

Stating the Self: Contemporary Latin American Autobiography and Authoritarianism

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Self-writing has been a part of Latin American letters since its foundation. Beginning with the chronicles of discovery and influenced by the picaresque model developed in Early Modern Spain, self-writing has constantly evolved according to political and aesthetic trends. Despite a plethora of first-person accounts found in religious and political confessions, travel writings, slave narratives, and testimonies, contemporary autobiographies have been largely ignored. In Latin American literature, it seems that the national, collective identity has been privileged over the individual subject. Yet like ruins amongst the greater Latin American literary landscape, inserts of photographs, proper names, and undeniable biographical likeness are found in several obtuse, experimental works. Verbal bricolages, these traces of authorial reference convert these dense books into abstract self-portraits. The texts that I am referring to, however, by Reinaldo Arenas (Cuba, 1943-1990), Clarice Lispector (Brazil, 1920-1977), and Diamela Eltit (Chile, 1949-), have not been read as autobiographies, nor has postmodern self-writing been extensively studied in Latin American literature. The confluence of the two, namely the tropologically complex form of writing the self and the political literariness of postmodernism,¹ has created a new type of writing, one that has escaped recognition and classification.

¹ Postmodernism is a term laden with problems of definition. It is usually defined relative to poststructuralism, although both are sometimes interchangeable in certain contexts. Derrida's deconstruction and French Feminists are generally accepted as poststructuralists, Baudrillard and Lyotard claimed as postmodernists, and Foucault and Barthes as participating in both. In reality, the ideas of most of these theorists can be found in this project, starting with the textual-based deconstruction and proceeding on to the sociologically-oriented analysis of texts in authoritarian societies. Postmodernism is perhaps more explicit in this turn towards society, especially in questioning reality, which ultimately, becomes a central contribution of this project. Postmodernism, as used in English autobiographical studies and as defined by Linda Hutcheon will be discussed in the second chapter.

The lack of critical interest in autobiography has had an unrecognized but profound effect on the reading and theorization of Latin American literature. The view of autobiography, especially those of celebrities, as a simple, artless, and apolitical form has resulted in a few critical inquiries into the changing nature of the self and of self-writing. Whereas English and French critics participated in the boom of Autobiography Studies in the 1970s and 1980s, Latin American criticism is, to this day, marked by a void. The near complete absence of book-length projects on autobiographies of the last fifty years begs the question as to why this genre is so neglected.² Even the premier Latin American scholar and foremost expert on autobiography, Sylvia Molloy, puzzlingly fails to include texts published after the 1959 Cuban Revolution in her monograph *At Face Value*.³ This present study argues that this void may be due in part to the evolution of the form, in part due to the impact of authoritarianism that took hold of much of Latin American during the second half of the twentieth century. “Stating the Self” thus addresses the relationship between the creative attempts to present the self in writing and the role that discursive practices of authoritarian states under Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990), Fidel Castro (1959-2011), and the Brazilian military (1964-1985), namely surveyance, surveillance, and torture, have in shaping the autobiographical subject.

In her overview of autobiography included in both *At Face Value* and the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature*, Molloy contends that “[t]he perceived scarcity of life stories written in the first person [in Latin American Literature] is less a matter of quantity than a matter of attitude, for autobiography is as much a way of reading as it is a way of writing” (“The Autobiographical Narrative” 458). Although Molloy takes the stance that reader-reception

² I am not including edited volumes of collected essays, for they usually analyze individual works without surveying the form as a whole. Nor am I including *testimonio* in my study of self-writing. Derived from different cultural practices, the distinction between the two will be made apparent in my use of prosopopeia to define self-writing.

³ This fact is all the more curious given that about a fourth of her bibliography, a catalogue of Spanish American autobiographies, would fall into this time period, an omission of over 30 years.

plays a factor in the lack of an autobiographical corpus, her analysis is nonetheless supported by form-based genre definitions and limited to a timeframe in which the model of self-writing most closely matched that of traditional autobiography. In other words, the stylistic selection coincides with a temporal selection, and Molloy fails to address the abrupt cutoff date of her foundational study or her rationale. At once the cause and consequence of her limited and genre-defined selection, Molloy's study of autobiography is hindered by outdated theoretical models. *At Face Value*, while astute and engaging, has as its theoretical underpinnings the deconstructionist theory of Paul De Man and prosopopeia (1983). The advances of postmodernism beyond poststructuralism are not included in Molloy's study, however, and these theoretical approaches will prove essential for uncovering later innovations.

If autobiography has been overlooked in Latin American criticism, the question of the state, on the other hand, has not. From the colonial Inquisition as the first modern, bureaucratic state, to the formation of new nation states in the 19th century, and the forging of nationalisms in the 20th, politics are often at the forefront of regional studies. Autobiographical studies are no exception, although Molloy limits her analysis to the political topics of select writings rather than impact of politics on the form of these narratives. However, the structure of self-writing has evolved along with the state and historical contexts.

In light of this scant criticism, studies of self-writing are forced to rely on the contributions of autobiographical studies outside of Latin America. Autobiography is held to be a type of writing that reflects upon itself (as a specular object and as a metafictional process) and upon the forms, intentions, and validity of self-representation. In his 1980 treatise "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," James Olney applies a poststructuralist reading to the evolution of the form. In his

view, variations of self-writing can be understood according to the three etymological units of the word: *auto*, *bio*, and *graphein*. Early texts privileged the *bio*, with the main concern of the text being historicity, that is, the supposedly neutral and objective narration of life events. This objectivity was based, however, on unproblematized notions of language, author, and history. Theories of self-writing and textual experimentation have deconstructed the traditional understanding of this type of genre. In “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography,” the 1965 essay credited as the beginning of autobiographical studies, Georges Gusdorf argues that autobiography reflects the Western evolution of the concept of individuality and humanism in that the form is more about the self (*auto*) than about the events (*bio*). According to Gusdorf, autobiography, more than anything, is an act of self-consciousness, for the writer is cognizant of the agency and subjectivity involved in writing him or herself into history, the problem of temporality in recounting his/her life, and the need to construct a teleology or apologia of the individual being in which he/she assigns meaning to events. This critical turn away from *bio* to *auto* implies the destabilization of history and truth, similar to the way Hayden White’s concept of *emplotment* argues that all history is organized through a narrative. Nonetheless, perhaps owing to the influence of autobiography’s confessional origins, truth remained an important value, although, as Gusdorf explains, the truth of events was replaced by the truth of the man, or what he calls “sincerity.”

The question of sincerity, essentially a guarantee of a work’s authenticity, would become one of the challenges in separating autobiography from the “autobiographical” novel. The need to separate autobiography from fiction, memoirs, and diaries led French scholar Philippe Lejeune to outline formalistic qualities of the genre, which he articulated in the now classic definition (*L’Autobiographie en France*, 1971): “retrospective prose narrative that someone writes

concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.” However, not entirely content with the external nature of sincerity, Lejeune later argued in “The Autobiographical Pact” (1975) that the defining characteristic of autobiography was to be found in a textual reference to a shared identity between the proper name of the author, the narrator, and the protagonist (often found in the title) and was to be considered a pact with the reader. Influenced by Emile Benveniste’s structural analysis of the grammatical person, Lejeune further argued that the “I” functions as a self-referential gesture or enunciation in which the re-creation of the past in the moment of writing is understood to be a reference to the actual past.

In response to Lejeune, reader-based theories of autobiography proliferated, in particular those that questioned the need for strict stylistic parameters (such as first-person narrative, historical series of events, etc.) and referentiality. Elizabeth Bruss, for example, in *Autobiographical Acts* (1976) interprets autobiography as an illocutionary speech act dependent upon certain pragmatic values rather than textual forms. In his famous article “Autobiography as De-Facement” (1979), Paul De Man at once recognizes the attempt at reference that underlies the reader-based approach and deconstructs the autobiographical act by highlighting its dependence on language, particularly the trope of prosopopeia, in which the writer attempts to give life to a dead being through language. Prosopopeia, and its specular structure, has since been held as the hallmark of self-writing.

The relationship between language, self, and autobiography has led to insightful philosophical approximations. Perhaps recognizing the problem of the “intentional fallacy,” Lejeune himself puts forth yet another theory in *Lire Leiris* (1975) that privileges discourse over story, for “the true reference of the *story* in autobiography is not to some comparatively remote

period in the subject's past but rather to the unfolding in language of the autobiographical act itself" (Eakin, "Forward" xiii). Poststructural and ontological approaches to self-writing continue to examine this relationship between the self and language.⁴ In terms of form, these interpretations have led to the acceptance of broader generic definitions of self-writing in place of autobiography, as postulated in *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait* (1980) by Michel Beaujour. On the other hand, the importance of traditional stylistic markers such as the chronology of one's life have been examined from the phenomenological perspective by Paul Ricoeur and others who find that there is a "phenomenological correlation between the temporal structure of autobiography and what they take to be the essential narrativity of human experience" (Eakin, "Forward" xii).

The developments of deconstruction centering on the instability of language resulted in the questioning of the relationship between literary tradition, the canon, and other types of selves. Postmodernism approaches to autobiography in English and French studies have also paid more attention to marginal subjects (based on race, gender, sexual orientation, colonial status) and have interrogated both the production of and resistance to the cultural discourses that produce identity. Similarly, the notion of the universal "Self" has been reexamined, as have the power dynamics implicit in the act of self-writing. For example, feminist critics have questioned the possibility of self-representation in autobiography given the gendered nature of language and the masculine gaze that remains from autobiography's confessional past. Postmodernism's emphasis on fragmentation and social constructs has contributed to radical stylistic experimentation in texts that depart from the traditional understanding of self-writing. Although less recognizable, these texts provide for conceptual innovations, for both postmodernism and

⁴ Two such examples are Paul John Eakin In *Fictions and Autobiography* (1985) and Jay Paul in *Being in the Text: Self Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (1984)

self-writing share the interest of theorizing the production of subjectivity and identity in the text, the problem of referentiality, as well as the role of language in the construction of reality.

Even if postmodern autobiographies appear to be obtuse and aleatory constructions, tracing their evolution from earlier models of Latin American self-writing becomes a principal concern. Beginning with texts of the nineteenth century, Molloy finds that these first autobiographies demonstrate an uncomplicated relationship with history,⁵ for the life stories are to be treated as historical documents destined for posterity. They tend to be objective and didactic, avoiding personal memories and imagination. The introduction of a *petit histoire* and childhood reminiscences, perhaps aided by the increased contribution of female authors to the genre, generally coincides with texts of the twentieth century. This more personal account was often motivated by the need to demonstrate familial ties and nostalgia for a particular, nationally-specific landscape, similar to the foundational fictions' longing for the closed space of childhood. If in the nineteenth century childhood was considered too trivial for a text that portrayed the exceptional individual as a representation of the nation (like Sarmiento or the bitter Vasconcelos who attempts to demonstrate his unrecognized political merit), the writers of the twentieth century valued the ideological potential of the childhood as a strategy to represent genealogies and the beginnings of prominent members of society or to reflect upon a paradise lost. The portrayal of the community and landscape, of the memories of others and oral traditions witnessed by the autobiographer, and an "entre nos" attitude also characterizes these texts, which were often written from exile or in the context of a rapidly changing society. Furthermore, in examining women writers, Molloy reveals crises of authority and gender expectations with which these writers struggled. In general, Molloy finds that Spanish American autobiographies

⁵ William Luis in *Literary Bondage* argues that these writers, such as Juan Francisco Manzano, attempt to rewrite history by selectively presenting and reorganizing events. I sustain, however, that the presentation of history, beyond understanding the potential for different versions, is still limited to a narratological approach.

involve a mix of self-repression, self-validation, an incomplete subject, and a diminished degree of introspectiveness, meaning that more is to be found in omissions and peculiarities of the textual self than in confession.

