dismantling of the social fabric that had at the beginning of the decade made possible the rise to power of the Unidad Popular (UP) and its replacement with a completely different regime of social structuration and political participation.

The repressive dynamic of the military government was consistently linked to the legislative, economic and social transformations that shook Chile from 1973, producing a political body whose objective and fundamental effect was to generate a system for the production of subjectivities apposite to market society. In fact, the repressive technologies imposed by the military revealed a conception of subjectivity as a substance malleable by means of physical torture. In contrast to what the militaristic ideology had always proposed, the fundamental objective of torture was not so much to extort information from the detainees as it was to eradicate established political identities and the social ties that sustained them. In that sense, the concentrationary system and the massive implementation of torture that followed the coup of '73 should not be

¹ According to the apt expression of Moulian.

thought of as eruptions or excesses in the exercise of power, but rather as structural elements in the project of social transformation that set the government of the Military Junta in motion.

Perhaps for that reason, and from the first instance, the testimonies of the survivors in exile proposed themselves as a space in which the commitments and modes of experience that had been sustained in the popular movement could be, in some way, safeguarded. That would be carried out by describing the spaces—the concentration and torture camps—especially designed to do away with them. In this way, the survivors who chose to narrate their experience in the camps both publicly denounced the scope of military repression and at the same time attempted to establish foundations for the continuity, in the near future, of the popular movement the military was attempting to extirpate.

This explains why many of the testimonies contained prologues by prominent figures in the Unidad Popular movement, figures such as Luis Corvalán, Volodia Teitelboim and Gladys Marín.² In the words of the prologue writers it is clear that, from their perspective, from the moment that the military regime had blocked up all the means of political participation hitherto available, to bear witness to what had happened in the camps constituted a new form of social struggle in perfect continuity with the popular project of the UP. In that sense, in the leftist imaginary, the survivors in exile who offered their testimony became combatants of a new kind, key elements in the reconstruction of the struggles that had been cut down by the violence of the coup.

From the beginning, some of the camp survivors' testimonies became materials in circulation, in which many exiles found a space of recognition, and that built the foundations for a certain symbolic cohesion in the face of the geographic dispersal of exile. Some testimonies circulated in mimeographed or carbon copies among the clandestine militants who still remained in the Chilean interior. Alejandro Witker, author of *Prisión en Chile*, donated the profits of his testimony to the clandestine leadership of his party in the interior of the country, with the hope of contributing to the reconstruction of their struggles.

The first group of testimonial texts produced in exile, therefore, maintained a close relationship with the broad movement of international protest that followed the coup of '73, and from different spaces attempted to pressure Western governments to check the development of the military regime. The figure of the concentration camp survivor was practically

² All figures linked to the Chilean Communist Party, and who carried out an intense project of protest in exile.

omnipresent in the commissions, events and interventions³ that marked this movement of protest, and many of the urgent publications denouncing the atrocious dynamic unleashed by the Military Junta would incorporate, already in the first few months, testimonies of those who had spent time in the concentration and torture camps, those who bore a singular knowledge, based on their own experiences of what was taking place there.⁴

Conscious of the import that their image and their word was receiving in the protest movements and in an attempt to reconstruct the struggles that had been uprooted by the coup, the survivors' testimonies brought to representation some of the central elements of the popular movement, political identities and experiences that the system of camps tried to eradicate. This was carried out with the objective of safeguarding them, albeit symbolically, against the military hurricane and of serving as a reference and an anchor for the political reconstruction that necessarily was to come after the fall the Pinochet regime.

Thus, many of the survivors used the stories of their lives in the camps as a metaphor of the social relations that the military regime had wiped out, and in many of their narratives they constructed an antithetical imaginary in which the military mode of behaviour was exactly the opposite of how the prisoners related to each other. Representing those elements that the repressive dynamic strove to smash—political identities, formations of the social network, collective experience—they emphasized the way that, despite the military violence, all these elements survived.

Many of the testimonies would extend to all levels of representation, thus, a process of metaphorization of the concept of community that the thrust of the popular movement had sustained, a community that would not let itself be lost. On the one hand the testimonies promulgated the experience of the camps as immanently collective, constructing individual experience as a hypostasis of a community experience; on the other, they

³ Among the most important, at the First International Conference of Solidarity with Chile, held in December of 1973 in Helsinki, was the proposed creation of the International Investigative Commission of the Crimes of the Chilean Military Junta. Testimonies by numerous concentration camp survivors were heard in subsequent sessions.

⁴ As was the case, for example, of the very early publications *Testimonios de Chile*, edited in Buenos Aires by the Argentine intellectuals Noé Jitrik and Silva Bermann; *Testimonio: Chile, septiembre 1973* (VVAA: 1973); Sergio Villegas, *Chile, el estadio, los criminales de la Junta Militar* (1974); Carlos Cerdá, *Chile: la traición de los generales* (1974); *Chile: le dossier noir* (VVAA: 1974); or Judy White, ed. *Chile's Days of Terror, Eyewitness Accounts of the Military Coup* (1974). Only a few months after the coup, all these had incorporated numerous survivors' testimonies.

showed the perseverance of collective commitments in the prisoners' relationships.

