

Wanderl[o]st:

Lost Identities and Losing Place in the New World (Dis)Order

BY

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Through the investigation of works by contemporary Spanish and Spanish-American writers—Roberto Bolaño, Abilio Estévez, Lucía Etxebarria, Ray Loriga, and Antonio José Ponte—this project explores subjects that get lost due to shifts toward totalizing economic and/or political systems. Through close textual analysis, it examines who these lost subjects are, why they get lost, and what the ramifications of being lost are for their respective societies and the world at large. The time period that the plots of these works cover (1968 to present) is one marked by socio-economic shifts, responsible for spurring the alienation of the subjects of these texts. In Chile, Pinochet's coup shattered ideals for a new generation; in Cuba, the collapse of the Soviet Union left the island isolated; while in Spain, Spaniards come to grips with the disturbing memories of schism provoked by the Civil War and isolation induced by the dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

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## Introduction

### The Loser Manifesto:

#### Lost in Space, Lost in Time Within the New World (Dis)Order

History is told from the point of view of those who win. Yet during dark times, the stories of the defeated surface to explain the failures and recount the nuances of history that were ignored by those who vanquished. The works that I analyze in this project tell tales of Latin American and Spanish subjects who have been marginalized and rendered lost by totalizing political/economic systems and broader shifts toward these systems. Due to their circumstances, these “lost subjects” experience a sense of loss, which compels them to wander. This wanderl[o]st is an inventive coping mechanism that I theorize as the lost subjects’ transgressive project of resisting the constraints society has imposed upon them. In this sense, the lost subjects in the works that I analyze roam vast distances across various continents or through parallel dimensions and alternate realities evoked by art and imagination in an effort to “get lost” and escape the respective systems that contain them. This introduction seeks to define these lost subjects by delving into the common traits and general “loser” aesthetic that all of these subjects share. Being lost has a fundamental relationship with place, while wanderl[o]st uses art to transgress space and time in a way that redefines the sense of who we are, much like the experience of an exile that can alter someone’s ties to their lands. The lost subjects are a continuation and variation on the concept of exile so I draw upon analyses of exile to define the lost subject, which I see as a representative of a more global era. To give a brief history of

lost subjects in order to account for their appearance in present times, I consider their antecedents such as Don Quixote, who I see as the archetypal lost subject because he is one of the first and most famous characters in modern literature to be compelled to wander due to major shifts taking place within the sociohistoric context that he lives. Like my contemporary lost subjects, Don Quixote bravely fights for his ideals against circumstances that mark him as doomed to fail. In their quixotic projects, the lost subjects that I analyze transgress previous conceptions of identity in order to re-shape their respective contexts.

Although lost subjects share many aspects, each chapter portrays different facets of being lost at the turn of the millennium. My discussion of the lost subjects' depiction in fictional texts begins in my first chapter with what I propose as the prototypes of "lost subjects" and "losing," the wandering Latin American poets with shattered revolutionary ideals that feature prominently in two of Chilean-born author Roberto Bolaño's novels, *Estrella distante* (1996) and *Los detectives salvajes* (1998). In its look at two novels that give a broad definition of being a lost Latin American poet during an era of failed revolutions, the first chapter illustrates being lost at an international level among losers who wander Latin America, Europe, and parts of Africa. In my second chapter, I explore the many ways that Cuban artist-subjects seek parallel dimensions as alternate realities to survive shifts in post-Soviet Cuba. These street-wandering artistic subjects appear as the Cuban versions of *flâneur* in Abilio Estévez's novel, *Los palacios distantes* (2002), and as *skitalietz*, a term that has both positive (wanderer) and negative (vagabond, hobo) connotations, in Antonio José

Ponte's stories, "Un arte de hacer ruinas" and "El corazón de skitalietz."<sup>1</sup> This chapter considers the personal scale of being lost, analyzing the ways subjects become lost at a "street level" in its look at wanderl[o]st subjects who are trapped and losing within a much smaller context, the city of Havana. In my final chapter, I study Bea and a nameless protagonist-narrator that I refer to as Él in two novels from Spanish-born authors, Lucía Etxebarria's *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998) and Ray Loriga's *Tokio ya no nos quiere* (1999), respectively. The wanderl[o]st of these subjects is marked by attempts to get over lost love in a way analogous to enduring a troubling historical memory and a collective amnesia, which is the case for countries like Spain that experienced a lengthy dictatorship and a history of violence. This chapter reflects on being lost during an age of transnational capitalism marked by the emergence of a post-Maastricht Europe and the growing economic relevance of other parts of the world, particularly Asia.<sup>2</sup> What connects the different chapters, which represent disparate geographic areas, is a sensation of hope within chaos, a scramble to find a firmer definition of identity in a time of extreme flux, an attempt to make beautiful a dark situation, and an approach to a freewheeling lifestyle not only as a way of life but as an art.

The chapters and the texts that are analyzed in them are further linked by the level of agency involved in losing. The losers have noble intentions and seek out quixotic quests while knowingly undertaking doomed enterprises. They are not necessarily forced into "loserdom" by circumstances beyond their control even if such circumstances might exist. Although the wanderl[o]st subjects in all of these



texts consciously take part in activities destined to fail, part of what prompts them to embark on their respective wanderings is a common “lostness” brought on by the changes of the world. The lost subjects, in this way, are symptoms of the ills of society. While not categorically a part of determining a lost subject, class does become an important aspect in creating lost subjects. Most of the lost subjects are educated and have the capacity for something greater yet are hindered by their respective situations. Lost subjects are not what we would call poor per se. The conditions of the world’s poor are much more desperate. Nor are they rich because the world’s wealthy class are shielded from problems created by the economic shifts that hamper the lost subjects. Therefore, it is more “average” citizens, like the lost subjects, that find themselves out of place when society experiences change. In this sense, coming from a loosely defined middle class, the lost subjects’ apparent failures and losses seem to *strike harder*.

My overriding argument is that struggles regarding the transitions to totalizing political/economic systems produce these losers and lost subjects who, in turn, use art and/or creative wanderings as ways to find their place. Shifts to totalizing political/economic systems like capitalism have put “everything in its right place,” as the lyrics of a Radiohead song of the same name insinuate in an ironic fashion. As shifts to these monolithic systems put people and art into their supposed respective places, some are left either without place or not in their “right place.” As a result, they are left to wander as lost subjects. Part of the sense of loss for these subjects is the eradication of creativity from everyday life. Tim Cresswell, in his study *In Place/ Out*

*of Place* (1996), observes, “[c]reativity once was a part of everyday life and now it is reduced to ‘proper places.’ [...] This removal of legitimate creativity from everyday life,” by relegating it to galleries or concert halls, “is connected to the rise of capitalism” (55). In the case of Cuba, the authoritarian bureaucracy (that administers what is still a socialist system) has attempted to “put things in their place” in an equally imposing fashion, which is why we can observe the transgressive art performed by the *flâneurs* in Estévez’s novel.<sup>3</sup> In all cases, the artistically sensitive lost subjects react against, indeed transgress, the limitations imposed by set conventions of the respective totalizing political/economic systems by making life into art and by finding a space in the margins.

The margins (areas of slippage created by transitions to totalizing political/economic systems or weaknesses in them) offer the opportunity for more agency than a situation in which everything is “in its right place.” As a result, the losers and lost subjects make use of these margins to transgress the norms imposed by the respective systems. Because of their positions within a world marked by transnational capitalism and the fights for and against it, part of the lost subjects’ struggle is against the market and totalizing political/economic systems. Alain Touraine, in *What is Democracy?* (1997), asserts that “in a postindustrial society where production centers more on cultural services than material goods, *the idea of defending the subject and its personality and culture from the logic of apparatuses and markets replaces the idea of class struggle*” (117; my emphasis).<sup>4</sup> In this sense, subjects acquaint themselves with an increasingly consumerist society within which

the individual seems displaced either as a commodity or a means to production. In Cuba, the individual's struggle is not against the market but rather an impending sense of being trapped on the island, which is making the transition to a system increasingly based on monetary exchange that comes with the resurgence of tourism and a black market with steadily growing relevance. In all cases, the individual's struggle against the totalizing systems that control them, however, is a rather abstract one. For an individual on their own, this battle is like going up against windmills because those that have power, those who have accumulated wealth to wield their influence on the economy and politics, are shielded from the systems' failures, while the individual takes the brunt of collapsing systems. With the "class struggle" rendered obsolete in Touraine's view, the result is every-(wo)man-for-themselves, and the paradoxical situation of an individual struggle which leads to a mass mentality. Art is how the subjects in the texts I analyze create a community that works as a shield to protect themselves from the (dis)order imposed by the respective totalizing systems in which they live.

In all of the texts that I consider, political and socioeconomic transitions have created the margins into which lost subjects have slipped. Francine Masiello, in *The Art of Transition* (2001), theorizes the notion of the transition between state and market as one from cultural practices that focus on class struggle to those related more specifically to identity in terms of sexuality and gendering. In her examination of the "market for social memory" and the "commercialization of pain and loss," she notes that dictatorships (in her analysis, ones from the Southern Cone) highlight the

tension between truth and fiction (6). To discuss this tension between truth and fiction, Masiello conjures up Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault's *microspace*, Homi Bhabha's *in-between*, Arjun Appadurai's *interstitiality*, and the *subaltern* as counterhegemonic oppositional forces in order "to engage the prospect of revolt from below to alter the monolithic discourses that dominate our times" (12-13). The transitions from one (monolithic) system to another open up wiggle room or margins where lost subjects can revolt from below. In their revolt that takes place in the interstitial zones that Masiello mentions, lost subjects alter the conventions of the monolithic systems that contain them. In their transgressions, lost subjects can "embrace the agency" of their "lostness" to be creative.

Within their respective creative and transgressive projects, the lost subjects wander lost not only physically but psychologically. They are disoriented within their socioeconomic situations and therefore experience a dislodgement from their homelands. In my theorization of lost subjects, I purposely elide the concepts of "losing" and "being lost" to depict how losing things—one's ideals, their lovers, homelands, and what might have been a comfortable life—is inherently related to being lost. Being lost and/or being a loser walk a thin line between experience and what a person embodies. For example, Michael Ugarte, in his seminal work on Spanish Civil War exile literature, *Shifting Ground* (1989), argues that exile is "both a phenomenon and a person" (5). Like exile, there are fundamental crossroads where indeed being lost is wrapped up in being a loser with one inducing the other, an overlapping that illustrates the venture of the lost subjects in this project.<sup>5</sup> Losing and

being lost also give the lost subjects their defeated qualities; vanquished in a lost battle with ostensibly impossible ideals, they are “losers.” Being a “loser,” in my conception of the term for this project, emphasizes not only losing things or not winning but erasing one’s identity because of the shifts taking place. Losing their identities provides agency for the losers because it gives them a new place to start finding new identities and new ways of being. However, the misery caused by losing things for all of these subjects was not so abject as to induce total desperation. So they continue on, making their way, surviving in the margins as lost subjects. The battle that they wage is with their ideals that, in turn, are the cause of their struggles with society. In this sense, I use the term “loser” endearingly, because failure is infinitely more provocative than success while losing can be construed as more honorable than succeeding— notions that I believe will become apparent throughout this project.<sup>6</sup> Losing is also richer in nuances than “winning” because “winning” usually implies only one “correct” path, or a path narrated as correct. My purpose is not to denigrate but rather to celebrate losing because it remains a fundamental, yet overlooked, part of life. Life, for the lost subjects in the texts that I analyze, becomes about failing in a good way, going down in flames but with honor. “Loser” suggests an adolescent tone connoting social outcast, an element shared by these lost subjects. In this vein, I see being an outcast or a wanderl[ost] loser as perhaps the most honest way to survive the absurd times in which we live.

Lost subjects, like exiles, have lost either their homelands or, more precisely, a sense of belonging, and because of this loss they have the tendency to wander. This

lust for wandering aimlessly, what I conceive of as a wanderl[o]st, thus induces journeys that may span a number of continents in the case of Bolaño's lost poets and the nameless protagonist of *Tokio ya no nos quiere*. But these subjects might also be tempted to wander through various alternate realities as is the case of the Cuban subjects stuck on the island in Estévez and Ponte's texts. I particularly liken the lost subjects to a movement, although there is still no formal agreement or manifesto among the lost subjects dispersed throughout the globe. This project, by presenting the various characteristics, ideas, principles, and motivations of lost subjects in several case studies, serves as a sort of "loser manifesto." The lack of formality remains a defining feature of the lost subjects' being. Like a movement, their project is indeed to move and they are defined by their mobility. Not only do they physically move but their metaphysical project is defined by moving in order to either better define their respective identities or lose their pasts. The lost subjects bring the youthful spirit of a rock band or a new poetry movement. Their lack of organization may be their most endearing quality as they bring an enviable camaraderie which gives one hope for their collective failings.

The consequences of being lost are dire but it does not appear that the lost subjects and losers make great efforts to "find" themselves or "win." I hypothesize that one big reason for the desire—or the lust—for wandering, getting lost, is the desire to lose one's identity, or the desire to disappear completely and lose a sense of self. The linguistic similarity between the words lost and lust, apparent in the designation wanderl[o]st, also reflects a pleasure in the idea that the loss was to be

recovered but disappeared. It refers to the enjoyment of not being there, the tacit acceptance of not having anything, not knowing, and more precisely, not being “a one,” that is, not having an identity. In other words, lost subjects seek to become like ghosts and rid themselves of a troubled past or an identity that they might perceive as antiquated. This erasing of their pasts might relate to a desired detachment from “paternal” influences. This desire to sever themselves from a “father figure” is also related to the history of a number of nations because for a long time—especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—a major concern in Latin America literature was to *find* an identity. Foundational literature attempted to create an identity based not on the continent’s colonial past and its European conqueror ancestors, but rather to find unique identities for the respective nations. And the same is true for Spanish writers of this day and age who may want to forget times gone by to move on from what Franco would have called Spain’s “glorious past,” a period more defined by insular intolerance than glory. This desire to lose—their identities, certain parts of their pasts or collective histories, or ties to places that suppress them—is what unites the lost subjects.

Lost subjects, in every text that I analyze in this project, tend to be drawn to other lost subjects with whom they share ideals and some general characteristics, which include: their bohemian nature in the way that they live outside of society’s conventions; their lack of preoccupation with money, which is why they frequently do not have it; their poetic qualities, in the sense that some write poetry (Bolaño’s lost poets), others create street performances (Salma and Victorio), and all of the lost

subjects I analyze observe the world with a keen, insightful, sensitive eye like that of a poet. They seek to escape reality, either by wandering through vast territories (exemplified by Él in *Tokio ya no nos quiere*) or through their imagination (typified by Salma and Victorio in *Los palacios distantes*); they live in the moment; they investigate reality and what is going on around them like detectives solving a case; they participate in general roguery in their wanderings; they are like what Tennessee Williams used to call the “incomplete people,” those on the brink of cracking that were the subjects of the North American playwright’s work; they share a strong sense of apathy; and they do not fight against their status of being lost because their “lostness” represents a tacit resistance against their situation, like an exile.

My theorization of lost subjects and losers inevitably incorporates theoretical ideas about exile, although this is only one facet of their characterization. Moreover, lost subjects represent an extension of more traditional concepts of exile, in a way that makes them more consistent with present times. Being lost, in my conception of the term for this project, shares traits with exile; nevertheless, because of a changing historical context, lost subjects are more profoundly estranged than exiles, which is why I portray them as lost, a denotation that indicates how the world has become more alienating. Edward Said alludes to this more contemporary version of exile in his seminal essay “The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile,” in which he points out that exiles are lost souls in a no man’s land, and “[o]ne enormous difficulty in describing this no man’s land is that nationalisms are about groups, whereas exile is about the absence of an organic group situated in a native place” (51). The absence



of groups, the deep sense of spiritual alienation, and a pervading sense of desperation present in exiles are elements even more pronounced in the lost subjects of this project. Their respective situations are reason not just for leaving a place, either physically or psychologically, but motivation to keep rambling on in a wanderl[o]st. In this vein, Ugarte establishes exile within the unknown: “it is an unidentified person, one who has been something but is no longer [...], something which has no tangible existence” (3). This indefinite quality epitomizes the lost subject, who, like the exile, has a lost identity and no tangible existence.

What further distinguishes the lost subject from the exile is that they must keep wandering in order to satisfy their wanderl[o]st. To make an analogy: Rather than a fixed exile in a new land, like being forced to live in a hotel as an expatriate, a lost subject figuratively moves from hotel to hotel or from predicament to predicament in such a blur that all the places seem alike, thereby inducing more disorientation. Likewise, James Clifford, in *Routes* (1997), discusses the “exile’s desire and need for fixity” in modernity (244). In the cases I work with, none of the characters seek out another “fixed” identity or become too settled in another place. Even the lost subjects in Havana, who stay in the city, live a “nomadic existence,” in a psychological sense. Because the subjects of Estévez and Ponte’s texts do not leave their native city of Havana, their exile is much more psychological than physical and my sense is that they are lost and participants in what Paul Ilie theorizes as inner exile in *Literature and Inner Exile* (1980). Ilie juxtaposes the terms—exile and inner exile—by stating that inner exile “is an emptiness that awaits restoration, much the

same way that territorial exile is the absence that compensates itself by nostalgia and hopeful anticipation” (14). In this sense, the Cuban subjects of Estévez and Ponte’s texts take part in inner exile because they do not have the freedom to move so easily as they are portrayed as “trapped” on the island, and therefore must satisfy their wanderl[o]st without even leaving their home city of Havana. On the other hand, although most people who migrate do not have a choice, Bolaño’s lost poets and Etxebarria and Loriga’s wanderl[o]st subjects are privileged to wander, which is part of their existence. Exile connotes a more coherent resistance against a specific political order and escape from it rather than the individual roaming of the lost subjects. In a globalized world with greater ease (for some) and need (for most) to be mobile, in addition to greater capability for communication through borders, can one really be an exile? Exile suggests being separated from a homeland (typically a nation) while the lost subject represents a world that seems marked more by conflicts that take place on a larger scale. With violence and injustice taking place on a planetary scale, there is no place to hide in exile; in contrast, the lost subject is more like a reformatted version of exile that reflects this worldwide disorder. As a result of the more worldwide conflicts, lost subjects have a wider scope of wandering that includes either various continents (in the case of *Tokio ya no nos quiere*’s Él) or various parallel dimensions (in the case of the Cuban subjects).

The lost subject is further differentiated from the exile because it is harder in this day and age to pinpoint the functions of the nation and the state in this world (dis)order, which gives a new dimension to the contemporary exile or lost subject.

This is not to say that the concept of nation no longer remains important. Many theorists have noted the contrary. Manuel Castells, in *The Power of Identity* (1997), sees our current age of globalization as the “age of nationalist resurgence” (27). Clifford notes: “The world (dis)order does not, for example, clearly prefigure a postnational world. Contemporary capitalism works flexibly, unevenly, both to reinforce and to erase national hegemonies” (9). In a similar vein, Touraine opines that the contemporary world has been “superficially described as globalized and unified,” but it “is on the contrary dominated by a hierarchal divorce between the world of international trade and the world of local identities” (21). Within this conception of nations and the world together with their relation to global and local identities, lost subjects appear as more disconnected from their homelands than exiles. Exiles feel nostalgia and anticipate a restoration, like the one Ilie suggests, with their origins. Lost subjects, because they know they cannot go back to the way things were, are more disconnected.

In *Who Sings the Nation-State?* (2007), Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak philosophize on the state of nation-states and the function of the individual within them by examining exile vis-à-vis “statelessness.” I link the lost subjects to this “statelessness” that Butler and Spivak theorize by noting that “[t]he state is not always the nation-state” (1). The state stands for legal and institutional structures that delimit a certain territory serving the matrix for the obligations of citizenship while it “can signify the source of non-belonging, even produce that non-belonging as a quasi-permanent state.” The state “binds,” but “it is also clearly what

can and does unbind” (4). Therefore, it “unbinds, releases, expels, banishes” (5). When the subject is banished, the person expelled—the refugee, the jettisoned, the dispossessed—often has “no place to go, even as [s/he] arrives someplace, if only in transit” (6). This having nowhere to go, not having a “right place,” in my discussion of the texts in this project, is the definition of being lost. The paradox that the lost subjects I analyze face is that they “have become effectively stateless” in terms of the shifts in global power that fundamentally change their respective states, yet they “are still under control of state power” (8). The subjects I describe also experience the sense of displacement, which, I argue, seems to reflect a state of the world.

Though geographically disparate in terms of the contexts they depict, the texts that I analyze are linked by the events happening in world history at a macro level—Pinochet’s coup in Chile, Franco’s death and the transition to democracy in Spain, the fall of the Berlin Wall—and their consequences on a Cold War/post-Cold War international context throughout many parts of the world. The universality of lost subjects makes impossible a comprehensive study, so I have selected representative case studies which illustrate different aspects of being lost. I see the places represented in the texts as being linked by representing pivotal points in the Spanish-speaking world for experiencing the benefits and difficulties brought on by an increasingly global economy. Furthermore, the wanderl[o]st subjects are linked by a common history of violence and disorder imposed by the totalizing systems in which they live. This common history is effectively described in Ofelia Ferrán’s *Working through Memory* (2007) when she describes Spaniard Emilio Silva, cofounder of the

Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica, and his use of the term “desaparecido,” which he borrows from the disappearance of political prisoners in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, to describe people presumed to be buried in mass graves in Spain, but whose whereabouts are unknown. Ferrán notes that “[b]y comparing the repressive Francoist practice of summary executions in Spain with the human rights abuses in various Latin American countries, Silva was clearly indicating that, although the Spanish transition to democracy has long been hailed as a model for transitions to democracy in Latin America, it, in fact, has suffered problems that are only slowly, and very belatedly, being acknowledged within Spain” (20). Thus we see the wanderl[o]st subjects presented in this project as linked by collective history of mass violence symbolized by the “desaparecidos,” a term that can refer not only to murdered political prisoners in the Southern Cone and Spain but throughout the globe, and the attempts to overcome this unimaginable violence brought on by totalizing economic/political systems.

As geographically disparate as the lost subjects are, it must be noted that they are linked in spirit to a number of antecedents and precursors to the contemporary lost subjects, going back to Ovid and Homer’s *Odyssey* and beyond, some of which I will present here as a way to further our understanding of what the current lost subjects symbolize and what in their genealogies makes them who they are. First of all, theorizing the state of being lost has ramifications in terms of how we perceive ourselves. After a lost battle, generals strategize over their losses in order to be better prepared for future battles. When we look at being lost, doing so tells us about what

we find but also what we prefer not to find. North American naturalist-philosopher Henry David Thoreau, in his most famous “travel” work, *Walden* (1854), writes that “[n]ot till we are lost—in other words, not till we have lost the world—do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are, and the infinite extent of our relations” (154). But the question is: Do we want to find ourselves? Being lost is a mental state of indecision and confusion as well as a physical state of separation and disconnection. Sometimes these subjects end up lost as figurative castaways, a poignant representation of the lost subject. Being lost as a castaway has commanded a great amount of human thought, and, like being lost, has a connection with changes in our modern societies. Well known examples from popular culture and classical literature such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Swiss Family Robinson* (1812), *Lord of the Flies* (1954), the movie starring Tom Hanks *Cast Away* (2000), the current hit television series *Lost* and its antecedent *Gilligan’s Island*, among many others, seem to suggest that this theme has captured the minds of the general public for a long time. I suggest that this interest in being lost (as a castaway) stems from humanity’s desire to escape modernity.

Lost subjects and losers, like the ones portrayed in the texts that I focus on in this project, seem particularly prevalent in literature from societies that have undergone more rapid, modernizing shifts in their economies.<sup>7</sup> For example, Charles Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), a collection of poetry that many see as the boundary between romanticism and what we now know as the modern era, reflects the rapid shift to an industrialized society with a horrifying depiction of urban social

life in Paris. Following in the same line, the narrating voice of Baudelaire's *The Parisian Prowler: Le Spleen de Paris. Poèmes en Prose* (1869) seems to best conjure up the defiance towards modern society, the despondency that said society produces, and the aesthetic of finding beauty in the dark aspects of life. In it, Baudelaire artistically portrays the losers and lost subjects of Paris. The narrator, a disgruntled Parisian prowler, is the epitome of a lost subject and functions as what Edward K. Kaplan calls a guide, "an intellectual, a metaphysical exile, an irremediable bachelor, a lonely, jobless, but peripatetic writer who endures the contradictions of his transitional age" (x). Like Baudelaire's Parisian prowler, the lost subjects that I am dealing with are disgruntled, desperate, and seemingly incorrigible in how they live outside the conventions of their own respective transitional age.

Living outside of society's conventions is part of the quest of Don Quixote, who is the first real loser and wanderl[o]st subject that we find in modern narrative; the estranged hidalgo sets a number of precedents for those to come. We must keep in mind that when Cervantes was writing, during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Spain's trade with the Americas, a transatlantic trade system that broke down a number of geographical and cultural barriers, typified what many consider to be the precursor to what we now know as economic globalization. Therefore, the estranged hidalgo is one of the first literary subjects rendered lost by shifts to a more transnational economy, particularly like the subjects in my first and third chapters. Carroll Johnson, in *Cervantes and the Material World* (2000), points out the presence of commodification, commerce and exchange in the *Quijote*, illustrating that

Cervantes's novel represents the clash of two different economic systems—a feudalism that is trying to resurge, embodied by Don Quixote, and an incipient and developing capitalism represented by Sancho Panza—and the socioeconomic issues brought about by this clash (1). This clash of economic systems has parallels with the contemporary lost subjects who experience shifts to imposing economic/ political systems.

The lost subjects, like Don Quixote, bravely fight for their ideals against a world that also is replete with the effects of a capitalism that wears down on humanity. Don Quixote begins categorically opposed to the idea of money while Sancho Panza constantly reminds him of its importance as an instrument of exchange of property and goods, and of more abstract commodities such as power. In the shift from a feudal economy to a capitalist system that Don Quixote and Sancho Panza represent, the hidalgo is temporally dislocated, and in his misguided sallies, we can observe him as both physically and mentally disoriented. Like lost subjects, Sancho Panza and Don Quixote, according to José Antonio Maravall's *Utopia y contrautopia en el Quijote* (1976), find themselves “frente a las perturbaciones, dificultades, crisis, con que tropiezan en la sociedad moderna—bajo el régimen del Estado, del dinero, de la administración burocrática, de los ejércitos organizados y numerosos” and “pretenden acogerse a una sociedad, tan utópica, como ucrónica, pero que, en su plantamiento, sería, pura y simplemente, irreal” (29). Their disoriented plight, within a utopian society doomed to failure, contains many of the elements that the lost subjects that I will analyze experience.



The dual logic represented by Don Quixote and Sancho Panza between utopic ideals and practicality, feudalism and capitalism, optimism and realism, madness and reason, fantasy and reality, and conjectures and truth, is what generates the margins in which lost subjects such as Cervantes's protagonists dwell. Being a lost subject connotes a mobile marginality because they are disoriented within an ever more complex world in a way that requires them to live in the margins. These margins, part of an emerging economic system, correlate to Don Quixote's perceived insanity as he teeters on the brink of madness in a new economic context. Some of the lost subjects' committals into insane asylums are reminiscent of the episode in Cervantes's novel in which Don Quixote is "committed": the debate over Mambrino's helmet (in "reality," the barber's basin). In this famous scene, the notion of truth is argued and resolved by way of payment, paving the way for an incipient capitalism in the novel that eventually maddens Don Quixote and other lost subjects like him. This is the first instance where Don Quixote admits the uncertainty of his chivalric ideals. Because it is pure capitalism that resolves the disagreement at the inn over the true nature of Mambrino's helmet, this episode illustrates that freedom and "truth" can be bought, as the priest from Don Quixote's village pays the barber for his basin. This discussion highlights not only the tenuous line of truth but also the importance of capital in self-determination. It is this episode that precedes Don Quixote's entry (by his own will) into a cage transported by a donkey cart and the admittance of his supposed madness. This end of the first volume of the *Quijote* is the beginning of his lost illusion as it is a sad admission of a failed ideal to do good in the world by going against society's

conventions. He becomes dehumanized much in the same way that the lost subjects do in these works.

When Don Quixote becomes confined, we see an effort that continues to this day to indoctrinate conformity and control those who roam like the lost subjects whose struggle is against this confinement and involves seeking out identities in a time when they appear lost. Michel Foucault, in *Madness and Civilization* (1965), makes the point that throughout history states did not create insane asylums to cure the mentally ill but rather to control and discipline social nonconformity. This shift—from free-roaming to confinement—is analogous to shifts related to the coming of neoliberalism and open market policies in Latin American and Spain.<sup>8</sup> At one level, these shifts open their countries up for investment making them potentially more economically prosperous, but at another level, they restrict many subjects because of the selective benefits of modernization brought by neoliberalism. As a part of developing the context that this realization takes place, it must be noted that the seventeenth century, like the contemporary information age, is, as Foucault notes, “strangely hospitable [...] to madness” (37). During this “disturbed” time, Europe is divided between Catholicism and the ideas brought about when Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of a church in Wittenberg in 1517. The *Quixote*, as a product of meditation on this schism, is an exploration of lost identity and coping with what is to come. Don Quixote, at three crucial points of the novel, manifests his faith in himself, the (lost) individual, as he confronts the madness of the world. These proclamations mark his madness and his “lostness” but also seem particularly

relevant to depict the spirit of the times much in the way that lost subjects do for their respective times. He proclaims, “Yo sé quién soy” after a failed battle early on (106; vol. 1, chap. 5). He asserts, “yo me lo sé” in a discussion of politics and knights with the barber and the priest (49; vol. 2, ch. 1). And he vigorously announces, “no hay otro yo en el mundo” when he refuses Altisidora in her attempts to seduce and distract him from his quest to be with Dulcinea (566; vol. 2, ch. 70). These brave affirmations of his identity in the face of adversity are much like the artistic projects of the lost subjects who bravely defy reason as a way of establishing new modes of thinking.

Lost subjects, like Don Quixote, fail honorably in their quixotic battles, which I see in their respective transgressions that use mobility to go against the norms. Being a lost subject inherently involves being mobile as a strategy for survival. Cresswell theorizes mobility in *On the Move* (2006) by noting that being mobile used to mean living on the margins, like the travelling minstrels and *wandering Jews*: “to be mobile in the Middle Ages was to be without place, both socially and geographically” (11). On the other hand, for Thomas Hobbes, as Cresswell points out, movement was liberty; “[m]obility seems self-evidently central to Western modernity. Indeed the word *modern* seems to evoke images of technological mobility” (14-15; original emphasis). The potential troubles associated with the modern age of technology are foreshadowed by events during the nineteenth century that include industrial revolution and tendencies to be more mobile. In this sense, wanderl[o]st has dual connotations: it can refer to a way to be free in and transgress

the established norms of a modern, global dynamic while it also illustrates how one can be trampled upon by modernity's processes in the way that it can insinuate being without place.

The lost subjects' project is not precisely a Marxist class struggle but rather a struggle by the individual to stay afloat, and their survival in the margins does not necessarily represent a resistance against society but rather a transgression using art as a means to find place. In order to distinguish transgression from resistance, Cresswell signals intentionality; whereas the latter implies intention, the former rests upon the results, "on the 'being noticed' of a particular action." The transgressors must be seen as out of place or crossing the line, and this is "judged by those who react to it" (23).<sup>9</sup> Cresswell gives the example of graffiti as transgression that may not be intentionally "political" but potentially represents an expression of the existential alienation of the artists. Like graffiti artists, the lost subjects of these works reflect an "unintentional" existential alienation, particularly in their deviance that illustrates their position within their respective societies.<sup>10</sup> Cresswell juxtaposes previously held conceptions of art and crime to redefine the former, which is part of the lost subjects' transgression against society's norms. For example, in *Los palacios distantes*, Salma, Victorio, and Don Fuco's "street performances" dismantle our notion of art as permanent, an activity that belongs inside, something tame, or a readable commodity. In opposition to these qualities of "established" art, Cresswell indicates that crime is outside, temporary, wild, illegible, and a noncommodity; these are all characteristics of lawlessness (50). Thus the lost subjects are deviant transgressors of art and are out

of place, mobile and temporary like graffiti artists who, bordering on the criminal, express the “decay” of a society.

Because they are transgressors and live on the “outside,” lost subjects must reassess their identities because of a fundamental change in their relations with place; they are out of place because they cannot find their “right place.” The relationship between place and human beings is symbiotic in the sense that we find our identities in place but places are also suffused with the human. Place consciousness and place attachment have also been important in resisting modernization. Lawrence Buell, in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), notes that place consciousness and place attachment involve “concentric circles of diminishingly strong emotional identification” and that part of our reorientation within modern society is due to the result that “modernization has rendered place-attachment nugatory and obsolete” (72, 64). Our relationship with place is constantly shifting. Clifford states: “Thinking historically is a process of locating oneself in space. And a location [...] is an itinerary rather than a bounded site—a series of encounters and translations” (11).<sup>11</sup> This notion is particularly evident in the parallel dimensions created in Estévez and Ponte’s texts, but for all of the lost subjects that I observe, changes in the notion of place become part of their own shifting identities.

The studies of shifting identities as part of collective memory are relevant in my investigation of the lost subjects’ realities, which is why I link place to the study of the lost subjects’ project of transgression through movement. In *In Place/ Out of Place*, Cresswell theorizes place as “location” and “a sense of the proper,” or the

notion that “[s]omething or someone *belongs*” (3; original emphasis). Being “out of place” can thus refer to deviating from society’s established norms. When someone is out of place, their identity shifts. Cresswell looks at places of transgression as places where something “bad” happens and “authority connects a particular place with a particular meaning to strengthen an ideological position” in order “to judge” this something “bad” (8). The lost subjects in the works that I will look at transgress the accepted norms in their movements; these transgressions are part of their projects in how they establish themselves in opposition to the “establishment” and prevailing winds of change in their respective places.

Throughout the narratives that I analyze, these lost subjects transgress space in a way that redefines their orientation in the world, making them outsiders. When I say that these lost subjects are outsiders and “out of place,” their “misplacedness” gives new meaning to our own sense of place because, as Cresswell notes, “within transgression lies the seeds of new spatial orderings” (166). In this conception of space, we can see how subjects are out of place but in ways that suggest other potential realities for the worlds that they live in. They therefore redefine our limits by transgressing previously held conventions. Issues regarding the construction of otherness and how it relates to transgressions on space and place are fundamental to lost subjects and losing. As Cresswell points out, “the ‘out of place’ metaphor points to the fact that social power and social resistance are always already spatial” (11). This is because “[p]lace is one of the easiest ways of being ‘included’ and recognizing ‘other’ positions” (15). We also must recognize that space is “a site of

meaningful resistance” (163). Thus when a subject is out of place, we are defining him/her in reference to others. Cresswell goes on to explain that “territoriality is an intrinsic part of the organization of power and the control of resources and people. Uneven development helps explain the frustrating problem of the continuation and expansion of capitalism” (12). Uneven development also pushes subjects away from their origins which, as a result, is part of what makes them lost in my conception of the term. Cresswell points to David Harvey and his insistence “that the command over space is fundamental to social (usually capitalist) power” (160). Therefore, those that dominate space dominate ideology. The losers are left to fight for what is left, the margins created by the struggle for power.

Space is an appropriate vector to resist the prevailing doxa as the lost subjects use movement as a way to transgress society’s norms, and in turn, find themselves not in their “right place.” Cresswell references Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams to illustrate how dominant groups appropriate “common sense” in efforts to impose hegemony over subordinate groups who must conform to the notion that this “common sense” will also benefit them (18). The lost subjects in the texts I analyze have done away with common sense, realizing that they are not the beneficiaries of its implementation. Hegemony and “common sense” thus play a large role in the lost subjects’ wandering as it pushes them away from an ill-conceived center. Cresswell marks the connection between someone’s “objective” position (a worker, a woman, or an elderly person) and their subjective beliefs. A lost subject’s objective beliefs are taken from a position that does not correspond to a larger centralizing group or an

established order. He concludes, “[t]he dominating groups have an interest in defending the taken-for-grantedness of things—the prevailing doxa—while the dominated groups seek to push back the boundaries of what is taken as natural” (20). The losers therefore transgress the limits of what we take for granted while redefining the “map” of “common sense.” All of the lost subjects transgress previously held conceptions—reality, sexuality, and memory—of the establishment as part of their wanderl[o]st projects that invent new systems for themselves and others.

Latin American and Spanish subjects have been disoriented in a physical way that is linked to how they represent themselves; part of their metaphysical “lostness” has to do with temporal dislocation as well. Shifts in our relationship with time, another vector in which one may get lost, are also part of the disorientation of the lost subject. My discussion of lost subjects must deal with space and time as fundamental dimensions for wandering because lost subjects are indeed lost in these vectors, attempting (or not) to orient themselves within the context of our reality. E.M. Cioran, in *The Temptation to Exist* (1956), notes: “We *understand* something by locating it in a multi-determined temporal continuum. Existence is no more than the precarious attainment of relevance in an intensely mobile flux of past, present, and future” (7; original emphasis). Hence, in this contemporary era, an infinite present of timeless time, we can see how subjects become temporally dislocated in the way that the past, present, and future continuously overlap each other. The search that comes about as a result of a loss, as experienced by these lost subjects, is also fundamentally related to time because it is fundamentally linked with memory of a disturbed past



which has spurred them to movement. J.E. Malpas, in *Place and Experience* (1999), notes that the notion of place and our relation to it also has to do with time. He uses Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–1927) and its discussion of the relation between people and their relations with their pasts and their locations to discuss loss: “The Proustian search for time, for place and for a life—the search undertaken through the many pages of *Remembrance of Things Past*—is necessarily a search that arises only as a consequence of the inevitable experience of loss” (193). Society has had to remain adaptable to the shifts of time because, as Castells notes, “conceptions of time have varied considerably throughout history” (461). Castells gives the example of Russia as a timeless society, and how the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism moved Russians “from the long-term horizon of historical time to short term of monetized time characteristic of capitalism, thus ending the centuries-old statist separation between time and memory” (463). This shift of time, related to the coming of capitalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union, is particularly pronounced in Cuba. With the emergence of a more global economy that I argue comes to Cuba during the post-Soviet era, shifts in time produce lost subjects on the island.

In their transgressions, we can see how lost subjects are both lost in space and lost in time in the new world disorder, but it is their “lostness” that helps them survive it. Throughout their trajectories, they create alternative histories, disfiguring our notion of time while they create new spaces which allow them to dodge the overwhelming presence of totalizing economic/political systems. As they trace new

trajectories on the map, they alter our own sense of place and time, redefining the limits of our knowledge. This redefinition of space and time by the lost subjects links with a verse from the contemporary Icelandic artist Björk's song, "Wanderlust," that served as the starting point for this project: "I have lost my origin and I don't want to find it again." It is no wonder that subjects in this day and age want to lose themselves—their origins, their pasts, and the pasts of those that came before them—and the most logical way for them to do this is by wandering lost through a world in which place has different meaning and time has become a blur. Throughout the perpetual movement that I see as inherent to the study of lost subjects, we witness shifting identities that are illustrative of the times that we live. We also observe shifting identities and the tendency to move or get lost as a way to survive in Don Quixote's time, linking these lost subjects to a number of qualities with the estranged hidalgo: they are brave, idealistic, and perceived as mad because they do not fit in with the new system. The respective systems in which the contemporary lost subjects live punctuate these characteristics even more. The three very different cases that I examine—the literary portrayal of Latin American poets lost in the world following the decade of broken dreams, the *flâneur* and *skitalietz* that are representative of the post-Soviet Havana landscape through which they wander, and the cosmopolitan Spanish wanderers that explore their identities while trying to deal with memory and forgetting—are evocative of the struggles of individuals around the globe. Their plight is against a new world disorder that leaves the subjects in a state of perpetual wanderl[ost]. Because literature is not only a recounting of the world's happenings

but an invention of the world, the wanderl[o]st depicted in the texts that I examine  
reshapes our conceptions of the world and our place in it.

## Chapter 1

## Lost Poets and the Decade of Broken Dreams:

Roberto Bolaño's *Estrella distante* and *Los detectives salvajes*

In *Notes from Underground* (1864) Dostoyevsky provides the blueprints for the anti-hero, and in this troubled figure we can observe the alter ego of the author, a downtrodden and humiliated figure, warped by social circumstances. The footnote that accompanies this famous short work states:

Both the author of the *Notes* and the *Notes* themselves are, of course, fictitious. Nevertheless, such persons as the author of such memoirs not only may, but must, exist in our society, if we take into consideration the circumstances which led to the formation of our society. [...] He is one of the *representatives of a generation* that is still with us. In this extract, entitled *Underground*, this person introduces himself and his views and, as it were, tries to explain those causes which have not only led, but also were bound to lead, to his appearance in our midst. (263; my emphasis)

The characters that populate the narrative of Roberto Bolaño (1953–2003) and particularly his alter egos—B., Arturo Belano, and others—resemble the “representatives of a generation” that Dostoyevsky signals, and are unmoored by the changes taking place in Latin America’s shift toward a market economy.<sup>12</sup> The assemblage of anti-heroes that Bolaño describes is a band of Latin Americans born in the 1950s in left-leaning middle class families. These Latin Americans become adults

during the 1970s, a period that I call the “decade of broken dreams” characterized by the coming to power of military dictatorships that violently squash revolutionary ideals and bring the transition to neoliberal economic expansionism policies in Latin America. These policies, through exploitative practices, have allegedly strengthened the economies of some of the region’s nations but at the cost of only benefitting privileged members of society.<sup>13</sup> Bolaño’s “representatives of a generation” are those that have lost out because of these policies and appear as lost poets in two of his novels: *Estrella distante* (1996), a novella that probes the history of the author’s native Chile; and *Los detectives salvajes* (1998), an epic novel that won the prestigious Premio Herralde in 1998 and the Rómulo Gallegos prize in 1999 for its portrayal of the plight of a group of wanderl[o]st Latin American poets.

Through its use of a narrative structure that I call the “river of voices,” a stream of narrators with numerous perspectives that exhibits traits of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, *Los detectives salvajes* weaves a story of poets rendered lost by the shattering of their revolutionary ideals during the “decade of broken dreams.” *Estrella distante*, a sort of murder mystery, makes use of poets of various stripes—leftist revolutionary idealists and a self-taught right-wing performance artist who photographs the mutilated bodies that he tortures—to probe the role of literature (both writing and reading) in politics and the way violence is portrayed on a national level and a universal scale. Both texts explore the line between fiction and reality in their depictions of disturbing times for many Latin Americans. Looking at his blends of fiction and “reality” and of poetry and narrative, I will show how Bolaño’s work

portrays a snapshot of Latin American subjects who are both figuratively and literally wandering lost and how poetry is part of their project of observing the reality that surrounds them. *Estrella distante* and *Los detectives salvajes* are two prime examples of this lost sensation that is a mainstay in the *oeuvre* of Bolaño. The wild detectives of *Los detectives salvajes*, Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima, along with a sample set of Chilean poets of various stripes in *Estrella distante*, are the homologues of this disturbingly lost, idealist Latin American generation searching for meaning in a time of violence.<sup>14</sup>

Starting with Dostoyevsky's prototype of the anti-hero/alter ego as a representative of a generation, I will demonstrate how in the case of Bolaño this figure symbolizes a generational subset of lost poets. Both of the novels that I will analyze present a spectrum of poets: revolutionary poets, acclaimed poets, poets who write for the State, desperate poets, and poets who make desperation an art. Even if some of Bolaño's poets might not practice poetry per se, the poetic ideal is fundamental to their existence as the ideals of poetry seem to permeate these lost characters. Using the figure of the alter ego/anti-hero poet, by observing Bolaño's visceral depiction of reality and through the analysis of the polyphonic river of voices that populates his works, I will illustrate how Bolaño paints a disturbing landscape of Latin America and the desperate times of the Latin Americans who wander from their homelands.

Bolaño himself epitomizes the wanderl[ost] integral to his poets because he lived a wandering existence. Bolaño's biography can be summed up with the

following progression: Chilean childhood followed by a Mexican adolescence and an adult life in Spain. He referred to feeling “at home” in Spain, where he spent most of his professional career (1977-2003) before his premature death, but he also recognizes his past in Chile, where he was born, and Mexico, where he spent his formative years (1968–1977). The pivotal point of Bolaño’s political life is Pinochet’s coup in 1973, an event that lingers as a spectral background for Belano, the alter ego in Bolaño’s fiction. The author famously returns to his native Chile from Mexico after the socialist president, Salvador Allende, comes to power. He is subsequently taken as a political prisoner after Pinochet’s coup, which takes place within a month of his return to Chile. He is set free due to a series of extraordinary circumstances and returns to Mexico; later he makes his way to Spain where he settles. Of his roaming in Iberoamerica and the question of whether he is a Spanish or a Latin American writer, the author himself explains:

Siempre me ha parecido absurdo dividir a los escritores españoles de los latinoamericanos. Tal vez esto si lo digo yo es un poco que yo no soy propiamente un latinoamericano. Yo he vivido muchísimos años en España. Yo aquí no me siento extranjero, eso sin ninguna duda. De hecho, cuando estoy en Latinoamérica todo el mundo me dice: ‘Pero si tú eres español’, porque para ellos hablo como un español. Para un español, no. Un español ve claramente que yo soy un sudamericano. Y ese estar en medio, no ser ni latinoamericano ni español, a mí me pone

en un territorio bastante cómodo, en donde puedo fácilmente sentirme tanto de un lado como de otro. (qtd. in Gras Miravet 59)

Bolaño's narrative reflects this interstitial existence between Spain and Latin America and a broader scope of experience. Notwithstanding his peripatetic globetrotting existence, some of Bolaño's novels like *Estrella distante* work on a local level, portraying a national tragedy. Nevertheless, because of Bolaño's wandering and the interconnections among the wandering poets that he creates, we see Chile's national tragedy depicted with a more worldwide perspective. Patricia Espinosa notes Bolaño's push for a neonationality: "Su itinerancia se vuelca en pretender una suerte de neonacionalidad. Gesto que demarca, trasciende y amplía el lugar latinoamericano" (22). By widening the Latin American space through his wandering, Bolaño's literature, like the author himself, points to the possibility of a new way of wandering the world and a more universal perspective on life.

Bolaño writes for and about what he calls an entire generation of Latin Americans born in the fifties and coming to age in the seventies, thereby connecting the stories of a number of Latin Americans that have and continue to wander lost.<sup>15</sup> There are a number of ways in which these characters are lost or experience loss. In most cases, they seem to want to be lost as this fits into their poetic, bohemian aesthetic. The brutality imposed upon them by dictatorships and sociopolitical circumstances forces on them another type of being lost in the sense of an alienation from a conventional "normality." Typically they are portrayed as marginalized poets perhaps because poets are more sensitive to the changes taking place within the



world. Characterizing the poets, the detectives, and the cross section of desperate Latin Americans that they figuratively represent as lost, and also as losers, is not meant to be degrading but rather as an indication of their camaraderie; they represent a unity of forces (albeit losing forces) that struggle against the overwhelming destructive influences of society.

Bolaño's lost poets are like Dostoyevsky's "representatives of a generation" in the sense that they are the desperate anti-heroes who exemplify the frustrations of many Latin Americans. Toward the end of Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, the author expands his blueprint for the alter ego:

A novel must have a hero, and here I seem to have *deliberately* gathered together all the characteristics of an anti-hero, and, above all, this is certain to produce a most unpleasant impression because we have all lost touch with life, we are all cripples, every one of us—more or less. We have lost touch so much that occasionally we cannot help feeling a sort of disgust with "real life." (376; original emphasis)

This disgust with "real life" creates the anti-hero and in the work of Bolaño, I argue, causes the anti-hero to wander lost. To understand the anti-hero, it is perhaps necessary to look at the hero and how s/he represents the values of society, which can be observed through the hero's alter ego. For example, in the world of superheroes, Batman is the alter ego of Bruce Wayne and helps Wayne fight crime in Gotham City; Spiderman is that of Peter Parker, and they both fight for good and for the love of Mary Jane Watson; but Clark Kent is the alter ego of Superman. Superman, when

he creates Clark Kent, portrays an elucidating portrait of the human being through the perspective of an outsider because as an alien he does not completely understand human life. The alter egos of superheroes reflect intriguing perspectives of their surroundings; in a similar vein, writers' alter egos also create elucidating depictions of their surroundings because writers such as Bolaño or Dostoyevsky, like Superman, are outsiders. Bolaño's alter ego in *Los detectives salvajes*, Belano, represents an outsider's glimpse at life because the point where the lives of writers and alter egos meet represents a crossroads between fiction and "reality," and at this junction we see how one can influence the other. In the case of Bolaño's alter ego, this crossroads suffers from the disturbing circumstances imposed by reality and, therefore, we have the anti-hero, a representative of a dark crossroads.

The way that Belano's life (as an alter ego) intertwines with Bolaño's life as writer provides revealing details about the relationship between life and reality because Belano and Bolaño fuse together and become one in literature to provide an unusual perspective on life. The life of Belano/Bolaño is literature, and literature is the life of Belano/Bolaño. Rodrigo Fresán opines, "No importa [...] dónde termina Bolaño y comienza Belano" (295). This is because Belano is "más una vida y alternativa en otra dimensión que un alter-ego del propio autor" (299). This crossing of life and literature is a tool to explore the past and a generation's memory, and how these affect this generation's present. The biographical data of Belano match up for the most part with that of Bolaño, following the writer's moves to Mexico and his return to Chile in 1973, when he is twenty years old. More than a memoir or a

testimony, Bolaño's literature connects his story of wandering and those of many others to create a more universal portrayal of what many Latin Americans at this time (the seventies and this decade's aftermath) were experiencing; he is able to portray the dark details of not only his alter egos but those of figures like Carlos Wieder, a poet who murders in the name of Pinochet.