In bridging the gap between Molloy's study and the present project, one must also take into account the relationship between literary movements and self-writing. The span of Molloy's study ends right before the beginning of the highly-experimental Boom, one that would change both Latin American and international literature forever. Autobiographies in the wake of Boom experimentation would, not surprisingly, show a similar rejection of realism and straightforward narration, in contrast to the *testimonio*'s return to realism in the 1970s. This correlation between literary movements and autobiographical styles generally holds true in Molloy's study and elsewhere. Colonial self-writings were either travel-narratives inspired by the conquest or confessional narratives (or their picaresque parody). During the independence period, Romanticism, along with a Romantic concept of self, can be seen to introduce nostalgia-driven plot structures as well as allegorical autobiographies in the shape of foundational fictions. At the turn of the century, regionalism during the building of nation-states led to the vivid representations of geographies, as Molloy observes, while *Modernismo* may have seen self-writing as a platform for the propaganda of "art for art's sake," if we consider Rubén Darío's *Autobiografía* as a representative case. Exceptions are to be found, as in Norah Lange and Felizberto Hernández, whose unique structuring of childhood stories reflects the experimentation of Dadaism and surrealism, just one connection that Molloy makes regarding the relationship between autobiography and concurrent literary trends.

The *Nueva Narrativa* and later the Boom ushered in radical changes to the "genre." As a basic difference from the prior literature, the New Narrative questioned the objectivity or

universality of reality and complicated the understanding of writing, including the concern for form and language. With a new, problematized conception of the world, structural innovation was necessary, including abandoning traditional realism and observation for fantasy and myth in shaping worldviews. A greater degree of experimentation was exercised with narrative structure as to reflect this complicated reality, exchanging the linear and ordered plots and chronology of traditional novels for fragmented, unordered, or circular structures as to resemble the unstable consciousness of the narrator or the incomprehensible outside world. The heightened yet complex subjectivity of the new narrative was accompanied by thematic innovations such as hybrid genres, ambiguous or absent narrators, metaphysical and existential queries (especially through the absurdity of the human condition), and taboo sexuality and eroticism. As a result of this anti-mimetic style, the relationship with the reader changed as well, and texts of the new narrative can be said to be more “writerly” than “readerly.” Language, as a never-ending and arbitrary process of signification, is brought to the foreground in the new narrative.

Many of these qualities of the *Nueva Narrativa* and Boom can be seen in postmodern self-writing. Notwithstanding the influence of these moments on autobiography, most contemporary self-writing is studied through the lens of the *testimonio*, which was particularly fostered after the 1959 Cuban Revolution and was heralded for its return to realism and politically committed literature. Although the relationship between politics and postmodernism has been the subject of much debate, as has the existence of characteristically postmodern texts in Latin American literature,⁶ experimental aesthetics have been overshadowed by the more mimetic texts and historical novels of the Post-Boom. If I digress in length here on literary movements, it is due to a fallacy in Molloy’s argument that may explain the basis of her exclusion of contemporary texts.

⁶ Latin American literary critics favor the neobarroque, Post-Boom, and other classifications.

Molloy indirectly posits that autobiography in Latin America “begins” in the 19th century. By focusing on the position of autobiography-as-reading (of oneself), she eschews a genre-based and formulaic definition. More than simply a first-person account held to be representative of one’s past, she is interested in a particular self in crisis, one for whom autobiography is not merely the means to some goal, rather the process of reflecting upon the self. Her redefinition of autobiography coincides with her search for a particular type of literary self, or figuration of the self, one that she argues is the product of a specific historical context, deriving from the void of authority left by the independence movement and age of Enlightenment. The danger of such an argument is that it suggests that autobiography can only exist—or at least be theoretically interesting or complex—during select eras. Even if a self in crisis, which manifests itself as a metafictional or structurally-exposed writing, is necessary to produce a philosophically engaging autobiography, it must be argued that the crisis of the self changes with time, as does the resulting representation of this self in crisis. Thus Molloy’s approach at once denies the traditional definition of autobiography as a genre while proposing a self-in-crisis based definition that is not free of its own formal, structural requirements.

If the structure of autobiography and the coetaneous crisis of the self are related, it can be argued that Molloy’s parameters for identifying autobiographies may or may not hold true for postmodern texts. To her credit, she admits that she does not delve into the theoretical act of self-writing, limiting herself to the study of narrated images of self. However, my belief that autobiographical structure and crisis of the self are interdependent means that the philosophical and historical dimensions of self-writing cannot be overlooked. For this reason, “Stating the Self” not only seeks to uncover similarities in postmodern autobiographies, but to also

contemplate the possible meanings, political and philosophical, behind such representations during the period of authoritarianism after 1959.

More than a way of reading, as Molloy and De Man propose, postmodern autobiography is a way of theorizing the self and its representation. From the perspective of autobiography as theory, I intend to demonstrate the untapped critical value of several Latin American texts that have either not been recognized as self-writing or have not been read from this theoretical standpoint but that can be said to probe the limits of the literary representation of the self.⁷ In Chapter Two I examine how Arenas, Eltit, and Lispector produce radical forms of self-writing that interrogate the notions of self, writing, and representation.⁸ The figure of prosopopeia, which reflects this crisis of self and self-representation, will be a starting point for redefining contemporary Latin American autobiographies. Taking off from poststructuralism's contribution, namely this defining trope and the deconstruction of auto/bio/graphein, I use postmodernist theories to connect form and society. If the crisis of writing is no longer "For whom does one write?" that marked 19th century Latin America, it now seems to be "What or how does one write?"

Through the use of prosopopeia, I illustrate how these experimental works can be read as self-writing. In this study, Arenas's *Antes que anochezca* stands alone as the only "standard"

⁷ In other words, my theoretical approach to self-writing implies a refusal to privilege texts based on generic or formulaic expectations of a first-person narrative that recounts the events of an individual's life. Instead, my selection is based on textual markers that call into question the elements of subjectivity, history, and writing.

⁸ Any selection of texts is necessarily subjective and arbitrary. However, the convergence of Arenas, Eltit, and Lispector, while improbable at first glance, each author produced multiple texts that implicitly engage with the question of self-writing and the cultural legacy of the confessional in Latin America. Arenas, for example, both writes a straightforward, rather traditionally structured autobiography, writes a parody of the confession in *El mundo alucinante*, and explores the trauma and representation of memory in the first two books of his *Pentagonía*. Soto, moreover, argues that much of his work can be seen as a parody of the documentary novel. Eltit explores various types of self-writing and testimony, including oral testimonies of marginalized populations as well as a more allegorical testimony (similarly related to trauma and memory). Lispector, on the other hand, produced introspective fiction that examined the nature of the subject, of the nature of the written self, including her own self in her autobiography, *Água Viva*, and in *Um Sopro de Vida*, where the structure and cadences of the confession are employed.

form of autobiography, although it is revolutionary as one of the first graphic, openly homosexual texts of the genre. However, his highly experimental *Pentagonía*, which complicates notions of memory and self, can be read as an alternative version of *Antes que anochezca*, one that violates the traditional narrative parameters of the form. Similarly, the texts by Eltit and Lispector are hardly recognizable as autobiography when considered from limited, generic definitions. Lispector, for example, paradoxically eliminates the most “autobiographical” sections of the first draft with the intention of producing a more theoretical template of pure self-writing. Eltit’s non-mimetic *Lumpérica* has been classified as a new type of *testimonio* but has yet to be accepted as an instance of self-referential writing of the self.

The division between *bio*, *auto*, and *graphein* as proposed by James Olney will structure my understanding of how the works radically rework the elements of self-writing. For example, all three authors can all be said to introduce original concepts of the *bio*. Arenas, debilitated and suffering the terminal stages of AIDS, writes from the perspective of death and thus formulates a *bio* that gives him a textual life that his material existence could no longer provide. Eltit can be said to incorporate a *bio* that is not dependent upon a life story but rather a vitality that is rooted in the ability of the voiceless to speak and write the self, free from the censorship of an oppressive environment. This *bio* is important in relationship to her concept of *graphein*, for writing is done on the body of the female protagonist, that is, literally and figuratively writing (on) the body. And finally, Clarice stands out among the three as the one writer to explicitly provide a reworking of the concept of *bio*, for her narrative voice states that she wants to be

“bio” in the sense of a living (albeit textual) organism, attempting (or at least theorizing) an exact textual replication of her living self.⁹

Innovations in the concept of the textual presentation of self or *auto* are also to be found, especially in the rejection of the first-person, or in the inclusion of third-person splinters of the self, as embodied by the protagonist in *Celestino antes del alba* and *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* by Arenas, and by Ângela in Lispector’s *Um Sopro de Vida*. Similarly, *I. Luminata* can be read as an allegorical representation of Eltit, for whom the only first-person reference in the text appears in the photo of the author with slashed arms, an image that reflects the maneuverings of the protagonist. Yet another manipulation of the first-person tradition occurs in *Água Viva*, where the first-person is used but remains nameless and all but genderless, a strategy that the narrator uses to uncover a de-essentialized self and probe the limits of consciousness.

Beyond expounding on the deconstruction of traditional autobiography through its components, I argue that with postmodernism we are able to relate these dimensions of self-writing to discursive practices, especially ones that are pivotal in bolstering authoritarianism. I associate the precarious “I” voice (*auto*) with the struggle for linguistic sovereignty in torture and terror, the hypersexuality (*bio*) with surveyance of bodies, and the metafictional quality (*graphein*) with surveillance. References to these discursive practices, both explicit and implicit, will be uncovered in the texts of all three authors. I argue that authoritarianism has a profound impact on self-writing as a result of these practices. This turn to the political dimension of self-writing structures the remaining chapters.

⁹ Bio can also figure in the interpretation of her work as an example of “women’s writing.” Clarice rejected this label, but it does coincide with certain qualities such as a fragmented narrative, the prominence of sexuality and the body, and the struggle against/in language.

In Chapter Three, I examine the crisis of representation that results from the discursive practices of authoritarianism. The use of metafiction, ekphrasis, and collage surface as techniques for dealing with this crisis in contemporary self-representation. Ekphrasis, which I understand as the representation of multiple genres within a single generic form, is a curious phenomenon that appears in the works by all three authors. Very much indebted to postmodernism's boundary tensions, I use the term ekphrasis to refer to multiple media, and collage rather than the postmodern "fringe interference" due to its relationship with representing being. In *Água Viva*, Lispector evokes different artistic genres as an attempt to transcend the limits of language. She wishes to represent herself in music, for example, or to paint the colors of herself, for writing remains limited in its expressive capacity. I connect this ekphrasis to Brazilian modernism and its connection to surveyance. Ekphrasis also occurs in Arenas's *Pentagonía*, where fragments of text are converted into a theatrical form, as if to capture the voices of his memory from a perspective in which the narrator relinquishes the control of retrospection and reinserts himself in and relives the moment. Arenas differs from Lispector, though, in that his dramatic fragments more resemble Theater of the Absurd than they do conversation. In *Palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, Arenas continues to employ the strategy of multiple media by including newspaper snippets, ranging from cosmetic ads to reports on the revolutionary uprising against Batista. These insertions occupy space in the text that forces the main body of writing to wrap around them. I examine his use of collage in conjunction with torture and the production of "truth," including that of the individual. *Lumpérica*, on the other hand, is remarkable in that Eltit successfully (con)fuses the filmic aspect of acting or surveillance, scripts and interrogation, and photography and narrative. The importance of ekphrasis in all three writers complicates the relationship between the self and art, questioning

whether we understand the self through or because of art, or if we simply use art to represent the self. As a result, examining the writer's decision to incorporate other genres may shed light on the changing nature of the self as well as the effect that certain societal factors and technologies have in producing a culturally-specific subjectivity within literature.

Chapter Four deals with one of the more evident similarities in the self-writing of Arenas, Lispector, and Eltit, that is, their foregrounding of sexuality in self-writing. This perhaps represents an evolution in Latin American autobiographical trends analyzed by Molloy in *At Face Value*, since the more contemporary text have evolved beyond the *petite histoire* to provide a sexualized account of the self. This sexuality appears in different forms, however, with Arenas's hyperbolic portrayal of his and Cuba's homosexuality in the form of a foundation fiction; Lispector's structural imitation of the female orgasm and play with androgeny; and Eltit's anti-mimetic scenes of masturbation and orgy in a public square. Perhaps as a result of such displays of sexuality, Clarice and Eltit have been recognized by critics as examples of *écriture féminine*. Women's writing and the notion of writing the body, which is of particular importance to feminist and postcolonial scholars, are important concepts that will be examined in this chapter. This chapter will also touch upon sexuality as a form of political resistance, as seen in a psychoanalytic rendering of the family romance in Eltit and Arenas's act of queering. Sex also figures as a way of contesting the essentialized, rhetorical subject that is demanded and constructed by the state.