That process of metaphorization of the lost community was not limited to the presentation of situations characterized by the mobilization of collective commitments; in many cases it animated the style by which the narratives organized their raw materials, the different voices and discourses that were called up in them, and the very narrative structures in which the testimonies took shape. Against the docile, malleable and depoliticized subjectivities that the camp system sought to produce, the survivors enunciated their experience of the horror from out of the regimen of political experience that the military regime tried to eradicate, with the declared objective of providing the near future with the elements of reference for a re-articulation of the struggles and the social network that the military government was obdurately trying to destroy.

The fact is that all this effort to safeguard the political identities and experiences of the popular movement would have little to say in the process of Chilean re-democratization, and would remain for the transitional ideology a rather sinister remnant of a past about which no one wanted to know anything. This should not surprise us, since if the Transition was effective in anything it was precisely in its capacity to drain away the antithetical imaginary that had sustained the struggles from the beginning of the seventies, an imaginary that in the testimonies of the exiled survivors would at best remain frozen, like a photograph of another time, and which in the imaginary of the democratic Transition would gradually acquire a sepia tone of memories that, from afar, appear to arrive from a foreign world.

Further, for many agents of the Transition, the testimonies of the survivors constituted a lacerating presence, in the context of the historical project that changed Chile and of the violence that failed to do away with it, because they presented themselves as a remnant of another time offering nothing in the way of direction for the political future; for these agents the testimonies would lack influence and relevance to the consensual project that would structure the social re-democratization and reorganization of the nineties. The survivors' testimonies would be, thus, relegated to a archive that, with few exceptions, no one wanted be responsible for. Like sordid family secrets, they would be relegated to a forgetting that would present itself, furthermore, as the condition of the spectacularized success of the transitional process, and thus were converted into an inert material, incapable of shedding light on the social space of which they had dreamed of being, a few years earlier, the referents.

Limit Experience and the Fragmentation of the Telling

When I was forced to abandon my country at the end of 1974 I found myself shaken. *My mind hadn't been able to grasp the significance of what had happened...* Then something unexpected happened: I re-read the pages and the initial memory was blurry, and only gradually did my memory begin returning. *At times it was as if the text had been written by someone else.* Strange how the mind blacks out those memories that make it difficult to function... (Sergio Bitar 13; emphasis added)⁵

Already published in Chile during the final years of the military dictatorship, Bitar's very belated testimony, *Isla 10*, explicitly posed a question of the relation the surviving subject maintained with the traumatic event undergone inside the camps: what role could testimonial writing have in the symbolic elaboration of this relationship and, as such, in a certain process of reconstitution of subjectivity years after the technologies of violence wielded by the military regime had made of that subjectivity its principal field of application.

From the beginning Bitar's text signaled that the experience of the camps was something which, at first, he was not able to integrate into his own biography. It had to do with an element the survivor had expelled from the representation of his experience, since he did not find the form by which to introduce it. In this way, the experience of the camps was situated in a regimen of exception or discontinuity with respect to Bitar's other experiences, with the result being that it was extremely difficult for the subject to construct a narrative in which to include it: as if the experience of the concentration camp had produced a discontinuity in the subject's temporality, a void in which he didn't recognize himself as such.

That problem would become one of the recurrent reflective elements in the Chilean testimonial narrative that, albeit with different forms and intensities, would not cease to address this question. In many of the texts written by the survivors, testimony was presented as a space that would facilitate the reintroduction of the traumatic incident into the temporality of the subject or, what amounts to the same, would construct for the survivor a subjective position from which to represent himself in the traumatic event. To carry that out would require, as is logical, an enormous illocutionary energy, and the construction in many cases of an

⁵ One of the principal leaders of the Unidad Popular political movement, Bitar was the Minister of Mining in the Allende Government and, many years later, Minister of Education in the Lagos administration (2000-2006).

extremely complex rhetorical structure in order to sustain that speaking position.

What is interesting to note is that the construction of this enunciative position capable of carrying out this process—which is nothing other than the position of the witness—could not be achieved without violence or contradictions: “At times it was as if the text had been written by someone else,” as Bitar says. And this paradoxical linkage of the narrated experience to the “I” embodied in the text would acquire in each of the testimonies a different form, in some extreme cases—those, perhaps, more formally elaborated—becoming veritable ontological paradoxes, as we shall see.

In fact, testimonial texts would not only propose their intervention with respect to the projects of historical transformation for which the authors had been spokespersons. Although that was the element that would give political meaning to the texts, permitting them to circulate in the spaces I have described and to be apposite to the authors’ intents, it is also clear that all the work of writing would be traversed by an element that seemed to emerge in a disruptive form in the face of the explicitly political orientation of their discourse. In fact, the presence in testimonial texts of what we could call a phantasmatic remainder of the traumatic event would seem to erode the solidity of the political wager, piercing the roundness of their enunciations and undermining from within the apparent power of their link to concrete historical projects.