Bolaño's tip-toeing between the realms of fiction and "reality," writer and alter ego, makes him out of place, a stranger, everywhere that he goes. Bolaño follows Borges (and many others) in that his literature represents a form of knowledge and includes references to other writers including himself. The blend of fiction and reality is particularly evident in *Estrella distante*. In the prologue to the novella, the author makes reference to his earlier novel *La literatura nazi en América*, a work of fictional notes compiled into a book that appears as a reader, an anthology of the biographies of writers related to the ultra-right in the Americas. A number of Bolaño's characters and ideas in other novels come from *Literatura nazi en América* (1996), which in many ways serves as a sketch for not only for *Estrella distante* but also for other novels to come. Each section of *Literatura nazi*, like an encyclopedic entry, has data on the author and their works, but it is written in the first person with ironic commentary and is a story in itself. The multiplicity of the novel's genre (is it non-fiction, an apocryphal encyclopedia, or fiction?) is furthered by an *Epílogo para monstruos*, an alphabetical listing of writers, works, and editorials. The emphasis placed on meticulous categorization and classification reflects the absurdity of trying to find reason and order in a world inhabited by monsters. It is in this work, in an

entry entitled “Ramírez Hoffman, el infame,” that the story of Ramírez Hoffman (who becomes Wieder in *Estrella distante*) first appears. The passage serves as a building block for the more extensive biography of Wieder presented in *Estrella distante*, which has some of the same characters—Abel Romero and Tatiana von Beck Iraola—and new characters, or characters whose names and/or personalities change (131). In *Estrella distante*’s prologue, the author curiously notes, “[e]sta historia me la contó mi compatriota Arturo B, veterano de las guerras floridas y suicida en África, quien no quedó satisfecho del resultado final.” The author states that together they composed the novel that is in the reader’s hands and that his purpose was to “preparar bebidas, consultar algunos libros, y discutir con él y con el fantasma cada día más vivo de Pierre Menard, la validez de muchos párrafos repetidos” (11). This Borgian note works as an apology for his repetition of many of the lines of his previous novel, but more importantly, it alludes to the many layers of the narrating process. This unraveling of various narrating entities—Bolaño and O’Ryan (a friend and informant for Bolaño’s writing), plus the other alter egos in Bolaño’s writing, such as B., García Madero, and Arturo Belano—similar to Menard’s re-interpretation/re-writing of the *Quixote*, gives us a richer perspective of what might have happened during the horrors of 1973 Chile when all of these poets were forced to disperse because of the violence created by Pinochet’s coup.

These alter egos are literary representatives of the lost poets of Latin America, which in turn, represent the many Latin American intellectuals who were unmoored following the violence and disillusion that ravaged the region during the seventies.

Repeating the same lines from *Literatura nazi* in *Estrella distante* in a different context (a “detective” novella replete with poets instead of an entry from a fictional anthology of nazi writers) gives a more insightful portrayal of the horrors because we see them from the perspective of the culturally sensitive poets. Celia Manzoni, in her book on Bolaño, *La escritura como tauromaquia* (2002), notes in reference to *Estrella distante* that Arturo B. is a coauthor and the double of the author-narrator-character Roberto Bolaño, who is writing from Spain. She also cites Freud’s observation that the world of the double creates an uncanniness that is present in Bolaño’s work and that is ideal for describing the ghost world left behind after violence. The poetics of the double expands and recuperates an art of memory (40). Within this disturbing art of memory is a creation of a phantom that haunts the lost subject; as Avelar has suggested, “the memory of the trauma *is* the real trauma” (33). In the case of *Estrella distante*, it is the imprisonment, mass disappearance, and subsequent exile of numerous Chileans, and more importantly, the memory of these vile acts that make the wheels of the narrative engine spin in order to recreate the haunting for the reader. Within the use of the double, we see a blend of life and literature that characterizes the storytelling of lost subjects.

The “doubles” that populate *Literatura nazi* are part of the snapshot of the reality that Bolaño lived; the doubles that practice literature give us an idea of Bolaño’s vision of literature and its role in depicting reality, particularly its darker side as Bolaño explores the horrors of dictatorships in this novel.<sup>16</sup> Jeremías Gamboa Cárdenas proposes a look at Bolaño’s work as a “self-critique” of modernist art

through the avant-garde and postmodernist artists that Bolaño portrays (214). Avant garde artists like Wieder in *Estrella distante* are presented in deep contrast to the novel's revolutionary poets such as Bibiano O'Ryan, the Garmendia sisters, Juan Stein, and Diego Soto. In his look at the varying scopes of art, as represented in the dandy and the bohemian, Bolaño presents a dialectical vision of art and its role in politics. While showing the potential horrors of art in the case of Wieder, Bolaño also shows art's inherent power to shift thoughts and take part in the changing of reality. This is important because all of Bolaño's fiction, in one way or another, ties to the political failure of Latin America and the world at large.

Within this portrayal of reality, Bolaño's use of alter egos allows him to participate within his narrative, dousing it with a unique perspective. Álvaro Bisama calls this participation a sort of literary cameo: "Bolaño, en clave tan desconstruccionista como irónica, funciona casi siempre como si fuera un invitado más o menos accidental que termina por dotar de sentido, de brújula a sus textos" (88). This Hitchcockian tactic is "un juego culterano pero efectivo: no se trata de una autoexhibición sino por el contrario de la creación de un personalidad *ad hoc* a la tradición literaria, una semibiografía disléxica que bebe por partes iguales del culto a la personalidad como de la retórica del narrador testigo." Bolaño is a metanarrator and Belano functions as a mediator between reality and fiction. "Bolaño [...] se ubica vivo y coleando en la zona gris que separa ficción de la realidad. Eso [lo] vuelve esencialmente un cameo" (89). One of Bolaño's famous cameo roles is in *Estrella distante* when, using his knowledge of poetry, he (as a narrator) helps Chilean

detective Abel Romero find Wieder. In this sense, Bolaño (the narrator) blends fiction (his knowledge of poetry) to affect “reality” (tracking down the evil poet, Wieder).<sup>17</sup>

*Estrella distante* is a reconstruction of the life of Wieder, Chilean aerial poet and torture artist, and the text works almost like a detective novel, yet the investigation is carried out through the study of Wieder’s poetry and that of his contemporaries. The anonymous narrator (who is also a poet) traces Wieder’s path by way of the torture artist’s works of poetry and includes testimonies of other poets who follow the clues to discover the whereabouts of this Air Force pilot. During the time following Pinochet’s 1973 coup d’état, Wieder allegedly murders innocent women to host a photo exhibit of their mutilated bodies in Santiago de Chile. He also performs a number of other disturbing “poetic” acts such as writing morbid, biblical poetry in the sky. Just as this disturbing poet represents a chilling depiction of the violence and torture perpetrated by the Pinochet regime, Bolaño creates a poignant portrayal of the sad story of Chile. By narrating the desperation of a few wandering poets who desperately leave the country to live in exile, Bolaño intertwines their stories in a way that artistically evokes the thoughts and fears of many Chileans.

Bolaño creates a world of poets and alter egos in order to display literature’s role within the doomed fate of humanity. His poetic anti-heroes and alter egos are acrid because they are marginalized. Although all are condemned to doom, we can see a dichotomy between poets and monsters in his work even though there is a thin line between the two factions. Citing Carlos Fuentes’s *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*, Idelber Avelar states in his study on postdictatorial mourning, *The*

*Untimely Present* (1999), that “[t]he passage from Domingo Sarmiento to Rómulo Gallegos is described as ‘the transit from epic simplism to dialectical complexity, from the security of answers to the impugnation of questions’” (24). He goes on to note the passage from two-dimensional characters (good vs. evil) to characters that represent both good and evil and the many shades in between. Fuentes defined Julio Cortázar’s more complex characters as the “‘first beings in the Latin American novel who simply exist, . . . without any discursive attachment to good or evil’” (qtd. in Avelar 25). In Bolaño’s work we can see on the surface that poets (like Wieder) are monsters and that monsters can write poetry as Pinochet does in Bolaño’s *Nocturno de Chile* (2001), yet there is a careful portrayal of the many shades in the spectrum; the monsters are observed with condemnation, yet they do “‘simply exist.’”

Bolaño’s fascination with intellectuals from the ultra-right is not coincidental. Bolaño seemingly erases the line between left and right politics alluding to the idea that evil maybe is not “causal” but rather due to “casual” effects. Socialist detective Abel Romero suggests this notion in *Los detectives salvajes* (he also plays an important role in *Estrella distante*), recalling a reunion of a group of exiled Chileans in Paris on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1983, the tenth anniversary of Pinochet’s coup: “el meollo de la cuestión,” he recalls saying to Belano that night, “es saber si el mal (o el delito o el crimen o como usted quiera llamarle) es casual o causal. Si es causal, podemos luchar contra él [...] Si es casual, por el contrario, estamos jodidos” (397). This blurred distinction shows that perhaps we are all complicit with evil even though we might not be able to control its effects. Not even the bravest pens, the most lost and



desperate poets, are capable of undermining humanity's doomed fate.<sup>18</sup> Even then, Bolaño's work suggests an acceptance of this bleak landscape that can only be countered with the dark humor that proliferates through his work and is navegable only with the help of poets and alter egos. Thus, his narrative functions both as a tool to make sense of the world, to find "truth" in it, and a way to escape its madness.

The narration in *Estrella distante* exhibits a careful examination (as if it were a police investigation) of the evidence presented in order to more firmly pinpoint the notion of truth. For example, the narrator is careful to note that certain passages of O'Ryan's anecdotes about Wieder are the latter's words (coming from O'Ryan's postcards and letters sent to Bolaño) and not his own, giving a new texture to the narrative fabric being woven. The anonymous narrator takes care to warn us that the details he gives—for example of the Garmendia twins' murder by the hands of Wieder—are only conjectures. This caveat gives another layer of verisimilitude to the narration as it makes the reader believe that the narrator is at least attempting to stick as closely as possible to the "truth" and that he will warn us when he makes conjectures; this careful placement of the statement reflects an ironic search for "truth," an idea that appears so elusive during a dictatorship because during dictatorships the State frequently imposes a distorted concept of reality. Under a dictatorship, one can only make conjectures—everything becomes a covert operation and nobody trusts anybody. In order to emphasize the veracity and to describe the intensity of Weider's photography exhibit, the narrator states, "La exposición fotográfica en el departamento, sin embargo, ocurrió tal y como a continuación se

explica” (92).<sup>19</sup> Once again, this cleverly positioned statement increases the credibility awarded to the narrator. The realism also gives another dimension and a more acute promiximity to the reader. The attendants at the exhibit—mostly Wieder’s friends from the Air Force—have a strange reaction to the photos of the women whose mutilated bodies are provocatively posed; the first guest leaves vomiting and the others collectively observe, “[n]os mirábamos y nos reconocíamos, pero en realidad era como si no nos reconociéramos, parecíamos diferentes, parecíamos iguales, odiábamos nuestros rostros, nuestros gestos eran los propios de los sonámbulos o de los idiotas” (98). The sense of realism produced by such blending of art and fiction—and descriptions of scenes such as these that are so horrible precisely because they show something “real”—makes the experience of reading more intense because art, when it adds several levels of narration, provides a more profound depiction of an event than its plain account; it relates several layers of perspective. Bolaño is careful to expose horror in a way that gets under the reader’s skin by describing the reactions of the disturbed military members who presumably have also taken part in acts of violence.

Bolaño avoids sentimentalist testimonialism in his descriptions, allowing for a more psychological reflection on the dictatorship that leaves the reader wondering what the origins of evil are. Bolaño’s visceral realism combines memory and a clever re-examination of the limits between “reality” and fiction. Using a meticulous attention to psychological details in a way in which only literature is capable, Bolaño contemplates the history of violence. He also achieves a balance between hermeticism

and political commitment by personalizing the story, inserting himself (as narrator) in a way that the reader can understand the nightmare that he has through the personal correspondence with O’Ryan and in his conversations with Romero. One gets the sense that he (the narrator) would rather forget about Wiedner and Chile; this desire to forget, matched by the impossibility of forgetting, makes the story hit harder because it represents a contrast to more superficial, propagandistic art that can be “preachy.”

Through his more nuanced style, Bolaño blends the personal and the collective in order to look at the artist’s role in documenting the horrors of dictatorship while walking a fine line between being “committed” to both art and the well-being of his compatriots. Edmundo Paz Soldán, in “Roberto Bolaño: Literatura y apocalipsis,” an introduction to *Bolaño salvaje* (2008), one of the more thorough investigations of the author and his work, begins by mentioning Cortázar’s “Apocalipsis de Solentiname” in order to raise the question of the writer’s perceived role in creating a balance between conceiving a politically committed work and having a complex, “hermetic” style.<sup>20</sup> Paz Soldán suggests that what the committed writer must do is “sin renunciar a su proyecto artístico, sin simplificar sus hermetismos, *enfrentarse* a esa realidad atroz y representarla.” This is because “no hay otra opción que dar cuenta del horror y del mal, y hacerlo de la manera excesiva que se merece: el imaginario apocalíptico es el único que le hace justicia a la América Latina de los setenta.” Bolaño confronts this evil like few others before him: “Nadie ha mirado tan de frente como él, y a la vez *con tanta poesía*, el aire enrarecido que se respiraba en el Chile de Pinochet” (3; my emphasis). The emotions provoked by

Wieder's photos for the characters that observe them are the same that should be provoked in readers and this is precisely why Bolaño (like Cortázar) uses art, specifically photography (which has the potential of offering a clear, realistic perspective that nevertheless could be interpreted in a number of ways), as a vehicle for portraying humanity's evil. The difference between Cortázar's story and *Estrella distante* is the absolute realism that the latter utilizes, as Paz Soldán suggests: "en Cortázar, el horror en las fotos aparece a partir de una estrategia narrativa fantástica; en Bolaño, aun cuando algunas fotos son montajes, éstas son claramente testimonio de la realidad, y muestras de la poética realista abarcadora de Bolaño" (4).<sup>21</sup> Fantasy enables photos of violence to mysteriously end up on the projector screen in Cortázar's story. This use of fantasy and unreality is in direct contrast to the method employed by Bolaño, who uses a vivid portrayal of a concrete "reality," which at least gives the illusion that he is portraying a disturbing actuality *as it is*. It is as if Cortázar distances himself from the violence taking place in Latin America through his use of fantasy and also because the narrator of his story returns to his calm life in Paris. Bolaño, in contrast, uses an extreme realism that puts the reader into the scene while depicting a reality that always exceeds fiction in a way that shows how literature can intimately depict reality. In addition, Bolaño utilizes the techniques of detective fiction—the hermeneutics of following the heroes' unraveling of a mystery—to enhance his own fiction. However, the mysteries are not resolved in the traditional way because, as witnessed in the absurdity of the violence committed by Pinochet's coup and subsequent "disappearances," logic is already lost.<sup>22</sup>

*Estrella distante* is the story of a nation as seen through a group of Chilean poets—Juan Stein, Diego Soto, Lorenzo, Bibiano O’Ryan and Carlos Wieder—who live and resist Pinochet’s coup in different ways; the stories of these poets represent the story of a nation broken by violence and injustice. The coming of power of Pinochet dramatically changes the life paths of these poets. They leave the country (except for O’Ryan) and follow their own paths but nevertheless represent the chronicle of Chile, a nation damaged by a bloody take-over, dictatorship, and the forced disappearances associated with Pinochet. These lost poets are plagued by idealism and tragedy, desperation and madness, bravery and destruction; all of these characteristics fit the description of Stein, a Chilean literature professor who leads a poetry workshop that the narrator attends. Stein is a desperate poet who lives through these times as a revolutionary and disappears mysteriously after the coup. The narrator and O’Ryan go to his house and nobody answers; “la escena además de traernos a la memoria momentos indeterminados de varias películas consiguió acrecentar la sensación de soledad y abandono que nos producía no sólo la casa de Stein sino la calle entera” (65). The house and the street are synecdoche of an entire country ravaged by a bloody coup and a violent dictatorship. Like a nightmare, this experience leaves a frightening sense of loneliness and the sense of abandonment and sadness provoked by the scene at Stein’s house is what causes the narrator to leave Chile.<sup>23</sup> Later, we learn from a newspaper clipping O’Ryan sends to the narrator that Stein was part of a group of “terroristas chilenos” that had entered Nicaragua with Sandinista troops. After this moment, Stein begins appearing and disappearing

everywhere “como un fantasma en todos los lugares donde había pelea, en todos los lugares en donde los latinoamericanos, desesperados, generosos, enloquecidos, valientes, aborrecibles, destruían y reconstruían y volvían a destruir la realidad en un intento último abocado al fracaso” (66). Stein goes to Africa with groups such as *Los Chilenos Voladores* and the *Frente Farabundo Martí*, becoming the quintessential revolutionary poet warrior fighting wars against injustice all over Latin America and Africa.

Bolaño also describes Lorenzo, a poor Chilean artist/poet/street performer who as a child loses both arms in an accident: “Así que Lorenzo creció en Chile y sin brazos, lo que de por sí hacía su situación bastante desventajosa, pero encima, creció en el Chile de Pinochet, lo que convertía cualquier situación desventajosa en desesperada, pero esto no era todo, pues pronto descubrió que era homosexual, lo que convertía la situación desesperada en inconcebible e inenarrable.” Lorenzo jumps into the Pacific in order to kill himself because “es difícil ser artista en el Tercer Mundo si uno es pobre, no tiene brazos y encima es marica” (81). As he is sinking in the water, his life flashes before him like a movie, sometimes in black and white and sometimes in color, showing him all of the things that make it worth living. It is at this point that he decides to learn how to swim, without arms, because “[m]atarse... en esta coyuntura sociopolítica, es absurdo y redundante. Mejor convertirse en poeta secreto” (82-83). This calling to become a secret poet, in a sociopolitical atmosphere best described as a nightmare, is emblematic of the loser-lost poet aesthetic that I describe throughout this project. In this sense, Lorenzo is an example of the bravery of poets,

their desperation and their ability to see life and beauty in the chaos that overwhelms Latin America. Soto is characterized as the antithesis of Stein and Lorenzo, representing the silent Left (those who left the country quietly after Pinochet's coup), and he lives a comfortable yet average life exiled in Paris, working as a university professor and a mediocre translator, with his wife and two children. His bourgeois lifestyle is described with disdain and he is represented as a tourist: “[t]urista latinoamericano, perplejo y desesperado a partes iguales, pero turista al fin y al cabo” (79-80). The denotation of “tourist” alludes to him being a helpless Chilean in the face of catastrophe.

Although Wieder, Lorenzo, Stein, and Soto choose different fates, they are united by living in exile and by finding life in their escape from Chile. As these lost poets illustrate, Chile and its inhabitants (those who remain in the country and those who wander in exile) are portrayed as lost in the sense that part of their history has been forgotten. These lost poets represent the different ways that a Chilean or, by extension, a Latin American can be lost in the world. They are the artistic representations of the stories of many Chileans and Latin Americans and their countries during and after the violent periods of transition in Latin America.

Wieder, in an almost ironic way, is the national poet of Chile who represents a brutal time for the nation.<sup>24</sup> Before the coup, only one of the poets who attend workshops with Wieder (alias Ruiz-Tagle) can detect in him the darkness that suggests a disturbing picture of what is to come; she cautiously remarks that he will revolutionize Chilean poetry (24). It as if behind this dark character, his “poetry” and

his “art,” we can unlock the mysteries of Chile and its shift from a socialist nation ruled by Allende that promised a new future for Latin Americans to a nation dominated by terror, torture, and Pinochet. Right before Wieder murders the Garmendia twins, the narrator conjectures that “está a punto de nacer la ‘nueva poesía chilena’” (30). This link between poetry and violence is powerful and gives the sense that literature is complicit with the atrocities taking place. Nicasio Ibacache, a critic associated with the political right, declares that with Wieder “nos encontrábamos (los lectores de Chile) ante el gran poeta de los nuevos tiempos” (45). From this statement we can see that the stories of poets are interlinked with the stories of the lands they represent. It is Wieder’s photo exhibit that shows just how brutal Chile’s future would become. Art, in addition to beauty, can show the terror, the horror of humanity’s lowest form. The photos of the women that Wieder murdered, whose bodies he mutilated, are described as “poesía visual, experimental, quintaesenciada, arte puro, algo que iba a divertirlos a todos” (87). The morning of the photo exhibition Wieder takes off from the Air Force base to write morbidly prophetic poetry in the sky. The narrator witnesses Wieder’s first aerobatic poet act as a political prisoner in Concepción, and remarks that it is a “happening” or a publicity campaign that just might revolutionize the way Chileans think about poetry (36). “APRENDAN” is the final word that streams across the sky (39). The “loco” Norberto asks the narrator if he liked Wieder’s aerial poetry; he can only respond as such: “sólo sé que no se me olvidara nunca” (40). Norberto affirms that it was the work of a poet, yet it appears to be more like that of a lunatic poetically capturing a dictatorship’s display of power.



The spectators of the aerial poetry do not understand the words that Wieder writes in the sky, nor his purpose, but they realize that they are witnessing something important (92). In the same vein, the exhibit of photos that capture minute details of each of the tortured bodies that Wieder presumably kills has equal impact and is the reason for Wieder to be discharged from the Air Force. He subsequently leaves Chile, using a number of different aliases under which he publishes his disturbing poetry and produces his morbid “happenings.” In this sense, *Estrella distante*, by using Wieder as a prototype, is a portrayal of the link between poet and nation and uses Wieder’s work as the embodiment of the extreme violence that takes place in Chile during the 1970s.

The Chilean public forgets and loses all signs of Wieder until 1992, when his name pops up in an investigation on the tortures and disappearances that take place during the dictatorship. In Wieder’s trial, the Garmendia twins’ Mapuche maid, Amalia Maluenda, gives a surprise testimony regarding the twins’ “disappearance” and alleged murder, as she was the only one in the house to escape the violence that takes place during the night in question. The trials, however, are not successful. The narrator relates, “[m]uchos son los problemas del país como para interesarse en la figura cada vez más borrosa de un asesino múltiple desaparecido hace mucho tiempo. Chile lo olvida” (120). Part of this collective forgetting, according to Avelar, has to do with Latin America’s economic transition. He notes: “Market logic absorbs even the documentation of disappearances and tortures as yet another piece of the past for sale” (22). In this sense, a market mentality further extenuates the dislodgement of

Latin America's lost subjects. The time between the violence (1973) and the trials (1992) is not that great; yet this quick forgetting follows in the logic of the Market that sees life totally in the present and aims at forgetting. As Avelar notes, "[t]he erasure of the past as past is the cornerstone of all commodification, even when the past becomes yet another commodity for sale in the present." This is because "[t]he free market established by the Latin American dictatorships must, therefore, impose forgetting not only because it needs to erase the reminiscence of its barbaric origins but also because it is proper to the market to live in a perpetual present" (2). Due to the increasing power of the market, people in places like Chile can forget the atrocities that were committed as part of their common histories. From Bolaño's novel, we get the sense of the disturbing notion that Chile can forget someone who has murdered many innocent people. In this sense, Bolaño portrays Chile as a lost cause, a distant and remote territory, forgotten amidst the violence and terror because it is a land that has forgotten its own people.

As is the case for Bolaño's poets, the collective memory of a nation can be represented by the poet; Chile's collective memory during the last thirty-odd years centers first on Allende's idealist dream of socialism that is then ruined by the nightmare of Pinochet, the "desaparecidos," and subsequently by a counterpoint between a renewed dream speckled by the flashbacks and recurrences of the nightmare. Andreas Huyssen, in *Present Pasts* (2003), makes the point that the culture of memory is important in countries like Argentina and Chile "to create public spheres of 'real' memory that will counter the politics of forgetting, pursued by

postdictatorship regimes either through ‘reconciliation’ and official amnesties or through repressive silencing.” He also points out that “the fault line between mythic past and real past is not always easy to draw” (15). Therefore, the battle against forgetting takes on a larger scale. Even if the task of remembering refers to a specific place (for example, the Holocaust in Europe or the *desaparecidos* in Argentina and Chile) the effort is taken with a global mindset in order to avoid repeating the act not just in the respective regions but around the world. Huyssen points out:

However different the mode or medium of commemorating may be in each local or regional case, all such struggles about how to remember a traumatic past of genocide, racial oppression, and dictatorship play themselves out in the much larger and more encompassing memory culture of this turn of the century in which national patrimony and heritage industries thrive, nostalgias of all kinds abound, and mythic pasts are being resurrected or created. Memory politics, indeed, seems as much a global project as it is always locally or nationally inflected. (95-96)

*Estrella distante* is illustrative in its depiction of this global project with national inflections. Because the novel’s lost poets leave Chile and carry on with their respective projects in other parts of the globe, we get the sense of a more universal mission regarding the politics of mourning. The novel does not purport to reproduce real memory; what we have is the fictional collected recountings of several poets. However, as Huyssen points out, “[t]he real can be mythologized, just as the mythic

may engender strong reality effects” (16). In this case, the effect of using poets to tell the story of Chile’s horror makes the experience more intense.

In *Estrella distante*, the individual (the poet) is used to express the collective experience of a nation, and literature makes it transcendent—thereby making it more universal. This universality also brings up a number of contradictions; a story about the nature of evil can be understood by a worldwide audience but the use of realist conventions reminds people that the story took place in a specific place and time (Chile in 1973). In this sense, this specificity makes it ring “true.” The story takes on a more all-inclusive tone in specific scenes (for example with the testimony of Maluenda), when Bolaño alludes to the idea that the story of Wieder is the story of something more—Chile, Latin America, or even the world, he insinuates. These scenes remind the reader that the story is “hilada a través de un verso heroico (*épos*), cíclico, que quienes asombrados la escuchan entienden que en parte es su historia, la historia de la ciudadana Amalia Maluenda, antigua empleada de las Garmendia, y en parte la historia de Chile. Una historia de terror” (119). We can extrapolate from this quote the idea that the stories of the “desaparecidos” are not just the stories of one family or Chile but of the Southern Cone, of Latin America, and of many parts of the world where injustice reigns; everyone shares in the (inter)national tragedy, and *Estrella distante* participates in a more universal remembering of terror.

One vivid illustration of the collective experience of terror within an individual context is described during the dream of a shipwreck that Bolaño has wherein he is on a boat when someone yells “¡tornado! ¡tornado!” and the boat starts

sinking. All of the survivors turn into flotsam, and Bolaño sees Wieder off in the distance hanging onto a plank. It is here that he has a troubling revelation: “[c]omprendía en ese momento, mientras las olas nos alejaban, que Wieder y yo habíamos viajado en el *mismo* barco, sólo que él había contribuido a hundirlo y yo había hecho poco o nada por evitarlo” (131). This dream sequence illustrates the disturbing complicity between the Chilean public (including those who left into exile) and the murderers who worked for Pinochet.<sup>25</sup> It represents an allegorical analysis of what happened to Chile during the 1970s. In reference to the use of the allegorical in Latin American literature, Avelar notes that “‘allegory’ takes place when the uncanny, the *unheimlich* element, hitherto identified as ‘marvelous’ or ‘magical,’ has become *heimlich*: familiar, predictable, indeed inevitable” (70). In this sense, the notion of a Latin American country during the 1970s being shipwrecked is familiar, as other countries in the region were going through similar processes as Chile and it is described within the uncanny nightmare of one poet.

The idea of a collective shipwreck, as represented by Bolaño’s lost poets, embodies a sentiment that was common at that time and is depicted throughout Bolaño’s *oeuvre*. Manzoni associates the experience of Latin Americans in the second half of the twentieth century with the title of a novel by the Argentine Eduardo Belgrano Rawson, *El naufrago de las estrellas*, which connects Latin America’s reality to a shipwreck of stars. She writes, “[l]a imagen del naufragio viene asociada a la de las grandes catástrofes que dispersan a los pueblos, ejemplarmente la del pueblo judío pero también la de los latinoamericanos aventados y desaparecidos en la década

del setenta” (14). For the lost subjects there is not a precise destiny or destination; theirs is more a sensation of being lost without a direction, like the aftermath of a shipwreck. The dreamlike narrative style is estranged and distanced yet very personal and intimate. The sense of otherness prevails, though at the same time we can recognize ourselves in the tragedy—in some sense we are all participants. Ezequiel de Rosso notes that *Estrella distante* is about transforming a collective or political crime—the tortures that occur subsequent to the coup in Chile—into a private question, a matter that involves one or two characters (136). Yet as stated above, the private matter forms part of a larger collective memory to become an even more universal problem. Bolaño is dragged into the story by O’Ryan and Romero because both characters are searching for Wieder. Thus what occurs on a macro level—an exploration of Chile’s murderous past—is portrayed at a micro level—among several poets, and, as a result, illustrates another way to present the horrors experienced collectively by focusing and personalizing the trauma of one recipient through the vehicle of memory. As Avelar suggests, “memory has both an individual and collective, affective and political dimension” (17). The individual and collective memories are connected in Bolaño’s work in a way in which one can explore the dictatorship’s horrors through a vivid realism. Concerning memory as a tool to explore a national reality, it is important to keep in mind Avelar’s affirmation that “[c]ompilation of data [...] is not yet the memory of the dictatorship. Memory far exceeds any factual recounting, however important the latter may turn out to be as an initial juridical or political step” (64). Dictatorships also have the tendency to

manipulate “factual recounting” and therefore can dislocate time and events in a way that suppresses them. Individual memory can re-surface, though, as in the opening of a common grave. By digging up past events the past reappears, though in strange ways that allow the reader to relate to it and experience the collective drama in a more intimate way. *Estrella distante* begins with Wieder infiltrating into the poetry workshops of leftist university students as a microfascist or a fascist that operates at a micro level. Nevertheless, he comes to figuratively represent the tragedy of a nation on a macro-level while his story symbolizes a collective tragedy that becomes more universal.

Bolaño’s writing, with its shifting perspectives (from micro to macro, individual to collective), should not be classified as Chilean literature even though *Estrella distante* has the traits that make it seem like a swan song to and a sad anthem for his native country. In its portrayal of Chile’s horror during the times of Pinochet’s coming to power, we can observe the makings of something that might also be happening on a world level. The expansion in scope that comes by way of his choice of words, his portrayal of the lost wanderings of the nation’s exiles and their connections with other lost subjects in other nations contributes to his recreating a Chile that, in his novella, exceeds Chile. Camilo Marks points out that “gracias a eso, a su desarraigo y su distanciamiento, ha podido recrear a un país que es Chile y no es Chile, un país imaginario pero, paradójicamente, muy real.” Marks goes on to write that nobody has been able to portray the Chilean dictatorship with such vividness, and that nobody who lived in Chile during that time would have been able to portray it so

lucidly (133). The construction of an imaginary Chile so convincing yet distant and not quite accurate, which comes as a result of the novelist's cosmopolitan background, gives the narration of the time of violence a richer perspective and a more visceral realism, making the stories of the lost poets more vivid and believable.

Bolaño's use of a more universal depiction of evil makes the events (taking place in Chile) have a deeper impact. For example, one criticized element of *Estrella distante* is its idiomatic inconsistencies. The use of words like *gillipollas* and frequent verb structures with the *vosotros* form, almost exclusively Peninsular in nature, are used by Chilean characters in the novel. These linguistic choices reflect Bolaño's transnational biographical geography encompassing the Spanish speakers on both sides of the Atlantic. Although they hinder verisimilitude (especially when uttered by Chilean characters that supposedly have never left the American continent), Bolaño was surely aware of the out-of-place word choice, and I assert that they give his work a more universal sense. He criticized the traditional division of Latin American and Peninsular literature, seeing the Spanish language as unifying both sides of the Spanish-speaking Atlantic, and this perspective makes the tragedy that he presents at a personal level (among several poets) tell the story of a national calamity that also has ramifications on a more international level (among the Spanish-speaking world).<sup>26</sup> In this vein, *Estrella distante* represents this strange dichotomy between national and international as seen in the linguistic inconsistencies mentioned, as Bolaño's work fits into a re-imagining of the nation after Chile/Latin America's opening to transnational capitalism that Pinochet's reign brought.



By using a more universal lexicon, Bolaño perhaps seeks to eradicate the solitary, provincial aspect of Chile by seeing it from the outside. This commentary on Chile's solitude is alluded to in the title, *Estrella distante*, which refers to the solitary star that resides on the Chilean flag and also to the nation's isolation from the rest of the world, separated geographically by the Andes to the east, the Atacama Desert to the north, Antarctica to the south, and the Pacific Ocean to the west. The distance suggested by the title also refers to how the nation is not only geographically but spiritually cut off. Part of why Bolaño seemed to emphasize what he called his neo-nationality was to show that this story and all of what he writes about the reality of dictatorships and the failures of humanity are not just local stories but rather part of the world's history, one that is emphasized as interconnected in all of his work. The interconnection can be seen when the exiles from Chile, Latin America, and other regions come together with other strange outsiders in different parts of the world precisely because these wandering outsiders gravitate toward others that are lost in their own way; they take solace in each other. The depiction of wandering lost poets and the evil that they encounter in *Estrella distante* takes place on a much larger scale with the *real visceralistas*, the lost poets of *Los detectives salvajes*.

As with many of the characters of *Estrella distante*, the protagonists of *Los detectives salvajes*, Ulises Lima, alter ego of real-life Mexican poet Mario Santiago, and Arturo Belano, are poets, and we see the failed project of Latin American utopias through their poetic perspective.<sup>27</sup> Bolaño's use of poets gives a more intimate portrayal and a more visceral depiction of failure. *Los detectives salvajes* is in many

ways a *roman à clef* that artistically portrays many of Bolaño's contemporaries, whom he met in his wanderings. Lima and Belano are leaders of the *realismo visceral* movement which could easily be described as a band, a troupe, a swarm, a militant cell, a gang, or a herd, and is based on Bolaño and Santiago's real-life group, the *infrarrealistas*.<sup>28</sup> Both the *real visceralistas* and the *infrarrealistas* follow in the lines of the Mexican *estridentistas* (an avant garde poetry and art movement of the 1920s). Both groups' aesthetics could be described as a sort of Mexican Dadaism. The project of the *real visceralistas-infrarrealistas* is to invent a language that most closely approximates "real" life in a way that would make apparent its contradictions while opening new perspectives on daily existence.<sup>29</sup> Bolaño's use of the alter ego/anti(hero) and poet as a crossroads between "reality" and fiction demonstrates a narrative style that works within the realm of an intense realism, and the visceral realists borrow from it in a way that re-visions "reality," resisting the brutality taking place in Latin America. Furthermore, the visceral aspect, inherent in the name of the *real visceralistas*, might allude to a relationship with bodies, indelibly linking the group to the violence and torture taking place in Latin America at the time of shifts to military dictatorships like those in Argentina and Chile.

With their visceral stance, the visceral realists also seem to be involved in creating a better future. They seek to break away from the canon of Latin American poets represented by Octavio Paz and Pablo Neruda.<sup>30</sup> While the canonical poets allegedly seek to make themselves through their use of words, the visceral realists seemingly prioritize action. This preference for action over the word might suggest

why wandering lost appears central to their project. Andrea Cobas Carral and Verónica Garibotto, in “Un epitafio en el desierto: poesía y revolución en *Los detectives salvajes*,” suggest that Bolaño’s visceral realists, like the poets in *Estrella distante*, touch upon one of the central questions that intellectuals on the left were particularly obsessed with during the 1970s, the decade of broken dreams: the role of the writer and of politically committed literature (169). But the visceral realists were neither poets truly of action like the Nerudian “poetas campesinos” or those of the word like Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz.<sup>31</sup> Horacio Castellanos Moya, a writer that depicts the Civil War in his native El Salvador, describes this debate surrounding the seemingly paradoxical “intellectual militant” in *Recuento de incertidumbre* (1993), denouncing the practice of denigrating certain militants by calling them “poets” or intellectuals (64). This attitude, he writes, has origins in Farabundo Martí who stated that the preeminence of action over reflection and the participation in combat were the only ways to legitimize one’s cause (65-66). Bolaño’s lost poets participate in a figurative battle as evidenced in their poetic ventures, yet their experiences in this supposed combat are marked by failure.

Bolaño portrays the failure of revolutionary writers in their quixotic quests, thus creating the archetype of the lost poet and depicting the failed utopia that the Latin American revolutions represented. Being a “real” revolutionary poet was synonymous with being a Latin American leftist writer during the seventies. Part of the lost poets’ failures stems from their failed attempts at achieving a utopia. For example, one of the visceral realists, Jacinto Requena, remarks when Lima is in

Nicaragua that the country must be some kind of paradise for revolutionary poets: “Nicaragua debe ser como el sueño que teníamos en 1975, el país donde todos queríamos vivir” (344). But Lima’s disappearance in Nicaragua recalls the chaos being experienced in the country as the revolution begins to crumble. Carral and Garibotto suggest that Lima’s voyage to Nicaragua alludes to the failures of the visceral realists and the Left in Latin America: “Si los realvisceralistas [...] apuestan a la interrelación entre vida militante y estética como modo de posicionamiento ético frente a un continente fracturado entre la esperanza de la revolución y un presente de violencia de Estado, la realidad nicaragüense se presenta para Lima como el tardío canto de cisne de ese sueño de la revolución” (175). It is in Nicaragua that Lima disappears, becoming truly a lost poet. Lima’s disappearance in the Central American country also alludes to Nicaragua becoming a sort of lost paradise because after a year, Lima returns with shattered ideals and reports that Latin America, with its violence and poverty, does not have anything “utopian” to offer.

Looks at reality, like this portrayal of a collapsed utopia in Nicaragua, are part of the “real” intensity, a hallmark of visceral realism, which is evident throughout *Los detectives salvajes*. The two supposed detectives—Lima and Belano—are trying to decipher a mystery: the origins of a literary movement and the whereabouts of its founder that in many ways leads them to the origins of the problems that surround them and Latin America. They (like Cesárea Tinajero) do not necessarily have to publish or even write poetry to be considered poets. Alan Pauls obsesses over the super-abundance of poets in the novel, stating: “no hay libro donde haya tantos poetas

activos, mencionados, aludidos, citados, evocados, como *Los detectives salvajes*” (326). The novel gives the impression that the world “está en realidad poblado únicamente de poetas” (327). The lack of poetry written by these poets further extenuates their poetic nature in an ironic manner: “ni Belano, ni Ulises Lima, ni el joven García Madero—que prácticamente nadie, ninguno de los poetas que se multiplican en las páginas de *Los detectives salvajes*, escribe nada—nada, en todo caso, que nos sea dado leer. Un libro inflamado, henchido, rebosante de poetas—y *no hay Obra*” (327; original emphasis). I see the novel as 609 pages of poetry in prose, a work populated almost exclusively by poets whose adventures border on a poetry in motion, in the rhythm of the Beatniks, but more revolutionary and less commercial.

One could also read Bolaño’s text simply as an adventure novel telling the stories of different wandering Latin American poets and the story of this cross section of Latin Americans coming of age during the 1970s. In the novel, as Camilo Marks notes, “se funden todas las vivencias y toda la experiencia de una generación latinoamericana, esa generación cuyos sueños se esfumaron, si bien insiste en seguir soñando,” so it can be seen as “un registro de los ideales frustrados, pero es incuestionablemente también, una apuesta literaria y estética por el futuro” (140). Bolaño presents the seventies as years in which Latin Americans appear either as revolutionaries or as instruments of the dictatorship, a time when the vanguard of art meets head on with the vanguard of terror and perhaps meets its end. Pauls calls these years “los años en que la idea de vanguardia articuló por última vez en un modo de existencia, en una inmanencia vital, la pulsión política y la estética; los años—para

decirlo con Bolaño—en que fue joven ‘la última generación latinoamericana que tuvo mitos’” (330). During this particular period, the sense of being lost is pervasive among the young leftists because of their disillusionment with their reality. Bolaño describes these lost poets and their failed ideals, which are important because poets embody the spirit of a time. Therefore, by writing about poets and poetry, Bolaño is writing about life. Throughout all of this discussion, it is important to keep in mind one of Bolaño’s greatest influences, Nicanor Parra, who writes in “Estética,” a poem from *Poemas y antipoemas* (1954), that “poesía es vida en palabras” (226). Poetry uses life as a point of departure, but does not return to it. This sense of the relationship between poetry and life that abounds in imperfections is what Bolaño captures in *Los detectives salvajes*.

*Los detectives salvajes* makes use of a variety of detective stories to unravel mysteries related to a number of aspects of literature and its role within global politics. The first and third sections of the novel—“Mexicanos perdidos en México (1975)” and “Los desiertos de Sonora (1976),” respectively—consist of the journals of Juan García Madero, young poet, drop-out, and recently baptized visceral realist.<sup>32</sup> These journals tell the story of how Lima and Belano seek out Cesárea Tinajero, a disappeared *estridentista* poet from the 1920s and the supposed founder of visceral realism, who allegedly left Mexico City to live in Sonora. The search for Tinajero and her subsequent death (as a result of this search) represent the axis of the novel and its driving force. Grínor Rojo suggests that with Tinajero’s death, “Lima/Belano/Bolaño quedan desde ahora en adelante libres para realizar su propia obra [...]. La muerte de

Cesárea Tinajero [...] es [...] la muerte de una cierta manera de concebirse el escritor a sí mismo y de concebir su creación” (72). Her death thereby suggests a new (anti)direction for visceral realism as the group disperses, lost in various directions throughout the world. All of the sections of the novel are linked by Tinajero, and the quest for her ideal is the underlying project of visceral realism.

Tinajero embodies the lost subject par excellence in her transgression against the acceptance of an institutionalized revolution in Mexico defined by a failed modernization through avant garde art. When she departs for the deserts of Sonora, she gives up her project of constructing Estridentópolis, the *estridentista* utopian project that aimed to create a city like Paris which was emulated by the vanguard poets. Amadeo Salvatierra, one of the narrating voices, recalls a conversation that he had with Tinajero in which she explains her departure from Mexico City to Sonora. When he begs her to stay, to construct Estridentópolis with the *estridentistas*, she insists that she is a *real visceralista*. Salvatierra says that he is, too: “todos los mexicanos somos más real visceralistas que estridentistas [...] el estridentismo y el realismo visceral son sólo más caras para llegar a donde queremos llegar.” She asks, where is it that Mexicans want to go? He responds: “A la modernidad [...] a la pinche modernidad” (460). Tinajero leaves behind Mexico City, the mega-city of the future, for the desert, the unknown, and thereby breaks her connection with the poetic movement and with movement itself, distancing herself from the future. She at once serves as a transgression against the mobility of modernization and the conventional establishment, an entity that suggests non-movement. In this vein, Tinajero is the

prototype for the lost poet, the (anti)revolutionary poet that symbolizes Bolaño's project in *Los detectives salvajes*. She also seems to be of a dying breed. One of the narrating voices, Pere Ordoñez, narrates from the Madrid Feria del Libro (a part of the novel with a number of observations about the future of literature): "Antaño los escritores de España (y de Hispanoamérica) entraban al ruedo público para transgredirlo, para reformarlo, para quemarlo, para revolucionarlo." Today, he continues, "el ejercicio más usual de la escritura es una forma de escalar posiciones en la pirámide social, una forma de asentarse cuidándose mucho de no transgredir nada" (485). Tinajero is admirable because she does not conform to the market-based literature industry that Ordoñez describes. As an "(anti)revolutionary poet," she takes part in a transgression that is most likely doomed to failure. Lost poets like the visceral realists therefore attempt to bring back this tradition of transgression that Tinajero represents through their aesthetic of failure. Her death occupies the pivotal point of the novel because it represents the end of the visceral realist movement. More importantly, it sparks the wanderl[o]st journeys of Lima and Belano and the wild dispersion of the members of their movement throughout the world.

Because the first section of *Los detectives salvajes* is aptly entitled "Mexicanos perdidos en México," it is not surprising that lost, "perdido," is an adjective that permeates the entire novel; the visceral realists and the generation that they represent are lost in at least three senses of the word: 1) they are failures or "losers" living a desperate existence, disillusioned when their hopes for socialist governments in Latin America are squashed by military dictatorships. They are poets



whose work is not generally published and, if so, only in the most underground of magazines and pamphlets (their publication is *Lee Harvey Oswald*, which counts with only one edition). This aesthetic of failure is one that they esteem. It appears that what attracts the visceral realists to Tinajero, their supposed “mother,” is that presumably nobody has read her; her failure also is her attraction. 2) The lost poets are out of place, misplaced, and in a perpetual deviation from the norm. Belano is a Chilean living illegally in Mexico and there is nothing mainstream about the other members of the visceral realists. The group consists of homosexuals, orphans, and unpublished poets, while the old man who designs their imagined magazine is committed to a mental asylum. 3) Because they are failures, they do not have any idea of where they are going; their futures seem dim because their poetry rarely seems to have a chance of being published and, as a consequence, they struggle to make ends meet. Their “leaders” sell marihuana to fund their own trip to Europe. The original “founder” of the group, Tinajero, was lost in the deserts of Sonora working as a washerwoman before being shot.

The lost poets, with Tinajero as a sort of guiding light and failure as their aesthetic, take part in a transgression against a failed capitalist system through their movement which is depicted in a conglomeration of narrating voices in the second section of the novel, “Los detectives salvajes (1976-1996),” which I call the river of lost voices. The river of lost voices is akin to a symphony of narrators that come together as one voice, albeit multifaceted, representing the lost Latin American poets that have lived the horrors of the second half of the twentieth century (born in the

1950s, coming to age in the seventies, the decade of broken dreams), and is portrayed in a “polyphonic” way in Bolaño’s narrative. Within this river of multiple voices, a single voice (that of a generation represented by these poets) stands out.

The river of lost voices describes the depths of being a lost Latin American subject owing to its portrayal of the geographic dispersal of a multiplicity of voices. 53 different voices (including “real-life” voices like Carlos Monsiváis and Manuel Maples Arce) narrate 96 passages in places as disparate as a book fair in Madrid, Sutherland Place in London, and Tel Aviv. For example, Roberto Rosas laments the situation that he and his contemporaries experience from the Rue de Passy in Paris. Rosas lives in an attic apartment with eight other Latin Americans (so-called revolutionaries that claim to have known the prisons of terror in the Latin America of the 1970s) and laments “el horror de París, todo el horror de la lengua francesa, de la poesía joven, de nuestra condición de metecos, *de nuestra triste e irremediable condición de sudamericanos perdidos en Europa, perdidos en el mundo*” (234; my emphasis). This recognition of being a Latin American lost in Europe and lost in the world is typical for the characters that populate the novel and Bolaño’s *oeuvre*; they are both revered as voices of a time riddled by violence while at the same time disgraced in their silent frustration. Simone Darrieux, another narrating voice in the novel, notes that the group of poets that Rosas belongs to consists of Latin Americans who are poets only in name, dispelling any notion of romantic idealism because “vivir en París, es sabido, desgasta, diluye todas las vocaciones que no sean de hierro, encanalla, empuja al olvido” (234-35). Her realistic pessimism regarding the poet’s

world is akin to the realism that Bolaño uses to portray this cross section of Latin American poets (published or not), “disappeared” by the violence and terror of Latin American dictatorships and failed revolutions in the region in one form or another. The most visceral realism is necessary to describe the desperation of the times that destroys the subjects both physically and psychologically, and we find this realism in the numerous perspectives of the river of lost voices.

The river of lost voices consists of flows and tributaries; each voice streams in and participates to narrate a specific part of the story of the lost, wild detectives—Lima and Belano. Each voice of the river works like a poem written in prose, a poet’s story; each begins *in medias res*, giving an idea of the action occurring all around the voice. Lima, at one point in the novel, claims to have traveled the length of a river that connects Mexico and Central America: “Un río de árboles o un río de arena o un río de árboles que a trechos se convertía en un río de arena. Un flujo constante de gente sin trabajo, de pobres y muertos de hambre, de droga y de dolor” (366). This river described by Lima, a stream of lost subjects poetically representing an entire generation like Dostoyevsky’s “representatives of a generation,” is like the second section of the novel, the river of lost voices, which consists of the voices of the marginalized—the hungry, the poor, and those who are pained by loss. The passages appear to be the annotated responses of characters, voices, and narrators who recount their experiences with the detectives in what seems like an attempt to ascertain their possible whereabouts.

The notations of the “river” suggest a *topos*, a territory of wandering Latin Americans that is immense and covers four continents. One fundamental mystery in this section is the notion of an implied listener. Although there is one case where the listener is clearly Belano, most of the passages seem to suggest an indeterminate other as they are narrated in a seemingly oral, colloquial speech. Each voice of the “river” begins with a meticulous annotation of the person narrating, the place they are narrating from, and the date as if the text were a transcript of a police interrogation tracing a detailed map of the detectives’ wanderings and their contacts. The first entry reads: “Amadeo Salvatierra, calle República de Venezuela, cerca del Palacio de la Inquisición, México DF, enero de 1976.” Salvatierra begins his narration, “Ay, muchachos,” to address the wild detectives, Belano and Lima (141). The second voice of the river is Perla Avilés, narrating from the calle Leonardo da Vinci, colonia Mixcoac in Mexico City, also in January 1976. She begins, “Voy a hablar de 1970. Yo lo conocí en 1970, en la prepa Porvenir, en Talismán” (142). Although she clearly sets the scene, we do not know who she is referring to (Belano, we can infer from other clues she gives later), and it is never clear to whom she is narrating even though her tone from the outset is that of a spoken dialogue as she opens saying that she is going to speak: “voy a hablar.” The river, in this sense, is a system of narration that re-creates the thoughts and feelings of wandering Latin Americans using various tributaries and it presents a number of mysteries that the reader unravels as it continues.