More importantly, however, I will demonstrate how the heightened sexuality must be viewed as a product of the specific political and historical contexts of these authors. In particular, sexuality signals a tenuous subjectivity that juxtaposes the individual with the subject of the state. Sexual expressiveness as a technique of representation and constitution of the self stems

from the tradition of self-repression developed by the confessional practice and the control of bodies through public policies related to sex. Thus, I theorize that repressive societies provoke a stirring of the cultural memories of confession, forcing sexuality into text and discourse.

In Chapter Five, I analyze the response of these authors to the complicated nature of the self that is created in language. I will draw conclusions from the remarkably different patterns of language and narrative present in the texts, taking in to account the referentiality of language, the relationship between self and Other in language, and the relationship between memory, experience, and language. Saussure and later poststructuralism, of course, entailed the end of a complicity between signified and signifier, forever changing our understanding of language, the subject, and the world. Word displacement, therefore, is a natural commonality of the texts, both on micro and macro textual levels. Examples of linguistic experimentation include the splicing and scrambling words in *Lumpérica*; illogical metaphors in *Lispector*; and the use of hyperbole in *Arenas*. Beyond playing with the arbitrariness of the signifier-signified relationship, Eltit and *Lispector* can both be said to write in such a way as to escape the phallogocentric and normative nature of communication. I interpret *Lumpérica* to be an allegorical fight for a self-writing in which the protagonist attempts to free herself from the text inscribed on her by the patriarchal, interpellative gaze of society.

The impossibility of language is also tied to the impossibility of reference, as well as the control over meaning and reality through linguistic sovereignty. *Lispector*, for example, engages the question of self-referentiality from a metaphysical standpoint and is preoccupied with capturing the “it” of being. She wrestles with the difficulties of capturing the self in a gendered and finite language, and compares writing to the silencing effect of torture and confession. Eltit’s text is perhaps less self-referential (with the only reference to herself being the

aforementioned photograph) and through her multiple forms of bodily mutations and poetic multiplications she explores the writing on the voiceless body that occurs in interpellation. Arenas's *Otra vez el mar* illustrates the difficult nature of writing trauma, with hypertextuality surfacing as an attempt to document the scale of pain and horror, and to regain a voice. In all three cases, I connect the linguistic indeterminacy or "dislocated words" to the violent practices of torture and/or interpellation, practices in which pain inscribed on bodies destroys language.

"Stating the Self" theorizes innovations in autobiography along the lines of self, subjectivity, and discursive practices. Although Eltit, Lispector, and Arenas lived and wrote in the context of dictatorial or military regimes, only Eltit and Arenas engage directly the topic of political oppression and representation. This testimonial writing appears in differing styles, however, as Arenas explicitly writes in protest of Castro while Eltit, writing from Chile during the Pinochet government, must use a more coded (yet equally vitriolic) style. On the surface Lispector is a fairly apolitical writer, with social commentary edited out of the final version of *Água Viva*, but the impact of discursive practices can still be felt in her work. The selection of Arenas, Eltit, and Lispector represents a much needed updating of the literary history of Latin American self-writing, for these writers produce works of singular theoretical impact for the reading of poststructural and postmodern self-writing. Through their work we see the impact of authoritarianism on the self and self-writing, of how societies and theory converge to change artistic models and sociological constructions of the self.

CHAPTER II

CONTEMPORARY SELF-WRITING: POSTSTRUCTURAL AND POSTMODERN INNOVATIONS

Contemporary autobiography in Latin America suffers from a double effacing, ignored due to both generic misunderstanding and the stubborn quest for cultural autonomy that has devalued postmodernism and autobiography as uncanny, foreign imports. Yet postmodernism and contemporary autobiography demonstrate theoretical and structural parallels, and their conjoining produces a philosophically rich and culturally revealing text. Of utmost importance is the central preoccupation with the self, for both the autobiographic genre and postmodernism have a “shared interest in theorizing the subject” (Gilmore, “The Mark” 3). Furthermore, far from being just a literary question, the subject is also of particular importance in examining the state.

Postmodernism lends itself well to autobiographical studies in that it brings the subject back to the forefront. In contrast, commenting on the changing nature of subjectivity in the crisis of modernity, Beatriz Sarlo states, “If there is not an *I*, literature can be freed from various servitudes: from sentimentalism, memory, nostalgia, the past, tradition, history” (63, my translation). If modernity marks the death or absence of the self, as such thinking would have, modernity must also imply the end of the autobiographic form. Sarlo’s observation, while perhaps too harsh a prescription for the the self in Latin American writing, seems to underlie the opinion of critics who overstate the dearth of autobiography in Latin American literature.

In this chapter I will apply both poststructuralist and postmodern readings to texts by Reinaldo Arenas (*Antes que anochezca*, the *Pentagonía*), Diamela Eltit (*Lumpérica*), and Clarice Lispector (*Água Viva*, *Um Sopro de Vida*) that reflect upon the challenge of writing the self and the hegemonic, linguistic, and societal dimensions of writing under authoritarianism. I accept De Man's poststructuralist trope of prosopopeia as a defining feature, and I illustrate how these authors deconstruct the categories of auto/bio/graphein in their works. I then read this deconstruction in a postmodern vein, connecting this evolution to discursive practices related to authoritarian societies. To understand this controversial and overarching term of postmodernism,¹ I depend on Linda Hutcheon's exposition in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, in which she argues that the movement is concerned with de-naturalizing what has been taken for granted, often uncovering the ideologies camouflaged in aesthetics and the revealing the power dynamics that underlie daily practices. Although often conceived in a negative light as a vague, catch-all term, postmodernism according to Hutcheon implies a "critique both of the view of representation as reflective (rather than constitutive) of reality and of the accepted idea of 'man' as the centered subject of representation; but it is also an exploitation of those same challenged foundations of representations" (17). This definition works well for postmodern autobiography, for it parallels the Sisyphean task of forever attempting to represent the self in a privative language. Nonetheless, postmodernism relies on recurring techniques, including irony, parody, self-reflexiveness, wordiness, border tensions and a duplicitous gesture of contradiction and

¹ US and French critics, in particular those who address postmodernism's impact on autobiography (and use the term "postmodern" specifically), provide points of departure for the recovery of the field of autobiography in Latin American literature. It ought to be noted that throughout this dissertation I use "postmodern" and "poststructuralism" interchangeably to refer to the historical and cultural moment of contemporary autobiography. I recognize that these are not the same thing, with postmodernism, in my understanding and usage, entailing an ideological consciousness while post-structuralism applies more to aesthetics and the to intellectualization of disciplines. Or, as Hutcheon rightfully points out, the difference can be articulated along the lines of de-doxifying versus deconstructing (4). However, when referring to something other than the historical moment, I consider poststructuralism to be a subcategory of postmodernism.

complicity (18). Border tensions are of particular importance, including both aesthetic borders (the mixing of genres), social (both the study of marginality and various “social constructs”), and cultural (high versus low art). At a glance, these strategies are seen in the multiple media and genres these authors use in their metafictional writing, in Arenas’s frequent pastiche, as well as the combination of elite, literary experimentation applied to lowly topics and deviant persons.

Autobiography, when theorized beyond a simple life history, similarly negotiates certain borders, such as public versus private, past versus present, and oral versus written, among others. For this reason, a postmodern reading is particularly fecund for yielding theories of self-writing. Although the comparison of the three authors undertaken in this dissertation is one that allows the theories to surge from the text, it can be seen that postmodern theories account for many of these qualities, especially genre instability, the foregrounding of sexuality, and deconstruction of cohesive and representative selves and language. Postmodernism therefore helps to both facilitate a reading of these difficult contemporary texts and to explain how favoring other movements over postmodernism, such as the Post-Boom and Neobarroque, causes autobiography to be overlooked in Latin American literature.

In addressing the literary history of Latin America, this study attempts to begin where Sylvia Molloy’s groundbreaking *At Face Value* ends. Similar to Molloy’s methodology of gleaning cultural models of self-fabrication from exemplary texts, this study focuses on autobiographies produced by writers who belong to a common era and to a similar political and cultural atmosphere. This historical backdrop is marked by the resurgence of authoritarian governments in the wake of the Cuban Revolution. This revolution signals changes in both politics and art alike. If autobiography stems from a cultural practice related to subjects and authority, the authors of this study are confronted with the similar crises of self and self-

representation in the face of censorship, surveillance, and bodily threat. The comparison of diverse self-writings suggests that language and region-specific innovations have resulted in an experimental style, one that has led many examples of self-writing in Latin America to be passed over when operating with traditional and outdated definitions of autobiography.

Poststructuralist and postmodern theories prove to be particularly enriching for autobiography, questioning the narrative “I” voice, the nature of language and memory, and the use of emplotment in history. Postmodernist self-writings therefore at once destabilize the autobiographic genre while paradoxically sharing its most fundamental concerns, including the production of identity and the subjectivity and/or agency to be found in discourse. As a result of this duplicitous and complicit movement, autobiography has been theorized to be an active type of writing and reading, a specific speech act according to Elizabeth Bruss. Rather than a narrowly defined genre, self-writing can be understood as a particular type of writing (or reading). Bruss believes the definitive qualities of autobiography are truth, identity, representation (that the writer is genuine, that his or her essence is captured, and that the writer and protagonist are the same (“Eye for I” 300)), all of which are established through the “scene of writing.” Paul DeMan’s use of prosopopeia captures this “scene of writing” as the self-reflective moment between the writer and the text (or the reader in the text), which he sees as the attempt to give voice to a dead or silent entity. Different from speculating about the reader’s intention, self-writing exhibits reflexive moments that allude to the attempt to create or represent the self in literature and language. This can be described as a metafictional stance or a textual doubling that engages with the questions of inner text and outer text, even when deconstructing the difference. This metafictional structure allows texts of self-writing to be distinguished from that of other fictions.

Instead of doing away with the destabilized autobiographic genre all together, writers of autobiography adapted to the influence of deconstruction. Furthermore, with postmodernism's ending of "master narratives," of which traditional autobiography was an example, the defining characteristics of the contemporary era may be articulated better through their relationship to ideologies and cultural practices rather than textual forms. If poststructuralism was concerned with the (re)constructed nature of the self ("the analytical and experiential category of the 'self'"), postmodernism added the impact on the politics of the first-person voice and the power relationship between textual representation and ethnicity, race, colonial status, and gender, among other categories (Gilmore, "The Mark" 4). The destabilization of realism and referential language, and the abandoning of master narratives, results in greater experimentation and the fluidity of genre. Postmodernist readings, as expounded in the following chapters, also change our understanding of the self, therefore forcing subsequent innovations to self-writing. The postmodern self is considered less of an essential thing as "something in process, never fixed and never as autonomous, outside history" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 37), characteristics that we will see in the works of Arenas, Eltit, and Clarice.

The degree of experimentation begs the question as to how postmodern autobiographies can be identified, including the texts of the present study. Far from being paralyzed by deconstruction efforts that undo formal definitions (as Sarlo seems to express), autobiography involves an imagining of the subject, an "inscription and construction," regardless of the intense narrative experimentation (Hutcheon, *Politics* 39). In other words, "there is still a story of a self, a construction of a subject, however 'deconstructed, taken apart, shifted, without anchorage' it may be," for "nothing is reported without making it signify" (Barthes qtd. in Hutcheon, *Politics* 39). Hutcheon also calls this the mimesis of process rather than product. Critic Paul Eakin

similarly asserts “autobiography is nothing if not a referential art” (*True Relations* 12). These two ideas can be further extended to state that autobiography’s referential function is not incompatible with postmodernism, for it does indeed signify and refer, but that these actions have little to do with the truth-value that was once assumed to be fundamental to the genre. Contemporary autobiography is therefore marked by the apparent effort to signify or refer to the self,² but it also involves a “representational self-consciousness [that] points to a very postmodern awareness of both the nature and the historicity of our discursive representations of the self” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 37).