That elusive but omnipresent presence, difficult to locate but nonetheless permeating the testimonies from beginning to end, is the element that makes these texts unique and differentiates them in large measure from other political texts. In fact, beyond the representations of the social relationships they evidence, which is to say their ideological claims and their self-representation as important works in the struggle of exile, what truly solidifies the political nature of the survivors’ testimonies is the presence of that traumatic remainder that, even without desiring it, is revealed in them.

Although each survivor confronted this traumatic nucleus differently, each would need to construct a perspective from which to write so that the experience could be inscribed in the discourse in some way. This was the fundamental challenge that the testimonial enunciation confronted: how to put into discourse the traumatic experience that had taken place in the interior of the camp dynamic? With what linguistic register should the horror be confronted? By means of what narrative strategies could an experience that had caused a fundamental rupture in the biography of the subject be ordered? With what discursive procedures could a space be

created such that the dislocating power of the traumatic event could emerge in the telling of it without breaking the narrative completely apart? In short, how to inscribe in the narration the processes of de-subjectification that had taken place in the survivor while maintaining the subjective position that allowed him to speak?

We know that the idea of trauma maintains an intimate relationship with the temporality of subjectivity: it concerns an experience that the subject perceives as strange to himself, as foreign to his biography, as an accident that provokes a discontinuity in subjective time. The traumatic event is expelled from the narrative framework by which the subject organizes his own story and therefore the temporality—not chronological, but experiential—through which the subject situates himself in the world and produces an experience of it. The trauma would be, thus, what comes to establish a hiatus in subjective temporality, given that it concerns an event that threatens to produce a dissolution of the “I” and therefore cannot be inscribed in the logic of the subject’s desire.⁶

That being said, the testimonies of the survivors pose a fundamental question which they tried to answer in their own texts: is there a way in which the subject can incorporate the traumatic event into his own history? In his now classic book on testimonies of the Nazi death camps, Lawrence Langer responded to this question:

Testimony is a form of remembering ... straining against what we call disruptive memory ...an effort to reconstruct a semblance of continuity in a life that began as, and now resumes what we would consider, a normal existence. “Cotemporality” becomes the controlling principle of these testimonies, as witnesses struggle with the impossible task of making their recollections of the camp experience coalesce with the rest of their lives. (2-3)

More than that, the testimonies accomplish—sometimes in an obvious way, sometimes less so—an elaboration of the traumatic event, converting it into the centre of a narrative, while at the same time situating it as the motor of the discourse, and, further result of its disaggregating effect, as the principal threat around which the narrative attempts to construct itself. If, as almost all the survivors posit in their texts, the concentration camp dynamic implied a demolition of the subjective order, an experience of radical dislocation in which the subject, to a greater or lesser extent, arrived at a nadir, the testimony can be thought of as the process through

⁶ An interesting approach to this problem from a psychoanalytic perspective can be found in Roca.

which the survivor could claim his position as witness: through it he would reconstruct his possibility of addressing the other and in that way the possibility of constructing a position of witness for his own experience, a position from which it, also, could be narrated.

In a general overview of the survivors' testimonies written during the first years of the military regime, what most stands out is the feeble narrativity by which almost all of the texts sustained themselves.⁷ Nonetheless, this feeble narrativity should not be read as an aesthetic failure, but instead as an indication of the way in which the survivors tried to articulate the experience of the concentration camps in the discourse. In fact, the majority of these testimonies lack an element that would unify the different experiences narrated in them and that would inscribe them in a causal continuity that would make intelligible the relation between the various narrative elements: in short, what the majority lack is a strong subject capable of suturing with his presence the disaggregation of the diverse elements of the experience at work in the narratives.

In my view, this raises two fundamental questions: in the first place, the fact that the concentration camp experience presents itself to the survivors as radically fragmented; and in the second place, that the way in which the experience is elaborated in narrative discourse would not find, in the majority of cases, any element by which to wholly integrate those disaggregated elements into a unified narration.

This has to do, of course, with a general consideration, but one sufficiently recurring so as to make us think that one of the fundamentals of testimony can be found in this narrative weakness, since in some manner it encodes the relation between the fragmented experience, the narration in which it is included and the subjectivity-guarantor of that narration, and its potential suture.

This is to say, testimonial enunciation puts into play a series of enormously complex and subtle relationships between the "I" that speaks—and claims for himself the status of surviving witness—and the subject that suffered the concentrationary experience, thus converting itself into the space of a radical and involuntary interior transformation. As I will analyze, the impossible adequation of these relationships would in

⁷ This is something that is not specifically highlighted by critics, with the exception of the attentive focus of Ariel Dorfman: "The functions that we have examined here [those of the testimony] and the concrete mode of their coming to fruition, implicitly bear an almost inevitable tendency toward narrative fragmentation. Memory, accusation, the panoramic sense, the truth of the others which succeeds the tragedy, the multiplicity of those who inflict it, all of this contains an irresistible grain of dispersion" (188).

large part mark the rhetorical strategies the survivors employed to narrate what was experienced in the camps.