All of the voices appear to be spoken monologues recounting what someone else said, conversations in a bar patched together into one multiple soliloquy; contradiction between voices (and even within voices) is fundamental to the purpose(s) of these transmissions. Bakhtin notes that “[a]s a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other.” He states that we talk about what people have said by constantly prefacing our statements with phrases like “somebody said” or “I heard.” “Every conversation is full of transmissions and interpretations of other people’s words” (77). For example, in the river young poet Luis Sebastián Rosado relates a night out with the visceral realists and recalls when Lima recited one of Rimbaud’s poems in French at the bar without anyone being able to guess the author. Rosado says that his friend Alberto Moore guessed Baudelaire. The next voice in the river to narrate is Moore who begins: “Lo que dice Luisito es verdad hasta cierto punto.” He goes on to state, “yo no dije Baudelaire, fue Luis el que dijo Baudelaire y Catulle Mendés y creo que hasta Victor Hugo, yo me quedé callado, me sonaba a Rimbaud, pero me quedé callado” (158-59). Another contradiction occurs when Ernesto García Grajales, professor at the University of Pachuca and the only specialist in the world on the visceral realists, admits to not being aware of García Madero’s existence. Most of the narrating voices in the second part of the novel do not mention the visceral realist poet who narrates both the first and third sections of the novel, establishing the aesthetic of visceral realism. It is as if Madero were an invisible character; a narrator that is inside yet mysteriously outside the events

narrated, internally focalized yet externally focalized as well, strangely heterodiegetic and homodiegetic at the same time. What is strange is how the other visceral realists end up liking him so quickly; he is not purged from the group by Belano, who goes on a rampage removing those undedicated to the movement for various reasons. It is indeed curious that Grajales, an “expert” on visceral realism, has not heard of Madero.

Along with these contradictions and discrepancies that arise because of the numerous perspectives, another defining aspect of the river is that there is no authoritative voice; voices move along with a flow, picking up tributaries with each new voice; there is no guiding force other than the indication of time passing in the carefully annotated dates and the constant presence (or lack thereof) of the lost detectives. The river, in this sense, is a unique example of heteroglossia, which is the use of another’s speech in another (social) language, serving authorial intentions in a refracted way. The river exhibits heteroglossia in the way that it “stratifies and fragments ideological thought into multiple views of the world” (Bakhtin 15). Bolaño’s river represents a revealing multiplicity that through the voices of wandering lost subjects tells the story of many Latin Americans of the time.

Similar to the way that Dostoevsky represents dialogical points of view to present the voices of proletarians and capitalists, an idea that Bakhtin suggests, Bolaño uses a multiplicity of oppressed voices to present their struggle against hegemony. Bolaño’s use of a multi-voiced narration is very timely, as Latin America was experiencing a strong resurgence of capitalist philosophy (in a manner similar to

that of Dostoevsky's time) with the implementation of neoliberal policies during the 1970s. Bakhtin points out that "[t]he polyphonic novel could, indeed, have come into being only in the capitalist epoch" (16). This observation links to the time that Bolaño portrays, in which neoliberal policies concurrent with the increasing presence of dictatorships in the region, begin to take form, opening Latin American countries for economic exploitation.<sup>33</sup> This rapid change illustrates another way that Bolaño's literary characters can be lost. As a result, the river of voices enters with each voice recalling their tale of the past, their part in the shipwreck initiated by the dictatorships, and their experience being lost.

The polyphonic river of lost voices is appropriate to describe modernization's failure in Latin America and a collision of worlds in the region on a scale not seen since the *encuentro* between the Spanish and the pre-Hispanic peoples. The seventies are a decade in which global economics and high-speed communications come head to head with a grassroots mentality in Latin America, and we also see the clash between the harsh realities of capitalism and the dream of socialism. The great problem that neoliberal policies bring is their brand of selective modernization, which produced a growing inequality that provoked violence, disillusion, and further civil war in a region already torn apart by struggles between conservative paramilitary soldiers and leftist guerrillas.<sup>34</sup> Modernization's failure in Latin America is the historic background for the original visceral realists' time (the 1920s, which is marked in Bolaño's novel by Tinajero's escape from Mexico City) and during the shift to neoliberalism in the 1970s (manifested in the "second coming" of the visceral

realists, Belano and Lima). The multiple perspectives of these two attempts at modernization are poignantly captured in the polyphony of the river of lost voices. Polyphonous novels, in the case of Bolaño and Dostoevsky's works, seem to fit the troublesome shifts towards capitalism and modernization as evidenced in the lack of freedom and abuses of human rights that took place with the Pinochet regime in Chile, for example. Russia, like Latin America, experienced times of great flux which were portrayed by Dostoevsky's polyphony, as Bakhtin notes:

The exceptionally harsh contradictions of early Russian capitalism and Dostoevsky's duality as a social personality—his personal inability to make a particular ideological decision—when taken by themselves are negative and historically transient phenomena, but they provided the optimal conditions for the creation of the polyphonic novel and of 'that unheard-of freedom of the voices...in Dostoevsky's polyphony....'

(29-30)

Like Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel, Bolaño's river of voices is an ideal vehicle for portraying the voices of subjects lost in the complex transition from State to Market in Latin America's socio-political sphere. It is important to emphasize the dialogical nature of the polyphonic novel; in a musical analogy its contrapuntal nature works like a fugue. Each voice works in a contradictory fashion but is balanced and strengthens the overall project. Bakhtin notes how in Dostoevsky's novel the voices converge, augmenting each other. The voices of the river in Bolaño's novel bounce off each other, fuse with the voices of the detectives (that do not narrate but



nonetheless remain omnipresent), and together they form the voice of a generation struggling to overcome the hegemonic forces of transnational capitalism.

Bolaño's novel captures the desperate search of a generational subset of renegade poet warriors (twenty-something bohemian poets) that was defeated by overwhelming military juggernauts in Latin America during the 1970s. This group of lost poets is dramatically different from the generation of boom writers like Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, or José Donoso, which was defined by its commercial success perhaps more than by any common literary traits that they shared. Bolaño's lost poets are the antithesis of commercial success and Bolaño himself lived in relative squalor until just a few years before his premature death. Gonzalo Aguilar notes that for a writer like Bolaño, whose biographical periplex is similar to that of Donoso or García Márquez, the reality of his Latin America is much different than it was for the boom writers: "[m]ientras Donoso o García Márquez," or others from their generation, "barrenaban en la cresta de la ola, Bolaño parece pasearse por la orilla recogiendo los restos de un naufragio" (148). Bolaño's writing reflects a change in Latin America's (literary) reality from revolutionary idealism and the giddiness of the boom to a bleaker outlook on a reality marked by the triumph of military dictatorships and the global market with a shift to a transnational capitalist system.<sup>35</sup> The lost subjects that inhabit Bolaño's work are portrayed as the victims on the sidelines of this shift, those that lived through (or died trying) and were left to pick up the pieces of the shipwreck. Avelar refers to the transition in realities by stating that the end/decline of the boom is September 11, 1973, the date of Pinochet's

coup. After Pinochet's coup, the realities that writers like Bolaño portray conform to a changing vision of the world in its shift towards international capital and the complexities that come as a result of the demise of some Latin Americans' socialist dream.

Another historical event that is presented as important historical background in *Los detectives salvajes* is the massacre at Tlatelolco together with the Mexican Government's military take-over of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) that took place in 1968, components of what Bolaño calls the "guerras floridas latinoamericanas." The massacre of student demonstrators perpetrated by the Mexican government took place just before the country hosted the Olympic Games and represents a continuation of the country's mythical, violent Aztec past while also linking it to other demonstrations that take place around the world at that time.<sup>36</sup> This massacre serves as a sort of prelude to the CIA's continued heavy-handed participation in politically related violence in Latin America throughout the 1970s and beyond, in places like Argentina and Chile. Bolaño's "guerras floridas latinoamericanas" are defined in his story "Últimos atardeceres en la tierra" as "años en que las desapariciones masivas y los crímenes masivos son una constante" (42). I see the use of the term "guerras floridas latinoamericanas" (used in several other Bolaño texts) as illuminating in the way it describes the senseless violence of the 1970s by alluding to the Aztec practice of declaring war on neighbors to capture prisoners for sacrifice. The reference parallels the forthcoming downfall of Latin American countries that Bolaño insinuates in his depictions of the horrors that take

place in Latin America, such as the “Tlatelolco massacre,” which serve as background in his fiction. Like the civil wars being fought in Central America, military overthrows in Chile and Argentina, the Aztec “guerras floridas” were fratricidal in nature as the violence weakened the regions in question, bringing their eventual downfall with the arrival of the Spaniards. Like the “guerras floridas latinoamericanas,” the “Tlatelolco massacre” in 1968 has a parallel that dates back to the arrival of the Spaniards in Mexico, which makes it have mythical significance for Mexican socio-political history.<sup>37</sup> In a similar way, economic globalization marks the collapse brought on by the “guerras floridas” in Bolaño’s more contemporary use of the term that gives his fiction an apocalyptic tone.

In *Los detectives salvajes*, Auxilio Lacouture, a homeless Uruguayan poet, narrates her experience hiding in the women’s bathroom for what seems like a number of days during the government’s violent occupation of UNAM thus illustrating how poets use writing to resist. While the Mexican government’s soldiers murder hundreds of innocent citizens, Lacouture writes verses on toilet paper to pass the time and calm her nerves.<sup>38</sup> Part of what she writes indicates the desperation and “lostness” of her situation: “Pensé: qué acto poético destruir mis escritos. Pensé: mejor hubiera sido tragármelos, ahora estoy perdida. Pensé: la vanidad de la escritura, la vanidad de la destrucción. Pensé: porque escribí, resistí” (198). This scene is a defining poetic image of the Latin American writers that lived the horrors of the late sixties and seventies because it shows that by writing, one can resist; writing and resisting are both ephemeral, and like poetry sometimes seem futile in a world

drowned in evil. However, Lacouture's voice and spirit serve as transgression against the violence. Her narration reminds us of one of the central questions regarding Bolaño's work: the role of literature in depicting the violent results of mass murders.

The historic-political context of violence has a correlation with Bolaño's lost poets and their wanderings around the world that begin shortly after their experience with violence. As the lost poets begin roving (clearly marked as 1976), no longer can Latin America be perceived as a Magic Realist dream world, as it was represented in the writings of some of the boom authors. It begins to reflect the changes of a more globalized world defined by rapid circulation of ideas, peoples, and languages. Part of the consequences of this shift has been an increase in violence as documented in the massacre at Tlatelolco and Pinochet's coup, in addition to Argentina's Dirty Wars, Brazil's repressive military dictatorship, and civil wars in Central America. In many ways, Latin Americans have had to sacrifice dreams in order to survive reality and that is why I deem this time (the seventies) the "decade of broken dreams."

Bolaño's deliberate use of multivoicedness, as evidenced in the river of lost voices, conveys the many ways that a person could get lost at this time. For example, Belano wanders Europe and Africa, living a somewhat bohemian life while still maintaining jobs—as a campground worker on the Costa Brava, crushing grapes in France, and as a reporter in Africa. As previously mentioned, Lima wanders so far off the beaten path that he loses track of reality, becoming truly lost for over a year in Nicaragua. Their assorted wanderl[ost] paths illustrate the numerous ways that lost subjects respond to their respective surroundings to transgress society's norms. The

wanderl[ost] is part of their transgression against a more conventional reality. In some passages, the antiestablishment aesthetic of the visceral realists is revered; in many, it is mocked; and, in most, it is nuanced and questioned because of the plurality of voices that narrate. Like the river, Dostoyevsky's world of heroes is also pluralistic. Bakhtin notes that "every thought of Dostoevsky's heroes [...] feels itself to be a *speech* in an uncompleted dialog" (27). In a similar vein, the river's voices piece together, as if they were a puzzle, to form a whole. Part of the river's power comes from the confluence of centripetal and centrifugal forces. The former centralizes and unifies meaning, a force used by a dominant social group to impose its own monologic perceptions of truth. Working against this process is centrifugal force, heteroglossia, "which stratifies and fragments ideological thought into multiple views of the world" (15). Each passage in the river has a single narrator yet there is always the sense of dialogue and plurality. The dialogism present in Bolaño's fiction, particularly in the river, is akin to Bakhtin's commentary of Raskolnikov's interior monologue in *Crime and Punishment*, which is an example of what Bakhtin calls the "*microdialog*: every word in it is double-voiced, every word contains a conflict of voices" (61). Even though the voices in the river appear as monologues, the sense of dialogue gives each voice a richer meaning.

Bakhtin is particularly interested in the artistic function of the idea in Dostoevsky's works, and I contend that this topic is useful for thinking about Bolaño's works as well. Bakhtin notes that the hero is a word about the world (his generation and the world at large) and also notes that the "truth about the world [...]"

is inseparable from the truth of the personality” (63). Beyond that of a single hero, the voices of many are important to portray a time, which is the case for the river of voices as it presents the decade of broken dreams. Bakhtin highlights Dostoevsky’s gift “for perceiving his age as a great dialog, and for capturing in it not only individual voices, but above all the *dialogical relationships* between voices, their *dialogical interaction*” (73). The interaction of the individual voices in the river demonstrates the dialogical relationships that connect voices; the multiplicity of the notion of truth, as a result, is emphasized. Because voices in the river contradict themselves, we get varying perspectives on the truth of a single event. Bakhtin laments how many of the scholars of his time see one single soul (that of the author) while what should be emphasized in the case of Dostoevsky (and in other authors) is their “special ability to *see* the souls of *others*” (31; original emphasis). This ability to see many souls alludes to what happens at a generational level; these authors become the voice of the generation, albeit a voice characterized by multiplicity. In the river, Bolaño portrays the preoccupations of many Latin Americans dispersed throughout the world.

The multiple voices in the middle section of *Los detectives salvajes* prescribe a “perspective of depth” in relation to identity, and all of these voices are created by emigrations and exiles both collective and individual. The depth in perspective that the river adds marks how the voices can represent the emergent “structures of feeling” of a time period marred by violence and failure. The voices dislodge the “voyeuristic look” of the reader and create enigmas that become central to the story

that Bolaño tells. De Rosso points out the major enigmas of *Los detectives salvajes*, which seem fundamental to understand the dimensions of being lost portrayed by the voices: To whom are the characters that narrate the second part speaking, and how are all of the interviews collected in this part connected? Why are these various characters telling the stories that are related in the book? One must wonder where the unity is and where is the closure (137). It is crucial to understand that in Bolaño's work the problem does not reside in the resolution of the answers to these questions but rather in the questions themselves, because they are not enigmas to unravel but rather a secret that the text appears to hide; this is what creates the precariousness of the mysteries in Bolaño's works.

The river of voices artistically reflects the schizophrenic and contradictory aspects of a vast and diverse region, Latin America, as portrayed in the multiplicity that the river reflects. Bakhtin notes how Dostoevsky (and the same is true for Bolaño) "creates the impression" that the subject of discussion is "not a *single* author-artist," "but a whole series of philosophical statements made by *several* author-thinkers" who represent "independent and self-contradictory philosophical positions, each defended by one or another of his heroes" (3; original emphasis). The impression of multiplicity created by Bolaño's river allows for a greater exploration of a diverse set of philosophical ruminations on Latin Americans lost in the world. The many voices in the river represent currents in the river of voices, and they can contradict their creator. Therefore, "[t]he hero is ideologically authoritative and independent; he is perceived as the author of his own valid ideological conception"

(3). The voice of the author is belittled by the voices of the many (anti)heroes, who I read as these lost voices. In its multiplicity, the river becomes the collective voice of a larger group representing their time, the decade of broken dreams and the time after.

The river, as a reflection of reality, is fragmentary, fractured, dislocated, and profound at the same time. In one of Bolaño's most experimental novels, *Amberes*, written in 1980 but not published until 2002, a character explains why one would want to write this way: "Sólo me salen frases sueltas [...] tal vez porque la realidad me parece un enjambre de frases sueltas" (69). The river is also like a storm of loose phrases in which we can see that life for this generation is like being adrift. The river of voices is a collective narrative machine that breaks down the traditional relations between character and novel, author and novel, and most important, reader and narration. The reader can decipher the ephemeral nature not just of the detectives themselves but their milieu through the multiplicity of contradictory and cacophonous voices in the river.

The river's position in the middle of the novel marks it as central to the life story of the wandering lost poets. *Los detectives salvajes*, in many ways, is the story of the archetypal return and of death itself yet the heart of the story paradoxically takes place in the middle and not at the beginning or at a climatic end. Being placed in the middle of the novel marks a contrast with Western thought, which seems obsessed with the beginning (the origins and the roots) and the end (death) yet ignores what happens in between. The Ford Impala that the detectives borrow serves as the Rocinante, the vehicle of exploration and of moving through space in search of



meaning. Their quest for Cesárea Tinajero, a poet whose only published poem is a three-line mystery and vanished without leaving a trace, is part of a quixotic quest for meaning in a time of chaos. Tinajero is for the detectives the founder and the origin of their being and of their band of visceral realism. They chase after her as if she were the Holy Grail. The failed encounter with Tinajero at the end of the novel is not as important as the search; being lost, misplaced, or dislocated is what the river narrates. At the end of the *récit* in 1976, Tinajero meets a tragic fate in her death. However, the river, as the middle section of the novel, carries the reader all the way to 1996, to follow the wanderings of the (anti)heroes. Defeated, the (anti)heroes retreat and this is where their story really begins, which is why it takes place in the middle.

Because it encompasses so many voices from so many places, anecdotes, plots, and settings, *Los detectives salvajes* could be considered as Latin America's finí-millennium saga that portrays the desperate search of difficult times in the region. María Antonieta Flores observes this quality by indicating that the novel "narra la saga personal de todos aquellos que transitamos este final de siglo." The multiple voices are the witnesses, protagonists in their own right, of the times. She also observes that "[l]as distintas historias y personajes que entrecruzan o se desencuentran constituyen las piezas de un collage, los fragmentos de un todo inatrapable" (91). All of these fragments represent a multiplicity that is one of the defining characteristics of Bolaño's writing, which revolves around multiple interrelated systems. The middle section of *Los detectives salvajes* is filled with

wanderl[ost] subjects and represents the saga of Latin Americans lost in a journey of tragedy and discovery. Flores notes:

Ulises Lima remite a un degradado Odiseo, sin acciones heroicas salvo la defensa de una prostituta como un hecho circunstancial, sin Penélope que lo espere, tras un amor imposible que lo lleva a Israel (tierra prometida que se equipara a la fantasía del amor logrado). Y, finalmente, su Ítaca será la ciudad de México, y sus viajes serán el olvido y los recorridos por el Parque Hundido. (93)

The multiple voices that narrate Lima and Belano's stories construct a fragmented, rhizomatic odyssey that in a way represents the multiplicity of a generation of Latin Americans lost in the world.

What unites the voices in the river is the notion of uncertainty that surrounds the detectives and their wandering existence, which is one that they share with other subjects that they encounter throughout the novel. Prior to his departure for Africa, Belano's farewell at the airport with fellow Chilean Felipe Müller prefigures the impending nightmare that the lost revolutionary poets must face. While bidding goodbye, Belano relates an anecdote about two young and promising Latin American writers, "de nuestra generación, es decir de los nacidos en la década del cincuenta," from poor families: "[I]os dos creían en la revolución y en la libertad. Más o menos como todos los escritores nacidos en la década del cincuenta." Yet their quixotic illusions were crushed by their circumstances. "Pero entonces ocurrió lo que suele ocurrirles a los mejores escritores de Latinoamérica o a los mejores escritores nacidos

en la década del cincuenta: se les reveló, como una epifanía, la trinidad formada por la juventud, el amor y la muerte” (497).<sup>39</sup> This trinity of desperation experienced by the poets epitomizes the desperate struggle not just of a number of Latin American poets but of a continent frantically seeking out change and a better existence. Carral and Garibotto conclude that visceral realism, “más que un movimiento capaz de convertirse en la cabeza de la vanguardia poética de Latinoamérica, es el sueño literario de una pandilla de poetas latinoamericanos ‘perdidos en México’” (177). More importantly, this band of poets is lost in the world, making their quest for life universal—like literature.

Fleeing seems to be the *modus operandi* of the detectives and all of the voices of the river, who seem to run away from a failure that I read as the collapse of their revolutionary dreams and utopias. The detectives wander off course to search for a new path but are unable to find one. They roam in a space that defines their reality; it is layered with violence, revolution, and defeat because their time is marked by the failure of a grand utopian project on a Latin American scale. Carral and Garibotto state that “[s]i en los 70 la promesa de la revolución latinoamericana forma parte del clima de ideas en el que surge el realismo visceral, la experiencia de Lima en Nicaragua y las reflexiones de Belano antes de su partida a África señalan inequívocamente el dramático naufragio del sueño revolucionario” (178-79). As in *Estrella distante*, the concepts of shipwreck and failure surround the lost poets in the river.

Through its depiction of lost poets, failed utopias, and shipwrecked projects, *Los detectives salvajes* illustrates the huge failure of institutionalized revolution. It suggests that revolution against previous violent regimes only begets other violent regimes. Carral and Garibotto link the two visceral realist groups: those of the 1920s represented by the lost poet Cesárea Tinajero and the coming of a Latin American modernization and those of the violent 1970s represented by the wild detectives Ulises Lima and Arturo Belano and the neoliberal policies and transnational capitalism induced due to the failures of the institutionalized revolution invoked during the 1920s. In this sense, Carral and Garibotto associate the visceral realists with the failure of institutionalized revolution:

El primer realvisceralismo muestra el modo en que la revolución, al institucionalizarse y coincidir con el programa estatal, deja de ser eficaz, y la manera en que la literatura es uno de los agentes de ese pasaje, perdiendo así su posible carácter subversivo. Los jóvenes del segundo realismo visceral caminan, durante su aventura en el desierto, sobre los residuos de la revolución institucionalizada: pobreza, marginalidad, violencia son las marcas de la derrota del proyecto estatal. [...] Institucionalizada la revolución, sólo se abren dos caminos para la poesía: volverse hegemónica al ligarse con ese proyecto estatal o ser estigmatizada como disidente por ese mismo proyecto. (185-86)

Carral and Garibotto's observation brings to light the precarious situation of poets writing on the margins during times of great change. It also foreshadows my

discussion in the next chapter of Cuban lost subjects and their relation with art during Cuba's institutionalized revolution.

Part of the success of *Los detectives salvajes* lies in its narration of failed revolutions similar to those in Latin America in other regions in the world such as Africa. Belano's time drifting in Africa—possibly the most intense part of the novel as it epitomizes the lost subjects' frustration with defeat and their impulse to wander—achieves a cathartic release while also making light of finding life in death and desperation. We get the sense that Belano is off the map on the dark continent and completely disconnected from the rest of the world because he is there to let himself die. The degree of chaos and violence that plagues Latin America finds its rival in Africa. Jacobo Urenda, an Argentine photographer who covers the wars in Angola and Liberia for a French newspaper, narrates the horror on the African continent and how it makes a big impression on him, “que a los Latinoamericanos el horror no nos impresiona como a los demás” (526). Urenda relates that Belano, who works as a journalist for a newspaper in Madrid, is constantly searching for medicine for the pancreatitis and numerous ulcers that he had. His stay in Africa brings him closer to death; the desperation can be seen in the narration of Urenda, who notes that Belano “estaba allí para hacerse matar, que supongo no es lo mismo que estar allí para matarte o para suicidarte, el matiz está en que no te tomas la molestia de hacerlo tú mismo, aunque en el fondo es igual de siniestro” (529). In Liberia, Urenda describes the political situation in the country by commenting on the civil war between the Krahn and the Mandinga while he himself is immersed in the chaos.

During a night of insomnia, while waiting to reunite with Belano and other journalists with murders taking place all around them, they hear lots of languages and he remarks: “Todas las lenguas, entonces, me parecieron aborrecibles [...]. Todas las lenguas, todos los murmullos sólo una forma vicaria de preservar durante un tiempo azaroso nuestra identidad. En fin, la verdad es que *no sé* por qué me parecieron aborrecibles, tal vez de forma absurda estaba perdido [...] en una región que no conocía, en un país que no conocía, en un continente que no conocía en un planeta alargado y extraño” (543). During that night, Urenda eavesdrops on a conversation between Belano and photographer Emilio López Lobo in which Belano describes how he wanted to die, to let himself die. López Lobo asks him why, and Urenda infers, “[h]abía perdido algo y quería morir, eso era todo” (545). Losing something (a home) or somebody (a lover) is enough to make one get lost in the darkness of Africa, as in the case of Belano, and is plenty to want to get permanently lost.

Bolaño, with his visceral realism and the river of voices that represents a cross section of many people (not just Latin Americans) that lived during this time, achieves a vivid portrait of being lost and how losing something (a homeland or the friends and family left behind due to a dictatorship’s violence) creates a sense of catharsis for the lost subjects. The time in Africa captures the desperation inherent not only in the wanderings of Belano, but of the visceral realists, and for a lot of the lost Latin American revolutionary poets. Belano and Urenda find life in death, in chaos, and in the most abominable of human conditions in the heart of darkness in Africa. This sense is summed up by Urenda in a simple observation: “Sé que estaba contento

porque me encontraba en medio de una aventura y me sentía vivo” (543). This sentiment, of being alive within the chaos and while being lost, pervades the entire novel and is one of the defining characteristics of Bolaño’s lost poets.

A common sentiment among those who are lost is a sense of catharsis, especially when they lose something; this release is also associated with a more realistic and accurate view of reality, an idea that I suggest links with Bolaño’s visceral realism and the characters of his works (particularly in the river of voices). The very idea that many Latin Americans of this time are lost (in one way or another) due to the circumstances in their region is disconcerting, yet there is a sense of release and a true sense of being alive that is poignantly revealed in the section that takes place in Africa, which contains some of the darkest passages of Bolaño’s work (with the exception of *2666*’s portrayal of a femicide-laden Santa Teresa, alter ego of Ciudad Juárez.) The scenes in Africa also make apparent a more universal sense of being lost.

The idea that we can all potentially be lost and that we are all responsible for the terror that takes place in the world (as suggested earlier in my discussion of *Estrella distante*) leaves a lot of questions and many of our answers may come from the last page of *Los detectives salvajes*, which may or may not illustrate the universality of the project of literature and its importance. The last image of the novel—a rectangle drawn in a non-continuous line preceded by two other rectangles, whose meanings are explained by García Madero in his journal (one is a part of a star behind a window and the other is a sheet hung out to dry)—seems to represent an

experiment in Gestalt psychology, an example of reification, in which the readers construct or generate an image that is not really there. This is a lot like Cesárea Tinajero's only published poem, "Sión," interpreted as a total joke by Lima and Belano, which appears as a rectangle sitting on top of a straight line, a curvy line and a jagged line. This image also appears in Bolaño's novel *Amberes*, in which the narrator offers an interpretation: "La línea recta es el mar en calma, la curva es el mar con oleaje y la aguda es la tempestad." He then relates this interpretation to life: "La línea recta me producía calma. La ondulada me inquietaba, presentía el peligro pero me gustaba la suavidad: subir y bajar. La última línea era la crispación. Me dolía el pene, el vientre, etc." (53). By having to work to interpret the "poem," the reader is engaged in an experiment in perception that also makes him/her a participant in the action of what is depicted, which is part of the *vanguardista* project that the visceral realists tried to emulate.

This suggestion further exhibits the responsibility of the reader in reading. This thesis is supported by Ricardo Martínez, who observes Bolaño's work from the point of view of cognitive linguistics, a study that sees language not in any way isolated but rather interrelated with other mental processes. Martínez points out that metaphors do not have a linguistic origin but are what we live, our thoughts and actions put into words. Martínez also uses Marvin Minsky's theory on frames in the understanding of images and human cognitive processes to explain the images and to give context to the visceral realist poetry, which presents a clearer picture of the importance of poetry in depicting lost subjects. Using cognitive linguistics, Cesárea



Tinajero's only published poem, and the strange images of the rectangles that close the novel, the journal and visceral realist body of work, Martínez concludes that the visceral realist poetry is "[u]na poesía que efectivamente 'debe ser hecha por todos'" (199). In a similar vein, Carral and Garibotto indicate that this "poem" represents one of the central aims of the novel which is "la lucha por la legitimación de la propia escritura" (166). This conclusion illustrates that poetry and literature are life, that we are all poets and that the visceral realist poetry suggests that our lives are ours to write.

We all may be lost in one way or another, yet Bolaño's vision is that poetry or literature (however we practice it) are ways to survive it. Also particularly revealing is the location of this immense epiphany that concludes and seems to (mis)guide the novel: the deserts of Sonora. The desert is more than just a desert but a state of being, a lost condition, an Eden and an Inferno. It also represents a purgatory in which the poet must confront him/herself and his/her origins in order to seek out new directions. The lost towns of Sonora that are featured in this finale that appears as the hymn of the visceral realists are the lost towns of America—not just in Sonora, but in Mexico, in South America, and in the United States. They are relics of another world yet inherently attached to the world's current situation of change. Those who wander in them represent the lost subjects of a changing world.

In many ways, Bolaño's lost poets are like wild detectives that investigate meaning while they search for identity in a world ridden by dramatic changes in its socioeconomic situation that leave many marginalized. They are the outsider poets

that attempt to cope with reality in a world where violence reigns because their ideals have been crushed by the coming to power of dictatorships that have brought much of Latin America's move toward transnational capitalist system during the seventies. In both *Estrella distante* and *Los detectives salvajes*, Bolaño layers the perspectives—by meticulously giving the viewpoints of various poets in the first novel and through his use of the river of lost voices in the second—in order to deepen the reader's experience with the horrors of the violence that he depicts. The lost poets in both novels provide a realistic, yet at the same time, poetic depiction of the chaos that Latin America experienced during the decade of broken dreams and the political reality following that period. Thus the lost poets are part of Bolaño's artistic project that defines the experience of many Latin American intellectuals that were dispersed following the coups in their respective countries. They are portrayed as anti-heroes or losers because their fight against terror was lost to dictators like Pinochet. However, they do not appear as weighed down by the defeatism inherent in their designation as lost subjects. I see their propensity to wander[lost] as a natural reaction to a world riddled by violent changes; only by living absurdly can they survive an absurd reality. In a world in which transactions and political changes take place with astonishing speed, Bolaño's lost subjects signal that one must move quickly or be swept away.

## Chapter 2

An Empire of Lost Souls in the Purgatory of Havana: The City's Parallel Dimensions Represented in Abilio Estévez's *Los palacios distantes* and the Stories of

Antonio José Ponte

Virgilio Piñera begins his poem “La isla en peso” (1943) with the verse “La maldita circunstancia del agua por todas partes,” suggesting that the condition of living on an island such as Cuba is a maddening prospect synonymous with being isolated, separated both by water and by mindset from the American continental mainland and from changes taking place in the world (33). Throughout its history, Cuba's psychological distance has been extenuated by its troublesome relationships with three superpowers—originally, the colonial Spanish empire; then, its subjugation to the business and political interests of the United States following the Spanish-American War; later, the socialist policies sought out by Fidel Castro following his 1959 revolution spurred the Soviet Union to subsidize Cuba's economy as part of an ideological battle. This brought about the island's disassociation from the United States exemplified by the U.S. financial and commercial embargo against Cuba. Despite, or because of, the island's troublesome relationships with superpowers, the island-as-isolated trope, as suggested by Piñera's verse, appears in a number of Cuban literary works, but seems to have particular relevance during the Special Period when the island was “abandoned” by the Soviet Union and excluded from free market economic policies taking hold in other parts of the world.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent shakedown in the Eastern bloc and disinvolvement with the Soviet Union mark key events that have left Cuba on its own. Since this event, in what has come to be known as the post-Soviet era, the island has found itself detached from the changes taking place in the increasingly interconnected free market economy driven by innovations in media and communications. Thus some of Cuba's literary subjects appear as lost, caught on an island within the grasp of a world superpower that imposes its will on the region, thereby isolating Cuba, and making problematic the island's socio-economic reorientation. As a consequence, the island has had to re-define its position in an internationalizing economy characterized by the deregulation of global markets. The island, as represented in a number of recent works in Cuban literature, appears to occupy a liminal zone, somewhere between life in a globalized context and being stuck in a timeless standstill. To weather this situation of being lost and spatio-temporally isolated within the unstable circumstances brought on by changes in the world economy, a number of Cubans seek redemption from their isolation through art, and this is particularly evident in some of the literature of this time which portrays how Cuban lost subjects use art to slip into parallel dimensions and alternate realities and survive the harsh reality of the Special Period. The experiences of these lost subjects and how they use art as a way to find themselves are exemplified in a novel by Abilio Estévez (1954- ), *Los palacios distantes* (2002), and in two collections of short stories by Antonio José Ponte (1964- ), *Corazón de skitalietz* (1998) and *Cuentos de todas partes del imperio* (2000).<sup>40</sup> Whereas the subjects of Estévez's

novel use art as a way to create alternate realities in order to survive marginalized circumstances on the island, the subjects of Ponte's stories wander through spatial, temporal, and psychological dimensions in their attempts to construct or invent a new Havana. Estévez and Ponte's wanderl[o]st subjects, or *skitalietz*, as Ponte refers to them, stroll through Havana much in the same way that Baudelaire's *flâneurs* do, in a manner that both passively observes and actively illustrates the perplexities facing the city.

Estévez and Ponte's texts portray Cuba as a sort of figurative purgatory in which the texts' subjects expiate the island's collective transgressions by creating alternate realities; through re-figurations of place and time and the use of art, their characters imagine other parallel dimensions where they can reside in order to survive Cuba's precarious socio-economic condition. These subjects' drifting typifies an era of social and economic transformation in which they have become unmoored. In this uncertainty, they appear as both lost in space and in time. The idea of an alternate reality to which Cubans flee in order to survive this condition is epitomized in *Los palacios distantes* by the ruins of a theater in Havana. There, the novel's desperate protagonists Victorio and Salma, two itinerant Cubans who suffer from the island's political and economic situation, live out a liminal existence under the guidance of Don Fuco, a seemingly immortal clown who shows them the beauty of quotidian life in Havana by means of the theater's "magical" powers. Salma previously had worked as a prostitute, dreaming of becoming an actress in Hollywood, while Victorio had lived as a squatter in a dilapidated "palace" scheduled to be demolished. The theater

that Don Fuco shows them gives their lives meaning in an island where many have to struggle to get by.

Of Ponte's stories, I will focus on "Un arte de hacer ruinas" and "Corazón de skitalietz." The first imagines an underground parallel universe invented by Havana's *tugures*, nomadic squatters that roam the city seeking places to dwell. Because of the city's housing crisis and the frequent collapse of buildings, the *tugures* in this story make a game of surviving in the margins of the city, which are figuratively represented by the alternate reality that they create beneath the city. "Corazón de skitalietz" is about a pair of mentally ill vagabonds who wander Havana while fabricating a make-believe city of their own. Even though they remain in Havana, they see Cuba from the outside as *skitalietz*, a Russian word that means dispossessed, outsider, or drifter. The outsider perspective, as embodied in the *skitalietz*, is also the position taken by Estévez and Ponte who portray Cuba from the perspective of these subjects who have been marginalized and rendered lost by shifting conditions on the island.

During the last twenty years (1988-2008), Cuba has seen a number of important shifts in global economic policies and has witnessed ensuing troubles stemming from its longstanding historical and geographical situation, which I will document using Louis A. Pérez's historical survey *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (2006) and Gustavo Pérez Firmat's *The Cuban Condition* (1989). I argue that the problems created by these shifts in policy relate directly to Cuba's geographical situation, its physical position as an island but, more importantly, in the

current changes taking place in its social landscape which seem to pivot on the question of Cuba's simultaneous connection with and separation from trends taking place in the rest of the world. Richard Gott's *Cuba: A New History* (2004) and José Quiroga's *Cuban Palimpsests* (2005) will serve to theorize the more precarious recent situation of the island following the break-up of the Soviet Union. The United States' stifling policies with regard to the island have hindered it even more from keeping up with technological and economic trends taking place in other parts of the world. In Estévez and Ponte's *Havana*, we see multiple layers of Cuban realities traced in its ruins that display how various histories have passed over Cuba. Quiroga describes the multiple dimensions as palimpsests: "a queer form of reproduction, one where two texts, two sites, two lives blend into one continuous present" (ix). Through the recurring images of ruins and the concept of palimpsest utilized in post-Soviet Cuban literature, we see multiple perspectives of an island's concurrent dismantling and creation as if it were in a state of limbo.

Cuba's status as lost and detached takes on much greater meaning during the Special Period, a time of profound economic and identity crisis on the island that is preceded by the severance from the Soviet Union. Gott sees the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 as a key moment in a seismic change that presented the island with the need to re-invent itself. With the Cold War over and the Soviet Union crumbling, the numerous shifts in power presented obstacles for Castro's government. As Pérez notes, "Cuba found itself virtually alone and isolated, with few political friends and fewer military allies" (292). These events, combined with Gorbachev's withdrawal of

Soviet troops from the island and the Soviets' discontinuation of the subsidized oil supply, spelled certain demise for the Cubans as malnutrition and discontent became widespread. Yet the resiliency of Castro and the Cuban people survived the 1990s with a strict set of plans that the Cuban leader euphemistically labeled the "Special Period in Times of Peace." The Special Period's policies are "a series of contingency plans conceived originally as a response to conditions of war" and "established a framework within which to implement a new series of austerity measures and new rationing schedules to meet deteriorating economic conditions" (Pérez 293).

Whitfield points out that the stringent measures recognize that

[s]carcity became a staple, to which the government responded with the calls for valor and endurance that had punctuated previous decades. *Resolver* ("to resolve") and *inventar* ("to invent") overreached themselves as the verbs of the moment, becoming practices for survival whose structural proximity to artistic creation, or to making something of nothing, haunts the period's literature. These initial economic measures, and the more drastic ones that followed, would radically alter the country's social and cultural infrastructure, staging a heady encounter with capitalist markets. (2008: 3-4)

More than a set of policies, the Special Period is also a mentality, one in which the patterns of daily life were greatly affected, as surviving hunger and the more frequent occurrences of blackouts became the norm, further isolating the island.<sup>41</sup>



A distinguishing factor of the island's isolation is that it lives separated (via its unique geography, but more prominently in this decade, through various political means) to a certain degree from changes taking place in the United States and Europe, yet integrally in the center of much of the life in the Caribbean, having historically been a central outpost for trade and culture in this region. The separation that has been haunting the island throughout its existence has been exacerbated by the Special Period and U.S. policies regarding the island. The scarcity of material goods and food resulting from the U.S. commercial embargo have incited apocalyptic themes among the writers of the time, such as Estévez and Ponte, who also concoct creative ways to survive the damage done. In this sense, I see the Cuba they portray as a parallel dimension because it is a realm at once detached from shifts taking place in the rest of the world, yet firmly based in the here and now and held together by unique ways of making do; thus life exists outside of what is going on away from the island but is fed by its neighbors both near and far by means of unusual practices. The island appears in their works as part of a world reality, one dimension, while also exhibiting other-worldly implications, seemingly occupying another dimension, based on the imaginary. This parallel dimension, as it appears represented in the works that I will analyze, functions amidst a number of dualisms—between fiction and reality, socialism and capitalism, the imaginary and the concrete, idealism and realism, madness and reason—suggesting a gray area of instability, and a liminal existence present in Cuban economics and society as a whole.

The island has been isolated through some of Castro's rejection of trends toward the deregulation of global markets, yet many Cubans living from the black market are dependent on the global economy through tourism for daily survival. Estévez and Ponte's texts represent this paradox by shifting the reader's conception of the passing of time on the island, an idea that is particularly evident in their depiction of its ruins and in the way their subjects appear trapped on it. The island feels both eternal and unhinged because ruins represent opposing ideas of identity as they are both the remains of a former identity but also a barometer of the present condition, which is marked by their accounts of the island's crumbling state. As the ruins of Havana collapse upon the texts' subjects, they appear trapped in their present condition. Yet in Estévez and Ponte's texts, they find ways to survive through the use of art and imagination.

Cuba's geographic position is fundamental in determining its geo-political role in the world because it has made it a vested interest of the United States, a superpower just ninety miles away. This position makes Cuba both dependent on the U.S. economically while at the same time prisoner of the empire's reach, a relationship that has given the nation an increasing sense of isolation during the Special Period. In its past, during the first centuries of Spain's control of the island, Cuba's geographic location served as an advantage rather than an isolating factor. A central part of Havana's early history revolves around the strategic location. In *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis* (2002), Joseph L. Scarpaci, Roberto Segre, and Mario Coyula argue that "Havana served first as a transfer point for wealth

coming from other Spanish colonies and subsequently from the rest of the island” (2). Therefore, the city was an important gateway and meeting point for many cultures. The strategic location has also made it apt as an outpost for piracy and contraband. Because of the island’s position, Pérez Firmat asserts that “Cuban culture results from the importation, and even the smuggling, of foreign goods” (1). As it is no longer such an important shipping crossroads (part of the U.S. trade embargo prohibits vessels calling at Cuban ports from visiting U.S. ports for six months, a restriction that has diminished the number of visits by ships), a black market existence based on contraband (items banned by Castro policies), has re-surfaced with greater force in the Special Period. The scarcity of goods and wages during this time has made it necessary for nearly all Cubans to make do “por la izquierda,” a *cubanismo* slang term that refers to the idea of acquiring goods and money by illegal means.<sup>42</sup> This way of living has isolated Cubans even more, paradoxically making them more dependent on the outside world by means of tourism money and material and monetary help from families living abroad. This unique situation has paradoxically shut the island off from the rest world while also making the island from dependent on others. Therefore, the sense of isolation and entrapment provoked by Cuba’s status as island partially stems from Cuba’s geographic seclusion, yet seems further punctuated by the Special Period, which underscores the island’s vulnerable, alienated condition. Estévez and Ponte’s literary representations of this specific historical time heighten the sense of the island’s disconnection—the sometimes troublesome relationships it has maintained—from the “outside” world.

Cuba's isolation was furthered by the tightening of the United States' grip on the island and its own economic policies that left the island self-sufficient and consequently more introverted and alone: "The watchword was now '*Cuba contra todos*'—Cuba against everyone—as the defense of socialism was construed to imply a historic duty for Cuba" (Pérez 303).<sup>43</sup> Later, the Foreign Investment Act of 1995 was in some ways an admission that Cuba must form part of the global market and break its estrangement from the rest of the world. Despite all odds and increasing pressure from the United States, Cuba has been resilient while also evolving to fit with the times. This isolation was interrupted by the re-birth of tourism, which has been a main part of the shift towards Cuba becoming part of the global economy.

One of the effects that this shift and the Special Period have had on the cultural production industry has been the increase in exiled artists, or in the case of Estévez and Ponte, the notion of "banished literature." Whitfield defines this term as literature "escrita en Cuba pero leída ahí sólo por lectores capaces de obtener una copia proveniente del extranjero" (17). In this sense, Cuba's banished literature is also a "lost subject," and a subject particularly lost within Cuba in the sense that not many Cubans have access to it. As Cuban writers that pen "banished literature," "writing from" the island "for" those not on the island, Estévez and Ponte provide an unusual vantage point on Cuba's situation.<sup>44</sup> Their works were not written from exile, and in this way, I see the authors appearing to be more "stable" in their *staying* while at the same time depicting an island in movement.<sup>45</sup> Unlike exiled writers, Estévez and Ponte might be less likely to feel nostalgia for a Cuba that maybe once was, or more

likely, never was; nor do they trash the island with resentment. Odette Casamayor Cisneros notes that for those that stay on the island “está negada la posibilidad de refugiarse en imágenes pasadas, teñidas de la nostalgia típica del emigrado. Muy al contrario, estos escritores son permanentemente confrontados al caos cotidiano, sumidos en la impresión de caer cada día más bajo” (73). Both authors avoid black and white political commentary; they are neither decidedly pro- nor anti-Castro, giving an apolitical view that, nonetheless, does not shy away from social commentary upon the state of disrepair in which the island finds itself.<sup>46</sup> The seemingly more dialectical black and white view (in terms of politics and social commentary) taken by exiled writers from earlier periods, such as that of the rather anti-Castro Reinaldo Arenas, seems to fit the historical context from which they wrote. During Arenas’s time, the island found itself in more marked polemics: inclusion versus exclusion, dependence versus independence, revolutionary versus subversive, socialist versus capitalist, and pro versus anti-American. Although these polemics continue shaping the island today, the Special Period has brought on greater desperation with regard to resolving them and thereby more uncertainty. The time periods that the authors represent (late 1990s, early twentieth-first century in the case of Ponte’s stories and Estévez’s novel and mid-sixties to late eighties for Arenas) represent various facets of being lost and show a tendency towards a growing sense of wanderlust in an increasingly mobile, global context. Although Arenas portrayed lost subjects as well, such as the exiled porter Juan in *El portero* (1987), there is more of a sense of metaphysical wandering in Ponte and Estévez’s work, and this, I suggest, has

to do with the changes in the socio-political context, which in its precarious state of flux causes subjects to wander off-kilter. Rather than refute revolutionary triumphalism like Arenas, Cuban reality just *is* in the work of Estévez and Ponte.<sup>47</sup>

Estévez and Ponte respond to what they see—a social project that is quite literally falling to pieces in a state of disrepair—by portraying ruins and a pervading sense of scarcity while also showing the possibility of art as an escape. Art, such as the underground utopia fabricated by the *tugures* in “Un arte de hacer ruinas” or Don Fuco’s theatrical space in *Los palacios distantes*, creates parallel universes in which subjects can get lost. Despite the unstable conditions on the island, Estévez and Ponte’s works illustrate that the beauty of quotidian life on the island *is* the uncertainty. Life on the margins, as for the wandering, lost subjects in the works by these writers, appears as the “honest” way to live.<sup>48</sup> Thus their work comes from the conditions imposed by the Cuban economic situation but also reacts against it.

Estévez and Ponte jettison what have now become false dichotomies—between us and them or capitalism and socialism—to portray a decidedly more ambiguous world. Their texts fit well with Cuba’s current situation; the revolution tacitly recognizes dependence coexistent with an effort to gain independence, and this is later translated into the paradoxical situation of being outside a global economic situation defined by trends towards deregulation of global markets, while nevertheless becoming part of globalization during the transition that Gott suggests that the Special Period represents. As Cuba gradually becomes part of the global system, particularly through tourism, it continues with growing pains that also seem to sharpen. This

precarious position puts the island in a strange liminal zone, caught between two worlds, which is particularly evident at the millennium. It is also one of the reasons why I see it as a sort of purgatory, as represented in Estévez and Ponte's texts in which their subjects survive in the margins using art and imagination.

Estévez and Ponte's work offers outsider looks at the transition the island is experiencing coming from insiders who have lived outside because these authors' works are influenced by their situation, not just in Cuba, but by the international market for their works. Whitfield comments on the relationship between Cuban books and their foreign audiences, saying that "[t]hese writers were physically separated from the circles in which their books were read and, conversely, they were deprived of the domestic audience," which could be described "problematically, as 'their natural readers'" (2008: 14). The question of a writer reporting from the inside for those from the outside creates a strange dynamic, but it is not unlike the characters of Estévez and Ponte's works, who also seem to be outsiders observing Cuba from the inside yet as outcasts and passive dissidents.<sup>49</sup> As a Cuban writer in Cuba, Ponte sees himself as a war correspondent *in situ* capturing the here and now in Cuba. Being there, among the itinerant Cuban citizens, marks him as another lost subject writing from a place that is hard to pinpoint.

Estévez and Ponte represent what has been deemed the "generación de 1990," a generation that responds to global events that took place during the time of the Berlin Wall coming down and the breakup of the socialist Eastern bloc.<sup>50</sup> This group follows in the lyrical tradition proposed by the literary magazine *Orígenes* (1944-

1956) and the works of writers such as José Lezama Lima, Alejo Carpentier, and Virgilio Piñera. It also reacts against the poor Soviet social realism popular among Cuban writers living under stricter vigilance during the seventies. Estévez, in an interview with Eduardo Béjar, suggests that one of the differences that marks his newer generation is “la necesidad de sujetivar la literatura.” The writers of the “generación de 1990” react against what Estévez sees as shallower propaganda-style writing, giving new meaning to introspection: “empiezan a buscar su propia vida, a psicologizarse” to achieve “una mirada ya llena de amargura, escepticismo, o también con optimismo pero ya bañada por el interior del personaje” (qtd. in Béjar 92).

Ponte’s work follows in this introspection but his style is decidedly sparser and Eastern European in its cryptic and esoteric descriptions, as if he were a Cuban Kafka. For example, Ponte’s tone is somber and introverted in order to explore a more metaphysical side of everyday life in Cuba. This tone suggests the bleakness and the feeling of imprisonment that describes life in the tropical plentitude. He borrows the Russian term, *skitalietz*, to describe the sense of wandering as Cuba recovers from its detachment from the Soviet Union during the 1990s. Estévez also looks both inside and outside of Cuba, following in the more baroque tradition of Carpentier, Lezama Lima, and Piñera (who was a mentor to Estévez) while layering his works with references from outside of Cuba, such as European writers. This shift in styles that Estévez and Ponte represent parallels Cuba’s transformation and gradual integration into a globalized economy in the sense that their work looks outward in order to look at what is going on in Havana. The paradoxical outward introspection is



necessary to portray the victims of the alienation experienced during this transformation toward a more international context.

Ponte uses a figurative empire that encompasses a variety of dimensions—spatial (particularly in an architectural sense in his descriptions of the use of living space in present-day Cuba), temporal, geographical, and psychological—to portray the tales of lost, peripatetic characters. For example, those in his collection *Cuentos de todas partes del Imperio* occupy an ironic empire that encompasses spaces both on the island, such as the women’s bathroom in the Havana airport in “Por hombres,” and in distant locales like the university dormitories of a cold, Eastern European country in “Las lágrimas en el congrí.” That Ponte alludes to this ironic empire suggests a Cuban space that extends beyond the island’s concrete existence. Space in his stories emerges through Cubans’ dwelling in distant lands, their influence on world culture, and the alternate realities that appear on the island itself.