This double movement is also a characteristic of postmodern representation in general. Postmodernism and autobiography share the paradoxical need to remain connected to a sense of the “real” (or realism) while demonstrating the opacity of any representation (Hutcheon, *Politics* 42). Part of understanding or denaturalizing these conventions involves a consciousness of the ideologies behind traditional forms, including narrative expectations for autobiography, and of the discursive practices that sustain these ideologies. If traditional self-writing assumes a seamlessness between person and written life story, the postmodern autobiography signals the rupture between the two as well as the ideological nature of the endeavor. All three writers of the present study engage with the problematic nature of self-writing, abandoning simple definitions of the genre. Clarice³ is the most explicit, bemoaning the impossibility of capturing the self. Eltit similarly represents/performs this struggle, but does so metaphorically as opposed to mimetically. Even though his writing is often not transparent (especially in the *Pentagonía*) Arenas is generally implicit in his questioning the limitations of self-writing, for it is the extratextual dimension of his work that illustrates the difficult process of representing the self.

² Testimony, contrary to Jameson’s claim, is not a very postmodern form, for it holds fast to the notion of realism. For more on this debate, see *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* by Georg Gugelberger.

³ In keeping with Brazilian tradition, I refer to Clarice Lispector by her first name.

Furthermore, his oeuvre is a testament to his probing of various forms of self-writing, ranging from rather traditional chronological accounts, to parody of the confessional narrative, to representations of trauma.

The relationship between the state and the self is an important question that particularly surfaces in the texts by Arenas and Eltit. As Leigh Gilmore argues, interpellation by an authoritative presence produces a self-consciousness that resembles the act of examining the self in writing. Owing to its roots in the confessional, autobiography therefore replicates the process of self-regulation and self-examination, one that implies relationships of power between the individual and the receptor/reader, as well as the public role of private lives. This fact is significant considering that in Arenas and Eltit fictional renditions of the act of writing are always performed in front of and in spite of a watchful government eye. Arenas goes so far as to frame his self-writing as a final stand against Castro, who he blames for his impending death. *Lumpérica* similarly addresses the trauma of the Pinochet government, specifically incorporating suggestions of torture, interrogation, and surveillance. Censorship and confession also figure in *Lumpérica* and in Clarice's *Água Viva*, for the two writers rely on a coded, allegorical language and an anonymous self.

While the texts are quite divergent in style, this selection is justified by the common denominators of having been written in the context of longstanding, authoritarian regimes and by the presence of certain key characteristics, including: highly self-referential and theoretical writing, stylistic innovations that both engage contemporary literary trends and revolutionize self-writing, and the prominent theme or metaphorical use of sexuality. These qualities allow for a fruitful comparison of such diverse works, including Arenas's oscillation between a mimetic, chronological account of his life and a collage of materials and imaginative prose, Clarice's

excessively metaphysical and phenomenological view of the self, and Eltit's fragmented and abstract political "testimony." The selection of Arenas, Eltit, and Lispector represents a much needed updating of the literary history of Latin American self-writing, for these writers produce works of singular theoretical impact for the reading of poststructural and postmodern self-writing. For this reason, I now turn to the individual authors in order to examine various possible redefinitions of autobiography.

Clarice Lispector

In 1973 Clarice Lispector published what is considered to be one of her most innovative texts: *Água Viva*. At this time she had already achieved literary success and fame during her thirty-plus years of writing, and her thirteenth novel was immediately considered emblematic of Clarice's individual style and *weltanschauung*. The recognition of *Água Viva*'s literary merit was catalyzed in large part by Hélène Cixous's appropriation of this text as the theoretical embodiment of women's writing (*l'écriture féminine*). This recognition not only signaled the start of a literary history of women's writing in Brazil and Latin America, but it also led to a greater theorization of Clarice's singular aesthetic.

Clarice's texts have been recognized as having anticipated poststructuralist disordering of writing and constructions of the world. Although she has not been included amongst the Latin American Boom writers who engaged in similar textual strategies, her introspection, stream of consciousness narration, lyrical prose, and her linguistic experimentation represented a dramatic break from the previous tradition of Brazilian regional novels. In the Latin American context, her innovation has been compared to that of Jorge Luis Borges in light of their significant textual reflections upon language, existentialism and the subjectivity of man, as well as their stylistic originality. In this context, *Água Viva* serves as a definitive example of her personal style and

illustrates her philosophy of writing as an extension of life. This is due, in part, to the “generic” similarities the text shares with self-writing and autobiography. Written and labeled as a fiction, there nonetheless exists an autobiographical gesture that draws the reader into a personal, egocentric (or “I-driven”) text. The text and its self-reflective nature force an autobiographical reading, in spite of the fact that it is supposedly merely fiction with philosophical and stylistic resemblances (Araújo 3).

Água Viva, while clearly a text about self-definition through writing, presents some immediate contradictions with regards to autobiographical tradition. Employing a first person narrative, this “I” is, however, best described as impersonal, nor does the text narrate the chronological history of the individual or represent significant events of the past. On the other hand, it does incorporate the philosophical notions of prosopopeia (the bringing to life of a self in language), the writing of the past from the present moment, and the attempt to define the self. One major divergence, and to engage momentarily the “fallacy of intentionality,” is that *Água Viva* was not originally written as an autobiography. *Água Viva* is, rather, the edited project of several versions of the text, revisions that dramatically altered the generic appearance of the work.

As Alexandrino Severino explains, the text was subjected to two years of editing, in which 100 pages were eliminated (only first 50 and last 3 remained approximately the same) and three titles were given. The history of the titles alone reflects the evolution of the project: originally titled *Atrás do Pensamento: Monólogo de la Vida*, then *Objecto Gritante*, and finally *Água Viva: Ficção*. These changes in the title coincided with the elimination of the references to Clarice’s personal life (Roncador 274),⁴ such as a mention of the life-changing fire and her

⁴ According to Carol Armbruster, there are several noteworthy resemblances, such as “rising at 3:00 a.m., taking notes, suffering through the *angst* of working with the language” (149).

traumatic divorce, and of sections that had (puportedly) been published in her newspaper column. Also, an original political dimension, a denunciation of rampant hunger in Brazil, was removed. According to Sonia Roncador, while nothing “new” was added to the definitive version of the text, a comparison of the documents indicates “their undeniable dissonance” and that they should be considered “independent esthetic projects” (273).

The autobiographical tradition is certainly not adverse to editing, but these revisions deconstruct the illusion of *Água Viva* as a stream of conciousness text that captures the instances and epiphanies of self-writing as they naturally occurred (Jose 8). Roncador argues that Clarice was initially of the belief that “Objecto gritante” was a finished text, one that she wished to preserve but not publish (271). Editing produced a more coherent text, eliminating what Jose Americo Pessanha considered to be the heterogeneous bricolage of the first version. As a result, the tone of the work was entirely modified, for instead of the “alteration of inflated moments with deflated ones” of descriptions of mundane actions, *Água Viva* exists in a state of “hightened exaltation” (273). In other words, the text was structurally transformed as to separate autobiography from self-writing.

This change was defended (and perhaps encouraged) by Severino, who claims that the two versions “represem, apesar de algumas diferenças no processo de execução, tentativas de chegar até um ponto infável, um *it*, para além do raciocínio e além mesmo para a imaginação” (115). Furthermore, these changes reflect a consciousness, on the part of the author and her friend-editor-translator, of *Água Viva*'s legacy in relation to earlier publications and their desire to capture (and hence articulate through this editorial decision) the “totality” of Clarice's aesthetic. If an autobiography was not the intended result, it is interesting that the author admitted that “Eu vinha escrevendo esse livro há anos, espalhados (sic) por crônicas de jornal,

sem perceber, ignorante de mim que sou, que estava escrevendo o *meu* livro” (Lispector qtd in Severino 117). The concept of “meu livro” is not necessarily eliminated with the change from “Objecto gritante” to *Água Viva*, for, as Clarice’s works attest, she had a radically complex understanding of the self, in particular with regards to the position of women in a patriarchal world and phallogocentric language. Although some critics (Roncador, for example) remain skeptical of this depersonalization of Clarice’s self writing, it can be argued that perhaps *Água Viva* reflects an emerging theory of self-writing that questions the traditions and components of auto-bio-graphy.

Self-writing is a highly dynamic “genre” of constant evolution, and *Água Viva* demonstrates poststructuralist transitions. Her deconstructed concepts of self, language, and the world figure in the structure and themes of her self-writing. As can be seen in *Água Viva*, Clarice postulates a “world making function of language rather than a world reflecting one” (Payne 767). In this sense, Clarice’s attempt to write her self would necessitate the creation of a textual being through and in language as opposed to a verisimilar, referential account of her life and identity. Furthermore, as opposed to a retrospective vision of life suggested by confessional or conversion narratives, Clarice’s phenomenological writing is situated in the present, as if trying to capture the instances and epiphanies of self-examination. For Clarice, writing is a form of life—“Eu escrevo como se fosse para salvar a vida de alguém. Provavelmente a minha própria vida” (*Um Sopro de Vida* 11)—and her writing is, therefore, means to a process of attaining self-consciousness rather than merely a representation of a coherent, apologia of the self.

In moments of prosopopeia, Clarice explicitly examines the relationship of language and self, considers the tropic limitations of the textual creation, and questions the medium of writing. De Man’s theorization of autobiography as a type of reading rather than a genre is particularly

useful for reading Clarice since *Água Viva* lacks the traditional markers of autobiography. For example, there is no proper name and references to the actual person are scarce. The use of the pronoun “I” to refer to herself is inconsistent, and at times she even appears to address herself as “tú.” Nor is there any history or development of personality to be represented, and the text reads more like lyric prose full of poetic images, metaphysical concepts, and anti-mimetic descriptions. However, Clarice demonstrates an awareness of the “facement” and defacement” of De Man’s theory, particularly in the attempt to capture the self in language and traditional autobiography:

In this dense jungle of words that wrap themselves thickly around what I feel and think and experience and that transform all that I am into something of my own that nonetheless remains entirely separate from me. I watch myself think. What I ask myself is this: who is it in me that remains outside even of thinking? I’m writing you all of this since it’s a challenge I’m forced to accept with humility. I’m startled by my ghosts. (55)

In this description we can see that the textual self is a voiceless or dead being in comparison to the actual person. We also see the specular gaze of the self that separates the textual creation from the author.

If De Man notes that this process of prosopopeia is privative, Clarice recognizes the limited nature of language when she states, “I can’t sum myself up because it is impossible to add up a chair and two apples. I’m a chair and two apples. And I don’t add up” (60). Here she also demonstrates the metaphoric creation of a self-image in language, which ends up being an inadequate medium for capturing her essence. Instead, she confronts the linguistic challenge of self-representation by altering the definition of autobiography. She writes, “There are many things I can’t tell you. I’m not going to be autobiographical. I want to be ‘bio’” (26). This concept of a living self-writing stands in great contrast to the “defaced” product of more

traditional autobiography. While much of *Água Viva* addresses the struggle to represent herself, Clarice comes to an awareness that her self-representation will need to reflect the living dimension of her self. Although Clarice rejected the label of *l'écriture féminine*, this new definition of *bio* can be interpreted as writing life in the form of the biological body instead of the life story. Cixous describes the writing of the body as the strategy of women's writing: "Women must write her self" (*Laugh* 875), "[her] body must be heard" (880); "Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes" (886). All of these elements figure in *Água Viva*. Clarice's use of language defies normal logic—becomes "impregnable"—and dissolves dichotomies through the use of androgyny and neutral categories such as the "it." The shattering of codes can be seen in the shocking feminine images of her eating her placenta (26), "a milk belly with a navel" (27), and "a white slug with a women's breast" (29). These maternal images show Clarice's preference for a semiotic rather than a symbolic language, according to the theory of Kristeva.

Another implication of Clarice's *bio* writing is that the living body needs a text that follows the rhythms of life as opposed to the static textual cemetery where "one is filed away as in an archive" (35). In addition to being born, her textual self must breath and grow. Conceptually, Clarice conceives of a *live* (en vivo) life-writing, and consequently much of her writing is about trying to capture the "fourth dimension" or time instances. For example, the reader must pause while Clarice is "waiting for the next sentence" (26). Furthermore, if the traditional act of autobiography involves the writing the past from the moment of the present, Clarice's understanding of self-writing belies the artificial nature of this narrative time. Clarice reflects on this artistic paradox in *Água Viva*: "I am before, I am almost, I am never [...] What I

speak is pure present, and this book is a straight line in space. It's always present time, and the shutter of the camera opens and immediately closes [...] Even if I say 'I have lived' or 'I shall live,' it's present because I'm saying it now" (11). The challenge of representing the self is plagued by the difference between the finite nature of language and the infinite nature of the self, and she explains, "I want to capture the present"; "I try to keep up with it. I divide myself thousands of times, into as many times as the seconds that pass [...] only in time is there space for me" (4). This need to produce a living text points again to her theorization of an auto-biography that differs from the prosopopeia of De Man.