In the attempt to express the experience that took place in the spaces the military set up, both in order to break constituted social identities and to construct subjectivities apposite to the new neo-liberal society, and having been the subject in which the fundamental spaces of this radical dislocation spoke, it should not surprise us that he who took charge of the discourse would do so in a wavering, exploratory form, without being able to construct a structure capable of making the language with which he gave his account intelligible, homogenous and narratively continuous.⁸

In this sense, the representation of torture scenes—where the logic of the violence permeating the entire concentrationary dynamic was carried to the limit—was the space concentrating most of the contradictions and problems of representation the survivors confronted in testifying. The forms in which in the texts construct the torture scenes varies greatly, of course, and depends on the choice each survivor made in facing the representation. But it needs be said that for that same reason the form of their construction and the place they occupy in the global structure of each account of the camps condenses the ethic of enunciation by which each testimony is sustained. They concentrate as a problematic knot the multitude of representational choices that each survivor had to confront in order to allude to those events presenting the most traumatic nucleus of their experience or, in some cases, to experiences which, even though the survivor was not directly the target, could not be completely shaken. And that was precisely the question: did a “targeted” subject exist in the experience of torture? And, if so, did he coincide with the principal subject of the discourse, with he who had decided to speak, and stood surety for the narrated world?

⁸ Contrary to what some literary criticism seems to think, it would be in the voids and the empty spaces which the assumed incapacity generated in the testimonies, in the abrupt leaps and discontinuities of its narrative configuration, where not only the particularity of these texts would be encoded, but also their extraordinary political value in as much as they gave rise, in Sonia Mattalia’s phrase, to a “new ethics of enunciation,” linked, precisely, to the dislocations that produced the phantasmatic remains of the traumatic event that took shelter in the testimonial enunciation.

Representing Reification: The Impropriety of One's Own Body

In *Prisión en Chile*, for example, the vantage Alejandro Witker constructs in order to approach torture in the camps is at once both very distanced and very effective in its analytic intention. By means of an impersonalization characteristic of some academic writing, the speaking subject constructs a supremely dense mask distancing himself in the extreme from the processes he will describe, while at the same time he presents an extraordinarily charged moral judgment concerning what is going to describe. The text manifests, therefore, a vigorous intention to disconnect personal experience from the possibility of articulating a judgment on the problem of the camps, in order that the latter will not be seen to be contaminated by the phantasms of the survivor's own experience:

The bodily torture varied: electric shock was applied to the sexual organs, to the anus or rectum, to the chest and over the heart; for the women, to both breasts, to their eyes, to their noses. In these places they set up a strap, connected to an electric device, such that turning it on provoked exhausting nervous crises, vomiting, fainting, and even heart attacks, costing numerous prisoners their lives. Bodies were usually struck with rubber whips, metal chains and sticks, and of course by the boots of the torturers. Some prisoners were strung up. Sometimes they were suspended from a beam by their feet, with their heads to the floor, or else by their hands tightly bound. Regardless of the method, the torture was carried out for several days, even weeks, and it was varied with being thrown violently against the walls. Burnings were also an often used procedure; in one variation they would burn women's breasts with lit cigarettes. (Witker 36)

What we have here is practically a typology of punishments, an anthropologically informed description of the possible forms of torture. Of course, nothing of the subjective experience surfaces in this analysis, and none of the textual markers link the speaking subject with the dynamics of what he describes. On the contrary, it would seem that the viewpoint from which Witker explains the torture is completely disconnected from any experiential anchor. Moreover, the text's syntax excludes the subject's participation in the narrated actions ("the bodily torture varied"; "in these places they set up"; "bodies were usually struck"; "the torture was carried out"), and speaks instead of the implication of bodies in processes in a

more or less abstract way, disconnecting them from any personal experience.⁹

But this gesture at once rhetorical and ethical also permits an objectification—before that evaluative void, the reader finds himself in need of constructing a moral position from which to pronounce a judgment on the dynamic so impersonally described—an objectification of the experience that, even though it has marked his life, the survivor chooses not to represent as his own. This process of analytical objectification of the experience has no doubt a close relationship to the survivor's position of exteriority with respect to the experience itself, an experience that in specific moments seems, according to Bitar, to belong to "someone else." And further, a close relation to the need of the survivor to establish a position from which to gaze upon the shattering experience of the torture, as if his subjectivity were not implicated.

The construction of this objectifying distance is modulated in diverse forms in the different testimonies of the survivors, each governed by differing, particular motives. However, in many there is a displacement of the subject's own body and of the subjectivity of the detainee, establishing a subtle and shattering game of distantiating between the subject and the enunciative instance foregrounding the survivor's difficulties of thinking and imagining himself in the camp and, above all, in the extreme scene of the torture.

In this sense, some of the most powerful texts manifest an important tendency to explore the possible formal solutions to the representation of the process of reification that was manifest in the concentrationary logic and especially in the torture sessions. The greater part of the contradictions of these testimonies are crystallized in the necessarily conflicted form by which the texts formally resolve the relation between the speaking subject and the process of reification that had taken place in him.

In Rolando Carrasco's *Prigüé: prisionero de guerra en Chile*, for example, the process of reification takes the textual form of a progressive grammatical objectification of the prisoners. Early in the text, in order to describe the process of reification to which they were subjected, the enunciation situates the prisoners as subjects of the processes being described:¹⁰ "we formed a bunch of hanging sausages." But in the scene in

⁹ In his testimony, Manuel Cabieses indicated that "to depersonalize our situation not only alleviates, but allows it to be better understood" (67).