*Cuentos de todas partes del Imperio* brings together the empire of the Cuban population that lives outside of the island and illustrates how networks of those who live abroad form and stay together. Within this figurative empire, lost subjects struggle to find themselves. The English translation is rendered *Tales from the Cuban Empire*, perhaps a more suggestive designation that puts emphasis on the idea of a collective gathering and assembly of *Cubans* not just living abroad but within the many dimensions—spatial, temporal and metaphysical—on the island itself. The title also might be perceived as “a gesture toward expanding Cuba’s limited borders,” as Whitfield suggests (2008: 20). The stories in this volume encapsulate the feeling of

communities living detached from their homelands in various corners of the world or displaced psychologically in Cuba itself; they are tales of an empire of castaways and undesirables. Such is the case in the stories from the collection *Corazón de skitalietz*, in which the characters appear as psychologically alienated and seemingly separated (particularly in the economic and political sense) from what happens in the world around them, and as a consequence, appear to wander (mainly in Havana) aimlessly off course. Within the stories of the latter collection, one can observe missing pieces in Cuba's foundations (spaces into which subjects slip) that appear as an unmoored spiritual topography, which consequentially portrays a lost history on the island.

Ponte's meditation on empire helps establish the sense of multiple dimensions by creating a perspective that is both on and off the island, that of Cubans and that of an outsider, real and unreal, and based equally on stability or remaining in place and the instability of wandering away from the island. In his prologue to *Cuentos de todas partes del Imperio*, Ponte makes reference to Rudyard Kipling's story "The Mark of the Beast." The reference is more than appropriate as the British author wrote from India, an outpost in the empire of all empires, the British empire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Kipling begins the story, "East of Suez, some hold, the direct control of Providence ceases" (293). This zone, east of Suez, represents another kind of domain, an alternate universe like that depicted in Ponte's works: that of the unknown, which principally refers to what was unknown by the British colonizers. This dimension of the unknown is prominent in Ponte's works because of the sense of unreality that surrounds them, especially for a reader from the outside. As in most of

Kipling's work, the gap between those that occupy the remote outposts of the empire and those of the metropolis (seemingly Havana in Ponte's case) is manifest particularly in the relationship between those that live in the "real" world and those that live in figurative parallel dimensions that Ponte creates. Despite living in Havana, a number of Ponte's characters seem to wander outside of reality, and thereby the concrete reality of the city, because much of the Antillean metropolis appears to exist as another dimension.

Within this strange universe created in Ponte's fiction, a Cuban empire is possible in which we can see Cuba as more than just the literal life on the island but rather as many possible "realities" in a figurative and imagined empire. The notion that Cuba makes up an empire is pertinent to the study of its lost subjects because of the fact that there are a huge number of Cuban exiles spread around the globe. Ponte states that there are "trampas en pensar Cuba en la actualidad. Una de ellas es geográfica. Esa trampa asume que el país termina en las fronteras de la isla y que el cubano que se va deja de ser cubano" (qtd. in Rodríguez 181). Ponte's statement suggested an expanded conception of Cuban identity that fits his notion of the island occupying a figurative empire that includes territories on the island and those where Cubans reside around the globe. Ponte goes on to propose that the collection is his response "a la Cuba monolítica en la que vivo y por otro mi contestación a la diáspora cubana, a la cantidad de exilios que los cubanos viven en todas partes del mundo" (qtd. in Rodríguez 183). It also indirectly implies Cuba's proximity to a gigantic empire to the north, which has in a number of ways shaped the history of the island.

An element common to all empires is their eventual decadence, which in the case of Cuba, is present in almost every page of Ponte's stories.<sup>51</sup> The undoing of the empire, through its decay as seen in Havana's ruins, for example, justifies its existence, and this undoing also has to do with erasing a colonial past as part of the Spanish empire, a present as the backyard of the North American superpower, and an interlude in which Cuba negotiated its existence with the then Soviet Union.

The recurrent allusion to empire is also part of Ponte's emphasis and contemplation on the increasingly internationalized context experienced on the island in relation to the shifts toward an international free market economy. Ponte's citing of Lord Dunsany's "Bethmoora" in "Un arte de hacer ruinas," analogous to his citing of Kipling in his prologue to *Cuentos de todas partes del imperio*, further reinforces the idea of Empire (British in the case of the referred writers) that extends throughout many realms and stirs the imagination of those "at home" in the metropolis. Ponte constructs an empire that suggests Cuba's extension throughout many worlds with its "natives" living in many parts. The island's international presence can be witnessed, for example, in Cubans studying Russian in the former Soviet Union in Ponte's story "Viniendo." The stories in the collection represent the tales of lost Cubans living in varying relations with the imagined metropolis; their stories are told in the first person as if they were being told around a fire in a tribal gathering. In the prologue, Ponte describes the tribe, which is not exactly a nomadic one but one that represents a prenational, collective state. The tribe alluded to in many of the stories is one that forms in order to overcome a great distance, as in "Las lágrimas en el congrí."

Therefore the lost subjects that inhabit Ponte's work intend to shorten the great distance (both physical and psychological) that the empire encompasses by coming together and telling stories.

This empire becomes like a parallel universe that maintains the characteristics of the universe in which we the readers live, but also provides a space in which the wanderl[ost] subjects dwell. The outsider characters invoke a sense of nationlessness thus provoking one to wonder: Where is the line that divides what is inherently Cuban from what makes up the empire created by the Cuban diaspora? Throughout the entire collection, Cuba is alluded to in almost every sentence, yet feels distant because it is never directly mentioned. One especially gets this sense in "Las lágrimas en el congrí" in which nostalgia for the island can be felt, for example, in the "masas de puerco fritas con el plato totémico de la tribu, el congrí" (45). The Cubans appear to be the tribe to which he refers but nevertheless the Cuban characters in the story seem distant, as if detached from the island that inspires their nostalgia. The idea of a Cuban empire, one that occupies a space much larger than that found in the geographical coordinates of the island is further explored in "Por hombres," which is rendered as "Because of Men" in the English translation but could easily be represented alternatively as "By Men," alluding to things done by men that spur (wo)men into movement and thus spread a group of people around the world. The scene of the story, a women's bathroom in the Havana airport, alludes to the island's potential connections with the rest of the world as it is an emblematic space in which to understand the nodes and points of human contact and mobility. The idea of an

empire being created is present in this story as several different lands (Iceland and the deserts of some land where camels are sold) and lovers are streamed together in a way that makes it seem as if they are all from the same place or one empire.<sup>52</sup> The other realms of the empire are the ethereal elements such as the alternate realities that I suggest describe life in Cuba. In much of his fiction, particularly the cemetery in his novel *Contrabando de sombras* (2002), Ponte plays with the realm between the living and the dead implies that in many ways, Cuba is alive but its life is suspended by a series of revolutionary policies that have shut it off from life in the rest of the world. Like the characters in his novel, many of the characters in Ponte's stories are like ghosts or *almas en pena*, lost souls wandering in a purgatory. In purgatory, lost souls are trapped and hounded by memories of their past deeds much in the same way that the lost souls of Ponte's texts are stuck on an island in which time seems to have stopped. Purgatory, in this sense, is where one can observe how time stops, yet the past still breathes life into the present.

The clearest representation of the alternate realities that lost subjects construct in order to survive the purgatory-like conditions on the island appears in the story "Un arte de hacer ruinas," which deals with the shortage of personal living space in Havana by means of an exploration of the city's ruins and the semi-nomadic squatters that occupy them. The story narrates, through the eyes of the engineering student-narrator, issues related to space, such as the contemporary urban problems of overcrowding and squatting, the process of Havana's buildings becoming ruins, and how citizens cope with these issues. Nearly impossible to summarize, "Un arte de hacer

ruinas” is a story about writing a thesis about urban planning in a city characterized by over-crowding and collapsing buildings. It is also a story about apocalypse or the complete destruction and end of a city. The idea of apocalypse is suggested on almost every page through the constant presence of building collapses, the question of whether the city exists outside of the adviser’s apartment, and subway tunnels becoming air raid shelters. The solution both to the over-crowding and the threat of the city’s destruction suggested by the story’s ending is the creation of an underground city, an alternate reality. The narrator, an engineering student, relates his dealings with his adviser and another man that he calls Professor D., a book with theories on urban development the latter has written, in addition to some notes of his that are intended to become a book entitled *Un arte de hacer ruinas*. The disappearance of Professor D.’s notes on these theories and the collapse of a building onto him, bringing him to his death, lead the narrator in pursuit of answers and to the discovery of the aforementioned underworld.

The story begins with an anecdote that reads as an analogy for dealing with the problem of over-crowding in Havana. This anecdote tells of a man’s visit to the psychiatrist to deal with the problem of living in a small house occupied by a loud family and a mother-in-law and niece that he cannot stand. Because Cubans cannot buy property, in many cases multiple generations of a family live together, creating tensions, particularly with the infamous mother-in-law. The psychiatrist’s cure is to get a goat, which would present so many problems for the man that he would forget about the issues of his annoying family in the small house; the man in the anecdote

discovers, “la vida sin chivo puede ser maravillosa.” With the cramped living situation described in the Havana or fictional Havana-like city that Ponte creates (he never gives the city a name) in this story, “[c]riar un chivo en una barbacoa puede ser menos raro que vivir con la suegra” (57). The narrator-student would like to use this anecdote about the scapegoat as an introduction for his thesis on *barbacoas*, the spaces improvised by space-deprived Cubans that make one floor into two, and one room into four, thereby “freeing” up more space and leaving you to discover the “generosidad vertical de tu espacio” (56). The anecdote is told in the second person as if the narrator were creating a story or situation in which the readers could imagine themselves, thus creating a sense of urgency in the dire circumstances caused by the lack of living space. In the story, the housing crisis in Havana, which is due to the arrival of more Cubans to the city and the lack of space, produces a new wave of lost subjects that have lost their homes. Those that have lost their dwelling space recur to the cracks left behind; they have been evicted in a sense from contemporary reality, forced to live in the margins, seemingly occupying another dimension, as victims not only of their decaying surroundings but also of rapid socioeconomic shifts. The story also presents the idea that Cuba’s problems could be blamed on any number of scapegoats—Castro, the United States, or the Soviet Union.

“Un arte de hacer ruinas,” which in some ways reads more as an essay on urban development than as a fictional story, is the precarious foundation for the collection of the same name.<sup>53</sup> I see it as a foundation because it best recaps the major themes of the collection, it is located in the middle of the collection, making it an



architectural base for the collection, and also because it is the only story of the collection that takes place entirely in Cuba, giving its subjects an anchor in the heart of the “Cuban empire;” it is precarious because of its shaky identity and the unstable, problematic reality of Havana that it portrays. As the wobbly foundation, it also suggests that Cuba’s foundations are unstable. The quality of elasticity seems to be a recurrent theme in Cuban literature of this time, which is marked by economic and political uncertainty, as seen in the story with its portrayal of Havana’s ruins.

Whitfield notes that the title of the story, it is rendered “A Knack for Making Ruins” in English, “insists that ruins do not merely happen as time takes its course; rather, they are created purposively” (2008: 148). I assert that the story indirectly alludes to the idea that the destruction is actually creation in the sense that it creates life within the margins, further reinforcing my argument about alternate realities in Ponte’s portrayal of the island.

The concepts presented by the characters in “Un arte de hacer ruinas” function as a working theory of the creation of parallel dimensions as the island’s slippery foundations slip into oblivion, into lost memory. The story presents how spaces change, how a place can be seen in a different light as it travels through time, and how one might experience two entirely different existences in the same place. Much in the same way that a *barbacoa* can make four rooms out of one, we can see that within one city there might be many cities because of the multiple dimensions that it figuratively implies. The story presents a unique use not only of space but also of time in its portrayal of the construction of the alternate realities that form Havana. In

the apartment of the narrator's thesis adviser, the narrator discovers a map from 1832, a year when there was cholera; the map "describía el itinerario del cólera, el avance de la muerte por la ciudad" (2005: 59). By tracing the path of death in the Havana of that year, the map also shows a city that is both completely different, yet undisputedly the same one as the Havana of the present. On the surface, the map indicates the path of cholera, but upon comparison of the two cities—that of 1832 and that of present day—the map shows the transpiration of time. Ponte insists on time as a dimension equally as plausible in which to get lost as space, and with this story he indicates that his characters are lost in time or made lost by the passing of time. Time, therefore, becomes an important vector in the dimensions constructed by Ponte in his portrayal of Cuba's wanderl[o]st subjects. J.E. Malpas, in *Place and Experience* (1999), makes note of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* and its discussion of people's relations with their pasts and their locations to portray how various dimensions play a part in the construction of memory. Curiously, the English title of this novel is rendered as *Remembrance of Things Past* even though the French title refers not to things but to time lost, time equally capable of making one lost or being lost itself. The intersection of lost time and past things seems appropriate to discuss wandering subjects and how they view the world because the searches for these respective entities are similar. The search for lost things and lost time referred to in Proust's novel, according to Malpas, "is necessarily a search that arises only as a consequence of the inevitable experience of loss"(193). Thus losing something might mark one as lost; subjects find themselves by reencountering things, places, and people from their

past. In this vein, the narrator's adviser further explains the importance of time as a dimension in which to get lost when in his apartment the narrator plucks a coin from a bowl, a habit that started for him as a child when he visited the adviser (who was then a friend of his father). Each coin would transport him to different parts of the world based on the coin's origin. The narrator recalls his fascination as a child with the place the coins come from; his adviser observes, "[d]e niño la geografía apasiona mucho más que la historia. Otros países importan más que otras épocas...Será que todavía no tenemos que empezar nuestros viajes en el tiempo" (61). The narrator reacquaints and reorients himself with Cuba's past when he finds the coin that tells the story of the particular place.

Because Cuba (and Havana particularly) appears in the literature of this period as a purgatory, a liminal zone between the living and the dead, it is also in a state of suspension and of waiting, and in it, we see a provocative use of metaphorical space and time in the description of the island's state in this story. The island is geographically close to the rest of the world (through its proximity to the United States), but as an island, appears politically distanced and psychologically isolated as if from another time. Through its discussion of traveling through time, as exemplified in the scene with the coin, this story indirectly suggests the possibility that its subjects are temporally and psychologically isolated from the rest of the world in its portrayal of ruins. Because the building collapses in the story are replaced with the cheapest substitute, usually empty space, the story suggests that time could be going backward in Ponte's Havana which seems to hang in suspension. According to Ponte, in his

essay *La fiesta vigilada* (2007), a big part of what stopped the clock and made time go backwards in Cuba is the revolution's defiance of money in a world that is increasingly defined by global capital and consumption. Sujatha Fernandes, in her study of Cuban arts and state power *Cuba Represent!* (2006), observes that Cuba has been going through a slow reintegration with the world, noting that "Cuba has been undergoing a process of *controlled transition* that is undermining the socialist project of centralized planning and gradually reintegrating Cuba into global markets" (5; my emphasis). Cuba's "controlled transition" into global markets is also part of the shift towards a more complex interplay in Cuban politics that is represented in the work of writers such as Ponte, who through his portrayal of a Havana in a state of suspension, makes light of its slow progress and the uncertainty that this period of flux has induced. Quiroga weighs in on the idea that the Special Period represents Cuba's transition into a global economy by saying that "[t]he collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist block did not produce a time understood exactly as a 'transition,' but a period of uncertainty that still meant to connect past to future while suspending the time between the two" (1). The element of hanging in suspension, like lost souls in a purgatory, is fundamental to understanding Ponte's fiction, which keys in on the stagnancy, as exhibited in the ruins and those that occupy them in "Un arte de hacer ruinas."

The suspension evident in "Un arte de hacer ruinas" can be observed in Ponte's portrayal of Havana's subjects that seem to float in a precarious existence among the ruins, thereby illustrating the precarious passage of time on the island.

This suspension also gives cause for the proliferation of parallel dimensions where the lost subjects escape the troubles caused by temporal dislocation. Like the ruins, which represent a passage of history upon buildings, life for people on the island is a battle against time. In “What Am I Doing Here?,” Ponte notes, “[e]very revolution can be considered as a device that combats Time.” He goes on to note that “[v]ery often one can hear it said that the victorious regime of 1959 has succeeded in banishing Time from Cuba (this would be one of the most illustrious of its exiles)” (15). This quote alludes to the temporal dislocation of life in Cuba and also shows how being lost involves both spatial and temporal dimensions. Rafael Rojas, in *Tumbas sin sosiego* (2006), points out that “[l]os cubanos de afuera son exiliados del espacio; los de adentro, exiliados del tiempo” and then state that “[e]sa nacionalización del exilio implica, naturalmente, la diáspora de la identidad, el rapto del espíritu nacional” (32). The expulsion of time on the island, as represented in Ponte’s fiction, marks his subjects as prisoners serving a life sentence in a purgatory. They experience an identity in a Cuba where time seemingly appears banished, and people are stuck re-imagining new ways to live. Cuba’s re-imagination of itself means re-defining itself economically. According to Ponte, the previous “banning” of money, defined by Castro’s socialist, market-defying policies, has put Cuba in an awkward position.<sup>54</sup> Ponte mocks socialist attempts to regulate the economy by saying that “[t]o create a rigidly centralized economy is, in a way, like trying to control the weather.” The revolution’s re-organization of money, in a global economy and society that depends on it in innumerable types of human exchange, has

positioned Cuba on the outside of life because the prospect of banishing money, like that of paralyzing time, is ridiculous: “Just like prostitution, money, after being banished, had to return” (2003: 219). Without money, Cuba became lost, surrounded by a world defined by monetary exchange. By painting Havana’s destruction and ruins in “Un arte de hacer ruinas,” Ponte illustrates how Havana has weathered a precarious financial situation that has slowed the passage of time on the island by painting the city’s destruction and ruins.

Ponte’s portrayal of ruins captures how the city seems to be expanding in many directions, various parallel dimensions, as we learn from other urban planning experts in the story. We meet Professor D. in what seems like the back room of an antique dealer’s shop where there are explosions taking place underground and people constructing *barbacoas* above. The city is taking part in a strange metamorphosis, what the characters describe as an expansion *inward*. The professor and the narrator-student nevertheless discuss the concept of “estática milagrosa,” which is the idea that “[u]na ciudad con tan pocos cimientos y que carga más de lo soportable sólo puede explicarse por flotación” (63).<sup>55</sup> This idea is further illuminated in Professor D.’s yet-to-be-published treatise entitled *Tratado breve de estática milagrosa*. The ideas of a city expanding inward, flotation, and miraculous statics that the professor and the narrator-protagonist discuss call attention to a nation in flux, which has had to use space in an unusual and seemingly miraculous and/or ridiculous way.

The strange use of living space also calls to mind the existence of parallel dimensions that I argue that Ponte portrays in the city. These parallel dimensions come about in the *tugures* that the narrator describes. When he describes his theory on *barbacoas*, he mentions the concept of *tugurización*, which refers to Havana's overpopulation due to a severe housing deficit and may also explain Cuba's precarious state of suspension. The best English equivalent of *tugures* and *tugurización* might be squatters and squatting, yet Ponte's *tugures* make a game of causing the buildings in which they squat to collapse. *Tugures* seem to live in a slippery parallel dimension, constantly on the move wandering through ruins. In *La fiesta vigilada*, Ponte explains that this need to live as a sort of squatter comes from contemporary urban problems such as overpopulation due to migration of those from rural areas to urban ones, housing issues, and the dilapidation and frequent collapses of older buildings, particularly in Central Havana (26-27).<sup>56</sup> The theory held by the story's urban planners is that the city finds itself in a constant struggle between *tugurización* and *estática milagrosa*. This theory calls attention to a battle between the *tugures* and "el empeño de esos edificios en no caer, en no volverse ruinas. De modo que la perseverancia de toda una ciudad podía entenderse como lucha entre tugurización y estática milagrosa" (65). Metaphorically, the story suggests that the lives of all Cubans seem to hover in this precarious position, between miraculously holding onto life and being victims of the ruins caused by its precarious foundations. This battle characterizes daily life as a struggle to survive the ruins caused by problematic living conditions: "[l]a gente podía copar un edificio hasta hacerlo caer.

Se hacían un espacio donde no parecía haber más, empujaban hasta meter sus vidas. Y tanto intento de vivir terminaba casi siempre en lo contrario” (64). Thus the story appears to suggest that a number of Cubans are like *tugures* living in ruins.<sup>57</sup> The *tugures* keep arriving in the city and the buildings keep collapsing, leaving the inhabitants with nowhere to go except for the margins, the dark cracks of an underworld.

As the narrator and his adviser watch a wave of *tugures* arriving in the train station, the adviser explains that the city is growing so much that it makes light of just how separated the island is from the rest of the world: “[c]uando no encuentras tierra nueva, cuando estás cercado, puede quedarte un recurso: sacar a relucir la que está debajo de lo construido. Excavar, caminar en lo vertical. Buscar la conexión de la isla con el continente, la clave del horizonte” (66-67). This search for a connection with the outside explains why the *tugures* take great pleasure in watching the buildings that they squat in fall down, and more importantly, why they create an alternate universe underground. When the narrator wonders why this tribe (one more in the “Cuban empire”) would wander around through ruins that are bound to crumble, Professor D. explains, “[s]on de sombra ligera, tienen sangre de nómadas [...] es duro ser así en una isla pequeña” (66). The restless spirit of these *tugures* represents the epitome of the wanderl[ost] subject because Cuba’s geographical isolation presents another dimension of being lost; they do not get lost in the great expanses of a continent but rather in the small, mysterious crevices of Havana. These lost subjects cannot wander far unless they are lucky enough to leave the island. Most of them



cannot leave and their restless spirit is contained, leaving them alienated, kinetic yet restricted to the island in a state of insular wandering. This alienation is explained as a kind of state of suspension in Professor D.'s description: “[p]ero cuando cae el edificio donde has vivido toda tu vida [...] descubres que hasta entonces no has tenido más que aire, más que el poder de flotar inconscientemente a cierta altura del suelo. Y perdido ese privilegio, ya no te queda nada” (67). Thus the city makes *tugures* as the citizens of Havana become lost, wandering subjects with nowhere to wander.

Ponte suggests in other contexts (essays and interviews) that the ruins created by the battle between *tugurización* and *estática milagrosa* are part of a war zone that has dominated Cuba's landscape for a long time. He considers himself a “ruinólogo,” which Whitfield notes “brings the retrospection of the archaeologist to the methodological vision of the architect and forms a critical and imaginative language with which to both excavate the cause and foresee the effects of the ruin” (129). His obsession with ruins allows us to see how the ruins tell the story of the passing of time in Cuba, where the island appears torn by a war that never really was.<sup>58</sup> Cuba has become a tourist destination for those who do not come to see the glory of the past but how the past has trounced upon the island left alone to survive it. The ruins are a measure of the passing of time and its isolating effects on the people. As Whitfield notes, ruins are “reminders of the past glory of the revolution, as well as of its present precariousness and its presumably doomed future” (2008: 134). Centro Havana is the most densely populated part of the city where, in Ponte's story, this miraculous

phenomenon, this human action on architecture, takes place. Here, we can see how population density matches up with the laws of physics. As measures of time, the ruins of Havana illustrate a city that has been torn apart by the Cold War, even if the battles in the actual city were more figments of paranoia than those of flesh and blood. Ponte, in *La fiesta vigilada*, states that “La Habana es un museo en ruinas” (178).<sup>59</sup> As a theme park for a war that never was or a museum in ruins, we can see how the passing of time has isolated Cuba.<sup>60</sup> This war-driven isolation re-enforces the state of limbo in which Cuba finds itself.

In this state of suspension, like that of a purgatory, the *tugures* in this story redeem themselves and their situation through the creation of an underground universe that the narrator discovers in the story’s conclusion. The strange events leading up to this climax begin when Professor D. dies in a building collapse. One of the books that Professor D. plans to write before he is caught in the collapse is *Un arte de hacer ruinas*, and this might have the clues we need to figure out what is happening (70). When the narrator’s adviser mysteriously dies, his notebook with notes on these theories also disappears. Through a series of surreptitious events, the narrator follows the man renting a room from his adviser (where the man prints paper money and forges coins) to what looks like an entrance to an air raid shelter. The protagonist continues his plunge into the underworld by going down a tunnel, supposedly a branch of the subway that never would be built that in the story appears as an air raid shelter. He brings one of the coins forged from the mysterious tenant’s furnace and repeats a password (the statement on the other side of a pilfered coin that

is muttered by the guard) to enter into an underground world, a parallel universe: “[e]l espacio, una vez que se entraba a tanta claridad, era enorme.” A radiant sky opens up in the underworld tunnel that becomes so vast that it is desolate and has no exit. In this parallel universe, there is an equivalent to everything that *was* found above the ground as the narrator sees the building that collapsed upon Professor D. This underground city is so similar to the city above ground “que habría sido planeada por quienes propiciaban los derrumbes” (72). The *tugures* seem to be constructing their own alternate utopia, which appears as a city of lost memory. The narrator enters Tuguria, “la ciudad hundida, donde todo se conserva como en la memoria” (73). Victoria de Hoyos calls this underground parallel universe an “[e]xcelente metáfora para una ciudad que al destruirse en el plano físico, se reedifica, con más belleza, en el plano de la nostalgia” (17). Tuguria represents a deconstruction of a city through its memory and a perceived nostalgia for it. Ponte explains this parallel universe further in *La fiesta vigilada* stating that “Tuguria es un no-lugar como los muchos otros trazados en los relatos, pero es un no-lugar peligrosamente cercano a la utopía” (27). Tuguria, as an underground, utopian replica of the city, “perpetuates the illusion of a sustainable structure aboveground while in fact rendering it ever more precarious,” as Whitfield suggests (2008: 148). Further proof of the *tugures*’ victory over miraculous statics comes when the narrator realizes that the lone standing wall of Professor D.’s collapsed building aboveground would soon join the three walls of the building below ground. Therefore, we see Havana’s ruins as reminders of what might have been,

fragments of a failed utopia not unlike the revolution itself that further reinforce the notion of the island as a purgatory inhabited by lost souls.

The *tugures* represent their own revolution within the Cuban revolution in the sense that they bring destruction upon the above ground reality in their re-building of an underground utopia. The story's conclusion imagines this alternate Havana as an imaginary city created by the *tugures* both in order to survive over-crowding and the lack of living space, and also as part of an apocalypse that seems foreboding during the precarious socio-economical time that the Special Period implies.<sup>61</sup> Seeing their intellectual limitation as reason for their questioning of the foundations of Cuban nationalism, the *tugures* create the utopian alternate reality that kept the revolution going after the break-up of the Eastern bloc. That the "real" Havana continues to exist might have to do with Ponte's presentation of this literary Havana as Tuguria, or as the preservation of Havana's memory. Therefore, the "real" Havana continues to exist as a ruin suggesting the beauty of the city of memory. From this hypothesis, Whitfield concludes that the *tugures* "represent the builders of the revolution and it is their covert interest in preserving a memory of greatness and perpetuating the fear of war that destroys the aboveground city" (2008: 150). I assert that the *tugures* are building their own revolution that further insulates the island by plunging it closer to apocalypse, and in this sense, the possibility of its destruction; in this sense, the *tugures* do represent the hope of reconstruction.

The story ends with a quote that the narrator's grandfather repeated from a story by Irish writer of the fantastic Lord Dunsany (1878-1957), "Bethmoora," which

recounts the apocalypse of an imaginary city by the same name.<sup>62</sup> Pérez notes that the apocalypse was a common trope during the time that Ponte's story takes place: "[t]he years of the *período especial* evoked signs of an apocalyptic premonition, especially in cities: major urban thoroughfares and streets with virtually no automobile traffic; vast swaths of neighborhoods enveloped nightly in total darkness" (295). In Ponte's story, the narrator learns the quote from Dunsany's story from his grandfather as a child, without understanding it completely at the time and not knowing if it refers to a real or imaginary city, only to learn its significance when he comes into contact with Tuguria and the suggestion of the above-ground Havana's destruction. The use of Lord Dunsany's story suggests that Ponte's imagined empire seems to be crumbling, yet it is still hard to define the space that it occupies as it continues to re-invent itself through the creation of alternate realities like those represented in the story.

While "Un arte de hacer ruinas" uses a study of architecture and urban planning to create a parallel dimension, "Corazón de skitalietz" employs insanity and alienation as vehicles to explore the alternate realities inherent to exploring Cuba's dislocation, both psychological and physical. All the stories in the collection *Corazón de skitalietz* are narrated in the third person in contrast to those of *Cuentos de todas partes del imperio*, which are in the first person. This gives a distanced sensation, and in a way, makes the tales have deeper impact in terms of the sense of alienation produced; the use of third person is less intimate but more concrete and credible. The use of the third person also creates a greater distance between the focalizer of each story and their homeland, making the depiction of Cuba more objective. The

collection *Corazón de skitalietz*, on the surface, is decidedly more “Cuban,” with most of the stories entirely set in a place that for the most part creates the illusion of being in Cuba; yet these stories also seem to wander more as the characters seem even more existentially lost.

As in “Un arte de hacer ruinas,” “Corazón de skitalietz” presents the idea of multiple cities in one, but the parallel dimension is portrayed through the lens of perceived madness; rather than an underworld alternate world fabricated by *tugures*, the protagonists of “Corazón de skitalietz” imaginatively re-invent the city in an effort to live in it. It begins with the night of a wedding as the focalizer Escorpión looks out onto the bay and says, “Me gustaría vivir en una ciudad como ésta, me encantaría quedarme en ella” (156). This comment refers to the distance between the place where he really is and the place where *he would like to be*, suggesting a multiplicity of places because both places are, on the surface, the same, yet it is Escorpión’s experience of reality that creates the perceived disparity between them. Escorpión later meets Veranda, an astrologer, when their telephone lines mysteriously cross while she is giving someone else a reading during a blackout. He comes to her apartment where a cushion mysteriously becomes a cat that speaks to him. This hallucination (or does it “really” happen?) is part of the narrator’s strategy to keep the reader at bay, on a thin line between madness and reality. Ponte’s narrative techniques indirectly involve the reader in the madness that Escorpión and other potentially lost Cuban subjects experience, bringing them closer to the precarious position that his subjects experience in a city that is seemingly approaching

apocalypse. The cat, after finding out that Escorpión is a Scorpio of the kind that likes old things, says, “[t]e habrás preguntado entonces [...] a qué acude la gente para seguir con vida” (158). What people do to keep on living is one of Ponte’s fundamental questions in this story and others like it: How does one exist amidst all the uncertainty, the scarcity, and the blackouts in Cuba, an island that seems to be divorced from time and the reality of the twenty-first century?

Escorpión appears to live in a constant fog induced by madness and the psychotropic drugs that he takes in order to survive the insanity of the Havana that Ponte presents. When he returns to the institute where he works as a historian, he finds furniture piled up as it is in a state of transition.<sup>63</sup> His boss asks him what he would like to research, and he responds by repeating the question that Veranda’s cat utters, saying that he would like to investigate “a qué acude la gente para seguir con vida” (160). The boss and his editor, seeing his madness, tell him he needs a vacation. That Escorpión’s boss cannot see the importance of his question within the context of the Cuba of that time makes the boss seem insane, too. This scene also underscores the absurdity of trying to make a living in Cuba. Getting by seems hindered by a variety of obstacles. Escorpión, in response to his boss’s proposal of going on vacation, says that he has nowhere to go. The boss coyly admits, “[v]erdad que cada día es más duro salir de La Habana” (161). Like inmates in a prison compound, Havana’s inhabitants are depicted as trapped in a purgatory where they are being judged before the apocalypse. Escorpión is left to wonder, “¿Qué sentido tendría dirigir un departamento de historia cuando a la historia le faltaba sentido?” (161).

That history on the island does not make sense is part of the narrator's strategy of making the reader question the various realities on the island: How do Cubans survive? What has happened in history so that Cubans can survive the economic scarcity induced by years of antiquated policies that have isolated the island from a global market? How many realities exist in Havana and Cuba? The story goes on to suggest that survival is dependent upon creating parallel universes in which to escape.

That there exists at least more than one city within the city further suggests a parallel dimension, one in which seemingly insane lost subjects such as Escorpión wander. Escorpión's colleagues send him to a clinic for psychiatric help, and he can only wish to be in that city of his dreams, the same as before, yet different. As with the hallucination of the talking cat—which we do not know is the result of the pills that Escorpión took earlier, or a dream, or if it could be explained by Escorpión's mental illness that appears later in the story—the ambiguity in the explanation of this imagined city gives the story a broader perspective, decidedly vague and indeterminate tone to avoid a black-and-white portrayal. This parallel dimension, the city that Escorpión constantly imagines, provokes other questions: Does nostalgia for a Cuba that once was change his perspective? Are the multiple realities a figment of the imagination induced by living in a tropical environment? Are they the result of the pills he takes? Ponte's story seems to point in all of these directions, which is part of what makes it so rich. It also leaves the reader wondering just how many levels of reality must be uncovered to discover the "true" lost nature of its protagonists. However, my argument is based on the idea that Escorpión, like Veranda, invents this



parallel dimension, a city that is Havana and not Havana at the same time, in order to survive what might appear to be an eternity in the purgatory that the city figuratively represents.

Escorpión and Veranda seem to defy all of society's conventions by leaving their homes and creating a new reality that fits their need to escape. This defiance makes the reader sympathize with them, realizing that it is their situation or predicament of living in Cuba, as Ponte presents it, in a precarious time that induces their so-called madness. And it is in this madness that they appear saner because they can have each other and be together in the madness. Insanity in their story, as Whitfield suggests, is a way for them to escape isolation in a certain way: "es una experiencia compartida, el lazo que mantiene un amor unido, es además, con frecuencia, origen de lucidez" (2005: 25). Crazy is a word that is oft repeated in popular culture; in the parlance of our times, it usually refers to that which we do not understand (sort of like magic). When somebody cannot understand a person or a concept, they dismiss it as crazy. This is probably because insanity is a logical response to an illogical world. In the clinic, Escorpión meets a number of marginalized characters and makes a number of observations that allude to the idea that madness provokes lucid observations. Being a patient in the clinic is equivalent to being unmoored and spiritually alienated, but what is most apparent is that almost everybody in the city appears lost in one way or another. Those affected by the insanity, the lost souls of Havana, are the losers with little left to lose. Another patient in the clinic where Escorpión stays notes in reference to the blackouts that "[v]ivimos

a medias [...] Apagan un municipio para que otro exista. Cuando no hay luz eléctrica, en la casa oscurecida, he tenido la seguridad de que otro como yo, otro yo en alguna parte iluminada de esta misma ciudad, hace cosas por mí, vive mi vida” (164). He calls this theory the “Logia de las Vidas Paralelas.” Like pages ripped out of notebooks, something is missing in these characters, which seems to suggest that something is missing in the foundations of Cuban society. The patients in the clinic are left to wonder who is living on the outside, just as a Cuban citizen might wonder what life is like off the island. The Lodge of Parallel Lives is further evidence of a parallel dimension in which others live incomplete lives by living halfway, an idea that seems to suggest Ponte’s allusion to the notion that Cubans might live halfway knowing that there are potentially more freedoms in the outside world.

When his editor tells him that he has to be let go, Escorpión sees how he is another lost soul, a *skitalietz*, a disinherited vagabond: “[o]tro más que lo abandona todo. No muere, no se mata, se desentiende de sus pertenencias, se reduce a vagar.” In Ponte’s story, Havana seems to be full of these beings that wander living halfway, looking for meaning: “la ciudad estaba llena de skitalietz, gente que vagabundeaba aparentemente sin destino” (165). *Skitalietz*, as a Russian word, is an appropriate denomination for the state of wandering souls in Havana, outsiders that observe, because it is from this post-Soviet context that many *skitalietz* emerge. At the clinic while playing basketball, Escorpión is intent on floating above the city in order to find meaning for his life, and there he finds Veranda, who also floats, but he loses her.<sup>64</sup> He finds Veranda again and learns that she is a Cancer, an appropriate

astrological sign for a woman dying of the insidious disease of the same name. Something inside of her is killing her much like the ruins created by a stagnant economy during the Special Period in Havana. The pair agree not to waste what little time they have left in the clinic, and she reveals to him her desire to leave Havana, to take a train and arrive at a country ““donde no exista ni siquiera un conocido de vista. Sin dinero, sin entender una palabra del idioma y volverse allí invisible”” (171). Both of the lonely hearts desire to leave the city, to start a new life, but neither is able to as they are trapped by their situation as if in a purgatory. Together, they create an imaginary world and take the decision to escape “reality” using their imagination: “a la salida del edificio se encontrarían en la pequeña estación ferroviaria, en un país extranjero,” they imagine (171). They both desire to get lost but they cannot, so by using their imagination, they turn Havana into a foreign land, a parallel dimension, and start a new life of wandering.

Escorpión and Veranda appear misplaced and dislocated, and their lost status refers not just to a spatial but also a temporal dislodgment. They attempt to find a spot where their respective times reunite. Whitfield says that Escorpión, a historian who loses his job, is searching for a “lost past” and Veranda, as a former astrologer, is plagued by a “fading future” (2008: 143). Veranda says that her job was to invent a future for those that cannot see theirs or do not have one. This is appropriate for someone living in this context because Cuba during the Special Period appears apocalyptic and futureless. This is why she says, ““Ya no veo nada del futuro. Solamente el pasado”” (170). This coexistence of past and present is exemplified in

Havana's ruins, as representations of a former reality, and in the daily life of its citizens like Escorpión and Veranda. When Escorpión sees the garden in the hotel where he celebrated his wedding and the city where he wanted to live with Veranda, he sees that “no era futuro, presente o pasado, no estaba en ningún tiempo” (172). Time is how Escorpión and Veranda synchronize their souls in their wandering: “Les quedaba ese tiempo que ella calculaba pronto acabaría y el espacio de una ciudad. Eran dos pasajeros de tierras distintas, coincidían en una terminal con tiempo solamente para un café. ¿Valía la pena entonces ajustar sus relojes a una misma hora?” (177). Together, they re-visit their pasts by piecing together their own history. As an astrologer and a historian, they wander lost through time: “No podrían ser más historiador y astróloga, eran ya vagabundos. Sus profesiones se les habían convertido en andrajos” (179). They end up torn like rags by the shifts in time. Time also appears as a ragged entity, patched together to form a wild quilt in the story. The narrative techniques of the story, through their use of time and the mystery that they induce, also provoke a sense of madness for the reader.

Because they live on the fringes of time and of social conventions, Escorpión and Veranda are vagabonds, *skitalietz* who observe from the outside, and their wandering is both the result of a condemnation placed upon them by Cuban society and a way for them to gain freedom in a place where they seemingly have none. They gather courage in order to leave and lose everything. Cuba has abandoned them so they feel obligated to abandon the daily life of Cuba: “Hay gente que al acostarse, en el momento en que empieza a respirar el día y a soportar la idea de que a ese día lo

seguirá otro, quisiera conseguir valor para dejarlo todo” (179). It takes courage to keep on going, to live a normal life, Escorpión notes, and that’s why they go crazy: “Pero se necesita valor para levantarse [...]. Ir al trabajo, regresar a casa, descansar un poco el fin de semana y comenzar un lunes... Lo que la gente llama una vida normal” (180). The pair wanders marginalized by society, leaving their “normal lives,” unable to put up with its conventions that no longer constrain them.

The characters’ lives as vagabonds are curiously interrupted by a social worker representing the State in a scene that further extenuates their position as lost subjects marginalized by their surroundings. In their interview with the social worker, we see the dehumanized status of the two *skitalietz*, who seem to be nobodies, casualties in a city ravaged by an imagined war. She asks them the usual questions that a social worker interviewing homeless people would ask: Do they have a place to sleep? What do they eat? Are they sick? Escorpión makes up a question that summarizes all of her questions and Veranda pipes in, “[e]s filosófica la pregunta, sabes. Somos dos filósofos de parque,” (181). This becomes sort of a joke, as they speak about themselves as another pair of numbers: “Somos un par de números en una columna. Te puedes escapar de tu trabajo y de tu casa, salirte de tus obligaciones, pero no dejarás de ser un número” (182). Thus their wandering itself has been institutionalized by what appears as a police state.

Escorpión and Veranda overcome this institutionalization by embodying characteristics associated with the *flâneur*. As they stroll through Havana, they experience the city’s shifts that were coming about during the Special Period while

also transforming the reality that surrounds them. They make the city theirs while observing it as outsiders. In this sense, being like *flâneurs* suggests that even though these wanderers are lost in purgatory, they have some critical coping strategies that also constitute a social critique of the contemporary situation on the island as reflected in Ponte's Havana. Keith Tester, in *The Flâneur* (1994), elaborates on the transformative properties of the *flâneur* saying that the figure "is able to transform faces and things so that for him they have only that meaning which he attributes to them" (2). Escorpión and Veranda's portrayal as *flâneurs* can be witnessed in the scene with the social worker in which the two "park philosophers," as Veranda proposes, invent their own professions. This fabrication of their professions becomes part of their project of re-inventing their own city, which can be observed throughout the story. As street philosophers or *skitalietz*, Escorpión's "invented" profession is to observe the behavior of social workers while Veranda supposedly analyzes the production of honey on the island. Both professions seem banal and detached from any "real" meaning in life as this is part of the "detached attitude" and the "isolation and alienation" associated with the figures of the *skitalietz* or the *flâneur*.

Being a *skitalietz*, in Ponte's conception of the term, is part of a project of erasing a past and re-constructing a new way to live, or more precisely, *to keep on living* in a city with nothing to do. After the first scene with the social worker, Escorpión is wandering around the city and is stopped by the social worker again and taken to a house for itinerants. They empty his pockets, looking for documentation or something that would tell them about his past. The *skitalietz*'s past seems to have

been erased, a commentary on the dangers of living in a city that seems stuck in time: “Nada entre esos objetos aludía a un pasado, el frasco de pastillas podría indicarles cuánto se había borrado éste” (184). He gives them his real name, and occupation: *skitalietz*. They ask him why he lives on the street if he has his own place, and he responds: “No sé hacer otra cosa con mi vida [...]. Debo tener un corazón de *skitalietz*” (185). With this response, he refers to the desperation in Cuba that Ponte alludes to in many of his stories; with nothing to do, the only activity one can take part in is wandering around the city like a nobody, a stranger visiting from another place or time. He realizes that he can never be free: “nadie podría ser libre si existía un solo, un único aquí, y tantos infinitos allá que reclamaban” (185). They bring Veranda to the home, but it is not her, as she appears damaged by the disease and the life that she has lived: “Parecía sacada de un documental de guerra” (187). He holds onto her and she becomes a mound of rotting leaves with the cancer eating her from inside. While he makes love to her, in an ambiguously necrophiliac scene, she seems somewhere between life and death, in a purgatory of the sort that I suggest that Cuba represents: “Escorpión abrazaba en la mujer a un montón de hojas secas. Levantó las primeras, más quemadas de sol, y a medida que apartaba, hallaba hojas húmedas, iba en camino hacia el corazón podrido de las cosas, a la humedad en la que se encharcaban moscas, ciempiés, gusanos” (188). This image of a mentally ill vagabond making love to a woman who appears as a pile of rotting leaves captures the problematic beauty of decay in the city of ruins, and shows how humanity seems

to slip into the cracks as if it were in a purgatory that leaves it hanging on to life just enough to be considered “living,” but really in a state of slow death.

Being in this state between life and death, somewhere between fiction and a depicted reality, enriches the layers of parallel dimensions present in the story, which come together, full force, in his reunion with Veranda. This idea of multiple cities enfolded in one returns when Escorpión is interned in another asylum and he appears to enter a fictional dream as everything repeats itself. This is where he re-discovers Havana: “Todo parecía repetírsele: la misma luna rara, la mujer que se iba, su amor por la ciudad en ruinas, su estancia en el hospital” (189). The references to the moon, the woman who leaves him, and a city in ruins, takes us back to the opening scene of the story and the idea of living in an imagined city perhaps created by the nostalgia of a forgotten utopia. This is where the future meets the past; the astrologer meets the historian all over again. He gets a call saying that Veranda is about to die, and together, they go back to her apartment, which had been ransacked by thieves. Without a bed for her, Escorpión is desperate. She dies while he gets a cart to transport her. For the first time in a long time, he is leaving Havana. The leaving is crucial because at this point he is setting off for another dimension, a seemingly fictional zone. One wonders if it is cause for any hope. He feels complete when he gets off at the first bus stop and finds all of the refuse of the city:

[e]l sonido de las olas borraba todo ruido de la carretera y frente a la costa desembocaba la mayoría de los residuos líquidos de la ciudad.

Sudor, saliva, sangre, orines, semen, mierda, se ligaban allí con el agua



salada. En ese punto terminaba la vida habanera. Escorpión tuvo la sensación de que alguien lo miraba, de que pertenecía a un rodaje de exteriores. No sabía qué hacer frente a Dios o la cámara. (191)

The story ends with this ambiguous line between fiction and reality. What really happens is life between the margins, like living on a film set, suggesting a world that is part fiction and part real, like a parallel dimension. Escorpión lives like a *skitalietz*, a wanderer caught between a number of worlds in Havana; these worlds are created by the *skitalietz*'s circumstance of living in a precarious time for the island, which is in a state of transition that takes place at a maddening pace. It is maddening at times because it feels as if everything is happening at once and at others unbearably slow, leaving Cubans waiting idly. The parallel universe suggested by the story's ending exhibits the dual qualities that place the island on the cusp between fiction and reality, socialism and capitalism, the imaginary and the concrete, madness and reason. Cuba's dualisms, as suggested in Ponte's parallel dimensions, illustrate the island's gray area of instability. Therefore, Ponte's subjects wander in the liminal zone of uncertainty that makes them appear lost, alienated or crazy.

The itinerant characters of Ponte's story, Escorpión and Veranda, share many attributes with Victorio and Salma, another pair of seemingly opposite wanderers or *skitalietz* who come together to escape their desperation in Abilio Estévez's *Los palacios distantes*. Like Escorpión and Veranda, they are seemingly crazy outsiders that, paradoxically, give meaning to and make sense of life in a place where reason seems to have escaped. These characters, too, exemplify the quintessential

characteristics of Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin's literary *flâneur* as they wander the city of Havana, the metropolis, observing their surroundings almost like invisible spies, a notion which seems repeated in the works of Ponte and the other writers that use figures akin to the *flâneur* to portray their times (Walsler, Musil and Sartre, to name a few of the early models).<sup>65</sup> The relationship between writing and espionage is also particularly fruitful with Victorio and Salma, who are *skitalietz sina qua non* that observe like spies from the margins, resisting the struggles of everyday life.

Estévez's protagonists use the power of imagination to take them to alternate realities, and this use of fantasy to explore parallel dimensions is epitomized in the mysterious figure of Don Fuco, who teaches Victorio and Salma about the importance of art within daily reality. Evicted from the ruins in which he lives, the former palaces of Havana's pre-revolution grandeur and decadence, Victorio quits his job, becoming a voluntary wanderer, and drifts through the city of Havana seeking some sort of refuge. During his wanderings, he runs into Salma, a young prostitute on the run from reality who reminds him of the beauty in life. Later, both of their lives are deeply affected by the appearance of Don Fuco, a seemingly immortal clown who lives a life of public performances that are condemned by many but bring a sense of joy and freedom to the lives of Victorio and Salma. These lost subjects appear to be banned from their homes and from time itself in the sense that they are forgotten, but are rescued by Don Fuco's entrance in their lives. With limited options, Estévez's protagonists are trapped and use the power of imagination—theater and art—to take

them to alternate realities. Thus art becomes a portal that transports them to parallel dimensions, and this notion is particularly evident when they take refuge in an old theater, *El Pequeño Liceo*, where they re-discover Havana and the multiple realities of the city.

Victorio lives a palimpsestual existence that also calls to mind the parallel universes that the subjects in Ponte's stories use to escape. At the beginning of the novel, Victorio lives in a *solar*, a Cuban word probably best translated as tenement, a house divided among several families or groups of dwellers. In this case, Victorio's *solar* used to be a palace during the colonial era when only one family and their slaves lived there. When he abandons it, a number of families appear to be living there. In contemporary Cuba, numerous families dwell in these ancient remnants of the past, which also represent another form of what José Quiroga refers to as a Cuban palimpsest. Quiroga's concept illustrates how different times are written over each other; in this sense, the former palaces appear like footprints of the past, vestiges of the colonial era. When Victorio finds out that the *solar* where he is living is scheduled to be demolished, he begins his existence as a *skitalietz* burning almost everything he has—his furniture, his books, his photographs and his paintings—to disappear into Havana's cracks. One of the first places that he stops to crash is the domain of an ancient Chinese man named Fung, whose space is covered in newspapers from other times that he cites as if they were describing current events taking place in the present. This image is not unlike the "revista de la calle" that Escorpión and Veranda construct in Ponte's story using scraps of paper they find on the street. The makeshift

periodicals of these two works seem to suggest the troubled nature of daily life in Cuba where news is invented in order to escape what “really” is happening in the events around them. The invented news from the street is part of the liminal space between fiction and reality that makes up the parallel dimensions that these characters occupy.

Ponte and Estévez both work with the interstitial spaces between these zones of fiction and reality to create the parallel dimensions that occupy their works and where their lost subjects struggle to find their identities by digging into their pasts. Like the *skitalietz* in Ponte’s story, Salma and Victorio search for meaning in a city where daily reality seems so desperate; the important relations between time, memory and place therefore suggest certain zones of alternate realities. Characters such as Victorio, Salma, Veranda, and Escorpión get lost in these margins and embark on an eternal search intrinsic to their lost status. Their search for identity is inevitably part of a search for a lost past in a country that has been visited by a revolutionary party that seemingly forgot to pick up after itself, which is part of why the sense of loss pervades these works.