The problem that arises for Clarice is how to convert this transcendental self that she experiences into a textual representation. This problem is best illustrated with her book's epigraph that describes a fantastical painting: "There ought to exist a painting totally free of dependence on figure—on the object—which, like music, represents nothing at all, tells no story and pronounces no myth [...] where trace becomes existence." Clarice deals with this problem at great length and examines multiple rhetorical possibilities. In addition to the complex metaphors and poetic images mentioned above, she turns to synesthesia on several occasions: "I want vast distances [...] my essence is always hidden. I am implicit. And when I begin to make myself explicit I lose my moist intimacy. What is the color of infinity? It is the color of air?" (17). Thus, rather than a representative effort, Clarice's self-writing can best be described as expressive and meditative, for she engages with the philosophy of self-writing and leaves behind abstract, ephemeral glimpses of herself.

In addition to *Água Viva*, Clarice wrote what Earl Fitz once called *Água Viva*'s conflicted twin, *Um Sopro de Vida*, published posthumously in 1978. Written with an awareness of her impending death, this final text uses the structure of the confession as a way of exploring the

usual topics of her works, including the relationship between reality and language and the nature of existence. Fitz argues that Clarice creates a narrative out of the internal monologue process, with the male protagonist and writer representing the analytical thought pattern and with his fictional creation, Angela, representing the emotive side (“Novel as Confession” 260). Fitz further suggests that Clarice, the author, often appears in the text, indistinguishable from her protagonist and his character. Not only does the text exude some urgency to confess, it is also very self-conscious about narrative. Clarice’s textual self-consciousness helps to shed light on similar curiosities in other poststructural self-writings, in this case, the use of fictional characters in place of or alongside the individual self. The male author explains this rhetorical, philosophical strategy:

Porque eu sozinho não consigo: a solidão, a mesma que existe em cada um, me faz inventar. E haver noutro modo de salvar-se? Senão o de criar as próprias realidades?... Escolhi a mim e ao meu personagem—Angela Pralini—para que talvez através de nós eu possa entender essa falta de definição da vida ...O que está escrito aqui, meu ou de Angela, são restos de uma demolição de alma, são cortes laterais de uma realidade que se me foge continuamente. (18-19)

To a certain extent, even self-knowledge cannot be captured, either in thought or language. If in *Sopro de vida* Clarice creates characters to address this void, this lack of definition, in *Água Viva* she writes more metafictionally about the ephemeral nature of being. She writes, “Creating escapes me [...] I’m satisfied with the impersonal vitality of the *it*. [...] the last few sentences I was only thinking on the surface of myself. So the core of existence comes forth to bathe and erase all traces of thought” (54).

Diamela Eltit

Lumpérica has been described by critics as an “indecipherable” novel, a deconstructionist text without a plot, and a reading “in/as the experience of illegibility” (Mary Louise Pratt, Weintraub s/p). Having said this, I elect to read her work as a different type of self-writing, a reading that requires radical and at times problematic redefinitions. In order to give some coherence to this cryptic novel, the basic event of the book is the masturbation and self-mutilation of the female protagonist in a public square, where she is filmed by Pinochet’s security cameras as the flashing letters of a neon sign illuminate her body. This main scene can be said to be reinterpreted multiple times, and Eltit appropriates the techniques of other media such as the cinematographic use of flashback, zoom, and mise en abyme, to alter the scene and even render it unrecognizable. This generic multiplicity, or ekphrasis, that represents this main scene through different scopes and perspectives includes the filming of the protagonist L. Iluminada’s self-mutilation as if she were an actress, the director’s comments regarding the “filming,” Pinochet-inspired interrogations based on the surveillance of the film, and a poetic rendition of the events in which L. Iluminada metaphorically assumes a multiform animal state, taking the form of a cow, a horse, and a dog in heat. The text also includes a picture of the author with slashed arms that parallels the narration of mutilation scene and that serves to depict Eltit’s concept of bodily writing. The aforementioned ekphrasis that characterizes the work is complimented by explicitly metafictional sections of prose, including various poetic reflections on the erotic and violent nature of writing and a reinterpretation of Harold Bloom’s “Anxiety of Influence” in which the fictional diamela eltit [sic] engages in sexual “rubblings” with literary figures. In addition to an erratic structure, the Neobaroque style of the text incorporates

moments of linguistic play including broken syntax and grammar, neologisms, foreign words and slang, puns with modified spellings, and variations of textual margins (Christ, “Extravag(r)ant” 10). As is evident, the work deviates dramatically from the tradition of self-writing. Even more unusual is the fact that Eltit “performed” the book in the film *Maipú* by reading the book to prostitutes, scrubbing the floors of the brothel, and cutting herself (as she does in the book). This cinematic projection of her image onto the walls of the brothel can be seen on the cover of the Seix Barral edition and the 1997 English translation.

The fragmented nature of *Lumpérica* is both the result of the difficulty of representing the marginal protagonist and a result of the specific historical context in which the work was produced. Written just a decade after the 1973 coup d'état that overthrew the democratically-elected Salvador Allende, *Lumpérica* figures as one of the most important and singular literary works of the Chilean *escena de avanzada*, a neo-vanguard movement. It has also been heralded as a rare example of contemporary *écriture féminine* in Latin American literature. The writing of the *escena de avanzada*, which emphasized writing from the margins, was necessarily allegorical and baroque; it was cryptic in order to escape censorship, symbolic because of the ineffable trauma suffered, and fragmented as a result of an irrecoverable past.

A new testimonial impulse developed out of the *escena de avanzada* movement, although it was a testimony that challenged the limits of traditional self-representation. Heteroglossa, fragmentation, and abject images were introduced to emphasize the “residual” nature of marginality. As Nelly Richard writes,

The Chilean dictatorship pushed the fragmentariness of the *testimonio* toward new extremes of creativity, in which the stylistic maneuvers, technical subterfuges, and fictional artifices perfected a sub-version of the genre, in order to give a much-deserved

eloquence to that 'inessential, disposable 'I' embraced by Benjamin: shreds of identity, narrative residue, lexical discard, technological rubbish, sexual errata, and the failing of genres and genders. (*Insubordination* 17-18)

The importance of Richard's definition is that it allows *Lumpérica*, with its fragmented scenes of masturbation, the glimpses of Pinochet's society in the interrogation and surveillance scenes, the Joycian passages, and the incorporation of multiple literary and visual forms, to be analyzed from the perspective of self-writing.

An obvious question that arises is how we can reconcile this new, non-traditional type of "testimony" with self-representation in a story that lacks the biographical account of a life, that lacks a stable protagonist, or that fails to express an individual identity. To begin with, the use of prosopopeia allows us to recognize this work as a theorization of self-writing. I am not the first to see prosopopeia in *Lúmpérica*. Idelber Avelar, viewing the text as an allegorical form of testimony, reads the protagonist's "story" as an attempt to provide a voice to the voiceless lumpen who populate the public square (*Alegorias* 18). While I agree with this, I find there to be a deeper contemplation of the act of self-writing within the text that goes beyond Avelar's metatextual, ideological perspective. I would also argue that this type of *testimonio*, in the true postmodern sense, can actually be a type of autobiography when the collective identity reflects the loss of individual subjectivity, as it does in *Lumpérica*. Eva Klein also notes the importance of self-writing and testimony in *Lumpérica*, which she considers to be Eltit's "intención de transformar el *lumperío* en presencia textual" (23). Moreover, it is a "un 'testimonio' diferente, una (auto)representación otra" (27), a postmodern self representation that "ensaya las posibilidades de la (auto)representación de sujetos fragmentados e identidades lesionadas que no calla sus incoherencias" (27). The work is postmodern in the sense that identities are no longer

thought of as “autoexpresión plena y transparente de un yo unificado...Lo ‘femenino’ es la negatividad plural que despliegan estas fuerzas.” (Richard, “Tres funciones” 50-51).

To move beyond the idea of testimony, a good starting point for examining the central criteria of postmodern autobiography—prosopopeia—is the picture of Diamela Eltit included in the text, which serves as a simulacra of the real person (or Lejeune’s signature/pact). In this picture, the author’s arms bear signs of physical torture, thus connecting the real person to the protagonist who mutilates herself in various manners throughout the book. The act of cutting the arms, as if referring to this picture, is also described in a chapter, thereby playing with the textual remembrance and the actual occurrence (represented by the photo). Prosopopeia can also be found in the repeated “scene of writing” that constitutes the basic “plot” of writhing and writing in front of the security cameras and interpellating light. This main scene is rewritten over and over again, and in metaphorical fashion, causing the versions to appear unrelated at the first glance. For example, rendered poetically, this self-abuse is retold with *L. Iluminada* symbolically debasing herself to an animal state in which she represents herself as a cow, a horse, and a dog that run around violently. This mutilation scene is also made in to a movie version, along with director’s commentary, in which *L. Iluminada* is treated like an actress, once again questioning the relationship between the representation of art and the original object.

Read from this interpretation, *Lumpérica*, despite its abstract contents, explores the relationship between representation and the marginal self. The challenge in interpreting the text as self-writing remains to connect three basic elements of the book: 1) the mutilation scenes, 2) the ekphrasis or generic instability between self-representation in prose, and its multiplications through poetry, photography, and film, and 3) the explicit references made in the text to the act of self-writing. In order to make these connections, I rely on the theory of Paul De Man from

his seminal 1979 article “Autobiography as Defacement” and how several of his fundamental points must be re-theorized for the autobiography of non-traditional subject.

The first necessary modification for the depiction of a non-traditional subject involves the limits and style of self-writing. In other words, the way we structure the concept of our selves (traditionally assumed to be the result of a chronological series of events) is determined by society and the models of self-representation, and that society normalizes these models and we take them to be natural. De Man writes:

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium? (920)

The importance of this idea and its postmodern reinterpretation is two-fold: first, it alludes to the possibility that the chronology and story of Diamela Eltit’s life are not necessarily prior to the text or even relevant to her self-representation, and second, that her surroundings can determine the structure of her self-representation and her concept of self. In other words, the effects of the dictatorship, including the split of the body and language in torture, the power dynamics of interpellation, the reduction of human subjectivity in surveillance videos, the emptiness of the photographs of the disappeared, and the power dynamics of confession are incorporated in the allegorical structure of the work.

The numerous scenes of mutilation and their explicit relationship to literature highlight the frustration of this attempted expression, and the novel is truly a culmination of fragmented and incomplete attempts of self-representation. Instead of De Man’s reconstruction of the body,

or “facement,” Eltit presents us with the destruction and disintegration of the textual body. In *Lumpérica*, the mutilations are intimately related to the trope of prosopopeia, as evidenced by the chapter subtitle “formulación de una imagen en la literatura.” Under the interpellating gaze of the security camera and the projection of the commercial sign’s letters onto her body, L. Iluminada construes herself as a blank piece of paper on which to write. Her dress, as well as the monochromatic, pale vagabonds that accompany her are metaphorical screens upon which the neon sign projects “la suma de nombres que los va a confirmar como existencia” (7). The image of interpellation by the masculine sign that lights her body is parallel to the patriarchal power inherent in prosopopeia, illustrated in De Man’s use of Wordsworth’s metaphor of the sun that reads the epitaph on the tombstone and confers a voice to this dead entity (925). The sexed nature of the reading/gaze involved in prosopopeia is problematic for women’s self-writing, and L. Iluminada constantly struggles with the problem of her body being written on with a phallic language. Her authority lies, as we shall see, in the manipulation of medium and the scrambling of words. Eltit’s preferred way of representing this control of her self-narrative is by mutilation. Not only can this be seen in her self portrait, where her injuries are more important than her facial identity (or representation of the self), but the text also explicitly equates mutilation with writing:

Solamente para otorgarse nueva identidad [...] y como una cita, frente a la fogata acerca su mano, adelanta su mano sobre las llamas y la deja caer encima [...] Y su mano abierta sobre las llamas cambia de color [...] Mira la mano, las ampollas que se levantan, la contracción de los dedos [...] Se ha abierto un nuevo circuito en la literatura. (29)

This bodily writing escapes the bounds of normal language, and Eltit is not capable of conveying her identity to us in a straightforward fashion. The numerous scenes of mutilation and

their explicit relationship to literature highlight the frustration of this attempt, and the novel is truly a culmination of fragmented and incomplete attempts of self-representation.