¹⁰ "The muscles of our legs stiffen, wet clothes stick to our hides, bags under our eyes and our tongues baked from so much smoking. We wait eight hours immobile in our detention, when they order us to get up and join together at one of the side walls. *Single-file line. They tie* our hands to the napes of our necks and with the

which Carrasco describes the beginning of the torture sessions the subjects are displaced in the spoken syntax by an object function:

They touch my body looking for arms. It's the third or fourth search in all that has happened since I was detained ten hours ago. Face to the wall I don't see the faces of the trio but I do distinguish small drops of blood coagulating on the wall and trailing painstakingly toward the floor. *The little red balls leave behind an opaque trail as they dry.*

"What's your name?"

I give my name.

"What party do you belong to?"

"To the Communist Party."

The fist that traveled in the direction of my face stops just at an eye without touching me.

"So you are a Communist? And aren't you ashamed to confess it?"

"No."

The fist returns and twists my head on impact. Multiplied it falls on the neck, back, ears. A knee comes from behind and hits the testicles. I clench my jaw and close my hands in a desperate contraction. (29, emphasis added)

The syntactic displacement extends in this way to all the strata of representation, transforming the principles upon which the figuration of the text is sustained. In fact, the grammatical objectification highlights a process of excavating all of the elements that could give organic coherence to the representation of the subject and his corporality. The body of the detainee enters the text as a mere sum of disintegrated fragments, impossible to unify in one single instance. These corporeal fragments, disarticulated from the bodies and the intentionalities of the subjects appear as mere objects (fist, head, neck, back), isolated from any relationship of continuity between them. By the same token, the blood appears disconnected from its violent causes, discursively constructed as a mere visual surface ("The little red balls leave behind an opaque trail as they dry").

The text manifests, then, the important work of distantiation between the subjectivity of the speaker and the elements of the scene he describes. What is paradoxical is that these elements are precisely his body, his

same rope tie us all together. We have our wrists tied behind our heads. The tip of my chin reaches the back of the person in front of me and the face of the person behind me presses on my back. Stuck together like that, its not easy to move forward, despite the shoving of the guards. We formed a bunch of hanging sausages, of vertical pieces, groping our way up the ladder, encouraged by kicks and shouts" (Carrasco 29, emphasis added).

intentions and the aggression of the torturers; however, not one “I” offers itself as a point of reorganization for all the disintegrated elements in the scene, which become, thus, totally disconnected from the subjectivity authorizing the discourse. It is through this process of distantiation that Carrasco discursively implements a certain elaboration of the process of reification which runs up against the horizon of representation: placing, in the heart of the scene, any relation of meaning between the parts of the body and the speaking subject outside the scene.

In the sentence that ends the selected fragment, however, the jaws and the hands of the detainee appear to be linked to a subjectivity that survives this process, despite all; they appear to refer to verbs implying a intentional act on the part of the subject who carries them out, and can, indeed, be identified with the subject who speaks. This oscillation between subjectification and objectification is a recurring theme in Carrasco’s text, as it is in other testimonies, and marks, if I am not mistaken, one of the great obstacles for those confronting testimonial enunciation.

In fact, the representation of bodily pain is one of the challenges that these texts must tackle, and probably the one that presents major problems to the survivors at the time of constructing an enunciative structure capable of doing so. Perhaps because the extreme pain of the torture sessions threatened to destroy the organic unity of the body and, in that way, to erase that which sustains the survivor’s subjective identity.¹¹

Some of the testimonies take up this problem as their principal exploration. In the case of Carmen Rojas’ moving text, *Recuerdos de una mirista*, the conflictive relationship between the body and subjectivity during the confinement is insistently thematized, underlining a representation of the experience of the uncontrollability of the body to which almost all of the survivors testify. In the case of Rojas, this is linked to the “loss of the sensation of space and equilibrium,” that is, to the subjective dislocation resulting from the blocking off of the senses produced in the detainee by the technology of repression. The disturbing representation of the disconnection between the subjective will and the functioning of her body is the antechamber of a phantasmagorical representation that took the detainees’ bodies as the principal object.¹² In

¹¹ In her now classic study of the structure of torture, Elaine Scarry, referring to the collapse of the prisoner’s world, maintains that “the absence of pain is a presence of world; the presence of pain is the absence of world” (37).

¹² “It seemed that my body had been divided up and spread out all over the place, beyond my skin, my arms and my legs.... Meanwhile, I had the feeling that the compact entity that our bodies made moved in waves like gelatin and *I didn’t know*

that representation, the force of the pain made the organic unity of the body unintelligible and, with the disappearance of the unified image of the body, the subjectivity dependent upon the body's cohesion also fell into fragments.