Even though the action of the novel is place-specific, on one level referring only to Havana, we can also see the island’s connections with other parts of the world in the wandering of the *skitalietz-flâneur*. The idea that in Estévez and Ponte’s works there appears to be a number of *skitalietz* in Havana is due to myriad socio-economic conditions on the island and their interconnections with what is taking place in the rest of the world. Because Cuba is in a state of transition, particularly as witnessed

during the Special Period, it marks a vibrant time for *flânerie*. As Tester points out, “Benjamin’s argument that the rationality of capitalism and, especially, commodification and the circulation of commodities, itself defined the meaning of existence in the city so that there remained no space of mystery for the *flâneur* to observe.” Place and time mark different ways in which one can perceive the *flâneur*. Benjamin suggests that the “hollowness of the egoistic individuals of capitalism is reflected in the *flâneur*” (Tester 13). In this vein, I have the sense that the more free market capitalism takes a hold in Cuba, the more that the population of *skitalietz* in the literary city of Havana will decline as the spaces in which to wander will disappear and it becomes more stable. As Cuba’s economy depends more and more on the *ease* of tourism so that visitors can navigate the landscape, the mystery of the city will be removed. Tester points out: “with rationalization, all mystery is removed from the city.” Therefore, the *flâneur* becomes “a passive spectator who is as duped by the spectacle of the public as the consumer who is duped by the glittering promises of consumerism” (14). That Estévez and Ponte both have wandering *skitalietz* as their protagonists is not surprising due to the island’s unstable circumstances during the time of the writing of these works—deep within the uncertainty of the Special Period.

The shifts taking place in Havana mark it as a city ripe for observing how subjects that are lost wander and search for other possible existences; therefore, the lost subjects of these works share other characteristics in their wanderings like the lack of access to cars or modern transportation. Their wanderings are almost exclusively by foot and the occasional *guagua*. In this way, *flânerie* illustrates a place

infused with a number of conflicting times, each operating on the city in strange ways. The search is the defining aspect of *flânerie* and it involves a repositioning of the public and private, which faces an unusual context in Cuba. The figure that Tester describes “is a man who is driven out of the private and into the public by his own search for meaning. He is the man who is only at home existentially when he is not at home physically” (2). All of these characters are united by their lost search for meaning that takes them out into realms they have not explored before.

Like Ponte’s Escorpión and Veranda, Salma and Victorio also lose themselves in the artistic activities that they take part in while wandering the city in a carefree sort of way that suggests defiance of and non-conformity to the restrictions placed on citizens of a police society that restricts their movement. Victorio is a street philosopher rescued by Don Fuco, a street-performing clown who represents art in its most instinctual form. A street philosopher-performer, such as Victorio under Don Fuco’s guidance, embodies the concrete poetry of *flânerie* that Baudelaire describes in the figure of the poet: “this solitary mortal endowed with an active imagination, always roaming the great desert of men, has a nobler aim than that of the pure idler, a more general aim, other than the fleeting pleasure of circumstance” (99). With Don Fuco, Salma and Victorio wander, visiting rest homes, cemeteries and churches to present their spectacles where the citizens of Havana (and the countryside) can be distracted from their sometimes miserable existences to transcend into the beauty of art.

The daily rhythms of his characters and the pace of Estévez's writing synchronize with the pace of a walking vagabond that appears similar to Ponte's *skitalietz* in their likeness to the tradition of Baudelaire's *flâneur*. This aspect of the novel that appears transcendent in the portrayal of Havana as an artistic protagonist is characterized with Estévez's use of long passages that appear as poetic inventories, rhythmically simulating wandering through the city. This poetic resource is evident, for example, when Victorio is about to set off rambling after finding out that the palace-*solar* where he has his room is scheduled to be demolished. This passage rhythmically captures the stream of wandering in which he re-discovers his city:

Supone que puede descubrir el único color de las paredes roñosas, el paso firme de los policías, el no menos firme de los delincuentes, el taconeo receloso y acongojado de las putas, la navaja inesperada y abierta que alguien lanza desde un balcón, el suspiro de alivio o de placer, dos seres que se entregan a un abrazo en el que quisieran reconocer la propia realidad, para saber, quizá, que no se han convertido en fantasmas. Victorio disfruta de la brisa que sube con su miasma desde el puerto, y del terral que baja de otras podredumbres. Descifra también el lenguaje de las estatuas descabezadas, escruta la escasa luz de los faroles, ve correr las aguas albañales por las aceras rotas, distingue el grito de las pesadillas, aprende que nada explica tanto a la ciudad como el llanto o la canción desesperada que

rompen el silencio de la noche, y tiene la certeza de que La Habana suele desentenderse del ritmo habitual del planeta. (45-46)

At the end of this passage, which works itself into a crescendo that portrays Havana as somewhat off-beat and syncopated in relation to the tempo of the rest of the planet, Victorio has discovered not just all of these details about the city in which he lives but his isolated state within the city; he realizes that he, like the city, is living out a parallel existence disconnected from the rest of the world. This long passage, like several in “Corazón de skitalietz” that take place when Escorpión and Veranda have achieved full *skitalietz* status, uses the repetitive rhythm of poetry to convey a pace of life, carefree like a rolling stone, that is achieved with a complete shift in perspective and that takes place when these lost subjects take the last step that sinks them into a deep abyss of wanderl[o]st.

As *jinetera* and homosexual, respectively, Salma and Victorio represent marginalized outsiders or losers who dream of becoming “escape artists;” yet at the same time, they are indelibly part of society because they are its losers. Victorio’s name comes from his father’s loyalty to Fidel; born in 1953, his father Robespierre wanted to commemorate Fidel’s assault on Moncada. However, Victorio’s father, “[t]an absorto y fascinado andaba con la creación del Hombre Nuevo que no se percataba del joven triste, taciturno y melancólico que formaba” (117). He also avoids recognizing the idea that his son is gay, a way of life unaccepted by the revolution and the idea of the *Hombre Nuevo* that it propagated. Salma has no memory of the



assault on Moncada, which shows the detachment of Cuba's younger generation from history.<sup>66</sup> She calls him Triunfo, but either way, his name is ironic because Victorio remains the classic loser, at least in reference to what the revolution has brought him. As Casamayor remarks, "Victorio, homosexual, vivió siempre en el más horrible temor de aquel padre para quien sólo la revolución y la Historia eran importantes. Él, en cambio, podía considerarse uno de los vencidos por aquella Historia" (78). Salma (also ironically) takes her name from Salma Hayek, the Mexican actress that she emulates because she went from Mexico to become famous in Hollywood, a dream that the Cuban Salma has. Nevertheless, the reader can see that there is not much hope for her career because her English is terrible and she, like so many other citizens of Havana, seems caught within the island's grasp.

The lost subjects function as barometers of society's problems because they live on its fringes. For example, as Victorio contemplates the loss of his friends, he notes that "[u]na ciudad en la que se ha dejado de tener amigos es una ciudad que te excluye, te olvida y no te concierne [...]. Sin casa, sin amigos, la ciudad se vuelve remota, ajena, incomprensible y hostil" (46-47). Being excluded and a loner, he is an outsider or a *skitalietz*, to once again use Ponte's terminology, but he is also closer to the reality on the street and able to observe it honestly. He functions as a scout that discovers the city's doom and its potential. Don Fuco is this scout for Salma and Victorio in that he leads them to a space that gives them their desired freedom: "[I]os conduce a ese espacio del teatro donde ellos encuentran su verdadera estatura, y a partir de ahí empezar a entenderse a sí mismos, y a salir con una idea de cómo pueden

actuar frente a esa realidad tan agresiva” (96). Therefore, they find salvation through art. Literature, art, and theater all function as forces of redemption for the lost subjects in Estévez’s work, and this notion suggests a multitude of possibilities for Cubans who might feel trapped on the island.

Because of the potential of art to shift realities, the multiple cities in one that are suggested in “Corazón de skitalietz” are even more evident in Estévez’s novel in which the city appears as a protagonist continuing in the tradition of literary cities such as Baudelaire’s Paris or Dostoyevsky’s St. Petersburg. Havana’s status as a metropolis in between the decay of ruins and the beauty of art makes it ripe for the presence of alternate realities. For example, in the description of Victorio’s palace-*solar*, Estévez juxtaposes the families of times past with the current residents, and we can get a sense of how history has passed over the island. The palace referred to in the title of Estévez’s work and in which Victorio lives is an ironic choice of words because to call the *solares* “‘palacio’ y ‘hotel’ resultaría cínico y hasta perverso” (18). The multiple times, suggested by the progression from palace to tenement in ruins, refer to dimensions as well, those achieved by a time travel that narrative makes possible. Because of this effect, Havana provokes two distinct impressions on Victorio: “la de haber sido bombardeada, la de una ciudad que espera el más leve aguacero, la más ligera ráfaga para deshacerse en montón de piedras; y la de ser una ciudad suntuosa y eterna, acabada de construir, elevada como cesión a futuras inmortalidades” (21). Throughout its history as epicenter for the Antillean region Havana has had to suffer the passing of various empires as a key outpost, and the

multiplicity suggested by the various dimensions—temporal, spatial and metaphysical—seems to be a trait that will remain constant in the city and part of the qualities that make it seem eternal. This multiplicity is embodied in Don Fuco’s first appearance in the novel balancing on a wire with a puppet that is his mirror image between the hotel and palace where Victorio lives and then disappears into the patio of the palace “por entre los caminos de los techos, caminos de depósitos sucios de agua, de trastos, de viviendas improvisadas, de antenas de televisión y de misterios” (26). In this appearance, we have a somewhat magical theatrical performance juxtaposed with the banal, dirty quotidian aspects of life in Havana; the many potential ideas that this vision connotes also imply Havana’s manifold possibilities.

Through Salma and Victorio’s wanderings, we have a spatial and temporal inventory of a multiple Havana, a listing of strata and topoi that intersect to form both the Havana they pass in actuality and the Havana of times of yore, pasts both near and distant, real and imagined. Each stop along their rambling path through the literary city functions as a portal to a scene in a book or painting. For example, during a stroll through the *Ciudad Deportiva*, Victorio sees a group of athletes that for him appear as a fresco in the Sistine Chapel. He then encounters some hot-air balloons and is transported to the trajectory of Phileas Fogg and his journey in Jules Verne’s *Around the World in 80 Days* (34). Later on, Salma and Victorio dream about taking a hot-air balloon off the island, and the possibility that a movie would be made about them, a seemingly ludicrous idea but one that gives their life meaning because it employs art as a way to break away from their current situation.

These artistic portals, alternative realities created by their imagination, suggest that through imagination and art, the *habanero* can survive daily life in the city. Estévez begins the novel with an epigraph from Virgilio Piñera's "El gran Baro": "Nunca he tratado de hacer payasadas, pero ya que usted se empeña, probaré." Estévez states in an interview with Béjar that the word *payasada* refers to another dimension of the clown, "un salir de la realidad hacia un mundo muy diferente" (95). This departure from reality is what Victorio and Salma do with the help of Don Fuco and artistic portals like the theater. Therefore, the novel illustrates the power of the transformation of reality—through imagination, through artifice, through the creation of an alternate dimension, and through theater—to survive the difficult life in Cuba because not only does art make life tolerable but enjoyable. *El Pequeño Liceo*, the theater that Don Fuco takes them to, seems to be the most apt place for the transformation of this reality, as Estévez suggests to Béjar: "nada mejor que un teatro para lograr el espacio donde la realidad se transforma en otra cosa." The theater represents the other space of reality, "donde el cubano que se opusiera a esa realidad agresiva de la ciudad perteneciera a ese teatro" of comedy and tragedy. Estévez calls the theater in which the three characters take refuge "una especie de palacio de buen vivir, la parte más espiritual de la vida," and "[u]na especie de templo sin connotaciones religiosas" (qtd. in Béjar 95). The portal within the portal of the theater is represented by the dressing rooms, which serve as a liminal zone between theater and "real life," between imagination and the actuality of a Havana decaying outside of the theater. Don Fuco transports Victorio to other times as he mentions the actors

and musicians that have used them. The theater thus recalls the verbs I mentioned earlier as watchwords for the Special Period: *inventar* and *resolver*. We can see this space, a parallel dimension, as product of Cubans' ingenuity and ability—to invent and resolve—in order to make do with life on the island.

Just as in Ponte's "Un arte de hacer ruinas," the strange temporal vectors in the theater describe the parallel dimension that Estévez's Cuba occupies. Victorio notes that time within the theater passes at a different pace than it does outside of it; such is the case of Cuba with the outside world. Time in the theater is "inefable, como si un minuto, nada más y nada menos que los sesenta segundos de un minuto, pudiera encerrar todas las horas de un día, y todos los días de un mes, y todos los meses de un año, y todos los años de un siglo" (128). Meanwhile, Havana is described as being stuck in "el lado inmóvil del mundo. Y como es siempre la misma y conoce el cambio, a la ciudad se la siente derrotada, deshecha, mucho más que otras de mayor antigüedad e igualmente castigadas por la historia" (137). This sense of temporal dislocation is echoed when Salma recalls her last visit to a church, where she fell asleep and had a dream about the drowned *balseros* that appear as lost souls in a state of suspension. Hearing this story, Victorio mentions a piece of revolutionary propaganda saying, "¡El presente es de lucha: el futuro es nuestro!" (188-89). Just like the signs that store-owners put up—"Hoy no fío, mañana sí"—these slogans indirectly suggest that the future will never come (189). Victorio compares the revolution's tenet of sacrificing the present for the future with that of Catholicism, saying:

Un día triunfó la revolución y empezaron a acabarse las iglesias y al cielo lo sustituyeron por “el futuro”, por el “mundo nuevo”, futuros imprevisibles, futuros utópicos, tan ilusorios como el “cielo prometido”, o sea, ¡a sufrir, muchachos, a soportar con estoicismo los rigores del presente, que lo bueno viene después que ustedes mueran, y mueran los hijos de ustedes... (190)

In this state of suspension, with only an imaginary future to anticipate, between a difficult present and an impossible future, the notion of Cuba as a purgatory is epitomized. Thus the theater represents an alternate reality to slip into and a temporal and topographic escape for Salma and Victorio from a city that seems stuck in time.

The idea of a place that represents a getaway like *El Pequeño Liceo* is first suggested to Victorio by a pilot called *El Moro* who tells him about a palace that awaits him: “Gracias a él [*el moro*] tuvo y tiene la certeza de que en algún lugar existe un soberbio palacio que lo espera” (22). He tells the young Victorio, “Lo importante, Victorio, es encontrar el palacio” (23). The palace that awaits Victorio and Salma appears to be *El Pequeño Liceo*. Casamayor sees the theater as another Havana, “a la medida de sus deseos. El Pequeño Liceo se convierte así en el palacio que estos personajes siempre soñaron poseer: es, en fin de cuentas, La Habana que les pertenece” (74). Finally, this parallel universe illustrates that Havana has become theirs; they are no longer imprisoned by the city. They cut off all of the relationships they had from their previous lives outside of the theater. The theater is at once a synecdoche of Havana—“existen dos sitios diversos que son, al propio tiempo, el

mismo e idéntico: La Habana y las ruinas del teatro”—but also a distraction from the difficulties of the city and a way to survive and be enriched by it (95). Within the theater, Victorio feels that “entre La Habana y él no existe una insondable distancia espiritual, sino que también ha llegado a establecerse una distancia física, como si las ruinas del teatro no estuvieran en La Habana, sino en un punto más lejano, mucho más lejano, en territorio salvado de los límites de geografías y de historias” (124). As Casamayor notes, “[f]uera del Pequeño Liceo, la ciudad es una jungla poblada de maldad y peligros, de gente que a diferencia de los protagonistas—los nuevos ‘elegidos’ de Estévez—son incapaces de apreciar la magia y el arte, embrutecidos por la sórdida cotidianeidad, esa constante necesidad de procurarse alimentos o de mejorar la situación económica” (75). This sense of escaping the daily travesties of life in Havana is furthered by the powerful imagination of Don Fuco that creates a space, a utopia where they can exist amidst Havana’s decadence, but also where the rest of the world ceases to exist for them, as described in the novel:

El silencio se instaura en las ruinas del Pequeño Liceo de La Habana, con ese atributo especial que tienen los silencios de las ruinas. Victorio aprecia lo lejana, lo ajena, lo apartada que se halla la ciudad, ninguno de sus infinitos bullicios llega hasta ellos, nada de lo que allá afuera acontece perturba la paz del teatro devastado, como si el teatro, y ellos con él, flotaran en un espacio sin espacio, dimensión ilusoria sobre la isla ilusoria del continente ilusorio del planeta ilusorio. (101)

The illusory quality that the theater presents so well, by adding to the elements of fantasy and by distancing the characters from reality, enhances the idea of it being a parallel dimension in which to flee an illusory world.

Paradoxically, what makes the theater an even more complete getaway is the idea that it is more real than the reality outside. Don Fuco notes that the puppet-doubles that Salma and Victorio discover are superior to human beings because “como apuntó Heinrich von Kleist el muñeco jamás haría nada afectado, porque la afectación (*vis motrix*) se halla en cualquier otro punto distinto del centro de la gravedad del movimiento, los muñecos tienen la ventaja de no ser grávidos” (262). At one point, Victorio cannot find the door to leave the theater, but he does not feel trapped. In fact, it seems that it is the citizens of Havana who are trapped: “A diferencia de otros encierros experimentados en tantos años de clausura [in Havana], las ruinas del teatro no le provocan claustrofobia. Estas ruinas tapiadas son lo menos tapiado de lo que haya conocido hasta el presente” (125). When he finally leaves the theater, he feels as if he is returning and re-encountering the city after a time abroad, which suggests the foreignness of the theater even though it is located in the heart of the city (137). Casamayor points out that because the theater is an escape that does not require leaving the city, the novel suggests that “[l]a salvación de la ciudad está en sí misma” (76). Thus the theater is not only a portal to a parallel dimension but also a gateway to where Havana’s more desperate citizens like Salma and Victorio can discover the beauty of the quotidian life of their city and thereby remedy their situation.



History and the imaginary intersect towards the end of the novel when Salma smashes a bronze bust of José Martí onto the head of her pimp, *el Negro Piedad*, who is pursuing her and has just killed Don Fuco. This scene comes at a climax in which the lost characters, Salma and Victorio, begin to find themselves. It is an image charged with meaning that suggests the power of art and history as a salvation for those alienated by time in Cuba. In the last lines of the novel, Salma and Victorio fully discover salvation as they soar across the city's horizon on the rooftops—he is wearing a green wig and harlequin outfit and she wearing tulle—carrying the body of Don Fuco. It is in this strange image that they find their purpose in Havana: “Ahora nos toca a nosotros [...]. Y, en efecto, a sus pies, dormida aún bajo la lluvia, se hubiera dicho que La Habana era la única ciudad del mundo preparada para acogerlos. También parecía la única superviviente de cuatro largos siglos de fracasos, plagas y derrumbes” (272). They find their niche in the *payasada*; by living absurdly, they can survive the absurd conditions of life all around them. The citywide panoramic view enjoyed in this last scene marks a stark contrast with the description of Victorio's small room in the *solar* with which the novel begins. As the two lost subjects have risen up, we see a change in focus from a close-up depiction of scarcity to a wide-angle shot of the citywide panorama suggesting a broader scope for Cuba in terms of its relationship to the outside world.

Throughout the work of Ponte and Estévez, the madness and alienation provoked by a deep isolation—both geographic and socio-economic—from the rest of the world seems to be the root of Cuba's frustrations. Virgilio Piñera also pointed to

this loneliness as weighing heavy on the island in 1942 in the verse from the poem with which I began this chapter. I maintain that this is an innate feature of the island that Cubans will probably always have to contemplate. The intransience of the sea around the island is Cuba's defining feature and what drives it to isolation and madness but also what makes it beautiful. In another novel by Estévez, *Tuyo es el reino* (1997), he describes a ranch called La Isla, another parallel universe that drives its inhabitants to an insanity that makes one of the characters claim that the island is like God, eternal and unalterable (19). What makes it worse is the fixed notion of the sea: "En una isla el mar es lo único seguro, porque en una isla, la tierra es lo efímero, lo imperfecto, lo accidental, mientras que el mar, en cambio, es lo persistente, lo ubicuo, lo magnífico, lo que participa de todos los atributos de la eternidad" (21).

Through this obsession with the sea, we can also observe the predominance of water in Cuban life and its predisposal for madness and the creation of alternate universes. The geographically fatal condition of being an island as seen in Piñera's verse seems to hint at a circular history doomed to repeat itself because the geographic condition will not change in the conceivable future. It also makes use of the temporal play that is an important resource in Estévez and Ponte's narrative strategy because "focusing on the individual and his or her relationship to insular space *and* to historical time allowed artists to question the role that History had played in the revolution" (Quiroga 27). Through its isolation, which has become a much more frequently used literary trope during the Special Period, we can see the island as a sort of purgatory with its inhabitants even further trapped like lost souls due to the tightening grasp that

the harsh realities of the Special Period impose on them. Yet Estévez and Ponte's work offer solutions by creating parallel universes where Cubans can break away from their troubles—usually through the use of imagination and art. *Los palacios distantes* is in many ways the expanded novel version of ideas presented in “Corazón de skitalietz” and “Un arte de hacer ruinas.” As a novel, it describes in greater detail the sense of isolation that sparks the creation of the parallel universes as escapes presented in the stories. However, Ponte's stories, in their more sparse descriptions, give a greater sense of mystery by narrating just the tip of an enormous iceberg of perplexities that Cuban subjects face. In this way, they not only suggest the potential of other alternate realities, but leave open the possibilities of other futures for Cuba. Nonetheless, isolation and escape from it seem to be on the horizon for a quite a while for the subjects of the island nation who seem particularly unmoored during the island's transition to a global economy.

## Chapter 3

## Lost Love at the Millennium:

Memory and Forgetting in *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* and *Tokio ya no nos quiere*

Jeanette Winterson begins her novel *Written on the Body* (1992) by asking: “Why is the measure of love loss?” (9). Her question will guide this chapter as it links ideas of lost love, memory, and the experience of loss with the changes that were taking place in the world during the latter part of the twentieth century. Lost love and dealing with loss connect time and space in a way that illustrates how the past can pursue us in a society that struggles to get over troubled memories of violence characterized by war, mass murders, and schism. When people lose love, like the protagonists of the novels I analyze in this chapter—because of a breakup or due to a distance between respective lovers—, they tend to get lost and detach themselves from the memory, which creates a sense of latent lingering in which the recollection of the relationship persists even though they might not want it to. The greater the love, the bigger the loss, and the more lost they become. In this chapter, I examine how memory and forgetting play into the idea of getting over a lost love in novels by two young authors representing Spain’s Generation X, Lucía Etxebarria (1966– ) and Ray Loriga (1967– ). The protagonists of Etxebarria’s *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998) and Loriga’s *Tokio ya no nos quiere* (1999) have lost love, and this has made them lost, spurring their physical and psychological wandering in a way that is part of reconfiguring an identity for the twenty-first century.

Etxebarria and Loriga's protagonist-narrators—Bea and a nameless narrator that I will refer to as Él, respectively—go on journeys through their memories in search of the losses created by their lovers. Their loss is reflective of a Spanish society that is in the process of redefining a more plural sense of identity which involves delving into the past—which for Spain was marked by the Civil War (1936–1939) and the stagnation of nearly forty years of Francoism (1939–1975)—and a look ahead to its future as an important member of the evolving European Union which Spain has been a part of since 1986. Through the exploration of Bea and Él's lost loves, which involves an examination of their pasts through writing, this chapter will illustrate the uncertainty affecting Spain that stems from the remembrance of its twentieth century history of violence and schism and its approach into a new, evolving Europe. Bea and Él's attempts at reconstructing their pasts with their former lovers are reflected in Bea's confused search for a purpose in life and in Él's attempts to obliterate memory of his former lover. Thus their attempts at reconfiguring an identity revolve around the recurring presence of the theme of a lost and/or fragmented collective memory.

Historical memory and reinterpretations of the past are themes that have dominated all genres of Spanish cultural production during the last thirty years. To approach these themes, I will draw upon José F. Colmeiro's study of Spanish post-war collective memory and collective amnesia, *Memoria histórica e identidad cultural: De la postguerra a la postmodernidad* (2005), which will serve as a link between the individual losses of these subjects and the collective lost memory that

affects Spain. Ofelia Ferrán's *Working through Memory* (2007) offers the term "meta-memory text" to elucidate the "inextricable connection between processes of memory production as well as transmission, and issues of writing and narrative representation" (15). I use Ferran's study of memory as part of my theoretical framework to explore Etxebarria and Loriga's novels, which have qualities of her meta-memory texts as they serve as a way to "work through" memory. Borrowing from Freud, Ferrán proposes the idea of "working through" memory as she points out how as post-Franco Spain approaches memories of violence and schism, its past has "been repeated but not remembered, acted out in various ways, but not worked through" (51). In addition, Joan Ramón Resina's *Disremembering the Dictatorship* (2000) will serve as a reference point in my discussion of *desmemoria* or collective forgetting. The pervasiveness of a disturbed memory in contemporary Spanish arts can be attributed to the political transition to democracy which underscored policies of political amnesty through historical amnesia to smooth over a troublesome history of civil war and dictatorship. As with the Transition, the notions of amnesty (as a way to forgive) and amnesia (as a way to forget) are fundamentally linked to getting over a lost love which is the case for the protagonists of the two novels I will analyze.

*Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*'s Bea, by travelling and starting a life in a new place, comes to terms with a former love interest while *Tokio ya no nos quiere*'s Él attempts to obliterate an ex-lover from memory. Resina points out that forgiveness, an amnesty after a break-up, "implies forgetting and starting anew" (8). He goes on to note the Spanish predilection for narrative (novel and film) during and following the

Transition and notes that “there has been something consoling in [narrative’s] rendering of subjective loss and disorientation, as if there were something biologically positive and life-enhancing in letting go of the past and living in a perpetual dawn-dusking dusk” (9). This “perpetual dawn-announcing dusk” is precisely what ÉI lives in with his attempts at oblivion while Bea copes with her loss by writing in what appears to be a journal (the novel is her first-person narration that delves into intimate details about her life). Coping with the reminiscence of an ex-lover functions as the premise of both novels’ discussion of memory and identity. Therefore, what these novels and my analysis of them contribute to the discussion of collective memory and amnesia is an examination of lost love and its relevance to a society that is attempting to get over a disturbing historical memory. Bea and ÉI’s respective separation from their lovers, and attempts to get over them, correspond with a detachment from the past as a way to look to a new future. By presenting this lost love, Etxebarria and Loriga make us ask an important question: Is love impossible in a world so interconnected by technology, yet profoundly disconnected in other more meaningful ways? The protagonists of these novels are forced to meditate their lost status in the world because of the distance(s) that separate them from their former lovers. Having lost what once was a constant—a troubled past from which they seek detachment—Bea and ÉI seem unmoored by their attempts to forget because the memory lingers. They endure this memory while struggling to find footing in a Europe that is also reconfiguring its sense of identity in a larger conglomeration (the European Union) while dealing with a divisive past.

The notion of losing something, love or a lover in these novels, contributes to the subjects' awareness of being lost in the world; this loss indirectly makes them question past and future. Within the interconnected network society that we live in, relationships are perceived as more fleeting because of a growing sense of mobility among the developed world's inhabitants. In this changing context, people are required to be more mobile, and as a consequence, we witness a simultaneous breaking down of interpersonal relationships and national boundaries as the world becomes more fractal. This hyperactivity is theorized by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (2000) as having derived from "primary factors of production and exchange—money, technology, people, and goods" and their ability to "move with increasing ease across the national boundaries" (xi). The quicker movement of commodities has also spurred a hyper-consumption that has made relationships determined more by consuming "things" rather than by the human spirit. The lost subjects that I am dealing with have more potential for getting further lost and encounter more opportunity for the breakdown of interpersonal connections because of the sensory overload produced by the plethora of data sent and received during this Information Age. The protagonists of the novels I treat are feeling love's loss due to the breakdown of interpersonal connection that shows how they are unable to realize love in this new context.

In the case of the novels that I am looking at, this sense of unfulfillment sends their protagonists into a cycle of displacement and isolation. The wanderl[o]st subjects, as a result, turn to rambling as part of a re-discovery of who they are. In



Etxebarria's *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*, Edinburgh and Madrid are juxtaposed as part of the assessment of Bea's past with Cat and Mónica, the two loves of her life that represent each city. In Loriga's *Tokio ya no nos quiere*, Tokyo is the city that the protagonist associates with his unnamed lover, Ella; despite his wanderings throughout the world, it is his memories of Tokyo that haunt him even in his attempts to erase memory. Upon this unstable ground, subjects affected by broken love experience the uncertainty of a reality whose perception has been manipulated by a world society that attempts to control memory, erasing horrors of the past while projecting a falsely constructed future. The broken love described in these novels is part of reconstructing an identity (although uncertain) for lost subjects.

Because forgetting and forgiving are part of enduring broken love, I will be referencing studies of collective memory and amnesia as they pertain to Spain. Resina begins his study of memory by noting that some have seen the current interest in memory beginning in the 1980s, when there was increased attention given to national identities and holocaust revisionism and counter-revisionism, and the emergence of the social science, hauntology.<sup>67</sup> He goes on to trace the "present's interest in the past" as going back to post-colonial struggles and relates it to the "resurfacing of suppressed national concerns among subjugated European peoples on both sides of the Iron Curtain" and "a past that was then beginning to look problematic after the sea change of the Cold War and the full blast of consumerist capitalism" (1). It is this general history that serves as the progression of time leading up to the times of the two novels that I will analyze. The problematic past was marked by attempts at

forgetting troubled times, which at the same time were important in defining national narratives. It is important to bear in mind that memory or lack thereof is fundamental to building national narratives, a point that Benedict Anderson brings up: “All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives” (204).<sup>68</sup> In this vein, Salvador Cardús i Ros asserts that a fundamental element of a sociological study of the transition to democracy in Spain is the notion of “intentional *forgetting*” because “the Transition to democracy was made possible by the active erasure of the social memory that had been made hegemonic up to 1975” (19). Colmeiro marks the difference between collective memory and historical memory by emphasizing the latter, associating it with historical consciousness of memory (17). On the other hand, historical memory is characterized by its self-reflective nature, collective, yet activated on an individual level (18).<sup>69</sup> Cardús i Ros further defines “collective memory” by pointing out that “memory, both the individual kind and the sort that is imprecisely referred to as *collective*, is a set of narratives resulting from the social interpretation of reality” (22). This emphasis on “social interpretation” makes memory vulnerable for exploitation. The portrayal of fragmented, manipulated, and erased historical memory in Etxebarria and Loriga’s novels make them poignant examples of the time following the *desencanto* when Spain’s history during the Francoist period was still being reinterpreted.

Colmeiro associates the current lack of historical memory among younger generations with the deactivation of political consciousness as part of the political

transition that resisted re-opening wounds stemming from the Civil War. Political amnesty was predicated by a collective amnesia in order to minimize the damage done by the past (19). Spain's prevailing historical amnesia has made it possible to a certain degree to forget its divisive past while at the same time the excessive attempts at memory recovery remind it of its schism. In Spain, there was never a "Ley de punto final," as was the case in Argentina, but rather a smearing of the past leaving what Colmeiro refers to as an ellipsis (20).<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Spain's transition to democracy has been called a "collective 'pacto de olvido,'" as Ferrán asserts. Furthermore: "Spain still needs to create an adequate 'culture of memory,' a process whereby society effectively confronts the legacy of its traumatic past of war, exile, dictatorship, and repression" (14). Part of confronting the past involves recognizing Spain's continuity with Francoism in the sense that the state police force, the *Guardia Civil*, and members of the judicial system remained in place after Franco's death. These groups had "to different degrees, been accomplices to Franco's regime, which explains their enthusiastic collaboration in the task of hiding the footprints of compromising facts" (Cardús i Ros 21). In this sense, the media probably played the biggest role in the collective forgetting as their stories deliberately avoided focusing on these glaring "left-overs." The new modernizing project, part of the transition to democracy, created a rupture with the past, which is associated with Spain's collective "forgetting" or *desmemoria*.<sup>71</sup> As Colmeiro explains: "el gran tabú colectivo de la transición [...] es que la sociedad española todavía no ha reconocido su complicidad con el franquismo, [...] prefiriendo el simulacro de la amnesia

colectiva” (32). This amnesia seems to be allegorically present in Loriga’s novel with the “memory eroders” or “oblivion” that Él sells and consumes. The consumption of oblivion in Loriga’s novel links with an expression that historian Santos Juliá suggests, “echar en el olvido,” which connotes voluntarily forgetting something (17). Within his discussion of contemporary Spain’s cultural products, Colmeiro also points out that the construction of historical memory and the formation of cultural identity are parallel processes (28). In this vein, *Beatriz* and *Tokio* represent attempts at redefining identities after being faced with the prospect of getting over broken love or troubled memories; therefore, the problematic relationship with memory that the protagonists have indicate troubling paths to reconfigure identity in contemporary Spain.

The hasty pace of change in its shift to democracy extenuates the differences between generations and is particularly evident in the seminal novel by José Ángel Mañas, *Historias del Kronen* (1994), which gives name to the “Kronen Generation,” otherwise known as Spain’s Generation X, with which Etxebarria and Loriga are often associated.<sup>72</sup> In their insistence upon popular culture, writers from Spain’s Generation X look to the outside for inspiration, which comes in the form of popular films and young writers from other countries; this is what gives their works a more international feel that corresponds to the centrifugal forces Spain is experiencing during this time.<sup>73</sup> For example, Germán Gullón points out in his introduction to *Historias del Kronen* the importance of contemporary music for this generation and the “winks” to movies like *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *American Psycho* (2000),

and *Trainspotting* (1996) (XIII).<sup>74</sup> In addition, my discussion of *Beatriz* will highlight its use of contemporary music as a factor that unites youth, while I will illustrate how *Tokio* shows a number of stylistic and thematic characteristics typically associated with science-fiction films. The writing styles of both authors seem heavily influenced by the narrative techniques of pop culture: Loriga's prose is typified by a minimalist tendency which is evident in *Tokio* but even more so in his first novel *Lo peor de todo* (1992); Etxebarria's style is not minimalist but imitates, in subtle ways, the vapid emptiness of best-seller novels, an element that is deceiving because her novels are deceptively complex.<sup>75</sup> Both authors prefer to narrate in the first person and they emphasize dialogue as a way to focus on a youth disgruntled by the superficiality of contemporary society; the authors' representation of this superficiality is fundamentally important to their aesthetic. By clearly marking the temporal context through mentions of current events and pop culture references, works from this generation portray Spain's changing situation and give the impression that what is happening in the works is occurring *in the moment*. At the same time, they also shatter our notions of time by re-defining the speed at which events that happen are being narrated.

Because of the intent to capture the moment, this group of Spanish writers coming out of the nineties has also been called the neorealists, and some have classified them as belonging to Spanish Dirty Realism (*Realismo sucio*) because, following North American Dirty Realism writers such as Raymond Carver and Tobias Wolff, their fiction portrays subjects in their natural states, in all their wanton

contexts.<sup>76</sup> Part of the novels' realism and honesty comes from the language and style of prose that writers such as Etxebarria and Loriga utilize. This generation writes in a style that has been referred to as automatic writing and is exemplified in *Tokio* in which the *Él* narrates like an automaton in his simultaneous absorption (like a computer processing input) and cold detachment from the reality around him. Within their sordid realism there is a lack of formality because of the attempt to capture the pace of what they are portraying.<sup>77</sup> This is achieved by placing importance on dialogue to capture real speech and by reproducing a sense of orality throughout the narration, which gives their works a seamless blend between action and the spoken. This speech is "blank," marking a disengagement consistent with the times in which they live. The perceived emptiness of the conversations or their lack of emotional connection as well as a lack of structure comes not just from what the characters say but what they experience. The sensory overload is so overwhelming that it seems numbed, which explains, in part, the irrationality of some of the characters' thoughts and actions. The novels suggest that the sensory overload of a society based on image takes away any potential for more profound conversation, yet even then, in the novels' ostensibly simple prose, the subjects achieve a simultaneous deep disaffection and loss that hits the reader like a knockout punch, particularly when we see their plights in trying to overcome lost love.

The drugs that are so present in these texts are part of creating a numbness perpetuating a sense of loss, alienation, or the absent attempts to feel included, and subsequently to being lost. The bleak honesty of an intoxicated narrator is part of why

Matthew J. Marr links the writers and subjects of Spain's Generation X with those of Hemingway's Lost Generation.<sup>78</sup> Marr uses Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1925) and Mañas's *Historias del Kronen* to conclude that "[t]he Lost Generation and Generation X, though vastly separated by time and space, coalesce [...] around remarkably parallel sociopolitical concerns" regarding their respective governments' curtailing of "festive indulgence" (129). In the case of Mañas's work, the increasing consumption of drugs is associated with Spain's rapid shift towards being a consumer society.<sup>79</sup> Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas note: "[t]he repressions, privations and denials imposed by a victorious Francoism on Spaniards after the Civil War became the perfect basis for Spain's largely uncritical assimilation of the new, mass consumerist culture when it finally arrived in the 1960s and 1970s" (263). The increasing tempo of the drug-infused narrations crescendos to correspond with the sensory overload experienced.

Part of what makes the subjects of Spain's Generation X writers appear lost is their depicted lack of collective memory which stems, in part, from a severance from the time of Franco's dictatorship experienced by their parents' generations. Not having fully appreciated what it was to live under Franco, the youth of the nineties seemingly *chose* to be apathetic and distance themselves from previous generations. Because of the previously mentioned swiftness of the transition to democracy, there seems to be a gap between this generation and that of their parents.<sup>80</sup> Etxebarria and Loriga's subjects reveal an empty apathy that derives from an era of transnational capitalism that is marked by excessive consumerism and cultural homogenization

which inevitably provoke the sense of loss and despair of youth (not just Spanish) of the nineties. As Luis Martín-Cabrera comments, “[t]he marks of the consumerist orgy of the nineties” are precisely what leaves these subjects devoid of feeling because “the object of desire—European integration, the illusion of normalcy, economic development, revolution, etc.—has disappeared, swallowed into the society of spectacle” (88). The rampant consumerism presented in these novels (particularly *Tokio* with the protagonist’s heavy consumption of “oblivion”) thus represents a failed process of forgetting and a fatalist way of finding fulfillment because no matter how much the protagonists consume drugs or other commodities, they are never really able to forget. In a world typified by simultaneous globalization and fragmentation, the subject must confront a number of dilemmas in how to negotiate collective and individual memory. Memory and forgetting the past are portrayed in *Beatriz* and *Tokio* as ways that subjects question their own identities in order to forget their pasts. Striving to get over their lost loves for Etxebarria’s Bea and Loriga’s Él is tantamount to Spain’s collective forgetting of a troubled past of isolation during most of the twentieth century.

Etxebarria’s *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* typifies a general finisecular uncertainty through its portrayal of Bea’s doubts regarding her lovers that not only express her ambiguous sexual orientation but also her confused relationship with place and time in a changing world. The novel consists of Bea’s reminiscing of leaving her home in Madrid and a troubled relationship with her parents to seek out a new existence in Edinburgh. While studying English in Edinburgh she meets Caitlin



(Cat), a lover who appears as the antithesis to the object of her desire in Madrid, Mónica. The narration goes back and forth between memories of her last summer in Madrid with Mónica and her time in Edinburgh with Cat; with the latter she leads an existence that is relatively calmer but also marked by an increasing sense of distance because of their differences in lifestyle. Bea's search for identity and her relationship with Cat become further confused when she has an affair with Ralph, another student at the university, who is the first man with whom she sleeps. This experience makes her question her sexual orientation and is part of an existential crisis that she has as a result of her time away from Madrid. The gaps between her lovers—Cat, Mónica, and Ralph—and between the places that they occupy mark fissures in her memory as she attempts to locate an identity for herself in the unmoored existence that she leads.

As evinced by the title of the novel, Bea uses astronomy as a medium through which she elaborates on her feelings towards the world and her lovers. The narration dwells on Bea's recollection and reexamination of her relationship with Mónica, who is one celestial body among many but the one that seems to shine brightest for Bea, especially during the end of her relationship with Cat. Early in the novel, Bea presents the graveyard orbit as a theme that will serve to describe many of the lost beings that Bea comes into contact with in the novel. This graveyard orbit is where satellites are sent to join other space debris after their operational life expires and seems to be a figurative residence for the lost subjects that Bea encounters in her wanderings. Etxebarria's use of outer space metaphors and celestial symbolism are apt; the "cuerpos celestes" of the title allude both to Bea's disapproval of her mother's

Catholicism and her own misconstrued notion of heavenly desire stemming from her idealization of Mónica. I also see the celestial bodies as indirectly suggesting a perceived growing distance between people in their relationships which is evident in Bea's interactions with Cat, Mónica, and Ralph. Her conceptions of love and sex are marked by emptiness and frustrated attempts at intimacy. Bea romanticizes the ideal of love that accompanies sex, and tries to achieve a deeper attachment with Mónica that is impossible to attain because of the latter's shiftiness. Mónica's resistance to Bea's attempts at getting closer to her is due to her promiscuous lifestyle which does not allow her to get close to anyone. This inability to have meaningful relationships is part of the aesthetic of superficiality that authors such as Etxebarria set out to portray. The outer space metaphors also function to illustrate the detachment between lost subjects, something that Vance Holloway describes in "The Feminine Quest-Romance in Spain at the End of the Twentieth Century" when he remarks that "the scale of astronomy emphasizes the insurmountably vast distances between celestial bodies, and symbolically, between human subjects, as well as posing a chaotic, material explanation of the creation of existence, devoid of transcendental purpose, in which humans and their struggles are insignificant on a grander divine scale" (46). In this sense, the outer space metaphors serve to suggest the huge scale of distance that separates lost subjects such as Bea and Mónica. Bea's insistence on referring to satellites marks her own status as a satellite—distant and detached but nevertheless linked to a larger body. In her case, she is a satellite to Mónica. Bea orbits around Mónica but can never get closer to her. The references to outer space also allude to

elemental forces such as gravity in the sense of a planet circling a star or a satellite's dependence on a greater object, which is analogous to Bea's attraction to Mónica, and is portrayed as an elemental desire. Borrowing from Judith Butler the idea of gender performativity and Foucault's theorizing of the body as a site of historicity, Kathryn Everly suggests in "Beyond the Postmodern Bodily Aesthetic in *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*" that the "heavenly bodies" of the novel "expose an unmitigated desire free from gender demarcations, biological determinism and social codification" (166). The heavenly spaciness of bodies also suggests their transitory nature.

Bea's disorientation is addled by an atmosphere of indifference; nobody seems to understand her and she seems unable to interact with others. She laments that her mission on earth seems failed: "fui enviada al mundo con una misión: comunicarme con otros seres, intercambiar datos, transmitir. Y sin embargo me he quedado sola, rodeada de otros seres que navegan desorientados a mi alrededor en esta atmósfera enrarecida por la indiferencia, la insensibilidad o la mera ineptitud, donde una nunca espera que la escuchen, y menos aún que la comprendan" (16). Bea's solitude is juxtaposed with her attempts to narrate the troubles that other disoriented beings in this age and those before them have experienced. Because she is a lost subject, she seems to gravitate toward others of her kind—like Bolaño's lost poets and the *skitalietz* that wander Havana in Estévez and Ponte's texts. Therefore, she presents her disorientation not just within a single time and place (the nineties in Madrid) but as a more universal sentiment that comes across in her use of the outer space metaphors and the description of music popular at the time. The lost sensation

that she expresses seems more pronounced in her space and time marked by finisecular disillusion caused by the “consumerist orgy” of the nineties. This dynamic marks a troubling confusion between the individual and the universal in this novel, as emphasized by her use of space metaphors to portray a growing disconnection amongst subjects of her generation.

The dialectic between individuality and interconnectivity is examined in the novel’s depiction of friendships and youths’ relationships with older generations. Bea reacts against her parents, who she blames for her problems, but we also see how her own failures stem from her selfishness and inability to understand their concerns. Bea ceaselessly attempts to dissociate herself from her mother, yet she learns that she cannot erase her family history. She comments that this common rebellion against their parents’ generation is what brings her together with Mónica:

Yo sabía que todas aquellas niñas pensaban que yo era muy rara, que estaba un tanto loca, pero había acabado por convencerme a mí misma de que me importaba un comino la opinión de aquel rebaño de criaturas dulces y bovinas [...] mientras contase con el apoyo de Mónica, poco podía influirme la consmiseración o el desprecio de aquellas niñas disociadas del mundo real, mansas como corderitos con un lazo rosa. En medio de ese mundo pastel Mónica era la única que compartía conmigo aquella difusa impresión de desamparo y desarraigo, de haber crecido antes de tiempo. (156-57)

In addition to her inability to associate with her peers, as evinced by this quote, it is evident that Bea seeks to understand the world through her failed relationships with her mother and father or at least to blame them for her failures. The disassociation from her parents also prefigures a disconnection with the past, characteristic of the youths of her time.

This misunderstanding between generations is the result of the rapid pace of change in Spain where cultural transformations took place in a much shorter period of time than in other parts of Western Europe. In “Conflictos Generacionales,” an article that compares *Beatriz* with Maruja Torres’s *Un calor tan cercano* (1997), María C. Ramblado Minero asserts that the supposedly private mother-daughter relationship “se ve claramente afectada por la turbulenta historia de España durante el siglo XX y por los cambios, para bien o para mal, sufridos por las mujeres de dicho espacio político desde la instauración de la Segunda República en 1931 hasta la actualidad.”<sup>81</sup> With the end of Francoism, Spanish women saw an opportunity to achieve the freedoms that women in other parts of Western Europe had already been experiencing since World War II. During Franco’s dictatorship, the fundamental role of a woman in society was the perpetuation of a patriarchal system by carrying out her traditional role in the home. With the end of Francoism and its reactionary tendencies, we see a more evolved role of women as changes in attitudes regarding marriage, sex, and love represent some of the more important shifts in Spanish society. *Beatriz* represents a personal history (that of Bea, a teenager growing up during the nineties and her relationship with her mother) to present the differences in generations to explore a

collective memory of women in Spain. Its depiction of a glaring difference in sexualities between the ambiguously gendered Bea and her prudish, strictly Catholic mother illustrate changes taking place on a national level. Holloway indicates that Etxebarria's work represents feminine independence "in ways that reconfigure the quest-romance to reflect transformed gender and social roles at the end of the twentieth century" (36). Part of the changing roles was a shifting notion of sexuality. Carmen De Urioste suggests that it was not until the nineties that Spanish society was prepared to accept lesbian and gay models in the media and film, something she associates with the lasting influence of a dominant culture that stemmed from the conservative mores with which Spain was left after Franco (123). She also links the axis of Church-State-Nation propagated by Francoism to Bentham's panopticon described by Foucault. In this sense, the three-pronged conservative attack was responsible for disciplining and controlling Spanish women making them submissive and docile sociosexual elements (124). As Bea breaks out of this patriarchal control in her sexual explorations, and by detaching herself from her parents, she confronts many of the problems related to Spain's own reconfiguration of identity following the transition.

Bea subverts traditional values and patriarchal notions of duality. On one level, her story could represent a *bildungsroman* of "coming out;" she becomes aware of her sexuality but there are several obstacles that make her self-discovery more complicated because she has to transgress deep-seeded conservative notions of gender binaries. Dana Heller's thesis in *The Feminization of Quest-Romance: Racial*

*Departures* (1990) indicates that from 1950 on, American women's quest-romances developed "as one of the most fundamental formal expressions of women's awakening to selfhood, mobility, and influence in the world" (15). Yet, as Janet Pérez points out in *Modern and Contemporary Spanish Women Poets* (1996), feminine quest-romances characterized by mobility (like that of Bea's) only start appearing in Spain during the nineties because throughout the Franco period feminine quest-romances continued to represent frustrated journeys marked by immobility and those women writers that matured during Francoism represent frustrated efforts to achieve mobility (42, 47). A writer like Etxebarria who comes to age in the nineties represents what Holloway posits as "feminine independence, adventures in exotic locales [Edinburgh in the case of *Beatriz*], and sexual exploration in ways that reconfigure the quest-romance to reflect transformed gender and social roles at the end of the twentieth century" (36). *Beatriz*, in its portrayal of Bea's relationship with her mother, represents a subversion of the lingering patriarchal order while it displays a rupture between generations that occurs because of the rapid pace of change taking place in Spain following the transition to democracy. Bea's troubled relationship with her mother, as Ramblado points out, marks different generations of women that "están paradójicamente conectadas por sus distintos entendimientos y, en el caso de las madres, experiencias, del pasado." In the case of Bea and others of her generation, she does not completely understand what her mother went through during the years of Francoism because of the collective amnesia and generational disassociation that characterizes her and her peers.

Bea offers a rationalization of her mother's identity and her strict Catholic education and upbringing but she does not intend to understand her or, as Ramblado points out, seek to assimilate her as an integral part of the generational transmission of memory. Bea's focus is on a severance of all ties with memories of her mother; as Ramblado states, "lo que sí se observa claramente es una ruptura total con el pasado, tanto personal como colectivo." Because of her mother's strict Catholic education, Bea sees her as a relic that represents the conservative mores often associated with Franco's times.