The final chapter, in addition to piecing together the textual fragments of the text, presents the epiphany of the problem of self-writing that the text represents on so many planes. After becoming aware of the patriarchal imprinting of identity and name, L. Iluminada traverses the public square to watch the flashing neon sign from all angles. She contemplates the alternating flashing of letters and considers every possible combination. She watches and realizes that “Que dos, tres o cuatro letras podrían caer si ella se paraba en un lugar preciso. Y era más aún, por la misma distancia, unas se montaban sobre las otras, dando origen a palabras completas, que más allá de un sentido claro o riguroso se establecían como nexos” (193). She examines the subversive potential within the language projected by the sign by modifying the reception of the paper/dress through her sexual writhings and various self-mutilations, and by cutting off her hair. However, she also realizes the futility of using words that “finalmente nunca le había correspondido en realidad” (193).

After experimenting with the different possibilities of imprinting and understanding that it is impossible to produce an exact combination with El Luminoso’s letters—“le era imposible precisar con certeza una combinatoria exacta” (193)—L. Iluminada takes out a mirror and examines herself. She contemplates her face from every angle, considers the fracturing and discoloring effect of the light and she practices a smile. The events of this scene, first, the scrambling the sign’s letters, then abandoning them all together in order to simply gaze narcissistically at herself in the mirror, can be interpreted as the self-representative gesture of the overall text.

Lumpérica not only represents the act of self-writing as futile, the text also presents a postmodern reworking of the understanding of self. Clearly, the protagonist is not telling a traditional life story, nor is she the traditional, exemplary autobiographical protagonist. However, we must understand that Eltit follows Derrida's definition of the female as "non-identity, a non-figure, a simulacrum" (qtd. in Ortega 56), and she therefore constructs the female as a metaphorical representation of marginality. This equation works both for reading the woman as a representative of the marginalized or, inversely, representing the woman as marginal. This negation of the individual subjectivity is evident in the symbolism of the title, for example, reflects this postmodern "testimonial" role and word *Lumpérica* evokes the meanings "América," "lumpen," "mujer," "lumen" (Avelar, *Alegorias* 230) and "perica"⁵ (Neustad "Clearing Space" 228). If on the one hand the female represents beings that lack subjectivity, it can also be said that this lack of subjectivity requires a different type of self-representation. We can even see that the etymology of the word autobiography needs rethinking: If the protagonist is annihilated, destroying all substance and biographical autonomy, the *auto* component also becomes problematic and we are faced with a postmodern destruction of the self. Following the removal of *bio* and *auto* what is left, then, is *graphein* or writing.

Read from this theoretical perspective, *Lumpérica*, despite its abstract contents, explores the relationship between self-writing and extreme marginality as experienced under authoritarianism. This testimonial act is based on the performances of L. Iluminada in which she serves as a model of bodily writing. After experimenting with various forms of representation before the gaze of the lumpen—burning her hand, writhing under the flashing letters of the neon sign, rolling on wet chalk to stain/print her dress, etc—she demonstrates her writing with sidewalk chalk, erases it, calls on the lumpen to help her erase, and then gives them pieces of

⁵ *Perica* is Chilean slang for prostitute (Neustad 228).

chalk and her own watchful eye: “Este lumperío escribe y borra imaginario, se reparte las palabras, los fragmentos de letras, borran sus supuestos errores, ensayan sus caligrafías, endilgan el pulso, acceden a la imprenta. [...] Están enajenados en la pendiente de la letra, alfabetizados, corruptos por la impresión” (105). This image is one of the most important of the book, for it is subject to a hostile interrogation in order to find out why L. Iluminada had the chalk and what words she had vocalized. As Julio Ortega writes, “La tiza que el personaje lleva en la mano es fuente (tinta) de la escritura (graffiti) pública (subversiva) [...] según el poder autoritario todo es legible y, por tanto, todo es sancionable” (64). Writing, self representation, and power are, therefore, essential themes of Eltit’s work.

Much of the text is a play with different types of writing and representation. One particular example is the act of scrambling of letters can be seen in several peculiar lines of the actual text, which will be analyzed in Chapter Five:

“Muge/r/apa y su mano se nutre final-mente el verde des-ata y maya se erige y vac/a-nal su forma”(142),

“Anal’iza la trama=dura de la piel: la mano prende y la fobia *d* es/garra”(143)

Eltit splices her words and in this process new meanings are created. The “mujer” and her bacchanal are translated in to a “vaca-anal que muge-r” signaling an even more abject and animalistic existence for the woman in language. In this light, the multiform animal state can be read as a poetic rendition of the marginal self into language. However, her story and identity are not successfully “translated” into language, represented by the linguistic splicing that occurs. Her metaphorical animalization of the protagonist signals an imperfect language system in which totalities are impossible, and a self-writing in which “no puede extenderse a totalidades”(46). This revolutionary use of language in autobiography will be examined later, but suffice it to say

that given the marginal self confronting a patriarchal language, Eltit finds herself in the white space between words and letters.

Fragmentation and repeated attempts at self-representation, found in the metafictional dimension of the text, are ultimately the only stories that can be gained from the work. Since the creation of the autobiographic subject requires a phallic gesture, as evidenced in the parallels between the paternal sun shining upon the tombstone or El Luminoso shining on L. Iluminada, our “phallic reading” of *Lumpérica* is ultimately subverted through Eltit’s unwillingness to write a coherent account. This is to say that this final representation of the main scene highlights the parallels between L. Iluminada’s reading of the sign’s writing and our reading of *Lumpérica*. Just as her bodily movements scramble and create every possibility with the letters of the sign, Eltit scrambles the text by challenging the traditional narrative and genres of self-representation. Finally, just as her reading ends with a metafictional moment—examining herself in the mirror—the ultimate and best reading of *Lumpérica* is one that metafictionally examines self-representation.

I propose, therefore, that the use of multi-media and multiple perspectives represent Eltit’s persistent striving to faithfully represent her self in spite of the limitations of language and the oppressive historical and linguistic context. The repeated yet frustrated attempts at self-representation cause the novel to emphasize the performance of this act over the actual message. The process is repeated, nonetheless, because as the etymology implies, genres are gendered, and thus language and the acts of writing, imprinting, and filming remain phallogocentric.

Reinaldo Arenas

Considered among the most innovative of the Boom writers by Emir Rodríguez Monegal (99),⁶ Reinaldo Arenas is mostly known for his candid, unapologetic, and often hyperbolic renditions of his homosexuality, as well as his fervid anti-Castro sentiment. Born into abject poverty in rural Oriente, Cuba in 1943, his childhood was marked by hostile familial relations and destitute economic conditions. An imaginative child, his propensity to artistic creation served as an escape mechanism from his precarious existence and social status, and would eventually lead him to Havana literary circles. With his first 1965 novel *Celestino antes del alba*, Arenas joined the ranks of respected Cuban writers, but the elevated repression of homosexuality led him to smuggle out manuscripts from the island. Combined with his sexuality, this defiance of the revolutionary establishment caused him to be persecuted and jailed, and he later escaped the island as part of the Mariel exodus in 1980. Extremely prolific during his 47 years of life, he published seven novels, several novellas, and poetry and short story collections. Exile in the United States allowed him freedom of expression and political visibility, but Arenas felt himself to be a perennial outsider, and he suffered poor health and poverty. In 1990, disheartened with his prolonged fight with AIDS, he committed suicide in New York City.

Arenas is perhaps best known for his anti-Castro politics and for autobiography, *Antes que anochezca*, which enjoyed great publishing success. Writing, particularly self-writing, was an almost manic activity for Arenas, one that he equated with living and one that filled his final years with a sense of urgency, as to finish both his linear autobiography and his poetic, symbolic account over the five-book *Pentagonía*. Whereas *Antes que anochezca* was written from the perspective of exile, the first three books of the *Pentagonía* were penned on the island and

⁶ It bears noting that Arenas is generally classified as Post-Boom. Rodríguez Monegal is unusual in this categorization, but it is useful considering Arenas's self-writing is more experimental than the historically-oriented works of the Post-Boom.

impacted by censorship. Declared as subversive and forcing Arenas to become a fugitive, these texts provide glimpses of political commentary that are enmeshed in his fragments of memory. The unstable writing of the first three books of the *Pentagonía* resembles the textual representation of trauma, including repetition of a violent scene and a gaze of the self from outside of the body. Arenas also wrote politically committed poetry, literary criticism, and anti-Castro petitions and propaganda.

The study of his *Pentagonía* as self-writing is due both to his own label as a “writers autobiography” and to the plot similarities with the more traditional *Antes que anochezca*. While texts are to be read independently of the author, if we listen to Foucault, Arenas’s suggested interpretation must be taken seriously, especially in exploring the limits of the form. The five-book sequence consists of: *Celestino antes del alba*, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, *Otra vez el mar*, *El color de verano*, and *El asalto*. These “novels” can be said to be symbolic, poetically lyric, and experimental versions of the life that he relates in *Antes que anochezca*. They give particular detail to his childhood, adolescence, the inner strife felt as a homosexual man, and the repressive political and social atmosphere in which he lived.

The *Pentagonía* could easily be read as fiction, but it does provide moments of prosopopeia that hint at Arenas’s attitude towards self-writing and realism. The most immediate sign is the use of his proper name in the fourth book of the series and the connection of biographical information from the *Pentagonía* to his life story in *Antes que anochezca*. Moreover, the theories revealed implicitly in numerous metafictional instances shed light on how his works are to be interpreted as self-writing. At a first glance, Arenas deviates from the traditional autobiography by destabilizing the first-person voice and unity of the autobiographical protagonist in his permutations throughout the series. Based on the prologue to

his authorized publication of *Cantando en el pozo* (originally titled *Celestino antes del alba*) in the United States, we know that these books are “narrado por un autor-*testigo*, aunque el protagonista perece en cada obra, vuelve a renacer en la siguiente con distinto nombre pero con igual objetivo y rebeldia: cantar el horror y la vida de la gente” (np). The nameless child narrator (whose alter ego is Celestino) shifts to the adolescent Fortunato, to the young adult Héctor, then to the trinity Gabriel/Reinaldo/Tétrica Mofeta, and back to an anonymous narrator. While this technique and questioning of perspective and subjectivity have been seen before, as in Gertrude Stein’s groundbreaking *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, it can be said to reflect a particularly postmodern vision of the self as incoherent, fragmented, or discontinuous. The allegorical nature of the quintet, namely its function as a metaphor of Cuban history, also raises the question of the relationship between individual and community. Various critics have argued that marginal groups have often preferred writing about a collective self rather than the individual, possibly due to identity politics, possibly as a reaction to the privileged and previously denied space of autobiography.

The questioning of realism as a referential style has always been a hallmark of Arenas’s craft. As is most evident in *Celestino antes del alba*, fiction and fantasy stand on equal ground with so-called realism. Perhaps this speaks to the postmodern condition in which there is a “Loss of the real, in Jameson’s view, [that] leads to reduction of the traditional autonomy of the self, since with postmodernism the individual subject is no longer able to define itself reciprocally against a reliable, exterior object” (Sim 22). Although Jameson’s theory can perhaps be said to be inconsistent with a country that does not participate in the “logic of late capitalism,” Arenas nonetheless demonstrates a poststructuralist sensibility in elevating fiction over realism. A particularly evident poststructuralist innovation of the self is his deconstruction of gender

categories. In *Otra vez el mar*, the first part of the book detailing the sexual and social tensions of a family vacation at the beach appears to be the stream-of-consciousness monologue of the female protagonist. However, at the end of the second part, a poetic and figurative re-presentation of the same week, it is revealed to the reader that the female does not exist. Héctor has, therefore, appropriated the female voice and perspective, as if it were impossible to express the self in one gendered form. Similarly, in the preceding book, Arenas's adolescence is represented as a composite of multiple family members, with his double or alter ego figuring in the character of his sister. It is difficult to imagine how one could conceive of the self in such fragmented fashion, and in reality, Arenas's vision of self can only be the subject of speculation. However, what can be said is that Arenas likely felt that a single, coherent portrait was inadequate to represent the stifled, oppressive atmosphere of his past and present (at the moment of writing) existence.