Nonetheless, the fragmentation of subjectivity effected by the dislocation of the body image manifests itself in the enunciated, but without permeating the enunciative voice. In linguistic terms, what takes place in the text is a radical distantiation between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciated, perfectly correspondent with the temporal distance that is implied in the title of the testimony, *Recuerdos de una mirista*.¹³ Such distantiation doesn't imply that the one didn't recognize the other, but rather precisely enabled the subject to speak of her own disarticulation in the past, once the restorative powers of time had worked their "reconstruction." This distance established, Rojas would represent her own demolition by constructing a strong subject of enunciation capable of fashioning extraordinarily condensed images in order to recount her own subjective demolition:

I received the first charge with a shriek. My entire body shook abruptly. My head cracked and my ankles hurt so much, *as if apart from the bones, they were striking each one of the nerves and veins of my legs....* Time was another enemy: I awaited, endlessly prolonged in terror, the brief intervals between each charge, tensing my body and twisting my muscles *in an attempt to make an impossible escape that was dying in the solitary space of my body.* And then each charge would come more ferocious and painful than the previous.... I was drowning. *My body in spasms on its own....* Afterward, spent, they threw me in the cell. (28; 31; emphasis added).

Beyond the extraordinary construction of images the text realizes, it can be seen to be permeated, as are many other survivor testimonies, by the figurative process of progressive isolation of the body with respect to the subjectivity that is lodged there ("My body spasms on its own"; "spent"). This should not surprise us, since the process was without doubt one of the principal aims of the concentrationary technology, overturned in the progressive erasure of all that was subjective in the individual and in his transformation into a mere corporeal existence disconnected from identity or will.¹⁴

exactly where my body ended and other bodies began" (Rojas 18, emphasis added).

¹³ A *mirista* is a supporter of the MIR, Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria.

¹⁴ This is one of the arguments developed by Agamben in his studies of the concentration camps and the production of bare life (1999, 2000).

Albert Sucasas has posited that the concentration camp experience is centered on the experience of the body, “but of a body that can no longer be considered, simply, as one’s own. Paradoxical experience: equally, strangeness of a body that had ceased to belong to anyone and radicalization of the identification with one’s body; the concentration camp inmate lives, unsurpassable horizon of his existence, the aporia of the impropriety of his own body” (198).

In this sense, the dynamics of the camp would have as object and effect the destruction of subjectivity and identity: “without identity, the concentration camp inmate is converted into pure somatic existence, into naked flesh” (Sucasas 198). Survivors would attempt to textualize that process in their testimonies through very different rhetorical strategies, but always highlighting the search for a means capable of accounting for this process of de-subjectification—that is, of the progressive erasure of the subjective through the demolition of the relations of sensation with one’s own body.

The valuable testimony of Luz Arce¹⁵ represents in an even more complex manner the process of dissociation between the subjectivity and materiality of the body that took place in her torture sessions:

Without saying anything they threw me on a mattress and raped me. Various men: at first I tried to resist, I tried to keep them from taking off my clothes, kicked blindly. Then on the floor, with the weight of those individuals on top of me, their fetid breath hurt me inside as if they had broken me, pain in my entire body, I am crying, I have no strength left, *I only perceive that I am “something” thrown there that was “being” used.* That I resist is like a stimulus. That I remain still, if I mentally go to other places seems to be less of an incentive for them, I am a disjointed dummy, two men hold my legs while they touch me, I am gagged by a greasy rag that insists on going down my throat inducing waves of nausea, first one, then another and another... *I am one single and great nausea* that grows, it encompasses all of me and I vomit, I can’t expel the vomit that smashes against the gag and returns inside, I gag, vomit again, I can’t breathe, something hot drowns me and suffocates me. I begin to learn to die, they are still on top of me, I feel my body shake spasmodically. (56, emphasis added)

¹⁵ Published in the first few years of the Transition to democracy, *El infierno* unleashed a polemic without precedent, given that Luz Arce had passed from being a functionary in the Socialist Party to actively collaborating—after having suffered ghastly tortures—with the repressive organs of the dictatorship. *Mi verdad*, the testimony published not long after by Marcia Alejandra Merino, ex-mirista and also an active collaborator for many years, would inflame even more the debate about accusation, responsibility, and amnesty.

This fragment is articulated upon a displacement in the temporal economy of representation, and especially in the relationship between the time of the enunciation and that of the event narrated. If in the first moment (in accordance with the global logic of Arce's testimony) the scene is constructed in the past, and thus the time of the speaking subject and the time of dynamic described do not coincide ("they threw me on a mattress and raped me"), that relationship would change abruptly once Arce reflects upon her place in the logic of the torture, and would give way to being syntactically constructed in the present ("I only perceive that I am 'something' thrown there that was 'being' used").

What is most significant is not that this slide is effected in absence of all transition or narrative believability, but that a highly problematic structure is engendered in which the moment of enunciation temporally and spatially coincides with the event being described. In creating this fiction of simultaneity between enunciation and event, the speaking subject coincides point by point with she who suffered the process of dissolution. Only from this fiction of simultaneity is it possible to enunciate something like "I only perceive that I am 'something' thrown there that was 'being' used," and later, "I am a disjointed dummy" and "I am one single and great nausea," in which the speaking subject literally confirms her own disappearance as such.