Bea associates her mother with what Ramblado calls "la figura castrante o fálica cuyo objetivo primordial es la perpetuación de la mística de la feminidad española en la que ella misma ha sido educada." Conflating her mother and Franco might refer to a figurative form of drag, which is interesting considering Ramblado's observation of Bea's mom as a continuation of the phallic figure. This observation of Franco as a sort of castrating figure partly stems from Juan Goytisolo's characterization of the leader who, in many senses, is the epitome of a paternal figure for Spain during his reign. Goytisolo's autobiographic genealogical project *Coto vedado* (1985) reflects both public and private memory in the narrator's depiction of not being accepted by his father because he is gay. This unacceptance is in some ways connected to the attempt to cope with the collective trauma induced by Francoism; in this sense, Goytisolo refers to "ese otro Padre castrador y tiránico" (250). Etxebarria's Bea follows in this tradition of tracing identity and sexuality through generations in a sort of (auto)biographic form (as mentioned before the novel appears as a journal)



and perpetuates this image of Franco as a castrating figure with its depiction of Bea's mother. As a result of the castrating affect that her mother has on Bea, she disconnects herself from her mother in an attempt to get over not just her own past. This dissociation from her mother also alludes to her generation's rupture with the past. Bea's rebellious attitude extenuates the rupture. In this sense, Etxebarria's novel is a re-evaluation of Bea's past on a personal level; her recollection of memories with her mother provides clues to explore a more collective past on a national level as we observe what Ramblado calls "el cambio radical, aunque paulatino, de una dictadura a un sistema democrático," which is possible "gracias al establecimiento de un silencio colectivo o desmemoria que comenzó en 1939 y que, en ciertos aspectos de nuestra sociedad, aún está vigente." This "desmemoria" plays a part in the younger generation's relationship with Spain's past. Those of Bea's younger generation, who grew up without the physical presence of Franco or the desire to conjure it up, met head on with the generation of their parents, who experienced Francoism and the shift to democracy. In the clash of these two mindsets, the younger group seeks dissociation with the memory of Franco.

Even though the novel appears as Bea's diary (a personal artifact), there is a constant negotiation between the personal and the collective, which is underscored by the space metaphors mentioned before. Journals, like Bea's, are spaces of memory and places or tools used by people to process past traumas—individual traumas that could be read more metonymically to include collective traumas experienced at a societal level. Although the narration goes back and forth, it seems that Bea slowly

unearths her past and scars that still trouble her to the present just as Spain's divisive history affects its own contemplation of the present. Stylistically, Bea's narration reflects a constant shift between flashbacks and the perceived present from which she narrates (presumably during the time after her return from Edinburgh although it must be noted that because the novel works like a peek into her diary, she seems to be working on it throughout the events of her life as she narrates). These temporal shifts emphasize a broken cultural memory that is evident on a larger scale. In this vein, the novel represents a journey, through writing, to Bea's childhood, specifically a traumatic moment—being molested by an old man in a park when she was seven or eight—that she does not relate until near the end of the novel. The postponement of her mentioning this dark stain from her past reveals the perplexity it represents to her memories and the process of writing (or narrating) as a force of catharsis. Although most of the focus is on her coming to adulthood (eighteen to twenty-three), there are a number of reflections on her past. In this way *Beatriz* links with Carmen Martín Gaité's seminal novel *El cuarto de atrás* (1978), which symbolizes a catharsis from a collective trauma (the Civil War and post-war times) through the depiction of a personal trauma and the recollection of this event through writing. *El cuarto de atrás*, because of the time of its publication, on the cusp between Francoism and democracy in Spain, also represents a shifting of the guard in literature much in the same way that *Beatriz* conveys a shifting mindset in terms of different generations' relationship with traditional gender roles.

*Beatriz* achieves this shift in mindset through the depiction of the dysfunctionality of both Bea and Mónica's families which unites them in their rebellion against the Spain of their mothers' youth. Bea reacts against the conservative, bourgeois gender expectations of her mother who mocks her clothes, her hairstyle, and her music. Bea is also clearly aware of not fitting into the patriarchal categories to which her mother (and those of her generation) submitted. This is evident in her mother's perception of her sexuality as she complains that Bea's hair and clothes are not very feminine. Bea sets out to attain this boyish look as a way to fit in with her friends and as a way to sever ties with her mother's traditional notions of gender. While Bea's mother is rooted in the traditional idea of a strictly Catholic woman performing domestic duties, Mónica's mother works as an editor for an upscale fashion magazine. She is a slave to women's perceived role as an ideal of physical beauty. In turn, Mónica mocks her mother's use of diet pills by selling them clandestinely in clubs and by wearing "grunge" clothes that would never find their way into one of her mother's fashion magazines. Bea and Mónica's active dissociation from their mothers is an important element of their detachment from what they see as an antiquated set of social mores.

Part of what orients and gives meaning to the lives of lost subjects like Bea is music, and it is through music that she understands the world around her and further reacts against the antiquated social mores. Music defines Bea's lovers and the environments in which she and her friends dwell. It is evident that teens like Bea and Mónica use music to filter and process their experiences in a way that sometimes

conflates their perception of reality. Each group, album, and song that they listen to help them think about the world, the people around them, and their position within their milieu. We are introduced to Mónica when both of them are listening to The Cure, one of the most important gothic groups that came out of Great Britain in the early eighties whose songs are characterized by dark impressions on love and society. Mónica also introduces Bea to the post punk band Siouxsie and the Banshees. The title of one of their albums, *Kaleidoscope* (1980), makes Bea think of Mónica: “su personalidad caleidoscópica estaba compuesta de múltiples detalles [...], y todos estos diferentes aspectos de sí misma se recombinaban a cada movimiento de forma que, si volvía la cabeza, creía ver, al remirlarla, a una nueva Mónica” (151). The nihilism associated with gothic music might explain the disregard for life exhibited in how Mónica constantly gets high (something that bothers Bea even though she sometimes participates) and their abandonment of Mónica’s friend Coco after his overdose. Elizabeth Scarlett, in an article on Gen X music in relation to the Spanish writers of the time, points out that the Gen X writers “blend rock music into their worldview of *desencanto*, or disenchantment with the post-1992, post-*Felipista* Spanish scene” because it is “tinged with the cynicism of *fin de siglo*” typical of “young people towards global capitalism and consumerism, without a valid alternative to be advocated” (98). Music therefore becomes another marker of the sharp division between generations. For example, Bea mentions that she is drawn to Alaska y los Pegamoides, and when her mother calls the music group a bunch of “mamarrachos,” Bea further dissociates herself from her mother by stating that she

feels out of place, “que el mundo al que yo pertenecía por derecho estaba fuera, fuera de mi casa, fuera de mi colegio, escondido en alguno de los rincones secretos de Madrid, en alguna esquina recóndita que no alcanzaba a verse desde mi autobús. Pero ¿dónde?” (178). This disassociation caused by their different tastes in music goes along with that of her generation and is also part of why Mónica begins to replace Bea’s mother as the source of her support—through music, Bea and Mónica understand each other and share common perceptions of the world.

Cat’s milieu is defined by ambient trance music such as that from groups like The Orb, Orbital, and The Prodigy: “atmósferas inquietantes creadas por ordenador, ritmos que adaptaba al latido del corazón. Ambientes hormonales, secuencias ciberchic” (45). The more subdued and “chilled out” ambient music of The Orb might be associated with the calming presence that Cat tries to exert on those around her. Orbital and Prodigy’s more club-based music is an indication of Cat’s active social life. For youth like Bea and Cat, techno, lounge, ambient, acid jazz, and trip hop accompany as background music the use of designer drugs like ecstasy; this electronic music exhibits a detachment characteristic of the times. Musically, this detachment is apparent between musicians and instruments as the music deliberately avoids the organic feel of an ensemble of musicians playing instruments together. The club music is characterized by a deejay (an individual) who manipulates laptops or turntables; this electronically determined musical disengagement is analogous to the disconnection felt in the relationships presented in the novel. In clubs, youth like Cat and Bea either dance in large groups, displaying a mass mentality, or sometimes they

are relegated to experiencing their “trip” on their own, unable to associate with others because of the drugs taken to experience the euphoria so desired. The club music, therefore, is representative of the opposition that Manuel Castells elucidates between self (individual) and net (as part of the network society), and illustrates how youths attempt to achieve individuality in a society based on homogenizing consumer patterns.<sup>82</sup>

Like the introspective music that she listens to, Bea’s musings on love in the novel are primarily self-reflective. Nevertheless, part of the intersubjectivity portrayed in the novel involves defining herself within the masses while the masses usually have an effect on her defining her own identity. Following Castells’s opposition between the net and the self, the dynamic between introspection and wanting to belong to a group is part of the experience for the youths of this generation. Techno music functions as an ideal theme music because it describes the simultaneous introversion and mass mentality that characterizes many youth coming to age at the millennium. It creates a superficially communal experience where those dancing coalesce with others around them while they also get lost by themselves with the music. In many ways, electronic music is the soundtrack for the society of the masses that we live in because it fits within Castells’s net–self opposition while illustrating a split between self and society and an active dissociation of youth from society. This type of music is also a characteristic of Bea’s dilemma. She wants to belong but also feels alienated within the superficial mass culture of Cat’s milieu. Therefore, she cannot escape her past and she is left unfulfilled and lost. The

simultaneity of communal life and individualism, illustrated in electronic music, presents a number of problems for Bea in her relationships with her lovers and with her past.

As with others of her time, Bea outwardly opposes traditional notions of love—monogamous and romantic—and at times feigns aversion to bonds, yet nevertheless such bonds form in the case of her relationships with Cat and Mónica. As Bea explains: at age 18, she is still a virgin while Mónica was very promiscuous during her teenage years. She points out, though, “[n]o éramos, sin embargo, tan distintas. La carencia o el exceso venían a significar lo mismo: la huida del compromiso, o la renuncia” (98). Sex is, for Mónica and later for Bea, a representation of their latent religiosity in the sense that it helps them describe their relationships with the world. It also illustrates how Spanish youths’ repressed Catholicism is manifested. They run away from their parents’ religion in order to express a new direction. As Bea points out in reference to Mónica,

[m]uchas mujeres educadas como católicas han tenido la sensación de que era urgente cometer pecados y se han pasado años encadenando aventuras. Quizá ella era así, quizá caminaba por el mundo llena de esperma, sintiéndose carnal, quizá el sexo se convirtió en una experiencia mística que era una gracia de los hombres, lo mismo que a santa Teresa de Ávila era Dios el que le concedía el éxtasis. Yo no puedo saberlo, sólo puedo imaginarlo, pero estoy casi segura de que

ella se empeñaba en acumular hombres por pura rebeldía, no por verdadero deseo. (100-101)

Catholicism, as part of the patriarchal order sought by Franco, is why Bea's mother stays together with her father despite their failed relationship, illustrating another botched application of religion that begrudges Bea. At least Bea has the possibility to escape, unlike her mother; Bea refers to that strict Catholicism as "aquella vida sin sentido de la que yo podía escapar pero ella no" (128). Nonetheless, Bea discovers that "hiciera lo que hiciera, estaba destinada al pecado, por mucho que yo me esforzara en evitarlo" (126). The lack of meaningful interactions represents the impossibility of erasing the guilt of Bea and Mónica's failed relationships, and marks their lives as endless cycles that are doomed to failure. The problematic relationship between body and mind, at the root of Catholicism, presents the impossibility of attaining a clear conscience, and, therefore, many like Bea choose to live in an eternal present that further distances them from their parents and potentially alters their sense of identity.

Etxebarria presents the desire to stay in the present and the exploration of androgynism as hallmarks of Bea's peers and part of a confounded self-discovery of identity. Bea comments the Peterpanism of her cohorts, "eternas adolescentes, cuerpos andróginos" with "permiso de residencia en el país de Nunca Jamás, visado sin fecha de caducidad." Bea is happy that her body could be that of an adolescent boy, and is attracted to others with this youthful quality. In the clubs, she comments on a girl that approaches and gives her the sense of a "presente inmóvil" (41). This



eternal youth is part of the identity crisis that those of her generation face. As Everly points out, “[t]he fascination with preserving the adolescent body shows a fear of maturation and eventual death” and this “aversion to death seen in both Beatriz’s attitude toward the body in general and in the overriding metaphor of the novel affirms the importance of the process, of capturing a moment frozen in the body and preserving the essence infinitely” (172). Finding the importance of the process and capturing a moment frozen in time are relevant to discussion of Spain’s own changes. Another facet of Bea’s search for identity is her sexuality; she says that she does not want to be a woman, but she also flees men. Later on, she makes the realization: “yo nací persona, y amé a personas” (276). This apparent indecision or her choice not to choose seems symptomatic of the questioning of her identity which appears in a state of permutation throughout the novel. While contemplating her affair with Ralph, she notes, as if she were lost, that she does not know where she stands with regard to her sexual orientation: “si me hubieran preguntado en ese momento si yo era lesbiana o si era heterosexual, e incluso si era bisexual, que parecía la respuesta más convincente, no hubiera sabido qué responder” (284). Having an ambiguous sexual orientation marks her shifting status and perception of herself. The flexibility of her recognized gender could also be seen as part of the flexible economy of postmodern culture, a posture that Judith Halberstam takes with regard to transgenderism in *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005). Halberstam goes on to explain a refusal to categorize sexualities by stating, “[m]any young gays and lesbians think of themselves as part of a ‘post gender’ world and for them the idea of ‘labeling’ becomes a sign of an

oppression they have happily cast off in order to move into a pluralistic world of infinite diversity.” These young gays and lesbians also express “that their uniqueness cannot be captured by the application of a blanket term” (19). Self-recognition of her ambiguous sexuality, her status as post-gender, and awareness of a desire for a perpetual present go through a number of transformations in the novel as she recalls episodes from her past that have affected her present self.

Part of Etxebarria’s project is to redefine the limits imposed on the body through Bea’s musings on problematic gendering. Bea discovers that flexibility and the gray areas of ambiguity are her keys to relationships. This connects with Spain’s own transformed sense of gender roles and of its changing identity. Bea’s affair with Ralph is part of her uncertain perception of her sexuality. It is curious that Bea refers to Ralph as her second Mónica. This links him to memories of her previous love, which she idealized because of the time that had passed and her frustrations with her lover at the time, Cat. She never had sex with Mónica and she appears much closer to her than to Ralph because her relationship with Ralph seems based more on sex alone; the pair meets up sporadically for sex and he does not desire a monogamous relationship, an element that subconsciously makes her more interested in him. The romantic triangle (it could even be a square) that develops between Bea, Cat, Mónica, and Ralph presents a revealing look at bodies, which is applicable to a growing openness in Spain that breaks with the traditional binary differences between male and female. Everly asserts that “Etxebarria is making a case against the limiting and confining definition not only of gender, but also of bisexuality. The either/or

mentality that accompanies heterosexual and homosexual preferences only serves to delineate and limit bodily boundaries” (174). She also suggests that the novel makes readers reassess the conventions of a binary gender system that has become outdated. By shattering this binary system, Bea achieves a post-gender status that is not limited by duality but rather open to multiplicity. In this sense, she overcomes this Western archaic gender system characterized by an ultra-Catholic fundamentalism in place for centuries in Spain, perpetuated and ensconced by Franco’s patriarchal legacy, and the traditional cultural norms that it propagated. As Dieter Ingenschay points out, “Sólo en el postfranquismo pudo surgir una nueva conciencia del cuerpo,” and it is through this new conscience that the “destape,” a period defined by openness in sexual relationships, takes place in Spain. Ingenschay characterizes this time as taking place when “la escenificación del cuerpo derivada de este cambio de conciencia se convirtió en una característica propia de la transición.” Furthermore, “la homosexualidad como tema literario se puso de moda hasta el punto de dominar gran parte de la producción literaria hispánica del último cuarto del siglo XX” (157). Bea, as an extension of this trend that began with the Transition, represents a more feminine angle than a lot of the fiction following the Transition and an emphasis on a postgenderism more appropriate to a finisecular context.<sup>83</sup>

Bea’s commentary on how she cannot erase her memory and her scarred past illustrate the weight that these scars have upon her character; her ambiguously gendered appearance and body, in many ways, is depicted as a receptacle for these scars. Because of her youth-like beauty, she is selected to be the “runner” in the drug

deals in the clubs; in addition, she is sent as a messenger to sell a mysterious object for Coco, Mónica's drug dealer friend. When her "client" attempts to rape her, Bea hits him over the head with a whiskey bottle. Later, she opens the package to discover a pistol. She then positions herself in front of a mirror, pointing the gun at herself, "a mi propia imagen," she relates (165). Everly sees the mirror as it acts as "an agent that reflects the body in a state of limbo" (172). This state of limbo, which marks her indecision regarding herself, is analogous to Spain's own situation of carving out an identity following a transition in which memories of the past still linger in its reconstruction. It is not coincidental that her perpetrator is a neo-Nazi, representing a figment of Spain's Falangist past. This episode causes her to reflect on her lost status as she later compares herself to Lady Macbeth: "Estaba tan perdida como lo estaba tres años antes, cuando deambulaba por las calles de Madrid, cuando me empapé las manos con la sangre de un desconocido. A veces me sentía lady Macbeth: sabía que esas manchas no se borrarán, como no se borraban, en mi corazón, los años en mi casa, aquella relación irreparable con mi madre, ni mi amor a Mónica" (284). Sandra Lee Bartky distinguishes the difference between men and women's bodily experiences in the way that for a female the body becomes "one's enemy" (65). This is particularly evident in the attempted rape of Bea and her subsequent aiming a pistol at herself, which alludes to her trapped position within a patriarchal society. Her female body can also become her enemy when it is conditioned to perform patriarchal myths concerning submissiveness (74). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains how "[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly

rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (33). Bea goes against Spain’s old traditions to stylize her body in an attempt to redefine herself. Everly concludes that Bea’s reshaping of her body represents how “the idea of performativity becomes tantamount to how the body operates within society and as a representation of certain cultural constraints” (168). This performativity as a representation of cultural constraints is particularly evident in Bea’s case because of the innocent quality of her appearance that she emphasizes in her narration.

Throughout her experiences, Bea carries scars of her past that weigh heavy on her identity because of the sexual nature of the scars (as memories of a rape). The memories of pain leave Bea disoriented in her search for identity because whether she likes it or not, her past pursues her: “No intentes enterrar el dolor: se extenderá a través de la tierra, bajo tus pies; se filtrará en el agua que hayas de beber y te envenenará la sangre” (19). Bea goes on to ask, “¿Para qué intentar huir y dejar atrás la ciudad donde caíste?” By leaving, she puts distance between herself and her past, which is marked by Mónica. But she cannot escape her past; written on her body, her lost love, and the lacuna in her emotional memory that her time with Mónica represents, these experiences mark her like a tattoo etched into her skin. Bea cannot forget Mónica because she takes her city (Madrid) with her: “A tu alrededor se alzarán las mismas ruinas de tu vida, porque allá donde vayas llevarás a la ciudad contigo” (19). The suffering is part of her. Later on she notes that “Mónica ya había dejado de ser una herida, se había convertido en una cicatriz, y por tanto imborrable,

no podía deshacerme de ella” (32). Like Madrid, Mónica is a scar written on her body that, like memory, will fade (but not disappear) although only with time and new experiences.

Because of this pain that pursues her, Bea’s narration goes back and forth between her four years studying in Edinburgh and her memories of Mónica and the troublesome summer in the drug-laden clubs of Madrid, where they spent their last time together before her departure for Scotland. It is important that Bea choose a European city that is not a Latin-heritage/Catholic country like France, Portugal, or Italy but rather a city that represents a stark contrast from her upbringing in Spain. This is relevant because it shows the diversity of the new Europe and the different groups that it brings together. The intercalation of times and places that switch with every short subsection of the novel illustrates how memories are intertwined within one another. The sections defy chronological order, which is useful on a number of levels because it integrates the characters and places allowing the reader to see an overlapping of certain traits and connect the past with the present.

Her troubled adolescent years with her dysfunctional family are characterized by Madrid while Edinburgh is where she escapes to reinvent herself, starting with a clean slate. It also represents a more complete coming-of-age than that of the one she initiates in her last summer in Madrid with Mónica. When she comes back, she reconfronts aspects of her old self—such as her relationship with her mother—but finds that they have changed. The pain that she has experienced in Madrid has created scars, pain that she cannot bury. This pain, associated with her lost love for Mónica,

is represented in the city. The cliché that love knows no borders does not work in Bea's trajectory, as place seems integral in her retracing her memories. Nevertheless, even though there are sentiments that she attaches to Madrid and others to Edinburgh and the stories that she relates are quite distinct, the cities meld together in the stream of her narration and in how they affect the course of her life. This idea is exemplified in Bea's narration when she says, "[v]endí éxtasis en Madrid, mi novia los vendía en Edimburgo: la ciudad es siempre la misma, la llevas contigo" (224). The distance between Edinburgh and Madrid—both geographical and historical—and the contrast between Bea's two lovers remains a constant throughout the narration, but the way in which their stories are narrated marks a seamless blend between cities and lovers, time and distance.

Bea's lost loves, Mónica and Cat, mark the trajectory of her path through the world. Like Edinburgh and Madrid, the two lovers are contrasted: "la tranquilidad de Cat y la efervescencia de Mónica, la dulzura de la primera y el arrojito de la segunda, la receptividad de la una y el empuje de la otra" (32). Bea experiences two different types of tragedy that she associates with love: "la falta de amor o el exceso de amor" (29). Mónica represents her lack of love while Cat her excess in the sense that Mónica never reciprocated the intense feelings Bea showed for her while Cat showered her with attention. The intense swings between affection and lack of it are similar to the drug culture that Bea and her friends participate in; seeking out extremes is valued over a flattened, numbed experience. Bea notes, "[n]o me fiaba de nadie que viviese en las medias tintas" (108). Nevertheless, she finds herself in a number of gray areas:

she is much warier of drugs than Mónica and her sexuality is more ambiguous because she is attracted to both men and women, something that Cat would not have approved of because she is strictly lesbian. Bea remarks, “[I]os sexos no estaban diseñados en prístino blanco y negro: existía una variedad infinita de matices de gris” (175). The gray areas define Bea’s ambiguous gender and her search for identity in a changing world.

The difference between the two lovers is further marked by desire; Bea has great desire for Mónica because she cannot have Mónica and her desire for Cat is weak because they have each other and Cat loves Bea more than Bea loves Cat. Because she cannot have Mónica, Bea’s thoughts turn to her even when she is with Cat. Mónica is the “naughtier” choice, which is what makes Bea’s desire for her stronger: “Si a Cat se la amaba por razón de su bondad, a Mónica se la adoraba pese a su aparente maldad. Cat era pasiva y Mónica activa. Cat era mejor persona, en teoría. Mónica, mucho más interesante” (50). Bea is conscious of the twisted notion of desire for Mónica, but this is what spurs her love: “mi noción de deseo estaba relacionada con Mónica, íntimamente ligada a su imagen, y podría decir que opté por enamorarme de ella” (183). Desire—in the wild attraction that Bea feels for Mónica—is illusory. The difference between her feelings for Mónica, who she describes as more mysterious and exciting, and Cat, who is more predictable, could not be greater. Even the sexualities of Bea’s two prime love interests are contrasted. She maintains a more or less platonic relationship with Mónica, who goes through myriad boyfriends while they remain friends (even though Bea is deeply attracted to



and obsessed with Mónica). It is only in a drunken moment after doing several lines of cocaine in a club bathroom that the pair sneaks a kiss. She is wildly attracted to Mónica but is not sure if Mónica feels the same or if it was simply a drunken moment. This celibate love seems out of place with the fast living and the wild memories she has with Mónica, but this lack of sex makes the desire for her even greater, as if she were idolized because of this lack: “No pensaba en acostarme con ella: me bastaba con sentirla cerca,” Bea notes (194). Nevertheless, it is not satisfying enough merely to be near her, and that is why the desire becomes even greater when Bea is in another country. It is a twisted notion of memory that causes her to revere her time with Mónica while she is in Edinburgh. She idealizes her in some ways and in her nostalgia for Madrid, but this idealization also fades as it goes through ebbs and flows.

She does not go into detail about her sex life with Cat but it appears to have patterns of consistency—she mentions that they always make love during full moons, for example. This comfortable consistency is, in part, why she does not feel as wild a desire for Cat. With Cat, Bea experiences a relationship of sexual equality and emotional nurturing. Her desire for Mónica overcomes the comfortable aspects of this relationship because of, as Holloway points out, Bea’s “sense of loss and longing for Monica, and fear of losing herself by emotionally committing to her relationship with Cat” (48). Bea feels that her union with Cat is part of what separates them. She complains that together they always frequent the same clubs, never exploring other realms of the city. With Mónica, she covers all parts of Madrid from gypsy ghettos

such as El Cierro de la Liebre to “pijo” neighborhoods such as Serrano. In contrast, with Cat, she remarks that she “tenía la impresión de que vivíamos automarginadas en nuestro propio gueto [...]. Nos movíamos en un universo limitado, en nuestra propia constelación de clubes de ambiente, y la gente a la que conocíamos, en general, tampoco había viajado a otras galaxias” (57). Once again, the outer space metaphors are employed to reflect her position as trapped with Cat. These metaphors also mark the constant association of the universal with the personal. Every being occupies its own universe in which their concerns orbit around them. This provokes her observation: “no podía imaginar a Caitlin como la acompañante ideal para el resto de la travesía de mi vida, e, inevitablemente, acababa comparándola con Mónica. Porque hay grandes estrellas y pequeñas estrellas que coexisten en las mismas galaxias.” She goes on to note that in the Milky Way, there is a star the size of all of Earth’s orbit around the sun, the Pistol Star, and that “Mónica, por supuesto, ha sido mi Pistola” (60). However, the size of Mónica’s importance is made even greater by the distance and time between them. As Winterson posited at the beginning of this chapter, love can be measured by loss but, conversely, loss also can ostensibly make a love “bigger.” Bea employs other metaphors to express the distance between herself and her lovers. She would prefer that instead of “Caitlin y Bea,” their relationship be known as: “Caitlin.....y Bea” (58). This entrapment into Cat’s milieu and their categorization as a “typical” couple is why she loses attraction for Cat. She does not want to be defined through another. It also marks how lovers find their love lost. This distance that separates them,

represented in the extended ellipsis that Bea craves, is part of the solitude that the world creates in its over-crowding. Even when society seems more interconnected, these characters appear more alone. Clearly, Cat is the more responsible choice for Bea, but that is what makes Mónica so much more appealing.

It is Bea's desire for Mónica (extenuated by the distance imposed between them), and not any sense of logical planning, that makes Mónica so attractive and interrupts any possibility for normalcy in Bea's stay in Edinburgh, where she constantly compares the city with Madrid and Cat with Mónica. In her geographical separation from Mónica, distance also imposes the idealized image of a love that never was. Because of distance, Bea idealizes Mónica, who she cannot erase from her memory: "Al principio de llegar a Edimburgo la imagen de Mónica me perseguía, implacable, allá donde yo fuera. Todas las chicas de la calle se parecían, por milagro, a ella" (68). She makes an exerted effort to forget her, realizing that this association is part of her nostalgia: "había llegado allí exclusivamente para olvidarla, así que hacía ímprobos (e inútiles) esfuerzos por desterrar su imagen de mi imaginación" (68-69). It is only at the end of the novel when Bea visits Mónica in a rehab clinic on a farm outside Madrid that Bea realizes that her desire for her was illusory, thus ending her idealized representation of her:

Cuanto más la miro y pienso en la persona fascinante que una vez fue, más me cuesta comprender que se haya convertido en esta especie de campesina regordeta de manos rudas. Comprendo que es absurdo volver sobre las pisadas del tiempo para intentar hallar lo perdido más

allá de las grietas que se abran en la memoria, porque la vida sigue, y el destino trama sus intrincadas redes, y lo que buscábamos ha seguido creciendo y nunca más será lo que era, excepto en el recuerdo. (336)

This reunion with Mónica also marks a rupture with the past. As Ramblado points out, “La ruptura definitiva con el pasado no es representada solamente en la futura huída, de nuevo, a Escocia, sino también en la disolución completa de toda relación emocional previa, incluyendo el vínculo materno.” When she sees Mónica in her sorry state at the rehabilitation clinic, the definitive rupture is furthered. To comment on the change in course of their relationship, Bea uses another outer space metaphor: the distant star and how its light takes millions of years to reach us, so many that it could have died millions of years before the time that we see it. “Al despedirme de Mónica comprendo que todo aquel amor que he mantenido vivo durante cuatro inacabables años no ha sido más que la luz de una estrella muerta” (337). The light from an “estrella muerta” is also what Bea sees when her mature self confronts elements of her past when she returns to Madrid. Subjects like Bea appear incapable of feeling love because of memories of a troubled past, which makes the lost love even more despondent. Love or a perceived love sometimes give the illusion of making oneself complete or making one disappear or metamorphose into another being. With both Mónica and Cat, Bea escapes or disappears from the troubles that her past with her mother had caused. Cat and Mónica thereby become the more tangible focuses of her pain that stemmed from a broken past. Like *Beatriz, Tokio ya no nos quiere* also explores how we escape our pain; it is another physiological and

psychological survey of memory and forgetting, and of getting over pain in a disorienting attempt at reconstructing identity.

Like Bea, the narrator-protagonist of *Tokio* (Él) has the memories of his lost love, who he refers to simply as Ella, and their time in Tokyo etched into his soul. Él is an agent for a transnational company, known simply as the Company or “la compañía,” that sells chemical substances known as memory eroders that are designed to eliminate both long-term and short-term memory.<sup>84</sup> Ella is the object of his memory that plagues him to the point of desperation and overdose because, despite his efforts, he cannot erase her. In his desperate consumption of sex and drugs to distract himself from the memory of her, we witness Él as a subject lost in time and space. Loriga’s novel questions the notion of identity in a society where just about everything, including oblivion, can be bought. It creates a not-too-distant futuristic world on the verge of apocalypse whose subjects appear indifferent and devoid of substance in their lost search for love and meaning.

The novel’s meditation on a dystopian future, a metaphorical projection of contemporary reality, and its presentation of how technology (in the form of the memory eroders that Él sells) can be used to modify memory links it with science fiction. Loriga uses this genre’s techniques—for example, the quick, sometimes “verb-less” prose that Philip K. Dick uses in his science fiction novel *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), shares some similarities to Loriga’s sparse, minimalist prose in *Tokio*—to explore symptoms of collective amnesia and hyper-consumption.<sup>85</sup> Loriga’s narration can be described by its schizophrenic apparition of images that

appear in brief sections that serve to emphasize the fragmented perception of reality characterized by the ups and downs, the blending of memory and actuality, past and future, which come together in a disjointed stream. Colmeiro describes the context of Loriga's novel by mentioning the accelerating pace of history and the subsequent withdrawal of memory, the homogenizing effects of economic and cultural globalization (indicative of Spain's inclusion in the European Union), which have affected consumption patterns that now have greater bearing on the conception of national identities (247). He points out that the novel, through its portrayal of the erasure of memory, also reflects a process of cultural homogenization that takes place on a universal scale and erases identities. The refusal of the past and the future, characterized by ÉI's selling of "oblivion" and Ella's fear of the future, goes along with being settled in the present in a way in which they and others are turned into global, homogenized consumers, what Colmeiro calls "desconciados, desmemoriados y desidentificados de sí mismos" (154). Because memory is a building block of identity, the destruction of his memory warps ÉI's sense of who he is by leaving him with an *almost* blank slate to create his future. Yet, it becomes apparent that his past is important in determining his future. Throughout his exploits, he narrates an atmosphere of temporal and geographic uncertainty symptomatic of the sensory overload produced by a world in flux.

The apocalyptic tone that pervades the novel gives the reader the sense of the failure of the deregulated, globalized economy that appears as part of the problem in the uncertainty surrounding the novel's events. This dark tone is exemplified by ÉI's

constant reference to airplane crashes; the airways in the novel appear way too crowded as planes and helicopters seem to be flying lower and lower and accidents occur wherever he wanders. Colmeiro associates the dark tone of Loriga's novel with the material conditions of society plagued by the adverse effects of late capitalism and a post-national and post-industrial complex. The dark tone also presents the potential of a complete neoliberal triumph which would threaten to erase cultural particularities and the memory of a past, seemingly suggesting Armageddon: "El apocaliptismo de la novela acentúa sobre todo la pérdida de la identidad y la desaparición del pasado, o lo que es igual, de la memoria del pasado" (249). Part of this apocalyptic tone is brought on by the uncertainty that is endemic to a more universal finisecular doubt embodied in Ella's mysterious identity and Él's journey across the world in an attempt to forget her. The entire novel seems to be directed to Ella, and in many ways it is like an open letter to her not unlike Bea's diary in *Beatriz*. The mystery of Ella's existence and location (if she is still alive) describes the uncertainty of the times in which he lives. On the first page, Él narrates: "He pasado por tu casa pero me han dicho que no estabas, me han dicho que estabas en otra parte, en Tokio. Hace años que se fue. Eso es lo que me han dicho. No me sorprendería que fuera cierto" (11). This uncertainty with regard to her location also relates to a confusion concerning the perception of time and memory.

The novel is a revelation of two opposing ideas of memory and the passing of time: Ella's fear of the future and Él's of the past. It also portrays two opposing technologies of memory: the perseverance of memory represented by Ella, as she

writes incessantly keeping track of her memories on napkins and letters to herself, and the attempt to free oneself from memory by taking drugs in *Él*'s case. Loriga illustrates how the memory erosions are both cures and poisons, but the bottom line is that they bring a confused sense of past and illustrate a collective history typified by forgetting.<sup>86</sup> Colmeiro also states, "La gran paradoja que presenta la novela es que una sociedad, como un individuo, que se queda sin pasado y sin identidad, acaso también queda sin futuro y sin posibilidades de encontrarse a sí misma" (259). I argue that the fears of past and future do not compensate for each other, and that is why Tokyo does not love them anymore. This irreconcilability of the idea of memory reflects humanity's inability to communicate. In a society where so much technology is dedicated to preserving and transferring memory (computers and the internet), an excess of memory is part of the problem for subjects like *Él* because too much information spurs the drive to forget. Because of the excesses of memory, there seems to be a lack of authentic connection between people. Txetxu Aguado marks this disconnection as part of an "emotional anesthesia" (75). The irreconciliation of their perception of memory, like that of a split in love, is akin to a miscommunication, a message from afar that does not reach the receiver. The novel might indirectly suggest that Spain, at the millennium, is somewhere between this fear of the past represented by *Él* and a preoccupation with the future represented by *Ella*. Fear of the past is reflective of a fear of the contemplation of Spain's ultra-traditional and violent past during the Civil War and Francoism while the fear of the future could allude to Spain's breaking of ties with the past in order to become part of a new Europe. This



uncertainty of time and the passing of it dislodge the relationship that Él maintains with Ella. In this way, their lost love is a vehicle to contemplate Spain's approach into the new millennium.

In addition to time, space is another vector that Él must negotiate in his reevaluation of the past—a past in which Tokyo becomes not only a place but an indistinct time that symbolizes his love and experience with Ella. And they see this time differently. During a flashback, he recalls that when they were together she said, “Yo no estoy en Tokio todo el tiempo, estoy también en las ciudades en las que estaré luego. Tú en cambio estás en Tokio como si no hubieras estado nunca en otro sitio.” This statement makes him reflect, “¿Quién sabe cómo serán las cosas después de Tokio?” She has plans to have a house and children with Él, but his fear of this potential future causes apprehension. This insecurity is symbolized by him never being in their photos and makes him ask himself, “¿No es, en medio del amor, el amor mismo lo que uno más teme?” (221). In his imaginings, he cannot see his possessions in the non-existent house that she dreams. For him, Tokyo is an instant, a moment frozen in time, without a concern for neither the future nor a worry about the past. Tokyo is a vacation in which he would like to live forever but cannot. While having sex, he ejaculates into her diaphragm and realizes that she is no longer trying to have a baby with him; her fear of an uncertain future with Él has provoked the end of their Tokyo. It is at this point that their relationship comes completely undone.

Tokyo is in many ways one of the archetypal cities that typifies the sense of detachment in terms of its interpersonal relationships and collective memory that the

globalized information age has brought about. In an interview with Richard Marshall, Loriga speaks about the inspiration that Tokyo had upon his work: “the title of the novel was taken from my feelings I had when I was there, that you are both there and not there at the same time.” Loriga says that he “came back with the feeling” that he “hadn’t been there at all.” The sense of being and not being in a place is similar to that which one has in a long-distance relationship in which one’s body may be in one place but their mind in another. This shifting between places is also akin to shifting between times—memory and a projection of a potential future together erased by feelings of guilt or jealousy. The idea that Tokyo doesn’t love them (us) anymore (as the title of the novel suggests) alludes to the apparent disgust with the network society that derives from its perceived paradoxical disconnection exhibited in its megacities, non-places, and the practices of corporations like the pharmaceutical company that Él works for. The title also suggests a nostalgia for the future, as Colmeiro indicates (259). This notion has greater effect in the Spanish version of the title as “ya” implies not only “anymore,” as indicated by the English translation, but could connote *already* or *yet*, marking a strange blend of times that takes place in an era when memory is created so fast in a sort of information overload.

Through its depiction of memory and forgetting, *Tokio* creates a new space and time, that of a projected twenty-first century in which megacities (nodes) are interconnected in the globalized economy. The novel illustrates the interconnectivity of a global society through Él’s numerous business deals while revealing the perverse absurdity of a transnational capitalist informational society and the potential

disconnection that it provokes. The action of the novel spans three continents and eight countries, and is thereby evocative of our current understanding of globalization. ÉI witnesses border conflicts in the desert of Arizona, the effects of what has been called the “Asian tiger” economies in Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia; he attempts to reorient his memory in a futuristic Tokyo, a reunified Berlin, and a cosmopolitan Madrid as seen in his stroll down the Gran Vía. The city of Tokyo is a textbook example of the nodes or the centers of control that coordinate activities and connect to form the globalized economy within which ÉI and the Company work. Castells notes that not only do megacities articulate the global economy and connect informational networks; they also are the depositories of the marginalized. They are connected to other nodes around the globe but nevertheless are disconnected from the populations of the interiors of their own nations (436). Castells summarizes this sentiment by stating, “[i]t is this distinctive feature of being globally connected and locally disconnected, physically and socially, that makes mega-cities a new urban form” (438). It is this local disconnection that describes a world lacking intimacy in which detachment from lovers is so possible as illustrated in Loriga’s novel.

This disconnection, in a world where intimacy seems nearly impossible, is also reflected in the multinational corporation that employs ÉI. The Company appears to have tentacles that tighten their grasp on agents like him, and suffocates their identities. Hardt and Negri borrow from Foucault to note that in this age of “Empire” we have shifted from a disciplinary society to a society of control. In the new society, mechanisms of command such as the Company “become ever more ‘democratic,’

ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens.” Power is exercised through machines (communications systems, informational networks) and bodies (welfare systems, monitored activities) “toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and the desire for creativity” (23). This “state of autonomous alienation” in which *Él* operates gives us a cold, distanced perspective of his interaction. We also see a new look at transportation, community, and business travel in the novel. *Él* operates within a network system that is akin to what Castells calls “a social organization aiming at the supersession of space and the annihilation of time” (502). In many ways, he is his own boss but he is subject to the Company’s numerous drug tests and inquiries regarding his sales diary; we can see a reorganization of power but it is one that leads *Él* to question his identity, which is later put in danger when he is suspended by the Company. As a result of his suspension, an agent for the company gives him the bad news that he will have the denomination SAQI imprinted on his identification. SAQI stands for “sospecho de actividad química ilegal, lo que le hace legalmente susceptible de retención, registro y deportación en todas las fronteras del mundo libre” (236). Thus the Company can control the fluidity through which he passes through the world’s borders while it also erases his identity. As Colmeiro points out, “La compañía farmacéutica multinacional funciona aquí como metáfora de la globalización capitalista, de su implantación universal, y de sus efectos destructores sobre las culturas locales y las identidades que pierden el nexo común de la memoria” (250).

This control of identity is important in the movement across the world that creates a new sense of identity for ÉL.

In the network society depicted in Loriga's novel, we can also see the homogenization of spaces that the traveling elite (such as ÉL) frequent. The loss of space, through the processes of homogenizing globalization, creates what geographers such as Marc Augé and Tim Cresswell have called "non-places" which extenuate the sensation of loss that ÉL and other lost subjects experience. Despite the diverse, international settings of the novel, not much of the landscape seems to change because most of his time is spent in non-places such as hotels and airport lounges that tend towards deterritorialization and dehistoricization. These non-places, which tend to attract younger generations and are constructed for the rapid circulation of people and commodities, underscore an overwhelming sense of impermanence in the novel that illustrates the emotional disconnection that humans have with perceived memories of their pasts and what is "real." Augé, in *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995), theorizes, "[i]f a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (77-8). In *On the Move* (2006), Cresswell adds to this definition saying that "[n]on-places include motorways, airports, supermarkets—sites where particular histories and traditions are not (allegedly) relevant—unrooted places marked by mobility and travel" (44). They also reveal, as Néstor García Canclini points out in *Consumers and Citizens* (1995), "a decrease (but not the disappearance) of the

distinctive favor of the deterritorialized and the dehistoricized” (73). The airport bars and hotel lounges that *Él* frequents do not have a historical specificity that could connect them with an identity. These non-places represented in the novel are analogous of those places lost in time because non-places are constructed in order to erase differences between cultures and to eradicate any trace of the past that would associate them with a particular identity thereby concealing the rootlessness of postmodern society. Augé’s thesis is that “supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity,” one that preserves the temporalities of place, “do not integrate the earlier places” or what he calls ““places of memory”” (78). In these non-places, identity takes on a completely different meaning because they are places where one can be anonymous and erase memories of disturbing pasts. *Él* calls these places sites without memory: “No hay nada mejor que beber en el bar de un hotel, también puede uno beber tranquilo en los aviones y en los aeropuertos y en todos los otros sitios sin memoria” (131-32). The non-places in the novel present a scathing portrayal of the precarious state of memory and a shallow identity within contemporary society. This new world of supermodern times is a world “surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral,” as Augé notes (78). In the ubiquity of these non-places, we can see that shifts in global politics have created armies of losers like *Él*, who in his anonymity exemplifies a typical member of the empire of subjects lost in the world.

Non-places form chains and paradoxically link the world in a way that disconnects it. Hotels function as ÉI's office; they are transient places for transient people, his perfect clients. As non-places, hotels are both connected and disconnected from the environments in which they reside. They are disconnected in the sense that a room in the Grand Hyatt Berlin might look exactly the same (even have the same temperature) as one in the Grand Hyatt Beijing even though the atmosphere and climate outside the hotel is completely different and reflective of different cultures. Hotels are connected to their environments in the sense that more and more of the world (particularly its megacities like Berlin or Beijing) reflects this "sameness." For example, one could spend years travelling and never really know the world outside of the non-places. This is reflected in the novel when ÉI travels to warmer places (Southeast Asia, for example) and some of the rooms are freezing; because of the air conditioning he has to open the window so that the heat can come in; the power to alter climates and create cold in the tropics due to industrialization and economic development refers to human beings' capacity to easily shift our environments, rendering our surroundings irrelevant both in geographic and temporal terms. When ÉI travels, there is a complete disconnect between his hotel rooms and the realities around him. Augé notes that this supermodern world is one "where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity)" (78). This leads Augé to the conclusion that the "traveler's space may thus be the archetype of *non-place*" (86). This non-

place describes the space of ÉI and his wanderings in terms of his business trips. The idea of the non-place can also refer to his use of drugs; devoid of memory, ÉI's body has become like a non-place. By taking drugs, he also engages in spatial divergences, movements appropriate to describe a lost subject. The parlance for describing the effects of drug use among those who use drugs—expressions such as “getting high,” “rolling,” or “tripping”—also connote a wanderl[o]st, a movement out of control like the one ÉI experience. Like the lost subjects of my previous chapter, who wander great distances without ever leaving Havana, taking psychedelic hallucinogens and sensory-altering chemical substances can take the user many places without ever having to leave his/her home.

Augé speaks of the coexistence of worlds in relation to travel, and in the case of *Tokio*, it could refer to the world of memory and non-memory and being with Ella or not being with her. This confusion of space and identity characterizes our age and defines these travelers as lost. ÉI wanders from one client desperate to erase memory to another in his own attempt to erase his memory. It is not only through the memory-eroding drugs that he sells but through movement that he tries to erase memory and to bring his Tokyo to oblivion. In a world with constant movement, one can take part in illicit activity and avoid being identified by constantly moving. Mobile people make perfect candidates for forgetting because they have a lot of life to leave behind. Above all, non-places such as hotels are disconnected from emotion and reality; therefore, they are where one can be anonymous. One can also engage in illicit emotions or activities associated with “no-tell motels,” further perpetuating their



anonymity, yet in a wayward fashion. In a strange way, the non-place has come to mean place within the network society, and this gives us a strange perception of the memoryless present and the passing of time.

The “memorylessness” provides a strange blend of past, present, and future, all of which can be indistinguishable from the others. Paul Virilio’s *A Landscape of Events* (2000) begins: “For God, *history is a landscape of events*. For Him, nothing really follows sequentially since everything is co-present” (x). This is important because it illustrates that the past has started to overlap into the present. As Virilio states, “the past, far from disappearing, from being erased by the present, continues to weigh it down—worse, to secretly contaminate it” (xii). The past contaminates the future; Ella and her fear of forgetting also indicate a potential omnipresence of past, which also alludes to an eternal present, bogged down by the past. Andreas Huyssen in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2004) states: “the boundary between past and present used to be stronger and more stable than it appears to be today.” Not so long ago, “the discourse of history was there to guarantee the relative stability of the past in its pastness” but “history was also the *mise-en-scène* of modernity” (1). Part of modernity’s move toward emphasizing history’s role in the eternal present can be felt in the acceleration of time in this hyper-paced information age as global capitalism and an image-based society have made an impression on our perception of time. This phenomenon characterizes the age of mass media and is produced by the immediacy and quantity of images and

information (history happening *in the moment*) transmitted requiring rapid (instantaneous) consumption.

In capitalism's attempts to free itself from constraints, revolts against time have characterized the history of the past. In this vein, Castells describes the notion of "timeless time," which is "the result of the negation of time, past and future, in the networks of the space of flows" (507). This concept seems particularly relevant to describe ÉI and Ella's "time" in *Tokio*. Timeless time appears in the instant gratification of the drugs that the characters take as it meets head on with the long pain of suffering. This analogy illustrates a disparate imagining of time as despite efforts to maintain an eternal present, one is not able to forget a scarred past. David Harvey, in his influential work *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990), theorizes the "time-space compression" in order to represent current transformations in capitalism such as the global deregulation of finance and the availability of new information technologies. Castells adds, "[f]or the first time in history, a unified global capital market, *working in real time*, has emerged" (465). This means that the speeds of financial markets "are based on making value out of the capture of future time in present transactions." Therefore, "capital not only compresses time: it absorbs it, and lives out of (that is, generates rent) its digested seconds and years" (466). In the case of ÉI and Ella, they rent rooms by the hour in the love hotels of Shinjuku, and these rooms recreate other times and places through a manipulation of the environment, not unlike how financial markets are manipulated by those speculating in the currencies and other derivative capital markets. Cresswell notes that non-places (like these love

hotels in Loriga's novel) are "often spaces of transit" and "refer to other places without taking you there" (244). As a result, ÉI and Ella's time together becomes a timeless time. The love hotels make a business out of "love" and compress "love" by compressing time, making it measurable in dollars or in yen, and this "compression of love" is part of the disintegration of their relationship concurrent with the destruction of financial markets. It also eventually makes them lose love becoming lost lovers. She is quite literally lost as it is impossible for ÉI to locate her, and he wanders lost because of this impossibility and that of not being able to forget her.

In his lost search, his quest for forgetting, ÉI becomes aware of an eternal present. By trying to erase the pain of memory, the memory comes back to him with all of its sorrow further intensified by his attempts to erase it. ÉI's memory of Ella that is ingrained into him is timeless palpably in the past because he can get her back; his attempts to erase it in his transient existence are short-lived. Much in the same way, Castells comments on the network society's search for an eternal present tense, remarking time's new forms: simultaneity and timelessness (491). This *presentness* is evident in *Tokio* as the text often minimizes the distance between the time of narration and the chronological time of the events that are being narrated. This also reduces ÉI's perception of reality and his conscience upon which nothing appears to leave any marks. Part of this presentness can be observed in the use of the present perfect tense. In a number of sections, ÉI's use of this tense is almost exclusive as he utilizes it to describe drugged-out states and his constant movements. Here is a snippet from one of the sections: "Me he bebido una botella pequeña de whisky que

llevaba en la bota. Me he metido medio gramo de cocaína. Me he tumbado en la hierba del parque frente a la biblioteca, pero luego, enseguida, me he levantado y me he ido” (136-37). The present perfect is effective because it describes what he did in a not-too-distant past and its effect leading into the present. We also have to keep in mind the pace of his narration because he must narrate before he forgets (which is a constant possibility considering his occupation and the quantities of drugs and memory eroders he consumes) just as the world around us goes so fast we have to narrate it quickly, succinctly, without wasting a word before something else happens.

Most of the novel is narrated in the present tense because someone without memory could not write a memoir in the past tense. As *Él* mentions episodes, a page or two later he will forget them not remembering people or actions. Temporally speaking, he narrates *in situ*, in the moment, just as he lives his life, yet the past and the future plague his thoughts. The short, incomplete sentences mimic the jagged existence of his life in a society with whirlwind changes. The narrator’s stream of events gives us a confused notion of the progression of time, which also simulates the effects of being on drugs. Colmeiro notes that in the same way that one fear neutralizes another, *Él* takes one drug to numb the pain of another (254). The amphetamines speed up his life causing pain and an epileptic episode that he erases using his memory erosions. As a result of the constant shifting between a life sped up and then pacified with memory eroders, the drugs wear him out. At one point he notes: “Mi cabeza vuelve a ser incapaz de soportar toda la química que mi corazón necesita” (138). With drugs, he can never kill the pain that his memories cause him.

Él deceptively appears hollow, floating, living on the edge of his feelings. He has constant *déjà vu*, emphasizing his eternal present (66). This difficulty to remember or being overwhelmed by the ability to remember represents the blur that is modern life full of sound bytes. As he notes, “[u]n hombre sin memoria ve constantemente imágenes del futuro” (81). The entire novel, like the times we live in, distorts our sense of time’s progression, twisting past, present, and future, memory and the moment. The attempts to alter memory, through the use of drugs and other forms of escape, relates to the manipulation of time that Castells sees as a recurrent theme in the Information Age. He sees the changing perceptions of time that we witness in an era in which memory and past can be controlled because contemporary society appears “obsessed with the binary reference to instantaneity and eternity: me and the universe, the Self and the Net” (493). The binaries of instantaneity and eternity are reflected in the novel by its attempts to be both *in the moment* and a lasting reflection of that moment. The duality of time, associated with the individual-network society bipolarity thus marks the paradoxical situation of the individual that is caught within being part of the interconnected network society (being in the moment) while also attempting to find an identity within it (finding lasting meaning).