Alternatively, the tenuous sense of self expressed in the quintet speaks to the difficulty of representing traumatic moments and the deconstruction of the subject in pain. Arenas's work thus suggests the need for a different fabrication of the self, whether related to a fantastical, ludic process of self-writing, a postmodern one, or the reflection upon the problem of documentation and the role of documents in creating subjects. Reinaldo Arenas can be said to explore a similar concept of expressive rather than representative self-writing in some of his earlier texts. Furthermore, the traditionally styled autobiography *Antes que anochezca* is inevitably used to understand the oneiric, allegorical, and experimental writing of the *Pentagonía*. This extratextual explanation is, admittedly, necessary for understanding how the series of the five books can be read together as an extended text, for the styles, themes, and names of the characters change from one book to another. This said, the *Pentagonía* provides an interesting contrast between the

retrospective self-writing of traditional autobiographies and self-writing that is written “live” or during the progression of the life. This latter type of self-writing may prove to be more metafictional or conscious of the act of storytelling/self-writing as opposed to focused on a transparent representation of one’s life. In the case of Arenas, the hypergraphy exhibited throughout his life, especially in his desperation to produce literature while facing persecution in Cuba and while suffering the debilitating final stages of AIDS, confers onto his writing greater meaning as a form of expression or performative assertion of self.

This association between writing and life can be seen in *Celestino antes del alba*. This text bears little resemblance to the traditional autobiography, for it lacks a chronology of events, it presents the imagined and fantastic world of a child, and the protagonist is anonymous. However, the text can be read allegorically as representing the process of self-consciousness that constitutes the autobiographical act. Since the text was published when Arenas was only 22 years old, it is difficult to speak of any organizing theme or metaphor of self-identity like those that later become clear in *Antes que anochezca*, which he wrote shortly before his death. However, *Celestino antes del alba* reflects certain dynamics of self-formation as well as the structuring of memory (particularly a traumatic one). The specular moment of reading oneself in language is, in essence, performed in this book, for the protagonist creates a splinter version of himself in Celestino. The text is rife with images of mirrors, such as when the child narrator examines himself in the reflection of the well. This allows for an easy interpretation of the text as the Lacanian mirror state in which the subject becomes aware of his own existence in language. (A Freudian reading is also possible, with the superego represented by the violent, axe-wielding grandfather who chops down the trees with Celestino’s writing opposed to the id of the childlike imagination). The splitting of the subject in trauma or violence is suggested, for the protagonist’s

mother throws a rock at his head, causing his head to split in two: “Mi cabeza se ha abierto en dos mitades, y una ha salido corriendo. La otra se queda frente a mí. Bailando” (14).

It can be argued that Celestino is an imagined double of the nameless protagonist, and this imagination parallels the specular moment of prosopopeia in which the person who writes the self examines their textual (or mental) reproduction. Celestino, as an imagined self, serves several functions in the text. First, he is obsessed with writing, literally writing on everything around him, from scraps of paper, books, the trees of the forest, and even on his own body. The protagonist is distanced from this writing, for he is unable to read, but he sympathizes with Celestino and understands the urgency of his drive to write. Celestino also represents the abused body that the protagonist witnesses, but because he is imagined (or in essence, textual), he is immune to truly feeling pain. Celestino is subjected to extreme violence. For example, he is brutally beaten and receives a blow to the head with the grandfather’s axe. The protagonist bears witness to these acts, and this separation can be said to reflect the splitting nature of torture that renders language impossible (Scarry 35).⁷ This can perhaps account for the pages in which the word “hachas” is repeated over and over again, separate from the narrative context, words that simply stand alone as echoes.

Curiously, Celestino is revealed to be dead at the end, despite the fact that throughout the novel his body is magically indestructible. For example, during the chapter that portrays the starvation that the family suffers, he fantastically gives the narrator his arm to eat. In addition to

⁷ Scarry writes on the relationship between language and pain: “Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of one’s language disintegrates, as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject. World, self, and voice are lost, or nearly lost, through the intense pain of torture...” (35). Arenas’s representation of the child protagonist and his alter ego experience precisely what Scarry describes. The narrator is more able to interact with the family around him. However, Celestino is possessed by the need to write (resembling the book’s repetition of simple phrases on many pages). Furthermore, Celestino appears to receive a greater share of the physical abuse. The reunion of the two bodies at the end of the text may, therefore, represent the reconstitution of the self of the narrator and of his linguistic capabilities.

this cannibalistic moment, the two characters fuse together again at the end of the book; this part is played out in the form of a drama, with character indications, including the use of “Tú” for the child narrator.⁸

La madre—¡Se muere!...

Tú—Enséñame el pájaro. ¡Enséñame el pájaro.

Abuelo.—(*Muy alegre.*). ¡Aquí está! ¡Míralo!

Tú—¡Celestino! Abuelo—Sí, ¡Tú! (174).

This creates a mirror like dynamic in the text, where the reader is situated in the place of the protagonist, thus creating the specular moment of “mutual substitutive reflection” that De Man speaks of. Interestingly, if Celestino is dead, so is the protagonist and, by extension, the reader.

While the lack of concrete images of Arenas’s childhood in *Celestino* may appear unsatisfactory referential in comparison to the fairly straightforward account he gives in *Antes que anochezca*, the key specular moment of self-reflection is present in the text and allows for us to call it self-writing. *Celestino antes del alba* can be said to be both an expressive and metafictional account of the difficulty of capturing the self and memory. However, it is interesting that in comparison to Paul De Man’s bleak conception of “defacement,” as well as Eltit and Clarice’s ultimately frustrated attempts at capturing the self, Arenas leaves a more positive view of the potential of non-mimetic writing: “Que nos muriéramos los dos y la poesía siguiera sin terminar” (139).

The innovations to the *bio* component of self-writing is related to the expanded creative potential of fiction. At times it appears that Arenas had an imaginative vision of self-writing in which the person and the character were equally real (or that imagination triumphed over

⁸ Furthermore, the confusion between the slur “pájaro” that denotes a homosexual and the word “bird” illustrates the linguistic uncertainty that I will discuss in Chapter Four.

repression.). Arenas often found parallels between his own life and fiction, as if the similarities between the life of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier and his own were related to his rewriting of Fray Servando's history in *El mundo alucinante*. Furthermore, knowing that his death was imminent, Arenas seems to have eagerly sought the restorative power of fiction, the ability to create textual masks both to disguise his physical deterioration and to give himself a life after death.

On the other hand, modifications of the concept of *bio* may speak to the repressed self that is best represented as incomplete or incoherent. In his insightful analysis in the chapter "A Homosexual Bildungsroman: The Novels of the Península," Francisco Soto expounds the tenuous relationship between self and representation in these texts. Arenas intentionally destabilizes both of these concepts, for the "use of splitting characters, imagined doubles, and metamorphoses [...] decenters the notion of a fixed continuous and integral identity" (*Reinaldo Arenas* 37). Soto finds similarities in the fragmentations of the subject in Arenas and in Menippean comedy, following the argument of Bakhtin in which the use of doubles to "proliferate the subject" recreates the monologue with the self. What becomes particularly interesting for the study of autobiography is how this dialogue with different fragments of the self, which are often represented as different characters, can be viewed similarly to the specular moment of prosopopeia. Whether it speaks to split personalities or the multifaceted nature of selves, or whether it reflects the communal forces involved in the construction of self, Arenas's fiction suggests that the concept of a coherent autobiographical protagonist, far from being representative of him, is neither universal nor timeless. It can be speculated that language is not always reflective of one's being or inclusive of one's marginal status, and the devaluing of personal pronouns may be a symptom of a repressed existence. The second novel, *Palacio de las*

blanquísimas mofetas perhaps best demonstrates the dialectic that is said to exist between self and other, as expressed by the fusion of both into a neologism “myours” (qtd in Soto *Reinaldo Arenas* 49).

If autobiography is generally held to be a form of self-construction, Arenas also presents the possibility of autobiography as self-destruction (or self-destruction as the representation of self-construction). Trauma and or identities imposed upon the self by the outside are both possible sources of this literary strategy, for we know both about the hardships of his life as well as his repudiation of a homogenous homosexuality identity. Self-torture is a motif that can be found in all three of these authors. Based on *Escrito sobre un cuerpo*, by Severo Sarduy, I am led to think that self-torture is an exercise in exploring the relationship between the self as object and the self as subject. This also reflects the autobiographical moment of *prosopopeia*, for the writer is at once agent and object of his own understanding. Self-torture (through sadistic treatment of autobiographical characters) and suicide ultimately raise the greater question of these acts as forms of bodily testament, although these questions fall outside the scope of this project. However, what does strike me as pertinent is an attitude present in Arenas’s work in which self-harm serves as a symbolic expression of the self and of one’s life. In the case of *Antes que anochezca*, his real-life suicide appears in the literary realm as a construction of him as a martyr who owes his trials to Castro’s wrongdoings. The appropriation of the trinity for his *Color del verano* also turns self-destruction into an expressive image.

This self-destruction may point to a particularly postmodern problem for autobiography, which is the crisis of authority. Contrary to the crisis of authority of for whom does one write, this is the crisis of the author and the loss of power in writing theorized by Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría in *Voices of the Masters*. Similar to El Supremo, who writes excessively and

contradicts himself at every move, this crisis is marked by the loss of the potency of the “I” voice of the author. In the case of Arenas, it can perhaps be said that the author is no longer an authority on his own self. In terms of the etymological breakdown, this would signal the dissolution of the *auto*, leaving a radical type of biography. This, of course, is not inaccurate for describing the *Pentagonía*.

In all three authors we have seen a drastic reworking of the etymological components of autobiography, with special focus on the *bio* and *graphein*. It can be said that the three authors have different concepts of self, or *auto*, ranging from Clarice’s existential sense of being to Arenas and Eltit’s election to explore the diminished or nonexistent self due to marginality. However, the questioning of the self, which is part of the postmodern condition, is the central source of the destabilization of the traditional autobiography. As a result of the shifts in *auto*, in these self-writings all three authors offer reformulations of the *bio*, one that seeks a more animated, complete textual self for which the body serves as a site and means of writing. For this reason, the power of writing, or *graphein*, is both celebrated and exhausted through hypergraphic, writerly texts.

Autobiography lends itself naturally to a theoretical study, as the cases above illustrate. Playing off of Valéry’s claim that “Every theory is the fragment of an autobiography,” leading American critic Leigh Gilmore rightly observes that “Every autobiography is the fragment of a theory” (*Limits* 12). Furthermore, these text provide “an assembly of theories of the self and self-representation; of personal identity and one’s relation to a family, a region, a nation; and of citizenship and a politics of representativeness (and exclusion)” (12). As my reading is oriented by a theoretical consideration of autobiography, in the next chapters I analyze the politicization of the deconstructed *auto*, *bio*, and *graphein* etymological elements. I question the limits of self-

writing and different manifestations of the self in the text, including: 1) the problems of language and referentiality in self-representation, 2) the juridical subject produced by state apparatuses in oppressive societies, as well as the relationship between socio-political environments and the stylistic experimentation in self-writing, 3) the marginal self and the evolving nature of subjectivity, and 4) metafiction, *ekphrasis*, and the impact of changing artistic and technological models of self-representation. The following chapters will continue to examine the rhetorical strategies that arise in autobiography under authoritarianism, connecting hypersexuality with surveyance, hypertextuality with surveillance, and dislocated words with torture and the performance of sovereignty. The theoretical deconstruction of auto/bio/graphic thus occurs due to societal pressures as well, with the “I” voice stifled by censorship, the body regulated and subjected to bureaucratic processes, and writing and language affected by the transience of meaning. In examining the impact of these discursive practices, I trace the crisis of representation, the tenuous nature of subjectivity, and the fight over linguistic sovereignty, demonstrating the ways in which subjects of the authoritarianism state the self.