The curious thing is that although the text implicitly postulates this identification between the speaking subject and she who was demolished, both possibilities are logically excluded. That is to say, how is it that in the precise moment in which the subject dissolves there emerges a position of speaking, there where nothing ought to remain?; from whence appears this "I" situated in an empty space—which the text itself decrees as such—in order to verify, precisely, her non-existence? Albeit with very different intensities and formal solutions, this profoundly paradoxical gesture can be seen in various survivor testimonies, and thus solidifies, I believe, something fundamental in the constitution of testimonial enunciation. In any case, it concerns a paradoxical position of enunciation—an impossible voice, as I have called it elsewhere¹⁶—that reveals the difficulty of integrating the traumatic nucleus of torture into the order of representation.

¹⁶ In *La imposible voz* (2005), I have tried to reflect extensively about this type of testimonial enunciation, by means of a detailed study of Hernán Valdés's testimony, some of whose arguments I briefly re-elaborate in what follows.

The Impossible Position of the Witness

Hernán Valdés's *Tejas Verdes: Diario de un campo de concentracion en Chile*, published not long after the coup, carried this enunciative construction to the limit.¹⁷ The testimony carries out a kind of transcription of the momentary thoughts and sensations of Valdés, constructing his voice in a rigorous present that would not be substituted throughout the course of the narration by any other tense.¹⁸ If we think of the enunciative process as the construction of a subjective position, the permanent, hypertrophic present tense of Valdés's account makes events coincide with the emergence of the subjectivity that was able to recount those events, thus producing a series of problems, as we will see, bearing on the fact that not every situation—and even less in extreme conditions—allows a subject to situate himself in a position of speaking about what happened.

As the narrative advances, the narrator begins to describe the recurrent impossibility of thinking himself a subject, linking it to the emergence of a corporeality that, in its uncontrollable materiality, undermines every type of subjective identification.¹⁹ If we understand the concentration camp, in its most extreme forms, “[to be] the name of the mechanism whose performance consists in seizing the subject in the refuge of his identity, producing as the final remainder an irreducible residual or remnant of this operation, the body” (Sucasas 198), then the fundamental problem that

¹⁷ First published in Barcelona in 1974, and in Chile for the first time in 1996.

¹⁸ To that end, the enunciative voice differs from the voice of the traditional diary format, since in Valdés's testimony the displacement of the narrator as effect of the experiences narrated is continuous, and does not manifest any rupture whatsoever—in contrast with the diary format, where the temporal distance of one day mediates each displacement of the narrator's position. Like a camera trying to capture an instant in the moment it occurs, the testimony utilizes a present tense syntax (“I see”) contrary to the structure of the past tense (“Today I saw”) typically found in the pages of a diary. This generates the illusion of a perpetual fluidity of the subject, whose enunciation coincides with the events narrated, without any mediating temporal distance.

¹⁹ “I have one sole preoccupation: to shit, because I can hardly hold it and I am sure that I will do it in the interrogation. I beg them to let me go.... The morning smell of eucalyptus even prevails over the stench of the ditch of shit. I steady myself and squat down. The shit flows instantly, all at once, the colour of Meaux mustard, to perfection. A soldier keeps watch with his gun, very close by. I don't have anything with which to clean myself, but what does it matter now. I scrape off the remains with eucalyptus leaves. We return. At a trot. The sun blinds me, the light and the speed *prevent me from thinking about myself in any other manner than as a mere object of nature*” (Valdés 112, emphasis added).

Valdés confronts could be formulated in the following way: from what position could he narrate his own subjective de-structuration and the emergence of this excremental remnant that is the body, if the subjectivity that could hypothetically testify to that process had been totally annulled?

I don't know how to say that I am trembling without making it seem like a rhetorical figure. My knees, shoulders, chest, the muscles of my neck and nape shake independently, each with their own distinct contractions. I know that my back aches, but the pain doesn't make me suffer.... The pain in my back comes in certain instants, as if just now I were beginning to receive kicks, one by one, in a methodical manner, with a precise chronology. I am sorry for my body. This body is going to be tortured, it's an idiot. And even still, that's the way it is, there is no rational way to avoid it. I understand the necessity of this hood: I will not be a person, I will not have expressions. I will only be a body, a bulk, they will come to an arrangement only with it. (1996 115, emphasis added).

This fragment thematizes the emergence of anguish in its most fundamental and irreparable form: the fragmented vision of one's own body, resulting, moreover, from the presence of that real materiality which is impossible to represent without recourse to the trope ("I don't know how to say that I am trembling without making it seem like a rhetorical figure"), and from the dislocation of the unitary image of the body, imaginary support of subjectivity. There appears, thus, a fragmented representation of the body in which each element is a discursive entity distinct from the others and where the only thing that unites the different corporeal elements is the figure of contortion, the coming out of their places of the diverse bodily fragments.

This anguish of fragmentation produces in the speaking subject a process of de-solidification of the body: "I am sorry for my body. This body is going to be tortured, it's an idiot." But in the sentence that closes the fragment this scission appears to change form, now that the subject of the enunciation, distanced from his own body, referring to it in third-person singular, identifies himself with it at the same time by means of the verb "to be": "I will only be a body, a bulk, they will come to an arrangement only with it." This implies, as I understand it, the will to construct a means that, from the impossible position of this scission, would allow speech, that is to say, from the non-place of articulation between the body and subjectivity.²⁰

²⁰ Or, in other words, the non-place of articulation between the living being and the speaking being, in accordance with the succinct definition given by Agamben (2000) of the enunciative position of the survivor-witness of the camps.