The excesses of memory and forgetting presented in Loriga’s novel are symptoms of an information overload that characterize the globalized society in which we live. Colmeiro comments this sensory overload in relation to the omnipresent movement in the novel in the form of massive displacements of immigrants, the travelling agents of the Company, and changing business flows and

their effects on memory: “El desplazamiento constante, el ritmo vertiginoso, y el empacho audiovisual de imágenes e informaciones, no favorecen precisamente la conservación de la memoria, sino el continuo desplazamiento de una memoria y su apresurada sustitución por otra nueva, lo cual conlleva en definitiva su rápido olvido” (252). For Él and other subjects of his time, the only way to deal with the sensory overload is through drugs, an element that both further extenuates the overload while also presenting the possibility of numbing it. Drugs offer new experiences to supplant old, uncomfortable memories. By relying on chemical substances to alter their moods, to “deal with” reality, subjects of this consumerist orgy are becoming like cyborgs. One uses psychoactive drugs and recreational drugs to temporarily get away from oneself, to feel comfortably numb. By losing themselves, subjects get disoriented; for the user, this disorientation ostensibly seems the most apt way to get through what at times seems like a sick society. Thus we have an endless cycle of desperation that typifies the consumerist society and its consumers as typified by the users of recreational drugs.

This endless cycle is exemplified in lyrics from Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes’s “Felicidade” that appear in the novel: “La tristeza no tiene fin, la felicidad sí” (17).<sup>87</sup> These words remind us that our pain is ingrained into us and that we carry it with us; we can temporarily numb the pain with happiness in the form of drugs and carnival, but the pain will linger. Sadness, our memory of pleasure or *jouissance*, never ends, but happiness—that moment of satisfaction (Ella, in this case)—does end leaving behind an imprint that is impossible to erase. This pleasure is the enjoyment

that comes from suffering, the punishment for what we have done in order to enjoy. The sadness never changes; Ella (or the memories of her) never leaves Él. While seeking pleasure in the red light district of Bangkok, Khao San Road, Él says to himself, “Ahora el placer es la primera y la única de mis prioridades;” “puedo olvidar la imagen de la mujer, tu imagen, cada vez que aparezca” (128). With money in his pocket and the ability to make more by selling all of the chemicals that he has, he can be free of the reality made from knowledge of his past: “Ahora puedo vivir los días, uno tras otro, y olvidarlos, uno tras otro, para que no estorben. Ahora sé que mañana, pase lo que pase, no habrá pasado nada” (133). This attempt at complete oblivion also makes him re-acquaint himself with the fear waiting behind the euphoria of forgetting. He is like many of his clients; they want to forget a loved one that is no longer part of their lives, but when that pain is gone, what is left? “Forgetting” (through the use of memory eroders) is an attempt to completely live in the present without ties to the past. For example, one of his clients wants to forget a man that she had lost, “y no entiende qué puede haber de malo en olvidar lo que al fin y al cabo ya no se tiene.” This woman had never taken memory-eroding drugs before, and Él has to justify it for her because, for those who have never “forgotten,” “no pueden disumular el temor a que haya algo diabólico en nuestras erosiones químicas de memoria, por más que sea evidente, y así se lo digo, que es el recuerdo, no el olvido, el verdadero invento del demonio” (148). Remembering is what torments the lovers who have lost love but it is also what makes them. Memories are the traces left by someone else. By erasing memories of the lost love through the use of chemical

substances, ÉI and his clients exhibit how they live in a world that could potentially be devoid of meaning.

The intensity of his wild lifestyle of mind-eroding drugs in which we can see the human body as connected to modern technology connects ÉI's narration to David Cronenberg's science fiction film *Crash* (1996).<sup>88</sup> The movie's focal point is Vaughan and his project of "getting off" sexually on the violent spectacle of car crashes. The more intensely disturbing the car crash is, the more he becomes sexually excited. At one point, the main character, James Ballard, asks, "What exactly is your project? A book of car crashes? A medical study? Sensational documentary? Global traffic?" Vaughan responds, "It is something we are all intimately involved in. The reshaping of the human body by modern technology." Later on, Vaughan clarifies this statement explaining that it is a study in psychopathology, one that I see as a study in the intense experiences that shape our minds. He asks, "Why is it satisfying? It's the future. The car crash is a fertilizing rather than a destructive event, a liberation of sexual energy, mediating the sexuality of those who have died with an intensity that's impossible in any other form." Living this intensely and finding desire in atrocity is akin to what ÉI experiences. He attempts to reshape his body (or his memory) through the use of technology (memory eroders). He lives intensely with the drugs in order to forget but even though he lives so intensely, he will always remember Ella. He is never quite able to supplant more intense memories that become as instinctual to him as Ella does. The intensity of the memory of his lost love Ella surpasses the intensity



the memory erosions that he sells, the other recreational drugs that he takes, and the prostitutes with whom he sleeps.

The modification of our bodies (through the use of drugs both legal and illegal) leaves us with some ethical questions, which are especially pertinent in the case of the subjects in this novel that have altered their memories, and consequentially, their realities. Sexuality has been manipulated by implants, and pills such as birth control or Viagra, much in the same way that pain is controlled and regulated by the consumption of goods on the market. In *El cuerpo transformado* (2001) Naief Yehya remarks that the relationship between the body and technology is affected by the context of a voracious international free market economy (14). The free market economy has made it not only possible to alter the consumer's sensory parameters but, by constantly reinforcing the desire to buy, it has promoted the consumption of these types of mind and body-altering products to the point of supersaturation. Yehya, for example, gives the example of when the pharmaceutical company Pfizer put Viagra on the market it did not go through the usual channels that pharmaceutical companies use to promote products (by passing it out among doctors) but rather by directly targeting the consumers bombarding them with television ads. This radically altered the way that impotency and sexuality were perceived by the general public (63). With a quick, easy fix such as Viagra, it became much easier to solve problems of intimacy. Through the use of a pill, one does not have to seek out real solutions that require effort or sacrifice. The same can be said of the memory erosions that É1 sells. They are a quick fix, perfect for a society of impatience,

seemingly based more on quick sound-bites than lasting meaning. It is not coincidence that I equate the respective potentials of Viagra and the memory erosions because much of what people want to erase are frustrated intimacy and sexuality related to a lost love. When a better sex life (through the use of Viagra) or a happier guilt-free, pain-free life (through the use of memory erosions) is attainable, the average consumer will set out for it. But later they are bombarded by all the possibilities. How does the modern subject deal with the sensory overload of a consumer society? In many cases, they cannot and are thereby relegated to becoming lost subjects like those in Loriga's novel because as their memory is obliterated, their identity becomes lost. Faced with a lack of identity, many subjects lose faith in others, in themselves, and in society. They have become dislodged physically and psychologically. In addition, by taking these chemical substances, the subjects of these novels are radically altering their outlook. Thus we can see the numerous ethical questions presented with the use of memory erosions and their potential. We can also see how they represent a vehicle for a subject to "get lost." The memory erosions and the act of controlling memory are fundamentally part of a medicated society that is conditioned to consume quick fixes yet never really looks into the deeper implications and real solutions to the problems. Therefore, subjects such as those in Loriga's novel might become derailed as a result of society's transnational capitalism which sprouts a consumerist orgy that does away with connections between human beings.

Because the memory eroders that Él sells are supposed to make his clients forget, this does not make the people that take them that different from people who

excessively use “real” drugs and alcohol. The idea that one could take a memory erosion and not remember taking it because that memory too was erased suggests that we might all be under the influence of “memory erosions” or that our minds and our memories can be controlled by extraneous sources, which is a troubling prospect. That memory can become a commodity is indicative of a world bent by consumerism and also suggests a finisecular clean-up of memories related to the twentieth century’s history of violence. Controlling society by altering memory is a recurring subject in science fiction in its imagining of a future. For example, in Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982), a film that pits replicants (androids) against Blade Runners, the bounty hunters who eliminate them, the protagonist discovers that the corporation that manufactures replicants implants memory into them so as to make them more human.<sup>89</sup> Resina see this film “as an allegory for the recent clash of memories in Spain” (8). This brings up the fundamental question: Does erasing memory make one less human? Other questions that this film points to, as Resina indicates, are: “Whose memories are genuine and whose implanted?” or “is forgiveness of the original sin of Fascism the same as rehabilitation?” (8). These questions lead to the idea that a state could dehumanize its subjects and thereby control them by erasing their memories, such as the case in Francoism’s efforts at *desmemoria* in Spain that sought to erase separatist movements such as those of the Basques, Catalonians, and Galicians which were based on long histories of cultural and linguistic differences.

In his dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1932), Aldous Huxley heralds the prospect that feelings, actions, and memory can be controlled by the State,

particularly through the use of chemical substances. Loriga follows the direction that Huxley signals in his portrayal of a world at the millennium that is dealing with memories of a collective, brutal past. In the futuristic, nightmarish utopia that Huxley imagines, emotions and pain associated with desire and monogamous relationships are eliminated. This is part of what the memory eroders in Loriga's novel do. Being alone without Ella is the greatest horror and nightmare for Él. Ella's absence makes it apparent how deep his love for her is. Not even memory eroders can solve this problem even though he tries. In Huxley's novel, *Mustapha Mond*, the Alpha-Plus World Controller, notes, "The greatest care is taken to prevent you from loving any one too much" (182). In the case of *Tokio*, not loving too much could prevent the pain that Él has in his attempt to forget Ella. Soma, the drug that the inhabitants of Huxley's *Brave New World* take in order to escape from reality and the pain associated with it, also suppresses thought, presenting a poignant way of controlling the ideas of the masses. In *Brave New World Revisited*, in a discussion of how religion is like society's opium or in the case of his novel, Huxley states that like religion, soma "had power to console and compensate, it called up visions of another, better world, it offered hope, strengthened faith and promoted charity" (56). Huxley alludes to the political potential of a substance such as memory eroders by stating "[t]hat a dictator could, if he so desired, make use of these drugs for political purposes is obvious. He could ensure himself against political unrest by changing the chemistry of his subjects' brains and so making them content with their servile condition" (60). Drugs therefore become the way that the lost subjects in Loriga's

novel cope with their sad status; it must be noted, however, that their choice to take drugs is not forced upon them as in the case of religious or political dogma. Aguado states, “Frente a una realidad, o frente a una verdad que no pueden soportar en su autenticidad, compran olvido de la misma forma que podrían comprar otra mercancía en un mercado globalizado” (75). Therefore, through mass consumption, life begins anew constantly in a way that supplants painful memories or thoughts, precisely the aim for the workers in *A Brave New World*, which is also Él’s aim.

Burying the past makes it bearable to face the future but digging it up makes us human again. The memory erosions and drugs reduce the infinity of the self. We cannot learn if we do not remember our mistakes. With memory erased, people do not know who they really are and they become easier to control. Everybody comes from their pasts, and our respective pasts have a tendency to follow us. It is not destiny or determination; the past represents the conditions that create us. And part of these conditions might be an objection to the desire to live freely like Él who lives promiscuously with exorbitant amounts of drugs and sex. Living without regrets, he loses his identity. This is possible because, without regrets, how else would one recognize their errors or their erring and thereby modify them to become fuller human beings? In pasts, people can find enjoyment in the memory, like when we listen to a song that brings us back to a place. For example, a memory could take Él back to Tokyo; not necessarily the city of Tokyo but the idea or memory of Tokyo that corresponds with his time there with Ella. The difference between this real place and the *idea* of it are like the gaps between our conceptions of desire and enjoyment.

Psychoanalysis marks the difference between desire and enjoyment (*Jouissance*). It is not only a difference, but a split, a division. Enjoyment is not pleasure; pleasure is easier to achieve because most of the time it has more to do with a painful memory that is being suppressed. It is that thing that makes us turn around and around again to find something, a drive, a pleasure, which is like an impulse that we cannot control. For example: ÉI desires to be back with Ella, or at least to the place he was, how he felt, when he was in Tokyo with her. Her memory has a huge effect on what he does and his thoughts as expressed in his narration. Nevertheless, he enjoys, in a painful way, not being with her, which is to say he appears to relish his role as the “left one” or the abandoned loser in a poignant way. It is not clear how their break-up takes place; we are not even sure if Ella is dead or alive or if she really “exists” outside of ÉI’s mind. However, we do know that whatever it is that went on between ÉI and Ella, it is what has spurred the narration of the novel and his ensuing breakdown. Tokyo is this enjoyment, the memory of what they had and it is the loss, the distance between where he is in the narration (usually in a twisted state of drug-deluded chaos) and where he was with Ella (content, confused, but in love). This distance is a lacuna in which we can see the breach between past and present, between memory of what happened and what “really” might have happened. Love is what allows enjoyment to cope with and touch desire and vice versa. Love illustrates our lack, our natural and always-there wound, our loss, making us aware of it and live with it, as in the separation between ÉI and Ella, a schism that will always be there leaving them scarred. The past(s) and memory are good examples to illustrate how love

demonstrates our loss because it is the past that has the biggest existence, the heaviest weight on our souls. The notion that one can erase the past or memory of it brings up the troubling prospect of a slippery parallel dimension between what we remember and what “really” happened, between past and perceived past. Can memories hide so that they can not be found and erased? This is a time of uncertainty and loss because the failure to forget or to remember is the failure to find: it is the condition of being lost.

The opposition between memory and freedom that is created by the desire to forget (or to get lost) seems particularly relevant in the case of a nation facing the crisis between historic memory and collective amnesia that Colmeiro suggests is the case for Spain. Huyssen adds to this rumination on memory and society by stating that “memory discourses are absolutely essential to imagine the future and to regain a strong temporal and spatial grounding of life and the imagination in a media and consumer society that increasingly voids temporality and collapses space” (6). When you take someone’s thoughts or feelings or their memories away, that person will have to confront what to replace them with, if anything at all. And when these manipulated (un)memories intersect, the subject might react with a berserk hysteria. These broken memories make for broken, lost subjects. The world described by *Él* and his position within it has placed him in what Aguado describes as postmemory: “en el tiempo más allá de la memoria como instrumento de conocimiento y ponderación de la realidad” (77). Postmemory can be achieved through the incessant movement from one place to another, from one time to another, wandering from one

hotel room to another, as *Él* attempts. Yet, he cannot forget Tokyo or his relation to the city and his relationship with Ella. The failure to forget can also be seen as the failure to find because typically in a tale about a quest, the object is to find something, but in this case the forgetting or not finding is the goal.

The memory of *Él*'s lost lover persists leaving no resolution despite all efforts to the contrary. With all of the drugs he takes to erase Ella from his mind, he collapses into a fit of aphasia, which leaves him unable to express the situation that goes on around him. He is brought to a clinic in Berlin where they try to recover his memory; he cannot even remember an iconic figure such as Bugs Bunny. The doctors in the clinic take note that he can remember his dreams but the memory disorders that he suffers render him incapable of remembering basic reality. He asks what city he sees outside his window (Berlin) and this is a question he repeats everyday. Everything that his mind constructs is disintegrating at every moment. The doctor diagnoses his condition as the Korsakof syndrome in which his short-term memory is obliterated; *Él* describes his situation as analogous to changing the channels on a television but not remembering what was on the last channel (167). The doctors in the clinic have a hard time establishing the hierarchy in the importance of his memories because he seems to keep memories of Ella hidden from them. She seems so important to him that he will not let them know his secret but it also confounds the process of re-establishing his memory.

*Tokio*'s pivotal moment comes with the last-ditch effort at re-establishing *Él*'s memory, the Penfield Experiment, an exploration of the future of memory and an



attempt to bring Él back to his old memories. This episode is a clear example of the novel's thematic and stylistic intertextual influences, which further create an ambience similar to that of a science fiction film. Through manipulation of Él's body by technology, we witness the disturbing consequences much like those created by the memory eroders that had previously manipulated his mind. The process attempts to bring patients back to their memories by applying electrical stimulus to the cortex of the temporal lobes. The Penfield Experiment is, in many ways, a reprogramming procedure: “[i]mágenes, sonidos, algunas canciones con las que el paciente debe atarse los zapatos del recuerdo y salir andando por encima de sus propias huellas” (190). To narrate this reprogramming procedure, Él utilizes cinematic stylistic devices, which are consistent with the entire novel. These devices are reminiscent of those presented in Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), which portrays a similar procedure as the two protagonists eradicate each other from their memories. The Penfield Experiment is also much like the fictitious “Ludovico technique” presented in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971).<sup>90</sup> *Tokio*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and the previously mentioned *Crash* illustrate the manipulation of body and mind by modern technology, and the disturbing results represent a failed attempt at creating a better society (without memory in the case of *Eternal Sunshine* and *Tokio*). In a similar way, memory can be manipulated by society. With regard to Spain and its political transition to democracy following some forty years of repressed memories of violence under Franco, Resina asks the important question: “Was not the Transition,

[...], the result of tinkering, not only with the state's political and economic structures but also with the official memories of that very process?" (8). The Penfield Experiment—like the memory implantations in *Blade Runner*, the social programming techniques illustrated in the “Ludovico technique” in *A Clockwork Orange*, and the erasure of memory in *Eternal Sunshine*—represents part of a “tinkering” with memory and history in the same vein.

Because of a reciprocal influence of film on novel that is consistent with the style of Loriga's generation of novelists, the processes to achieve this manipulation of the mind are visual, and the descriptions of the Penfield Experiment in *Tokio* follow in this visual aesthetic in order to display the Information Age's alarming potentials.<sup>91</sup> Ella, in *Él*'s recovery of memory, represents the return of repressed memory and the disturbing potential of this return. *Tokio*'s thematic connection with a number of films, both from Spanish and international directors, reveals both a Spanish and an international crisis in memory that takes place while also illustrating Loriga's stylistic use of film's visual aesthetic to portray the shortcomings of a society based on images and sound bytes.

During the Penfield Experiment, *Él* is brought back to where his memory was interrupted and he returns to Tokyo and the love hotels of the city where he celebrated rendezvous with Ella. His return to these episodes in Tokyo's love hotels can be explained by what the doctor describes as the Zeigarnik effect: the confusion of dreams and past lived experiences which make the incomplete episodes of one's past the most likely to remain. This explains why after all of the drug-induced

obliteration of his memory, he still can remember the name of Ella and his time with her (173). Her memory is what persists and what still haunts him because she is a residual tension which is the type of memory that a mind best retains. Therefore, a lost love continues haunting him like a disturbing memory that lingers. Ella must have been a big love because loss can be the measure of love as I posited using Jeanette Winterson's question that opens this chapter. Through this lost love, we can witness how a memory hangs on and a horror continues to affect the present and the future of an individual or even a nation. Nevertheless, Ella and Tokyo can only exist for Él because of the technology, implied symbolically, by the Penfield Experiment. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922) Freud observes that "all neurotic 'pain,'" like the memory of Ella, for example, "is pleasure which cannot be experienced as such" (6). He goes on to state that a dream "continually takes the patient back to the situation of his disaster, from which he awakens in renewed terror" (9). Such a situation occurs in the Penfield experiment. In his look at psychoanalysis, Freud expounds upon "bringing into consciousness of the unconscious," noting that a "patient cannot recall of what lies repressed" (17-18). Therefore, "[h]e is obliged rather to *repeat* as a current experience what is repressed, instead of, as the physician would prefer to see him do, *recollecting* it as a fragment of the past" (18). But this repetition is not a healthy act because the patient is oblivious to the forces that are repressing the memory or resisting it in the present. In "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through," Freud suggests "working through" the resistances of the present in order "to fill in gaps in memory; dynamically speaking, it is to overcome

resistances due to repression” (148). The Penfield Experiment borrows from this idea as *Él* *relives* the key moments that defined the beginning and the end of his relationship with Ella.<sup>92</sup> When *Él* relives his experiences with Ella, he conjures up memories and feelings that had been repressed. In this sense, love that had been obliterated by distance and time can work itself back and become part of his present rather than his past.

It is not coincidence that the Penfield Experiment takes place in Berlin, which symbolizes a scar that tells of Europe’s past and projects a potential future of a new Europe. Comparing Berlin (Germany) and Madrid (Spain), we see two places that were ideologically divided for a long time and were left with scars because of this separation. Colmeiro suggests that the novel’s portrayal of a problematic relationship between memory and technology alludes to how modernization in both Germany and in Spain has served as a way to overcome and repress traumatic and uncomfortable memories (258). In the novel, *Él* observes Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin and calls it “la herida abierta entre las dos viejas Alemanias heladas. Una de las muchas cicatrices de esta ciudad aún agarrada al dolor de la memoria” (239). Berlin represents a unique site of memory as the German capital of (re)unification. Huysen says that “Berlin is a city text frantically being written and rewritten.” It has “left behind its heroic and propagandistic role as flash point of the Cold War and struggles to imagine itself as the new capital of a reunited nation” (49). This is why it is appropriate that *Él*’s memory is rewritten in the German capital. His memory is also, in a certain sense, being erased because while the gaps in his memory caused by the

memory eroders are being filled in the clinic in Berlin, they are also being erased and replaced with potentially “false” memory.<sup>93</sup> Huyssen says of Berlin, “[n]othing less is the goal than to create the capital of the twenty-first century, but this vision finds itself persistently haunted by the past” (52). He goes on to observe that the official slogan of the new Berlin became “BERLIN WIRD—BERLIN BECOMES.” Huyssen asks the question ““becomes what?”” “Since much of central Berlin in the mid-1990s is a gigantic construction site, a hole in the ground, a void, there are ample reasons to emphasize the void rather than to celebrate Berlin’s current state of becoming” (54). These holes that Huyssen mentions are like the gaps in ÉI’s memories. These voids to be filled represent the shifts taking place in Europe and the world as the holes represent the *tabula rasa* for the city, for Germany, for Europe, and the world.

What we observe in the case of *Tokio* are the shifts in modes of thought, of coming to terms with loss. “Berlin seemed saturated with memories,” Huyssen notes, and after the fall of the Wall, “the years since then have also taught us multiple lessons about the politics of willful forgetting” (53). ÉI learns more about “the politics of willful forgetting” in his encounter at the end of the novel with Krumper who represents the preservation of memory, albeit a twisted memory, as he resides both in the body of a twelve-year-old Mexican girl and a television monitor. While the blue light of his monitor is fading, Krumper tells his story of working with the Nazis in the development of chemical agents that destroyed memory. After World War II, being hospitalized and having the bandages removed from his eyes after his face was nearly

blown off, he remembers the occupation troops working on the ruins of a bombed building in Hannover. Memory of his old Germany had been obliterated; the demolition of the past is a construction of the future of Europe. Krumper concludes that “[l]a destrucción del pasado me pareció entonces la única esperanza posible” (258). For Spain, like Krumper, the destruction of the past of Francoism and the schisms that it created in its wake seems the only hope for a future constructing a nation that has become part of a new Europe similar to the one that emerged after World War II and after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

After his days in the Penfield Experiment, *Él* appears scarred, tattooed with images of his past, as his brain is like the rubble left after a war. He heads back to Spain, and watching television, he sees a man whose face is being tattooed, who says, “Pase lo que pase ya nunca podré volver a casa.” Therefore, *Él* concludes, “[e]l miedo que tiene ahora le salvará del miedo del futuro” (243). A tattoo, like a scar, marks a moment in someone’s life; like a growth ring in a tree, it marks a specific time, a memory that cannot be erased. It can also mark a fear or *getting over* a fear by working through it. Thus in many respects, *Tokio*’s project is to confirm a look to the future after being scarred by the past. And this connects to Spain as *Él* describes watching Good Friday processions from around the world in a bar in Madrid. He sees penitents carrying huge wooden crucifixes: “España lava la culpa eterna.” As Spain washes its eternal guilt, which is to say its unavoidable past, this description of an old tradition links to his realization that he is back home, which he says does not mean anything: “Devolverle sus cosas a un amnésico es como mandarle cartas a un ciego”

(244). His detachment from his “home” and being nameless marks Él’s identity void.<sup>94</sup> This ambivalent identity or lack thereof links to a confused and disturbed sense of past marked by his tendency toward oblivion. During his “homecoming,” he asks himself, “¿Nadie podrá nunca detener la fe de este pueblo? ¿Qué demonios mantiene a España clavada en la fe del pasado? La falta de fe en el futuro, seguramente” (244). Thus he proposes that in order to reconfigure a new identity, Spain look ahead rather than behind. During political transitions, such as those in Argentina, Chile, Portugal, and the former Soviet bloc, “[a]n element of ‘forgetting’” was necessary, as Michael Richards suggests, which also “was intrinsic to Spain’s peaceful transition to democracy after Franco” (44). This “forgetting” is also fundamental to getting over a lost love, which is the case for Él. Unfortunately, as Él observes, “[e]l precio para olvidar el horror es un precio muy alto” (28). Forgetting a horror, a trauma, is nearly impossible. Fear, like the irrational fear one has when presented with a food that at one point in the past had made them violently ill or like feeling heat more intensely on a part of your body scarred by a previous branding, is like knowing the horror of the history of violence before you, and knowing that you will never be able to escape it. The years of Francoism will remain in Spain’s memory. *Tokio* suggests that tampering with collective memory is part of constructing an identity or a nation just as manipulating memory, through the use of drugs, is part of the (re)construction of an individual identity. Nevertheless, the process is one that distorts the sense of who we are. Therefore, it seems necessary to work through a past, as Ferrán suggests, following Freud.

At the beginning of this chapter, I used a quote from Jeanette Winterson that posited the “size” of a love being measured by the sense of loss it provoked, the indentation it left on the soul. I do not believe that a love or a loss can be quantified, but the mark that an important love leaves on us does affect us for the rest of our lives. Nobody can leave behind a “true” lost love; it stays with them forever, either physically or as a memory traced onto the soul. In the novels I have analyzed, part of Spain’s so-called finisecular neorealism, we see a poignant portrayal of Spain as it gets over its past. Rupturing with its past and elements of Francoism that still lingered is portrayed through the depiction of getting over a lost love which is in many ways like erasing a past. Bea and ÉI split ways with their lovers and must pay the consequences in order to go on. Their narrations are full of confusion and heartache as they try to erase their pasts but are unable. This is in many ways the predicament that Spain was facing during the 1990s as it attempted to erase a twentieth century full of schism and of broken and lost love. Etxebarria’s *Beatriz* contemplates lost love in relation to Spain’s becoming part of a new Europe through Bea’s broken relationships in Edinburg and Madrid. The lost love in Loriga’s novel spans different cities and continents as it contemplates a new reality within a globally interconnected network society. We can see the direction of (dis)connection in the digital age. In *Beatriz*, the portrayal of Beatriz’s troubled relationships with Cat and Mónica are characterized by a dissociation that is akin to ÉI and Ella’s detached relationship. Fear of the past and anxiety about a future “full of promise,” where everything has already been delivered to them by the convenience of living in a consumer society, plague the



finisecular subjects. Spain confronted its relatively new status at the millennium as part of this globalized, consumerist society and suffered a somewhat bitter separation with what it once was, which is like trying to get over a lost love, in order to contemplate a new horizon that had already arrived.

## Conclusion

### The End of an Era of Losing?

I began this project about wanderl[o]st subjects and losers with inquiries fundamentally related to the plight of the individual in a disturbed world order and the portrayal of those who struggle to get by in this context. I have hypothesized that the state in which many individuals find themselves induces them to wander and to get lost, while the portrayals of these wanderings elucidate the confused state of the world that we inhabit. In a similar way, Henry Miller, in *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* (1957), a book that consists of the author's ruminations on paradise and the artist's place in the world, relates the stories of lost subjects and how they came to find their places in the world through their use of art as transgression. Miller laments that instead of a concept layered in meaning and worthy of rumination, paradise has become more of a fixed idea, thereby weakening its power. This shift is what has made paradise degenerate from myth to taboo; it is also what makes it so unattainable to people despite Miller's suggestion of its alleged proximity. This impossibility of the notion of paradise, Miller suggests, is the result of people making their own hells in this world. He proclaims, "[m]en will sacrifice their lives to bring about a better world—whatever that may mean—but they will not budge an inch to attain paradise. Nor will they struggle to create a bit of paradise in the hell they find themselves. It is so much easier, and gorier, to make revolution, which means to put it simply, establishing another, a different, status quo" (24). Lost subjects struggle against the fixed notion of paradise in their wanderl[o]st. They do not content

themselves with revolution but seek out some form of paradise in their wandering, which is their transgression, their movement, in and out of place(s) that defines their position in the global scope.

Wandering is how lost subjects transgress the limits of what was previously known in order to bring about new realities or potential paradises. Lost subjects, rather than make their own prisons, construct their own paradises within the difficult situations in which they find themselves, which is what makes them venerable despite their “losing.” By “losing,” by wandering lost, the subjects are winning a new kind of freedom within the hells created by others. Lost subjects, in their respective travels throughout the world, attain a freedom from the world’s hindrances not only by moving but by maintaining active minds and spirits free of the hindrances that the world brings upon them. These subjects also negotiate, cope with, and build upon the problems they face, rather like an artist would use raw material in order to survive. Their mission is to find life in a world where complacency is the norm. Miller, towards the end of *Big Sur*, makes reference to a similar mission and to how subjects cope with the imprisoning forces of the world through the use of art and writing. He states: “A man writes in order to get to know himself, and thus get rid of self eventually. [...] To make living itself an art, that is the goal” (400). Lost subjects, in their wandering, make living an art. By questioning their identities and respective historic memories in their wandering, the lost subjects that I portray in this project transgress previously held conceptions of the world and thereby push the always in flux limits of identity.

Being wanderl[o]st, in my conception of the term, is a transgressive project that redefines place identity in a mobile society. Transgressions allow us to conceive, from a distinct angle, what is accepted as “common sense” or “conventional.” Wanderl[o]st subjects, because they live on the margins of society, are part of a recharacterization and broadening of the mainstream. Tim Cresswell, in *In Place/Out of Place* (1996), suggests that “[b]y studying the margins of what is allowed we come to understand more about the center—the core—of what is considered right and proper” (21). Being wanderl[o]st expands the conception of who we are in spatial and temporal dimensions that have an effect on other aspects of who we are—for example, our socio-political, psychological, sexual, and national identities. In this vein, Cresswell surmises that transgression, going beyond the limits of rules related to space or law, literally being out of place, makes the meaning of place change, giving new meaning to it, and making it the place of the other, the transgressor or lost subject (60). As transgressors, the wanderl[o]st subjects thereby change previously held conceptions of the world. While lost subjects begin to occupy more and more of the margins, something I see as endemic to the times, being lost becomes a feature that characterizes the “normal.” Because boundary-making is part of the geographical ordering of society, in both a figurative and literal sense, it leads to the possibilities of transgressions. Lost subjects are thereby redefining who we are as a collective society when they transgress.

The lost subjects are part of what I see as a paradigmatic shift from a society based on collectivity to a one more focused on the individual. Nevertheless, they

serve as cautions against this shift because, through their respective plights, we see a breakdown of values in terms of how we treat our fellow citizens within the shift to the “individual-based” society. I see this change epitomized in the “Ownership Society” propagated by former United States president George W. Bush, though of course it is not an original idea. This philosophy defines various conservative wings of US politics and has an effect on how the US relates to the rest of the world, while it extends to affect how other parts of the world treat each other. By no means is the Ownership Society the exclusive force of change in the shift in thought of the world but it is representative of the change in values of the times. The Ownership Society, as part of a larger world view of conservative ideals that are as old as political philosophy, stresses the importance of personal responsibility, economic liberty, and the owning of property by individuals rather than the state as the fundamental goals of government. This philosophy, fostered by laissez faire economics and enforced by neoliberal policies makes apparent the idea that we (as a collective humanity) are no longer working together as a collective society but rather that we are many “individuals” left to struggle on our own. This downside, the propagation of a me-first attitude, displaces many people (poets, artists, teachers, and others); the lost subjects that I analyze represent those who have lost out because of this change in mindset. Lost subjects represent the remainders, the debris left behind in the shift toward a more self-centered attitude brought on by market-based economics as symbolized by the Ownership Society. They represent the wreckage lingering in a shift to market-based politics and a common struggle to survive within the rubble.

They fight to break free of society's conventions in order to aspire to *a life of their own* and a new path for humanity. This notion is best elucidated by Miller, who notes how individuals signal out new directions for society: "We are in the habit of speaking of 'the last frontier,' but wherever there are 'individuals' there will be new frontiers" (18). In this sense, wanderl[o]st subjects, as "individuals" that seek out new frontiers, are part of a project of broadening our notions of identity. In their wanderings, we see the carving out of new boundaries in our modes of thinking.

Being lost fundamentally links to the times in which lost subjects live; the troubles faced by the lost subjects portrayed in the works I analyze form part of a time period that shapes the regions represented in the texts. In Bolaño's novels, we see how the globalizing economy plays havoc in parts of Latin America; Estévez and Ponte's texts portray shifts to a new reality in post-Soviet Cuba; while Etxebarria and Loriga's novels represent troubled memories stemming from a century of violence and a political transition in Spain. Looking at the history of humanity, these dilemmas are not that much different than troubles faced by many human beings throughout the trajectory of time—reconfiguring identities in an atmosphere of political coups, coping with the scarcity of resources for some and overabundance for others, overcoming injustices that stem from being different, and the struggles related to living as an artist in a world sometimes characterized by intolerance. The uniqueness of the time period represented by the lost subjects that I am working with is found in its supposed interconnectivity, a feature that both binds and divides those that live in it, making the sense of loss even stronger. The beginning of the period that typifies

these lost subjects is represented by the events leading up to Pinochet's coup in 1973, which is part of a paradigmatic shift of events in some parts of Latin America that replace state-oriented management with market-based economies. This shift is also a harbinger of the dictatorships that come to disturb the region, an idea that I theorized earlier using Idelber Avelar's *The Untimely Present*. The authors whose works I approach in this project also reflect upon a period marked by the swing in world politics provoked by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989; the beginning of the post-Soviet period in Cuba is a direct result of this event while re-thinking Europe for Spanish authors is an indirect consequence. These events, the result of changes associated with globalization, reflect an era in which many individuals lose and "get lost."

In order to provide concrete illustrations of the lost subjects that operate in this climate of economic change, I will provide a brief synopsis of the projects of the Zapatistas and the American militia, two "real-life" groups that embody methods in how to transgress the New World Order through movement. Their tactics and ideals share some common general principles with those of my lost subjects, and looking at them will elucidate strategies for surviving in the chaotic world in which we live and make clearer the way I perceive the mission of the lost subjects. In *The Power of Identity* (1997), Manuel Castells, with his insights on information technology and the restructuring of capitalism, considers these groups in his examination of the conflicts that we find ourselves in as we begin the millennium. Within his study of the network society, the twenty-first century counterpart of last century's industrial capitalism and

statism, it is possible to perceive future struggles. Castells takes a diverse look at the planet, indeed exposing a vast multiculturalism in his analysis of resistance movements such as the Zapatistas and the American militia. Castells notes “that the process of techno-economic globalization shaping our world is being challenged” by these groups, and hypothesizes that societies “will eventually be transformed, from a multiplicity of sources” (3). These sources include groups like the Zapatistas and the American militia; I contend that my lost subjects are part of the transformation process.

Part of this change in global dynamic is the shift from that of a class struggle against hegemony to that of the individual struggle against technology and the market. Within interactive telecommunications networks, the opponents of the power of financial markets such as the Zapatistas make use of the enhanced interconnectivity of the network society to propagate their message of opposition.<sup>95</sup> Movements like the Zapatistas or the American militia are indeed, as Castells suggests, “*symptoms of who we are*” (3; my emphasis). The lost subjects that I analyze throughout this project are also a profound indication of the world’s current state. Their representation in literature makes us aware of the horrors brought by globalization that many of the world’s dispossessed experience.

What makes the Zapatista opposition relevant to my project is how their movement uses transgression in a way pertinent to our times. The Zapatistas seem to symbolize and encapsulate the struggles that Latin America has faced for five hundred years and continues to confront. Delegado Cero (also known as



Subcomandante Marcos), the *vocero* or spokesperson of the Zapatistas, and his followers have led a netwar, a revolution for the disenfranchised, landless peasants, abandoned and abused by colonizers, bureaucrats, and settlers. Their struggle against colonization and oppression is pinpointed in their view of NAFTA and the neoliberal policies that it upholds as failing to include peasants and indigenous peoples. Castells points out that the Zapatistas “fight against the exclusionary consequences of economic modernization; but they also challenge the inevitability of a new geopolitical order under which capitalism becomes universally accepted” (77). What makes their movement even more appropriate for the times is its use of the internet, making it the “*first informational guerrilla movement*” (79). In a similar vein, my lost subjects are part of a general project to find order and social justice in the global disorder; they operate within similar historical conditions but they tend towards movement instead of the internet as a vehicle for transgression against the alleged constraints imposed by a transnational capitalist system. Delegado Cero and the band of Zapatistas he has formed, postmodern rebels that are part merry pranksters and mostly serious fighters for land rights, represent transgressive figures characteristic of the times we live in. They break the limitations put upon them at a local level by bringing their message to a more universal stage through their use of media.

The lost subjects that I theorize use the “weapon” of movement as an arm against stagnancy and static policies that exclude them from economic modernization. Delegado Cero, as a sort of a militant performance artist/poet, embodies the lost subjects’ struggle against society’s complacent acceptance of transnational

capitalism's intrusion into the creativity of life. I started this project with the premise that the lost subjects struggle against the notion that totalizing economic/political systems such as transnational capitalism put "everything in its right place." The removal of creativity from daily life, as Cresswell suggests, is a side effect of capitalism (or totalizing systems like it) related to putting people/things in their place (55). Delegado Cero brings hope for a fight against putting everything in its "right place" by means of publicity stunts and organized demonstrations against the injustices of a transnational capitalism. He fights so that even the most downtrodden might have place. Lost subjects use the postmodern guerrilla tactics of the Zapatistas but on a smaller scale. Like Delegado Cero (a published poet), the lost subjects use poetry and art to make their case as illustrated in the textual analyses of this project.

In contrast to the Zapatistas, Castells mentions groups such as the American militia units that use the interconnectivity of the network society not as part of their resistance but rather to inspire fear and withdrawal as a response to it. These militia, who like the Zapatistas, use the internet as their most vital tool to fight against the New World Order, have an appeal in the United States (estimated in 1996) of some five million sympathizers (88). These militia "are the most militant, and organized, wing of a much broader 'Patriot movement,' whose ideological galaxy encompasses established extreme conservative organizations," anti-federal government groups, and the "powerful appeal to Christian Coalition, as well as to a number of militant 'Right to Life' groups, and counts on the sympathy of many members of the National Rifle Association, and pro-gun advocates" (85, 86).<sup>96</sup> What makes them scary is that "they

are [heavily] armed, sometimes with war weapons” (88).<sup>97</sup> The militia members have experienced globalization in a frustrating fashion, which has been the case for the subjects that I analyze in this project, but in different ways.<sup>98</sup> What differentiates the subjects that I look at from their North American counterparts is my lost subjects’ ability to detach and find peace in wandering and their use of art as a transgressive project. Rather than resisting by expounding intolerant xenophobic tendencies as a means to combat the New World Order like the American militia, my lost subjects promote quite the opposite: an unsystematic spirit of cooperation and artistic beliefs based more on poetry and art than on guns and bibles. And this, I believe, is what makes my lost subjects worthy of discussion.

The lost subjects in the texts that I analyze appear to have a drive which aims at being “true” to their “ideals;” this drive leads them to failure but is part of an important unwritten code of honor and is what allows them to transgress the harmful aspects of the global system. While the lost subjects struggle against being put in their “right place” by totalizing economic/political systems, they take positions in a battle that is seemingly lost before it begins, but it is this defeat and their hard work that is their victory. Their efforts are heroic because of the odds against them. By struggling against convention, the set way of doing things, the lost subjects are living the only honest way that they can. In “Absolutely Sweet Marie,” Bob Dylan famously sings, “But to live outside the law, you must be honest.” This honesty in defeat or in living outside the set rules is a significant part of my lost subjects’ mantra. In this way, I see the lost subjects’ defeat as their triumph.

In addition to their work ethic of struggling against all odds, the lost subjects that I analyze are not violent in any way, an element that makes them more worthy in my eye. Their pacificism might induce further “losing,” but it is also what makes them more endearing because of their quest for “honesty” in the Dylan-esque sense of the word. The knowledge of defeat and the plight for integrity are also inherent qualities of literature. In one of Bolaño’s oft-quoted statements on literature, he compares the writer to a samurai:

La literatura se parece mucho a la pelea de los samuráis, pero un samurái no pelea contra otro samurái: pelea contra un monstruo. Generalmente, sabe, además, que va a ser derrotado. Tener el valor, sabiendo previamente que vas a ser derrotado, y salir a pelear: eso es la literatura. (qtd. in Fresán 293)

Although not violent per se, the lost subjects that I analyze are like the samurai in this quote. The monsters, in their cases, represent the evils of the world—the violence and hypocrisy which come about in the political struggle for power and the economic injustices perpetrated to get to power. Knowing that they are going to lose and aiming for this defeat is the lost subjects’ mission. Literature portrays the human details of this battle—the specifics of who, what, where, when, and why—but also presents these “samurai duels” as universal so that each one of us can potentially see ourselves in them.

Don Quixote is the original wandering loser fighting a lost battle which embodies the failure of ideals in the face of “reality.” Don Quixote’s tragedy reaches

a climax in failure in his defeat to the *Caballero de la Blanca Luna* on a beach near Barcelona. Like the estranged hidalgo, the lost poet Belano in *Los detectives salvajes* has a duel somewhere on the Catalonian coast.<sup>99</sup> I find the duels to be an enlightening connection between the two epic novels. Both focus on idealists—Don Quixote and the lost poet Belano—and their failed quests to create a better world. The image of a duel on a beach suggests a larger battle of ideals culminating in a clash between values. In both cases, the idealists (the crazed poet Belano and the insane knight errant) “lose” the duels marking the failure of their quests. Being vanquished in Barcelona by the Caballero de la Blanca Luna is the pinnacle (or the abyss) of Don Quixote’s disconnection from reality and of his losing. After his defeat, by prior agreement, he must admit that Dulcinea is not the most beautiful woman on Earth in an earth-shattering statement that summarizes the lowest point of losing and the failure of his ideals. Instead, he utters, “Dulcinea del Toboso es la más hermosa mujer del mundo, y yo el más desdichado caballero de la tierra [...]. Aprieta, caballero, la lanza y quítame la vida porque me has quitado la honra” (534). This defiant yet sad moment, the admittance of failure, is the lowest of low for all who dream of a better world, for all who have fought windmills only to be trounced by the terrors that the world produces. It is a moment that Bolaño’s poets, who confront the “decade of broken dreams,” also share. In *Los detectives salvajes*, one of those gathered to watch Belano’s duel observes the scene: “Durante un segundo de lucidez tuve la certeza de que nos habíamos vuelto locos. Pero a ese segundo de lucidez se antepuso un supersegundo de superlucidez (si me permiten la expresión) en donde pensé que

aquella escena era el resultado lógico de nuestras vidas absurdas” (481). This statement insinuates that all of our “battles”—both real and imagined—are the most absurd expressions of humanity. They are what define us and our lunacy. The desire to win, the supposed culture of success imposed by the me-first Ownership Society, drives weaker subjects to kill, cheat, and betray what is honorable. In this way, I find the defeats of the lost subjects and losers that I analyze in this project to be the shining examples of their merit for society. In this way, *losing is winning*.

Reasons to lose abound in the work of Bolaño. For example, one of my favorite passages in Bolaño’s narrative, which comes from “Carnet de baile,” a story that lists sixty-nine reasons not to dance with Pablo Neruda, depicts the failure inherent in revolutions led by poets. The passage, like seemingly all of Bolaño’s work, centers on returning to Chile in 1973 to confront Pinochet’s coup of September 11. Reasons 28 to 30 describe the absolute lack of organization of those Chileans fighting for Allende at the time; more lovers than fighters, Don Quixotes in spirit and in fighting skills, their tragicomic reaction says a lot about revolutions and the failure of poets, who fail poetically, but nevertheless fail:

28. El once de septiembre me presenté como voluntario en la única célula operativa del barrio en donde yo vivía. El jefe era un obrero comunista, gordito y perplejo, pero dispuesto a luchar. Su mujer parecía más valiente que él. Todos nos amontonamos en el pequeño comedor de suelo de madera. Mientras el jefe de la célula hablaba me fijé en los libros que tenía sobre el aprador. Eran pocos, la mayoría

novelas de vaqueros como las que leía mi padre. 29. El once de septiembre fue para mí, además de un espectáculo sangriento, un espectáculo humorístico. 30. Vigilé una calle vacía. Olvidé mi contraseña. Mis compañeros tenían quince años o eran jubilados o desempleados. (211)

The list goes on, but this passage, in the description of the pathetic preparations for battle, in the digression about the cowboy novels and feeble battlemates, illustrates how life is an eternal battle that we are doomed to lose before we begin. The goal is to struggle and to lose, but in a beautiful way. There is no doubt that all of Bolaño's work, in one way or another, centers on his personal experience of the defeat of socialism's ideals in his native country on September 11, 1973. Seeing the failure of a project, the suicide of a president, a broken dream in its most abject form prompt Bolaño, the writer, and in turn Belano, his alter ego, to eventually leave the country, to wander lost, to fight in other failed revolutions in Central America, to meet other poet revolutionaries, and to ultimately find some sort of peace on the coast of Catalonia where he can sit and write about it all. Like Salma and Victorio, in *Los palacios distantes*, Belano finds poetry among the squalor and misfortune of his surroundings. Salma and Victorio's creation of street art with Don Fuco is their encounter with poetry and with beauty. It is how they survive honestly. In *Tokio ya no nos quiere*, Él attempts to find beauty in oblivion and poetry in his daily rhythms that he documents in a poetic way; they appear as the verses of a traveling bard or the mundane prose of a sad salesman's diary. Bea, in *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*,

redefines the limits of gender in her exploration of identity, which takes place as a journey through music. All of the lost subjects described in these texts struggle to get by living in the margins, hanging on by a thread in a bohemian manner.

Part of this need to just get by and to find meaning and beauty in art and imagination rather than in “reality,” is the result of the supposed defeat of the notion of utopia fundamental to the dreams of revolutionary Latin American poets and artists in the 60s and 70s. The alleged disappearance of utopia is part of the resignation that produced the lost subjects. Colombian author Jorge Franco, in “Herencia, ruptura y desencanto,” opines that

una de las razones más decisivas para que la literatura de hoy haya tomado rumbos diferentes: la desaparición de la utopía. Con ella se fueron los sueños, los ideales políticos y sociales, los compromisos que no sean estrictamente literarios o estéticos, a pesar de que en lo más íntimo seguimos soñando con un mundo mejor y una sociedad más justa, pero no nos hemos dejado llevar por el engaño de la historia y de ahí que se haya pasado de la utopía al desencanto, del ímpetu a la resignación. (39)

The disappearance of utopia is a fundamental part of the decade of broken dreams that I theorize in the first chapter of this project, particularly evident in Ulises Lima’s experience in Nicaragua portrayed in *Los detectives salvajes*. It is also part of why we see the dispersal of so many wanderl[o]st poets in both this novel and *Estrella distante*. In a similar vein, Estévez and Ponte’s texts encompass a reevaluation of



“utopia” in their examination of Havana as a purgatory and Cuba as a failed revolutionary attempt at paradise. Ignacio Padilla, in “McOndo y el Crack: Dos experiencias grupales,” clearly defines the generation of losers and failed utopias: “Se ha dicho hasta el cansancio que quienes nacimos en torno al turbulento 1968 somos la generación del desencanto, la generación del fracaso de las utopías, la generación de la indiferencia” (144). He sets out a new direction by stating: “Ahora tenemos la oportunidad, que no el deber, no sólo denunciar las consecuencias atroces del derrumbamiento de las utopías, sino generarlas nuevas” (145). In this look at the future, a call to create more utopias, maybe in the sense of Miller’s interpretation of the multiple versions of so-called paradise(s), the desire to reinvent pushes writers because literature, more than a recounting of history, is a reinvention of history and a look at the future.

The disparate geography represented in this project (with authors born in Chile, Cuba, and Spain telling tales set in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe) is part of what I see as the breaking down of the division between Latin American and Peninsular literature intrinsic to the future of literature in Spanish. In *Palabra de América*, the result of a conference of young Latin American writers that met in Seville in 2003, one of the overwhelming conclusions, as plainly put by Fernando Iwasaki in “No quiero que a mí me lean como a mis antepasados,” is that there is no longer a “new” Latin American literature, but rather only literature written in Spanish (121). (Ironically, no Spanish writers were invited to this conference.) Part of my project’s aim is to stay true to this vision of the future for literature in Spanish, which

is one of the reasons for including two novels by Spanish-born authors. My discussion of two texts written by Spanish-born authors enhances my argument of what I see as the universality of losing, of failed battles, of losers, and wandering lost. What *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* and *Tokio ya no nos quiere* add to this project are examinations of a potentially more universal notion of identity based on evolving conceptions of nationality and sexuality and how one becomes disoriented in a more chaotic interconnected society characterized by sensory overload. The “lostness” that these novels portray is a reflection of identities in flux during a time of rapid change. My discussions of *Bea* and *Él* are indispensable to this project because they illustrate how wanderl[o]st subjects, when they wander, redefine more widespread limits of who we are. They widen our perspective of the center. In this vein, the Atlantic Ocean does not serve as a barrier against losing.<sup>100</sup> It is not only cliché but erroneous to state that we live in a world without borders, but it is beginning to look like the sum of what we share has begun to overcome that which separates us. Even in my second chapter’s portrayal of *flâneurs*, *skitalietz*, and *tugures* that are trapped in Havana and thereby not crossing any borders, we can see their plight as part of a larger world project of wandering lost and losing.