It's as if they cut me in two. For fractions of a second I lose consciousness. I recover because I am at the point of asphyxiating. Someone rubs violently over my heart. But I, as soon as I heard it spoken, feel it in my mouth, leaking out of me. I begin to breathe out of my mouth, at a hellish speed. I can't find the air. My chest leaps. My ribs are like a grating that crushes me. *There is nothing left of me* except this hysterical greediness of my chest for swallowing air. (1996 117, emphasis added)

The logic the text constructs in order to relate the process of radical de-subjectification that took place in the torture sessions is, in this passage, taken to the extreme, its paradoxical nature to a limit point. In order to recount that process, it is necessary, in effect, that a strong subjectivity take charge of the discourse, which is in open contradiction with the fiction sustaining the entire rhetorical apparatus of the text: namely, that the speaking subject and the subject whose avatars are represented are the same, and, further, that what happened to him was meticulously simultaneous with the very act of speaking.

This fundamental contradiction produces deep paradoxes such as “there is nothing left of me”: while “there is nothing left” emphasizes an idea of a radical evacuation of subjectivity, to enunciate “of me” it is nonetheless necessary that something abide; something has to remain as residual in that process of radical de-ontologization in order that from there one might speak, and refer that lack of being to an “I” which is explicitly negated in the “nothing left.”

In other words, if “this hysterical greediness of my chest for swallowing air” was the only remaining remnant of the subject, from where, on the very inside of the event, could it have enunciated that permanence of an excremental residue divested of subjectivity? Only from the non-place of articulation between the body and subjectivity, that is, in the space that arose between the bodily materiality that survived as remnant and that voice that appeared anchored to a disappeared subjectivity, as object of its own enunciations, although without a determinable position in them. Another remnant remained, therefore, of that radical de-ontologization—not only the body that survived as opaque materiality, but the position of enunciation the subject occupied—a remnant that made possible the enunciation itself, because without it, it would not be possible to speak from any place.

The paradox that sustains the position of the witness is grounded in this impossible loop; an impossible position, since it permits a subject to speak from the place of his own demolition, in the very moment in which it was produced. Agamben has highlighted a process of this nature in proposing that “to bear witness is to place oneself in one's own language in the

position of those who have lost it, to establish oneself in a living language as if it were dead, or in a dead language as if it were living” (2002 161). If we understand a dead language to be that one in which is impossible to assign the subject position, the logical consequence of this comparison is that the witness assumes a subject position in a space in which his possibility is negated: and this, exactly, is what sustains the enunciative position in *Tejas Verdes* as I have analyzed it.

Moreover, this impossible position that Valdés’s text facilitates by narrating the concentrationary experience must be conceived, I believe, from the paradigm of fantasy: the fantasy of the subject who can dissociate completely and, in this way, observe and narrate coherently his own demolition in the moment in which it was produced. This fantasy facilitates the impossible gaze upon that which sustains the text, and that which, therefore, determines the representation of the experience that takes place in it.

Curiously, psychoanalysis teaches us that fantasy is one of the principal modes by which we subjects elaborate the elements that provoke anxiety in us, displacing them in scenes of imaginary configuration, oftentimes in a paradoxical way: in such scenes the subject is at the same time principal actor and spectator.²¹ Psychoanalysis teaches us as well that in the aforementioned dialectic between the traumatic event, the subject’s temporality, and his biography, one of the ways that the traumatic event can be included in the interior of the account by which the subject narrativizes his existence is precisely through the means of fantasy.²² This is to say, if the trauma is that which supposes a discontinuity in the temporality of the subject and a break in the narration which sustains the subjective position, one way the subject can reintegrate the trauma into his biography is through fantasies that elaborate in some form, by means of scenes or narrations, these traumatic elements.

In this way, it seems that the construction of an enunciative position negating itself as possibility is the means by which, for Valdés, something of the traumatic nucleus is enunciable in the account. That he is able to

²¹ In *El acoso de las fantasías*, Slavoj Žižek indicates that “given the temporal circuit, the phantasmatic narration always incorporates an impossible viewpoint, the viewpoint through which the subject is already present in the act of his own conception” (23-24).

²² Translating from the French, one psychoanalytic tradition alludes to fantasy by the term “fantasm.” In his excellent article about trauma and the time of the subjectivity, Francesc Roca indicates that “An experience lived as traumatic by placing the subject face to face with his lack of being, can only enter into discourse by means of the fantasm with which the subject speaks to himself” (80).

enunciate this nucleus by means of a fantasy allowing him to find himself present as subject (with the ability to articulate the entire representation around him), merely confirms that only in this form could the paradoxical relation—of extimacy, psychoanalysis will call it—be exorcized: to turn the trauma into a strange, extraneous body, both lodged in and radically external to the subject.

Translation from the Spanish by Colman Hogan and Marta Marín-Dòmine

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