It might have been possible to reframe this entire project by looking at lost subjects in even more disparate regions—Bosnia, Japan, and Uganda (to give three random examples)—to portray the sense of a more universal conception of being lost. However, I do see firm connections between the texts I analyze and the wider parameters of the conception of being lost that each chapter offers: the lost and failed

revolutionary poets in Latin America; the metaphysical wanderings of Havana's *flâneurs* and *skitalietz*; and the global-scale wandering through non-places and gender identities depicting a more cosmopolitan sense of losing. In my broad depiction of losing and wanderl[o]st, what links the disparate regions that I look at is language and what I call a common history of violence. In other words, the despondency surrounding the subjects in these works has to do with a common past between Spain and Spanish-America that was affected by the history of the conquest, colonization and, more recently, dictatorships and failed revolutions or troubled encounters with systems of government.

By no means is my project an exhaustive presentation of the lost subjects in Latin America and Spain. The beauty of wanderl[o]st lies in its universality. Another text that I would have liked to include in this project to give a perspective from Central America is Horacio Castellanos Moya's novel *Insensatez* (2004), which deals with documenting the memory of extreme violence in Central America. Like Bolaño's fiction, most of Moya's work involves lost poets during the time of revolutions and civil wars. But instead of a revolutionary poet like *Estrella distante*'s Stein who goes to Africa with groups such as *Los Chilenos Voladores* and the *Frente Farabundo Martí* to heroically fight against injustice all over Latin America and Africa, the narrator of *Insensatez* is a coward and represents the "distanced perspective" of an "intellectual." The novel revolves around the following questions: What is the role of art in the discussion of political violence? What is the role of an "hombre de letras" vis-à-vis an "hombre de armas" in revolutions? In the analysis of

this quandary, we see the ethical questions surrounding violence and revolution and the strange role that art has in documenting them. The narrator of *Insensatez* has been contracted to edit an 1100 page manuscript of the eye witness reports of the massacres committed by an undisclosed country's military government against the poor, indigenous inhabitants. In his analysis of the manuscript, the narrator begins to see poetry in lines like "*Allá en el Izote estaban los sesos tirados, como a puro leño se los sacaron*" or the verse that he plans to use as the title of his novel about his experiences editing the manuscript: "*Todos sabemos quienes son los asesinos*" (62, 153). The poetry is in the insanity of the violence; because the violence is beyond explanation, it is comparable to the unfathomable aspects of poetry. The narrator of *Insensatez*, as a witness to abject losing, struggles with his own role in the defeat.

Another text by Moya that would be appropriate for this project is *La diáspora* (1989), which tells the stories of four focalizers with different viewpoints of the civil war in El Salvador and the subsequent diaspora of Salvadorans: Quique is the small-town communist militant excited to be promoted to a position fighting in the field after working a desk job; Juan Carlos, a propagandist that grows cynical with regard to the movement after the assassination of Ana María (an internal job) and the subsequent suicide of Marcial (two leaders in the communist movement); Jorge Kraus, the idealist Argentine journalist that covers the various revolutions of Latin America; and El Turco, a cynical musician who represents an apolitical viewpoint and a disaffection with revolution and the corrupt violence of his militant friends. The novel, like a lot of Moya's fiction, seems to hang on the verb "tronar," which

expresses the idea of splitting up, schism, or excision; this concept is part of the discussion of degrees of loyalty of each faction in the sectarianism evident during the time of civil war in Central America (126). These schisms produce the great diaspora of wanderl[o]st Central Americans throughout the world as portrayed by the novel.

What remains fundamental to this project—even in the geographically disparate depictions of being lost from writers born in Chile, Cuba, and Spain who portray losers from various continents of the world—is not just the telling of the stories of losing and being lost but rather *how we cope with loss*. Coping with loss is part of a general project of literature, which functions as a means for lost subjects to deal with losing and make do in a world defined by losing. Throughout this project, I see losing not exactly as the antithesis of winning or of happiness per se. Indeed, happiness is possible for subjects such as Escorpión and Veranda in their games of wandering Havana as *skitalietz* while Salma and Victorio find joy in their itinerant street art. These subjects' wanderl[o]st is how they make light of their trapped situation on the island. Losing, for all of the lost subjects presented in the texts that I analyze, is rather an acceptance of reality without a particularly corrosive cynicism or an irreverent idealism, which could diminish the sense of authenticity. The realism apparent in the acceptance of a supposed “reality” and making a life of it through art, imagination, and poetry (like Miller suggests) is also part of making a longer term happiness or one not bogged down with the hollowness of an “easier” approach to being alive. In this way, I see wanderl[o]st as a fundamental component of surviving in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>1</sup> *Skitalietz* translates into Russian as скиталец while “Skitalets” is the standard Library of Congress transliteration of the word. (Special thanks to the William Comer and Raymond Charles Finch III at the Center for Russian, Eastern European, and Eurasian Studies at the University of Kansas for this information).

<sup>2</sup> The Treaty of Maastricht established what we now know as the European Union, a political and economic merger that currently consists of 27 states, on November 1, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> For example, state institutions such as the ICAIC (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos) and the UNEAC (Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas Cubanos) have controlled what art is produced and promoted on the island. In addition, Fidel Castro drew a somewhat ambiguous line between the art that belongs *in* the Cuban system and that which should remain outside the system. In his famous speech, “Palabras a los intelectuales” (1961), he states: “Dentro de la Revolución, todo; fuera de la Revolución, nada” (11). This nuanced statement causes a precarious situation for artists who might not know if their work is the everything that is part of the revolution or the nothing outside of it. Castro, in this speech, seems to indicate that although he does not want the revolution to be an enemy of the freedom of expression, the promotion of the revolution and the Cuban people should be of primary importance in artists’ work. As a result, Castro’s revolution has had a long history of censorship with many authors (the most famous example might be Reinaldo Arenas) forced to publish their novels abroad because they do not submit to this ceaseless promotion of the Cuban revolution. In this sense, the Cuban revolution is a totalizing structure that constricts the freedom of artists and lost subjects, as evidenced in the texts I analyze.

<sup>4</sup> Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez elucidate this concept in their introduction to *McOndo* (1996), a collection of stories by young writers that depicts the MacDonalidization of Latin America: “[e]l gran tema de la identidad latinoamericana (¿quiénes somos?) pareció dejar paso al tema de la identidad personal (¿quién soy?)” (13).

<sup>5</sup> In the *Larousse gran diccionario usual de la lengua española*, there are thirty-seven definitions or uses for the verb “perder” and eleven for “perdido,” illustrating the many ways to lose or be lost (1316-17).

<sup>6</sup> In *La ciudad letrada* (1998), Angel Rama celebrates Latin American exiles (a form of lost subjects or losing) by stating that they are “los peregrinos de quienes habló Martí que según éste, son la más admirable tradición de libertad del país” (14).

<sup>7</sup> An obvious exception to these hasty modernizing shifts is Cuba. However, following its disassociation with the USSR, Cuba went through dramatic changes not unlike those that take place with rapidly industrializing countries.

<sup>8</sup> Neoliberal economic theories, within the context of this project, refer to an economic system unhindered by restrictions in its emphasis on free markets and free trade. Neoliberal economic theories are part of the shift of the economy from state oriented economics to an emphasis on the market or the private sector thereby producing this era of transnational capitalism. There is a vast amount of studies and criticism on the subject of neoliberal economic theories. One of the more well-known proponents of neoliberal thought is economist Milton Friedman, leader of the Chicago School of economics. Two of his many important books on the subject include: *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962) and *Free to Choose* (1980). These texts set out a number of the tenets for this economic philosophy. One might

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also want to refer to David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) for a more contemporary interpretation.

<sup>9</sup> Simon Williams expands upon by Cresswell's definition of transgression by noting that it refers to "breachings of boundaries;" it is "closely (i.e. intimately) connected with the *unconscious and desire*." Transgression, in sum, "is an ephemeral, volatile, at best precarious and at worst unstable, state of (corporeal) affair" (369). For lost subjects, their transgressive project is an unstable state of breaking boundaries.

<sup>10</sup> Sociologist Howard S. Becker defines deviance from the perspective of those who perceive and label an action as deviant: "*Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infractions constitutes deviance*" (9; original emphasis). Becker refers to those labeled deviant as "outsiders," a term that, as Cresswell points out in *In Place/Out of Place*, marks their out-of-place-ness (25-26).

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, "place itself is no fixed thing: it has no steadfast existence," as Edward Casey states in *The Fate of Place* (1997: 286).

<sup>12</sup> Bolaño's other novels include *Consejos de un discípulo de Morrison a un fanático de Joyce* (1984), *La pista de hielo* (1993), *Literatura nazi en América* (1996), *Amuleto* (1999), *Monsieur Pain* (1999), *Nocturno de Chile* (2000), *Amberes* (2002), and his post-humously published *2666* (2004). He has several collections of stories—*Llamadas telefónicas* (1997), *Putas asesinas* (2001), and *El gaucho insufrible* (2003)—and his poetry is collected in *Los perros románticos: Poemas 1980-1998* (2000) and *Tres* (2000).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, John Rapley's *Globalization and Inequality: Neoliberalism's Downward Spiral* (2004) for discussion of the inequality of benefits brought to world citizens by neoliberal economic policies.

<sup>14</sup> The English translation, *The Savage Detectives*, was translated by Natasha Wimmer. Since the translation of this novel to English and recognition in *The New York Times*, Bolaño's works have gained more international recognition. The most comprehensive studies of his work are *Bolaño salvaje* (2008), edited by Edmundo Paz Soldán and Gustavo Faverón Patriau; *Roberto Bolaño: La escritura como tauromaquia* (2002), edited by Celina Manzoni; *Territorios en fuga: Estudios críticos sobre la obra de Roberto Bolaño* (2003), edited by Patricia Espinosa H.; and *Les asters noirs de Roberto Bolaño* (2007), edited by Karim Benmiloud and Raphaël Estéve.

<sup>15</sup> It must be mentioned that the concept of "Latin American" in this context is problematic because even though many Latin American countries share some historical and political parallels, it is still over-ambitious to speak of "Latin America" as a homogenous entity. Certainly, the history of Peru, for example, might have some similarities with that of El Salvador but these are mainly topical. Also, writing of "one" Latin America falls into the same trap that the boom writers were accused of in their mythicizing the "Latin American," one of the complaints that the younger generations of Latin American writers has had with regard to their predecessors. Many writers from Bolaño's generation and those after him, such as Chilean Alberto Fuguet, contest the "myth" of what it means to be "Latin American" and of what "Latin American" writing should look like, intentionally creating an infinite possibility of Latin American identities.

<sup>16</sup> Franklin Rodríguez identifies four major aspects of Bolaño's narrative that *Literatura nazi* projects: "(1) a fragmentary quality that is a major characteristic of his poetics as it affects ethical, political and aesthetical readings and compositions of his novels; (2) a preoccupation with "the uncanny

[*unheimliche*”]; (3) the problem of ‘*lo abyecto*’ [the abject, abjection] and; (4) the role of writing or art in translating experience” (10-11).

<sup>17</sup> Along with Celia Manzoni, I see this anonymous narrator as Bolaño himself.

<sup>18</sup> Carmen Boullosa points out Bolaño’s frustration with literature: “Being canonized as a secular saint did not interest him; he didn’t think that literature is an uplifting enterprise, a self-help manual or a weapon for changing the world; if anything, it is just the opposite. As he explained to Luis García, “Literature, especially because it is an exercise practiced by sycophants of all stripes and political creeds—or an exercise that creates sycophants, has always been a step away from ignominy, from the vile, even from torture. The problem lies in its sycophantic nature. And also, of course, in fear” (32).

<sup>19</sup> The narrator explains that this information came from an autobiography written by a former Air Force officer.

<sup>20</sup> In the story, a certain Julio Cortázar, Argentine writer, arrives in San José, Costa Rica at a press conference where they ask him the usual questions: “¿por qué no vivís en tu patria, qué pasó que *Blow-Up* era tan distinto de tu cuento, te parece que el escritor tiene que estar comprometido?” Hidden in that string of questions is the one that Cortázar explores in this story: the question of political commitment. The narrator reflects that at the Gates of Heaven/Hell, Saint Pedro might ask this writer, “¿a usted no le parece que allá abajo escribía demasiado hermético para el pueblo?” (155). This dialectic that the narrator sets up in the first paragraph of his story is crucial for a Latin American writer working at the time (1976) when the story is written: a time of violence, brutality, and injustice in Latin America. He returns to his comfortable life in Paris with wine, Mozart, and his wife Claudine to see the slideshow of bucolic paintings produced by the locals of Solentiname, where he had observed their work. Instead of observing the paintings of the simplistic beauty of life in a Latin American village, blissfully ignored by the violence occurring in the rest of Latin America, he sees a slideshow that depicts violence, terror, and the murder of Roque Dalton.

<sup>21</sup> When I refer to realism in this case, I am more specifically describing a concrete realism in which reality is “artistically” portrayed “as it is.” I am also considering Roland Barthes’s description of realism in *S/Z*, when he describes painting as a model for realism. In his position, literary description is a view. He gives the analogy of the empty frame that a realist artist carries as being more important than his easel. Barthes writes, “realism (badly named, at any rate often badly interpreted) consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy of the real.” Therefore, “realism cannot be designated a ‘copier’ but rather a ‘pasticheur’ (through secondary mimesis, it copies what is already a copy)” (55). Art’s interpretation of reality might have something to do with the title of Roland Barthes’s text, *S/Z*, which is an important jumping-off point that at once tells us nothing and everything, and this antithesis is essential to the text. Barthes’s book is an in-depth analysis of literature using the tutor text “*Sarrasine*,” a story by Balzac about a sculptor and his love for La Zambinella, a castrato opera singer. As the story unravels, Sarrasine the sculptor learns of his love’s castration, her “nothingness,” and thereby is victim of his own symbolic castration, the “everythingness” of the story. The (/) in the title of Barthes’s text therefore functions like a mirror, and similar to art, it distorts the S into the Z. This distortion is at the heart of all art and literature, two elements that Barthes weaves together in his illuminating commentary. Thus in the comparison of Bolaño and Cortázar’s texts and their respective realism, we see that through a more concrete use of art to portray reality in Bolaño’s work, rather than through the resource of fantasy in Cortázar’s story, we get a “clearer” depiction of the violence taking place. Nevertheless, the reality portrayed is distorted.

<sup>22</sup> See the *The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report* (2004), which is also known as *The Valech Report*, for full documentation of the thousands (somewhere near 28,000) of Chileans allegedly tortured and “disappeared” by the Pinochet regime. In Argentina, some 30,000



citizens were forcibly “disappeared” between 1976 and 1983. All of these figures have been disputed by various factions.

<sup>23</sup> As Avelar notes, “by the late 1970s tens of thousands of Chileans had been forced to or chosen—though in such circumstances this is a pointless distinction—to live abroad” (44).

<sup>24</sup> Bolaño explains the origins of *La literatura nazi en América* and characters such as Wieder in an interview with Marcelo Soto by saying: “Pero el origen de ese libro, creo que está en una conversación que tuve hace muchísimos años con un chileno, cuando todavía estaba Pinochet en el gobierno, le pregunté si en Chile había una literatura pinochetista y él me dijo que no, y a partir de allí me puse a pensar en lo patéticamente divertido que podría llegar a ser esa literatura pinochetista.”

<sup>25</sup> Paz Soldán comments with regard to *Estrella distante*: “es la novela de la complicidad de la literatura, de la cultura letrada, con el horror latinoamericano” (3).

<sup>26</sup> Avelar notes that the central role of the military dictatorships such as Pinochet’s was “to purge the social body of all elements that could offer some resistance to a generalized opening to multinational capital [...] the dictatorships, by submitting unconditionally to *international* capital, turned the *nation* into the crucial battlefield for all political action” (36). This relates to what was happening with writers and artists that had to leave because “[t]he more intellectuals had to leave their countries, in a diasporic phenomenon of considerable proportions, the more the nation acquired the obsessive status of lost object and utopian promise” (37).

<sup>27</sup> “Si he de vivir que sea sin timón y en el delirio” is a verse attributed to Santiago that appears as the epigraph of Bolaño’s *La pista de hielo* (1993) and also seems to define the *real visceralista* aesthetic, which values a carefree, experimental, and wandering spirit. Referring to the counterculture film, *Easy Rider* (1969), one of the characters in *Los detectives salvajes* reflects: “Más o menos así éramos entonces.” And the voice refers to Ulises Lima and Arturo Belano “[c]omo Dennis Hooper [sic] y su reflejo: dos sombras llenas de energía y velocidad” (321).

<sup>28</sup> It is important to first recognize that Ulises Lima and Arturo Belano refer to it not as a group or a movement but as a gang (17). As a gang, we can see also that it is more a way of life than a group of poets who write in a similar way.

<sup>29</sup> In many ways, the movement’s characteristics are unknown. The only text we see of theirs is García Madero’s diary, and he admits his ignorance of the movement from the first page of the novel: “No sé muy bien en qué consiste el real visceralismo” (13).

<sup>30</sup> García Madero narrates, “Nuestra situación [...] es insostenible, entre el imperio de Octavio Paz y el imperio de Pablo Neruda. Es decir: entre la espada y la pared” (30).

<sup>31</sup> At one point in the novel, *Piel Divina* describes Mexican poetry as having two sides: “[e]l bando de los poetas campesinos o el bando de Octavio Paz.” The *real visceralistas* resisted this dialectic: “no estaban en ninguno de los dos bandos, ni con los neopriístas ni con la otredad, ni con los neoestalinistas ni con los exquisitos, ni con los que vivían del errario público ni con los que vivían de la Universidad, ni con los que vendían ni con los que compraban, ni con los que estaban en la tradición ni con los que convertían la ignorancia en arrogancia, ni con los blancos ni con los negros, ni con los latinoamericanistas ni con los cosmopolitas” (352).

<sup>32</sup> García Madero can also possibly be read as an alter ego of Bolaño. Because we learn about *visceral realism* with his initiation, his narrations establish an aesthetic of the group (and hence the novel). His

observation of Lima and Belano is like that of a reader, but a reader of “real life” filtered through his journals.

<sup>33</sup> As Idelber Avelar signals in *The Untimely Present*, Latin American dictatorships bring on a change in focus from a State-based philosophy to one based on the market. His underlying hypothesis is that dictatorships are “ushers of an epochal transition from State to Market” (11). He signals that “[t]he end of the dictatorships cannot [...] be characterized as a transitional process.” He underscores that “*the real transitions are the dictatorships themselves*” (58; original emphasis).

<sup>34</sup> Neoliberalism has met with great opposition particularly in poorer parts of the world like Latin America, where the benefits of its implementation have aided only a privileged few, a capitalist class that profits from increased trade and investment flows, while many (such as Néstor García Canclini) see the introduction of neoliberal economic theories in Latin American politics as an obstacle to justice and economic equality. The great problem that neoliberal policies bring, as Canclini points out in *Latinoamericanos buscando lugar en este siglo* (2002), is that “a diferencia del liberalismo clásico, que postulaba la modernización para todos, la propuesta neoliberal nos lleva a una modernización selectiva: pasa de la integración de las sociedades al sometimiento de la población a las elites empresariales latinoamericanas, y de éstas a los bancos, inversionistas y acreedores transnacionales” (44; original emphasis). Therefore, “[l]a modernización innegable de zonas prósperas [...] no alcanza a disimular la pauperización extendida en los suburbios” (45). With the “selective modernization” brought by neoliberalism came a growing inequality that provoked violence and disillusion across widespread areas.

<sup>35</sup> See Cortázar’s more politically oriented definition of the boom: “eso que tan mal se ha dado en llamar el boom de la literatura latinoamericana, me parece un formidable apoyo a la causa presente y futura del socialismo, es decir, a la marcha del socialismo y a su triunfo que yo considero inevitable y en un plazo no demasiado largo. Finalmente, ¿qué es el boom sino la más extraordinaria toma de conciencia por parte del pueblo latinoamericano de una parte de su propia identidad?” (Rama 61).

<sup>36</sup> Although the massacre in Tlatelolco takes place in 1968, I see it as representative of the spirit of the decade of broken dreams. It is estimated that police and military shot and killed some 200 to 300 student demonstrators, although the number is hard to determine because there are discrepancies in the statistics due to it being part of a clandestine operation. Many eye-witnesses give their account of what took place in Elena Poniatowska’s *The Night of Tlatelolco* (1971) and Octavio Paz documents the event and its relevance to Mexican society in *Posdata* (1969).

<sup>37</sup> On August 13, 1521, the *conquistadores*, together with their tlaxcalteca, texcocano, huejotzinca, chalca, and cholulteca allies massacred over 40,000 mexicas near Tlatelolco (López de Gómara, cap. CXLIV).

<sup>38</sup> Bolaño extends her narration to novel-length in *Amuleto* (1999).

<sup>39</sup> One is Peruvian, considered to be the next Mariátegui, and is ruined by the *Sendero Luminoso*. The other is a Cuban destroyed by the revolution’s intolerance of his homosexuality (this could easily be Reinaldo Arenas).

<sup>40</sup> Estévez is author of the novel *Tuyo es el reino* (1997), a collection of stories *El horizonte y otros regresos* (1986), and a number of theater works and essays. Ponte has written one collection of poetry *Asiento en las ruinas* (1992); four collections of essays *Un seguidor de Montaigne mira La Habana* (1995), *Las comidas profundas* (1996), *La lengua de Virgilio* (2001), and a novel *Contrabando de sombras* (2002) in addition to these two collections of stories which are now available in one volume

entitled *Un arte de hacer ruinas y otros cuentos* (2005). The texts I cite will correspond with this edition. However, when I refer to the stories and respective collections, I contextualize them in the two separate collections.

<sup>41</sup> Whitfield sees the unofficial end of the Special Period in 2005 (2008: 2). Nevertheless, the Cubans I spoke with consider the Special Period ongoing; the only major difference now being the less frequent occurrences of blackouts.

<sup>42</sup> Typical Cuban salaries are between \$12 and \$18 a month. Most non-food items from the State-run markets cost what they would in the United States, making it impossible to live on one's salary alone.

<sup>43</sup> Earlier, "Soviet patronage," in the form of subsidies and subventions, "had insulated Cuba from the full force of the U.S. trade sanctions," as Pérez notes (298). He goes on to say that the U.S. employed a number of strategies "to induce other countries to suspend economic assistance and curtail trade relations with Cuba" (301). "Mounting U.S. pressure all through the 1990s did nothing to allay Cuban misgivings. Cuba found itself increasingly isolated and beleaguered" (313). Pérez notes that, "[s]anctions were designed to foster economic disarray, disrupt production systems, and increase domestic distress as a way to generate popular discontent against Fidel Castro, a means to bestir the Cuban people to political action by subjecting the population to increased hardship and thereby erode popular support of the government" (314).

<sup>44</sup> Ponte suggests that one of the reasons why he no longer publishes in Cuba is that censorship prevents him from saying what he wants to. In the process of publishing, he discovered that "los censores eran escritores que yo hasta ese momento respetaba como artistas. Haber descubierto esto me ha hecho apartarme un poco de las editoriales cubanas. Sólo el pensar que un libro mío tenga que pasar por una censura efectuada con ojos de comisario político más que de crítico literario hace que se me quiten las ganas de publicar dentro de Cuba" (qtd. in Rodríguez 185).

<sup>45</sup> Estévez did write part of *Los palacios distantes* in Mallorca, but it appears that he is not in exile during the time of his writing the novel. He currently lives in Barcelona (Quiroga 142). Ponte also spent 1999 in Portugal and a semester at the University of Pennsylvania, so both of their writings reflect contact with the outside world. Ponte refers to this group of writers as "gente que, o está en Cuba pero nos vemos menos, o está en el exilio" (qtd. in Rodríguez 181).

<sup>46</sup> Ponte states, "no creo que mi literatura, mi idea del mundo, dependa de un político u otro" (132). In an interview with Stephen Clark, Estévez claims that because of the ephemeral nature of politics that "la literatura no es, no debe ser unida a la política de un modo demasiado directo" (87).

<sup>47</sup> This is an idea Ponte alludes to when he says of his generation of writers (he lists Rolando Sánchez Mejías, Victor Fowler, Félix Lizárraga, José Manuel Prieto and others as other members): "privilegiamos la literatura y la lectura por encima de la política, algo que en otros escritores no es tan evidente" (qtd. in Rodríguez 181).

<sup>48</sup> Whitfield notes Rafael Rojas's opposition to the classification of contemporary Cuban literature as "Special Period" literature (specifically in the case of Ponte), and she defends herself saying that "the writers' work is "both 'of' and 'against' the special period" (2008: 160).

<sup>49</sup> Whitfield, in her introduction to *Un arte de hacer ruinas y otros cuentos*, refers to the dual nature in Ponte's stories that observe life on the island but from an outsider existence: "aunque Ponte ha residido toda su vida en Cuba, su ficción narrativa se relaciona sólo tenuemente con la de adentro [...], la narrativa es en sí misma casi atópica, cautelosamente distanciada del proyecto social utópico bajo cuya

sombra está escrita.” The stories, although “intensamente locales,” “atañen más allá de los límites de la nación tanto en sus manifestaciones políticas como físicas” (2005: 9).

<sup>50</sup> Ponte, in an interview with Néstor E. Rodríguez, speaks of his generation as those born in the 1960s. Of this group, he says that it is interested in a more international conception of literature rather than a more limited, Cuban vision, based on the limited publications of Casa de las Américas and Arte y Literatura, two of the primary editorials on the island: “Nosotros somos una generación de lectores muy críticos con la literatura oficial cubana, lectores que sospechamos que el verdadero arte es clandestino porque está censurado, prohibido, en el mundo, y Cuba vive muchas veces de espaldas al mundo” (180). He mentions Abilio Estévez and Reina María Rodríguez as two writers, born in the fifties, who fit into this more international perception of art.

<sup>51</sup> Rafael Rojas, in a review of the collection, states: “Pero para confirmar su esencia imperial, que proviene del modelo romano, todo reino debe experimentar la decadencia. Y esa decadencia, como es sabido, consiste, generalmente, en una fragmentación del territorio o de la comunidad de súbditos que puede durar años o décadas” (Rojas “Un arte...”).

<sup>52</sup> The attendant explains how her son left her. “La locura me dio por pensar que los que viajan, y las maletas, y los aviones, estaban allá afuera para hacerme creer que existían otros países, cuando había uno solo y era éste;” this mad statement is concurred by the other woman that has traveled the world and says, “No hay otros,” further extenuating the maddening notion that the world is smaller than it seems (51). This statement also strangely harmonizes with Ponte’s vision of the imaginary Cuban empire.

<sup>53</sup> This hybridity between genres is something that Ponte aims for and something that he comments on: “No me considero poeta, narrador o ensayista a secas; no hago esas diferencias” (qtd. in Rodríguez 180).

<sup>54</sup> With its transition to a service-based economy through tourism, Cuba becomes what Ponte calls “[a] country of [university graduate] waiters, whose tips are tightly controlled” (227). Cuba, in this respect, loses many talented citizens. He goes on to poignantly remark that “the Revolution’s techniques of using money are approximately the same as those found in a manual of torture: dizzying changes, dislocation of the sense of time, rupturing of the sense of filiation and of any link that tries to relate an effect with some cause” (219).

<sup>55</sup> Ponte admits that he cannot remember where he originally came in contact with the term but in *La fiesta vigilada*, he defines “estática milagrosa” as a term used by urban planners to describe “edificaciones habaneras en pie pese que las leyes físicas más elementales suponían sus demoramientos” (173).

<sup>56</sup> Pérez notes that during the last half of the twentieth century “[n]ew construction did not keep pace with population growth. Thousands of dwellings, especially in Havana, had passed into varying conditions of disrepair and decay. The priority given to construction in the countryside exacerbated conditions in the cities. Havana suffered most from the new parity in expenditures” (280).

<sup>57</sup> Ponte further explains ruins by citing Jean Cocteau, who says that “[a] ruin is an accident in slow motion,” and then goes on to note that “one may ask how much immorality exists in writing about an accident—no matter how slow it may be—instead of offering assistance to the victims” alluding to the ruins/accidents that have been caused by Cuba’s independent political stance (15).

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<sup>58</sup> Estévez also uses ruins to show how history has affected the city. In *Los palacios distantes* Victorio observes that Havana is not just the city of columns as a title of a novel by Carpentier suggests, but of collapses: “No son como el Coliseo, derrumbes que informan sobre el paso del hombre por la Historia, sino todo lo contrario, derrumbes que informan del paso de la Historia sobre el hombre” (64).

<sup>59</sup> In *La fiesta vigilada*, Ponte complains of the revolution’s paralyzing act of impeding the Sert plan that consisted of demolitions that would have knocked down numerous decaying buildings. In 1982 UNESCO declared Havana patrimony of humanity in a move that made those decrepit buildings immune to demolition. “(Primero fue el triunfo revolucionario, paralizante. Luego la declaración patrimonial, que sacraliza)” (178).

<sup>60</sup> Ponte further explains the temporal isolation created by the revolution with an anecdote of Ry Cooder’s creation of a false object of nostalgia by forming a “nonexistent” orchestra from the 1960s on an album that he produced: *Buena Vista Social Club*. Much in the same way, the current Havana is a fabrication of the same kind, a museum in ruins.

<sup>61</sup> Teresa Basile reads the *tugures* as Ponte’s contemporaries, the Cubans of the late nineties (3-4).

<sup>62</sup> “But my thoughts are far off with Bethmoora in her loneliness, whose gates swing to and fro. To and fro they swing, and creak and creak in the wind, but no one hears them. They are of green copper, very lovely, but no one sees them now. The desert wind pours sand into their hinges, no watchman comes to ease them. No guard goes round Bethmoora’s battlements, no enemy assails them. There are no lights in her houses, no footfall in her streets; she stands there dead and lonely beyond the Hills of Hap, and I would see Bethmoora once again, but dare not” (Dunsany 62).

<sup>63</sup> The university in “Un arte de hacer ruins” also appears in this state of change suggesting that Cuba’s state-run institutions like the university are going through a number of growing pains in order to re-define themselves.

<sup>64</sup> Although there is no direct evidence I believe that Veranda is also the wife that might have jilted Escorpión after the wedding at the beginning of the story. This case of crossed identities can be explained by the crossing of times or in other manifestations within this dream-like, hallucinatory story.

<sup>65</sup> In *La fiesta vigilada*, Ponte links writing with espionage by recalling Graham Greene’s comic spy novel *Our Man in Havana*, writing about his friends that ask him why he comes back to Cuba. He imagines them reuniting in a café in Europe and calling him “nuestro hombre en La Habana,” using the title of Greene’s novel. The use of the spy novel as a tool to describe the current situation in Cuba is appropriate, too. Speaking about the supposed “death” of spy novels (particularly those of the Cold War) and ghost stories, Ponte says that “nuestra facultad de entender peligrosa toda alteridad, nuestras sospechas cifradas al otro lado de cualquier límite, nos harán suponer nuevos fantasmas y nuevos agentes secretos” (40). Therefore stories about ghosts and spies continue to have relevance for talking about Cuba in its state of change. Ponte’s writing style is particularly influenced by espionage as spying is one of the metaphors that the writer uses to describe his own writing. Stealthy and deceptive, like a fly on the wall, Ponte observes and informs from the margins not seeming to take one side or another. He makes reference to Greene, who also compared the spy to the writer saying that both “observaban y escuchan con disimulo, buscan motivos, analizan sujetos y, empeñados en servir a la patria o a la literatura, carecen de escrúpulos” (217).

<sup>66</sup> Estévez narrates, “Para los más jóvenes La Habana carece de historia, y esto resulta, acaso, un modo de defensa, los más viejos inventan otra historia, mentirosa como debe ser, al fin y al cabo, toda

historia, en la que La Habana termina siempre como una especie de Susa, Persépolis o Síbaris que ellos han tenido la dicha de habitar” (219). They use this invented history as a “modo de defensa.” In the battle “entre La-Habana-que-no-existe y La-Habana-paraíso-perdido, se ven en la peculiar realidad de esta especie de ensoñación o desvarío subtropical, bajo el sol, al borde de la bahía hermosa, diabólicamente hermosa, abierta a las peligrosas aguas del golfo de México, atestadas de tiburones y de almas en pena” (219-20).

<sup>67</sup> Ferrán notes that “[t]he past thirty years have seen an unprecedented rise in interest in the study of memory within the humanities and social sciences” (15).

<sup>68</sup> The exhumation of people and events which stand in danger of oblivion was at heart of formulations of nationalism. Renan, in “What is a Nation,” was famously preoccupied with this forgetting and how it relates to nationalism and argued that a nation is a collection of individuals with things in common that has forgotten many of the same things, too. With regard to Renan, Anderson comments, “[h]aving to ‘have already forgotten’ tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be ‘reminded’ turns out to be a characteristic device in the later construction of national genealogies” (201). He gives the example of the Valle de los caídos, constructed by the Franco regime as a way to remember those who died in the battle *against* Bolshevism and atheism. But, as Anderson reminds us, “at the state’s margins, a ‘memory’ was already emerging of a ‘Spanish’ Civil War. Only after the crafty tyrant’s death, and the subsequent startlingly smooth transition to bourgeois democracy—in which which it played a crucial role—did this ‘memory’ become official” (202).

<sup>69</sup> Colmeiro divides collective memory of Spain from the post-civil war (beginning in 1939) to post-*desencanto* (starting in the late eighties) into three phases: 1) the time of silence and forgetting with the initiation of Francoism, characterized by censorship of the opposition; 2) the time of transition (during the late seventies and early eighties), between residual testimony and amnesia in which we can witness an attempt to recover historical memory; and 3) the time of quantitative inflation and qualitative devaluation of memory during the time of *desencanto*, typified by fragmentation and decentralization of memory (18-19).

<sup>70</sup> Argentina’s Ley de Punto Final dictated the end of investigation and prosecution against members of the military accused of political violence during the dictatorship (1976-1983). However, by giving amnesty to perpetrators of crimes against humanity, the law symbolically approved of a collective amnesia. The law was repealed in 2003, thereby opening up legal cases of potential genocide (Greste).

<sup>71</sup> Colmeiro suggests that this term connotes a voluntary lack of historical memory and an active disinterest in the past, while forgetting implies carelessness. *Desmemoria* marks the tactics that Francoism utilized such as censorship, rigid control of education and control of the media, all of which represent institutional control over a shared past and produce historical amnesia. Ferrán gives the example of how in Spain “there has been little official government aid or support, until 2004, for the work of civic organizations calling for the exhumation of the numerous mass graves still located throughout Spain, mass graves filled with the bodies of people killed during the civil war or in the postwar reprisals by the by the victors” (14). This begs the question that Resina asks: “How, [...], can one decide between the ‘false’ idea of Spain promoted by Francoism and the ‘true’ (or at any rate, legitimate) idea of it reestablished by the Transition” (5-6).

<sup>72</sup> Ferrán points out this hasty pace of change by stating that between 1982 and 1996, when the Socialist Party was in power, “Spain embarked on a frenzied campaign to become ‘modernized’ and

'European,' and dealing with the past was simply not compatible with such a forward-looking campaign" (25).

<sup>73</sup> The classification of the Spanish Generation X or Generación X commonly refers to those Spanish authors under forty years of age who write narrative during the nineties (Gullón v-vi). It must be said that inserting them into a literary generation is problematic because, even though these authors write during the same time and do share some stylistic and thematic traits, critics like Robert Spires have called such literary generations "simultaneously all-exclusive and all-inclusive" (485). It is particularly problematic, he notes, given the historical context from which they write because their categorization is one "that works against the depolarization episteme of post-Franco Spain" that characterized the transition to democracy and the time thereafter. Nevertheless, he denotes Mañas (1971), Loriga (1967), and Etxebarria (1966) as "the recognized pillars of the Generation X category" (486). Other authors that could be included in this generation are Juan Bonilla, Belén Gopegui, Igancio Martínez de Pisón, Pedro Maestre, and Juana Salabert y de Martín Casariego (Gullón v).

<sup>74</sup> The mutual inspiration between film and novel is particularly fruitful as all three of these films were based on popular novels. Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* was based on Anthony Burgess's novel of the same name (1962); Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* was based on the novel by Irvine Welsh (1993); and *American Psycho* had roots in Bret Easton Ellis's novel (1991).

<sup>75</sup> Loriga's other novels include *Héroes* (1993) which has a style that exhibits the influence of media, as Kathryn Everly points out by stating, "Loriga uses both visual and verbal language to reveal manipulative television ethics." This is important in my discussion of memory and forgetting because "[t]he emphasis on the visual, the urban settings, and youth in Loriga's works stems from an artistic tendency to look toward the future, instead of reflecting on past national disasters such as the Spanish Civil War and resulting Franco regime" (171). Loriga's other novels are: *Caídos del cielo* (1995), which was made into a movie directed by the author, *La pistola de mi hermano* (1997); *Trífero* (2000); and *El hombre que inventó Manhattan* (2004). He also has two collections of short stories: *Días extraños* (1994) and *Días aun más extraños* (2007). Etxebarria began her career by writing *La historia de Kurt y Courtney: Aguanta esto* (1996), the biography of rock musicians Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love's relationship. This first work clearly marks her influences and positions her within the so-called Generation X with its reflection of her interest in this generation's music. She continued with her first novel, *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* (1997), which was accused of plagiarizing Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation* (1994). *Beatriz* won a Nadal Prize in 1998. Etxebarria continued with *Nosotras que no somos como las demás* (1999), *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* (2001), and *Un milagro en equilibrio*, which won a Planeta Prize in 2004. She has also published works of poetry, essays, and self-help books such as *Ya no sufro por amor* (2006). She recently published another novel, *Cosmofobia* (2007). Another curious sidenote about Etxebarria is that she famously posed nude in the magazine *Dunia*. This publicity stunt, part of a promotion of *Beatriz*, is an indication of a growing trend among authors (and Loriga seems to follow in this direction) to be more concerned with selling books than of being accused of being "sell-outs."

<sup>76</sup> North American Dirty Realism is a derivative of minimalism, and reflects a tendency toward a stripped-down narrative whose anti-hero protagonists tend toward debauchery and failure. Cintia Santana, in "What We Talk About When We Talk About Dirty Realism in Spain," notes that the Spanish "*Realismo sucio* writers' self-conscious insistence on their association with a global (i.e. primarily Anglophone) culture, often carried with it an adamant rejection of an autochthonous tradition" (34). Santana points out the differences between the American Dirty Realists and the *Realismo sucio* writers by stating: "Dirty Realism depicts the lives of blue-collar men and women through minimal prose and plot, while *Realismo sucio*'s protagonists tend to be privileged, young men in their late teens and early twenties, fascinated with spectacular violence" (36). This is because "if

Spanish *Realismo sucio* has been said to be symptomatic of the ‘globalization of literature,’ it also illustrates that local receptions and reappropriations persist” (37).

<sup>77</sup> Santana relates the fast pace of these works with the North American Dirty Realism of writers like Raymond Carver and Tobias Wolff. “The brisk syntax and set of cultural references said to be characteristic of Dirty Realism began entering contemporary Spanish writing soon after [the Spanish translation of Carver’s *Cathedral* from Anagrama (1986)]: Ray Loriga’s *Lo peor de todo* (1992), José Ángel Mañas’ *Historias del Kronen* (1994), and Benjamín Prado’s *Raro* (1995) became the paradigm of a new generation of Spanish writers” (34).

<sup>78</sup> In response to shifts taking place in American politics associated with the Prohibition movement, this group reacts in a similar way as that of the Spanish group with their mass consumption of alcohol and other recreational drugs.

<sup>79</sup> Part of the Gen X attitude concerning drugs relates to a paradigmatic shift in Spain’s drug policies that takes place between the early 1980s, defined by a freedom to consume drugs publicly, and 1992, when stricter measures were employed regarding the consumption of drugs as part of a plan to coincide with Europe’s drug policies, thus provoking a defiant sentiment among the Spanish youth of this time. John Hooper notes in *The New Spaniards* that “in the year after coming to office,” the new Socialists of the transition legalized “the consumption of narcotics both in public and in private,” which propagated “the impression throughout the eighties [...] that ‘anything goes’” (203). However, with Spain’s integration into the European economy, these measures were repealed as they fell into line with neo-liberal mores. As Marr notes, “[a]longside the nuts and bolts of moving forward a free-market economy [...], integration with the European Community would require that various public health standards and criminal codes come up to snuff with the more developed nations of Europe. This is especially true with respect to those codes having some bearing upon the sale and trafficking of (elsewhere) illicit drugs” (137-38).

<sup>80</sup> This generation has come to be known as “la generación de los nietos de los vencidos.” Santos Juliá and Paloma Aguilar say of this generation: “Ahora ha llegado una generación que no vivió la guerra, que ni siquiera vivió la dictadura y que, por tanto, vuelve atrás y responde a los datos de la historia desde otra mirada” (qtd. in Rojo 2004). Unfortunately, statistics point out that Spanish youth have been somewhat apathetic in their response to Francoism, as Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis have indicated: “según una reciente encuesta (*El País*, 19-10-2002), nada menos que el 33.8% de la juventud española de 12 a 18 años cree que una dictadura puede ser necesaria en ocasiones o que tanto da que tengamos dictadura o democracia siempre y cuando haya orden y progreso (eslogan del franquismo)” (16).

<sup>81</sup> Ramblado Minero, María de la Cinta. “Conflictos generacionales: La relación madre-hija en *Un calor tan cercano* de Maruja Torres y *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* de Lucía Etxebarria.” *Especulo. Revista de estudios literarios*. 23 (2003): <<http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero23/conflict.html>>

<sup>82</sup> Castells, in his book *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996), observes that the defense of the subject (against markets and apparatuses) replaces the idea of class struggle in a post-industrial society in which cultural services have replaced material goods (22). He calls this the bipolar opposition between net and self (3). His network society is representative of the transnational capitalist economy that typifies reality for youths in a Western European country such as Spain at the end of the twentieth century. For Castells, “[a] network is a set of interconnected nodes” and networks are “appropriate instruments for a capitalist economy based on innovation, globalization, and decentralized concentration” (501, 502).



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<sup>83</sup> Ingenschay looks more at “gay” reflections of the Transition that are part of the process of disremembering the dictatorship like Eduardo Mendicutti’s *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* (1988) and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s *Los alegres muchachos de Atzavara* (1987). The first novel recalls a transvestite’s experience of the attempted military coup that takes place on February 23, 1981, a date that many mark as the end of the Transition because the King Juan Carlos came out in definitive support for a political democracy. Vázquez Montalbán’s novel relates the experience of some rebellious homosexuals that form a sort of commune in the mountains of Aragon in the summer of 1974 prior to the death of Franco.

<sup>84</sup> I capitalize Company because it appears so in the English translation *Tokyo Doesn’t Love Us Anymore* by John King.

<sup>85</sup> Take, for example, this short paragraph from Dick’s novel: “‘Remove his shirt,’ a voice stated. No doubt building’s physician. Highly authoritative tone; Mr. Tagomi smiled. Tone is everything” (240). All of the sentences are brief and the second and third lack verbs. This economic prose, in an effort to more quickly move the plot in as short of space as possible, is akin to the prose that Loriga uses.

<sup>86</sup> The argument about the relevance of memory in questions of identity or the erasing of memory as both cure and poison between fear of the past and fear of the future is similar to that proposed by Jacques Derrida in his reading of Plato’s “Phaedrus” in “Plato’s Pharmacy” (1981) in which he points out how the god Theuth, when explaining his invention of writing to Thamus, that it will help people remember. To describe this “remedy,” Plato uses the word *pharmakon*, which in many ways resembles our contemporary use of the word “drug,” in the sense that it means both cure (like a pharmaceutical drug) and poison (in the case of a potentially dangerous recreational drug such as heroin or in the abuse of a pharmaceutical drug). So Thamus responds to Theuth’s invention saying: “So it is not a remedy for memory, but for reminding, that you have discovered” (qtd. In Derrida 102). In this way, he is pointing out that writing will not make memory better but rather force people to be dependent on writing things down to recall them, making their memories atrophy. This is how Ferrán sets up her argument for her discussion of Juan Benet’s novel *Volverás a Región* (1967). In Benet’s novel, Región is the place where characters who dare to recall the time before the war are threatened with death. By recalling a forbidden past, Benet’s work subverts Francoist ideology, Ferrán argues, “because it presents an alternative way of knowing, one that eschews the dogmatic affirmation of certainty and absolutes imposed by the regime” (63). Loriga’s novel, in a similar way, challenges the way we approach the past. Although writing may not seem as important to his work as it is in Benet’s, Loriga makes it known that memory is indeed a *pharmakon*, both giving identity to and also plaguing society.

<sup>87</sup> The original Portuguese lyrics are: “Tristeza não tem fim/Felicidade sim.”

<sup>88</sup> This film is based on the novel of the same name by J.G. Ballard (1973).

<sup>89</sup> This film is based on Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968).

<sup>90</sup> The Ludovico technique represents an artistic portrayal of Pavlov’s conditioning, a psychological phenomenon. In the story of *A Clockwork Orange*, when the protagonist is made the subject of the Ludovico technique, he is conditioned to associate his psychosis with violence so he will cease his criminal activity.

<sup>91</sup> Thematically, *Tokio* fits in well with a number of Spanish films that approach subjects’ problematic memory stemming from a trauma. Films such as Alejandro Amenábar’s *Abre los ojos* (1997), Pedro Almodóvar’s *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999), and Patricia Ferreira’s *Sé quién eres* (2000) are three recent examples. Colmeiro states that in films such as these “aparece como un leitmotiv recurrente la

traumática pérdida de la memoria a nivel individual, que sin embargo se convierte en telón de fondo ambiental de una desmemorización colectiva mucho más profunda” (248). *Tokio* also links with Martín Gaité’s *El cuarto de atrás*, which represents the transition between Francoism to post-Francoism and the entrance into postmodernity for Spain as it is set in the crossroads between past and future. Martín-Gaité’s novel endeavors to represent the acceptance of the past through the purging of memory. The back room as a metaphor for archival and hidden memory that she presents is in many ways an artistic device like the Penfield Experiment. It is in the back room that Martín Gaité’s protagonist-narrator recovers lost memory and takes stock of her cultural identity.

<sup>92</sup> Narrative, particularly in the case of these “meta-memory texts” (to borrow Ferrán’s term), is also an important aspect of “working through” a memory, as Paul Ricoeur explains: “It is precisely through narratives that a certain education of memory has to start. Here we can introduce the connection between memory and forgetting because the best use of forgetting is precisely in the construction of plots, in the elaboration of narratives concerning personal identity or collective identity; that is, we cannot tell a story without eliminating or dropping some important event according to the kind of plot we intend to build. Narratives, therefore, are [...] the place where a certain healing of memory may begin” (9). And this why Ferrán suggests that “meta-memory texts [...] may ultimately serve as models for the process of creating a necessary ‘culture of memory’ in Spain” (60-61).

<sup>93</sup> Wolfgang Becker’s *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003) also vividly portrays the rewriting of cultural memory and the loss of East German identity in its depiction of a woman that awakes from a coma following the fall of the Berlin Wall

<sup>94</sup> It also must be noted that his sexual identity fluctuates as well, as he has sporadic sexual encounters with both men and women, and sometimes, both at the same time. Like Bea in Etxebarria’s novel, his sexuality is ambiguous, suggesting an individual identity in flux that can be read metonymically for a more collective identity, Spanish or more global.

<sup>95</sup> Although their Maoist dogma has been discredited, the Zapatistas’ project—of restoring justice for people (the Indigenous groups of the Lacandon forest in Chiapas and, by extension, the poor in many parts of the world who can find meaning in their struggle), exposing the corruption of the PRI in Mexico, and revealing the horrors brought by globalization that the dispossessed experience—does offer some hope in an era of losing.

<sup>96</sup> The Zapatistas have arms, too, but to compare the arms of the two groups would be a farce. Part of the success of the Zapatistas is their non-violence. They have abstained from using violence since the uprising of their inception on January 1, 1994.

<sup>97</sup> In Loriga’s *Tokio ya no nos quiere*, a novel that I analyze in my final chapter, there are several characters that share a lot in common with the American militia groups: the Promise Keepers, a group of American evangelists that kill the “asesinos de memoria” such as the protagonist Él. In their battle against “dis-memory,” the Promise Keepers make their case against the New World Order. The Promise Keepers’ fundamentalism and strict adherence to a society based on memory where one can never escape from the guilt of his/her sins harkens back to a time before the overindulgence and sensory overload that marks the Information Age. Both Él and the Promise Keepers represent different reactions to this age. Their presence in the United States—Él’s business deals in the deserts of Arizona and the increasing presence of evangelic Christian groups (somewhat like the Promise Keepers) in parts of the US—might stem from a characteristic that Castells indicates about the country: “a society relentlessly at the frontier of social change and individual mobility” (21).

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<sup>98</sup> Castells notes, “[f]or the American worker and small entrepreneur, the age of globalization and informationalization has been the age of a relative, and often absolute, decline in their standard of living.” Castells provides statistics to back this up: “the top 1 percent of households increased its average income from \$327,000 to about \$567,000 between 1876 and 1993, while average family income remains at about \$31,000” (96).

<sup>99</sup> The duel in *Los detectives salvajes* comes about because the critic Iñaki Echavarne is about to write a poor review of Belano’s latest novel and Belano challenges him. He finds swords and they meet on the beach with a small gathering.

<sup>100</sup> As a sidenote, it is curious that I am putting these two novels in conversation with two chapters that analyze texts from Latin American literature (whatever that means), whereas the “Spanish” novels themselves are very much in conversation with most of the rest of the world (particularly Loriga’s), *except* Latin America. There almost seems to be a deliberate evasion of Latin America in these Spanish novels (and others).

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