CHAPTER III

SURVEYANCE, SURVEILLANCE, AND TORTURE: METAFICTION AND THE CRISIS OF SELF-REPRESENTATION

[A]re we so certain that autobiography depends on reference, as a photograph depends on its subject or a (realistic) picture on its model? We assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium?
---Paul De Man (920)

Clarice Lispector describes her self-writing as unsayable, uncommunicable, unthinkable, and as a product of incomprehension (42, 72), and she vacillates between words, paint, and music, comparing the difficulty of this task with that of photographing perfume or capturing the color of air (43, 17). Diamela Eltit switches back and forth between narrative, film, photography, and performance art to represent a singular event that occurs in a Chilean plaza at night. Arenas writes about a fictional Reinaldo Arenas, confusing fiction and “reality” in the mixture of bureaucratic documents, newspaper clippings, and character doubles. These metafictional attempts to transcend the traditional limits of autobiography all point to similar crises of representation. It is not that words simply fail to represent, although they are often inadequate, as Clarice frequently laments. Rather, familiar categories of autobiography such as the first-person voice and a chronological, flowing account of one’s life are not suitable for reflecting the subject-in-crisis of authoritarian societies.

Instead, these texts reflect the force of poststructural changes on self-writings and the challenges of representation related to the repressive practices associated with authoritarianism, ranging from censorship to the powerlessness of the individual. In the face of a diminished “I” voice, of the lack of agency to tell one’s story, of the disjunction between official histories and individual experiences, straightforward autobiographies are often not possible. Metafiction, that is the turn toward representing the frustrated process of self-writing, characterizes these contemporary autobiographies.

In this chapter I connect specific cultural practices and societal forces that I believe determine the experience of authoritarianism. For each work examined, I connect a discursive practice to the resulting metafictional portrait of the self. In Clarice, I focus on surveyance, that is, the control of bodies in the attempt to create a homogenous nation, and how modernization and its artistic counterpoint in Modernism lead her to write metafictionally. In Eltit I focus on surveillance and how the omnipresent gaze affect the narrative and cinematographic models of that are available for expressing the self, as well as how model impact the shape of the self and the ability to articulate an “I.” And finally, with Arenas, I analyze how torture and interrogation are associated with the destabilization of truth. “Truth” is manipulated and constructed through torture, and Arenas attempts to recreate objectivity through the inclusion of actual print material. While the presence of all three discursive practices can be found in each of the authors, the focus on a single practice in each case study allows for us to theorize on the structural and subjective consequences that authoritarianism has on the form.

Autobiography is not a universal form of writing but rather it is indebted to cultural models and historical contexts. In light of the relative scarcity of self-writings produced in Latin America, it bears asking what influence artistic precursors and cultural norms have on this type

of expression and how the existing texts reveal the impact of unique, regional “technical demands of self-portraiture.” The concept that artistic medium or models of discourse may determine the shape of the “life” represented in autobiography (rather than follow a “natural” chronological narrative) becomes particularly important for contemporary Latin American literature. This chapter is interested in the role that authoritarian societies, characterized by diminished individual rights and opportunities for self-expression and/or realization, have on self-writings. My thesis is that by looking at the salient quality of metafictional representations of the self, this narrative structure reveals how autobiography is conceived, constructed, as well as tolerated by censors in rather repressive contexts. By metafiction, I refer to Linda Hutcheon’s understanding of metafiction as a “mimesis of process” that “grows out of that interest in consciousness *as well as* the objects of consciousness [i.e. the self] that constitutes [a] ‘psychological realism’ ...” (*Narcissistic Narrative* 5). Metafiction speaks to a crisis of representation—and perhaps an even greater crisis of subjectivity—one that is experienced by Clarice Lispector, Reinaldo Arenas, and Diamela Eltit. Despite different origins and manifestations of this crisis of representation, each author uses metafiction in a way that addresses general the discourses and experiences that are specific to Latin American authoritarianism. Authoritarianism thus produces “technical demands” that become evident in the vocabulary and structure of self-writing. Specifically, these models of self-representation and subjectivity are developed from the discursive practices of surveyance, surveillance, and torture.

This chapter focuses on how metafiction reveals a crisis of representation stemming from the sociopolitical climate of authoritarianism in Brazil, Chile, and Cuba. Subjectivity as produced by the national state and as contested in individual self-writing affirm De Man’s theory that, far from being simply a mimetic genre, self-portraiture is produced out of the tensions

between the discursive practices that create subjects of the state and the artistic medium in which the author desires to freely and accurately represent the self. Beginning with Clarice Lispector, I examine the impact of Brazilian modernization her on self-writing, especially the surveyance of the national populus by the centralized and homogenous *Estado Novo*. I connect her use of metafiction and Brazilian modernist art, both of which reflect a crisis of representation and of individual subjectivity. *Água Viva* and Brazilian modernism alike contend with the state's production of an essentialized national identity. By examining the parallels between Clarice's metafictional self-writing and modernist techniques, I argue that an anti-essentialism that can be found in her text, one that is surprisingly political.

In the second part of this chapter, I turn to Diamela Eltit's metafictional incorporation of multimedia in order to reflect and comment upon the atmosphere of surveillance in Pinochet's Chile. With *Lumpérica* taking place in a public plaza before a security camera and a flashing commercial sign, metafiction becomes a strategy with which to subvert the identities imposed onto individuals by the state. The subjectivity created in surveillance and subsequent interrogation is gendered and sexually violent, as is the linguistic trope of prosopopeia, further compounding the crisis of representation.

In turning to Reinaldo Arenas, in the third part of this chapter, I examine the inclusion of extratextual print material as a metafictional response to diminished subjectivity of Cuba's revolutionary society. Parting from other chapters, I analyze his second autobiographical novel, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, written between 1966 and 1969 in Cuba, as a source for understanding the specific autobiographical techniques and societal practices that create subjectivity. Arenas's deviations from standard autobiography, such as the use of collage, elimination of the first-person voice and perspective, and the lack of a chronological or realist

narrative, are ultimately attributed to torture. Arenas's text is particularly insightful for how autobiographical "projects" must contend with the restricted and restrictive parameters of the national identities imposed by authoritarian governments.

Before turning to these texts, it bears noting that poststructuralist and postmodern autobiographies have a felicitous relationship with metafiction. Phillip Lejeune's work on autobiography supports the idea of a textual bridge between different conceptual selves. That is, metafiction can result out of the transcendental quality of autobiography that connects the cognitive understanding of the self with both the ontological sense of being and the speech act in which the reader recognizes the text as an authentic gesture. De Man, on the other hand, identifies the trope of prosopopeia as the linguistic site where self-representation takes on a metafictional dimension, for this "specular structure is interiorized in a text in which the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding" (De Man 921). Although De Man's deconstructionist theory primarily focuses on the failure of a linguistic trope to capture the self, in the case of Arenas, Eltit, and Clarice, the crisis of representation and subjectivity exceeds the "prison house" of language. Metafiction comes about as a failure to represent the self through the available cultural models and discourses of selfhood. When representation is not possible, the focus of the narrative turns instead to the process of attempted self-expression.

While all three authors engage in metafiction as an autobiographical strategy, it bears stating that this chapter does not focus so much on the literary qualities of metafiction as it does on how metafiction sheds light on the impact of authoritarianism on self-writing. In all three authors it will be shown that this process of constituting and representing oneself as an autonomous and unique subject is impeded by authoritarian practices related to the formation of national subjects. Furthermore, the authors employ metafiction to appropriate and problematize

the available narrative models and cultural practices related to the self. By identifying a metafictional autobiographical response to the state machinations of producing subjects through surveyance, surveillance, and torture, I illustrate how authoritarian societies frequently lead to a crisis of self-representation. Despite different governments and national cultures, this chapter will unpack how self-writings in authoritarian societies develop alternate forms of self-representation.

Surveyance: Essentialized *Brasilidade* and Clarice's Search for an Unessentialized Self

Clarice is almost universally read as a writer who departed from the Brazilian canon using a unique style described as mystical, hermetic, abstract, deterritorialized, and poststructuralist “women’s writing.” However, all of these classifications, veering towards a textual interpretation based on anti-representation, hinder a critical analysis of her concept of subjectivity and its relationship to the political and social context of her times. Although it is easy to restrict an analysis of the metafictional qualities to a purely literary reading, I argue that her autobiographical style concretely engages with the artistic movements and state ideologies of the time. Furthermore, in agreement with Lucia Villares¹ and contesting most of the decontextualized criticism, Clarice’s text reveals surprisingly tangible references to the national politics and projects spanning from the Vargas regime to the military rule of the 1960s and 1970s.

Since Lispector’s first novel, the 1943 book *Perto do Coração Selvagem*, her work has been regarded as revolutionary due to its introspective nature. The turn away from plot and

¹ Villares’s argument is novel for explicitly connecting Lispector’s writing to a sense of Brazilian nationness, or *brasilidade*. She does so, however, by reading her novels as participating in the racial debates of the time, as a preoccupation with whiteness being a fundamental concern of Brazilian identity during the time. While I agree that these racial concerns exist in her fiction, and that they do situate Clarice, I am more concerned with connecting *Água Viva* and her self-writing to the national climate of the time. Villares curiously does not mention *Água Viva*, an oversight or deliberate exclusion that strikes me as problematic considering the claims she makes concerning the author’s identity.

towards interior monologue or dialogue would remain one of the most recognizable characteristics of her writing. The lack of exteriority, of reference to an outside and localizable world, may have stemmed from her rather frequent displacements, moving from Ukraine as an infant to the cities Maceió, Recife, and later Rio de Janeiro. This pattern of migration continued into adulthood, when from 1944 until 1959, Clarice Lispector lived in Europe and the United States, accompanying her diplomat husband abroad, with periodic interludes in Rio de Janeiro. Her introspective nature may have also been related to the fact that she had lost both parents by the age of 20. Her mother, who was paralyzed from syphilis transmitted during a military gang rape, had died when Clarice was nine.

Clarice came of age during the interwar period and the first Vargas regime (1930-1945). Vargas rose to power following a period in which regionalism was found to be detrimental to national interests. National authority was violently established in revolts such as Canudos (1896), the Revolt of the Vaccine (1904), the Revolt of the Whip (1910), and the Contestado movement (1912-1915) (Williams 2-3). Regional loyalties combined with the impact of the Stock Market Crash in 1929, as well as the assassination of Vargas's Vice-President candidate led to the military coup that ushered Vargas into office. Despite his liberal stance, such as giving literate women the right to vote, and progressive, state-building goals that strengthened the federal government, Vargas engaged in extraconstitutional measures, intimidation, and authoritarian control. As historian Daryle Williams puts it, this was "an interventionist state, which sought to establish a palpable presence in the home, schoolroom, hospital, and workplace (5-6). This "nationalist-authoritarian political culture" would endure until the mid-1980s. By the time Clarice moved to Rio in 1935, skirmishes involving the federal government and reactionary groups (often labeled as communist) caused Vargas to retract his promise to restore democratic

elections. In 1937, the same year that Clarice entered the Law School of Brazil, Vargas burned the state flags in the *Queimas das Bandeiras*, a symbolic performance of national unity. This showcase of national power also coincided with the end of individual rights and identity, and anyone who deviated from the national prototype of *brasilidade*, including Jews, communists, immigrants, and regional elites, was targeted as subversive (Williams 10). Furthermore, to accomplish the goal of building an *Estado Novo*, Vargas created a climate of “militarized technology of internal surveillance, policing, repression, and countersubversion [, one] that took on horrid proportions during the military regime of 1964-1985” (10). While in the previous chapter I elaborated on the state building projects’ use of surveyance to control national bodies, in this chapter I focus on surveyance as the building of a national identity through artistic representations of a modern and whitened state.

During Clarice’s adolescent and adulthood she bore witness to cultural initiatives that attempted to define Brazilian national identity, especially through modernist arts. The cultural management of the Vargas years was paradoxical, combining formal experimentation and state sponsorship that went hand in hand with institutionalized censorship. At the center of the cultural wars were the Department of Education, responsible for transmission of nationalist propaganda, and the Department of Justice, which became a censoring agency following the 1935 Intentona Comunista (Williams 73). In this context of reduced political liberties, the introspection of the 1943 publication of *Perto do Coração Selvagem* would have represented a safely apolitical novel, whereas Jorge Amado and Graciliano Ramos had been harrassed and later imprisoned and exiled, respectively (Williams 15). When the proclaimed *Estado Novo* began in 1937, the language of renewal and nationness characterized both the political and cultural goals of the regime. Despite the leftist political affiliations of some of the most renowned *modernistas*, the

images of modernity and rejection of neocolonialism led to state support of these futuristic designs. Acclaim at international conventions such as the New York World Fair (1939), the Golden Gate International Exposition (1939), and the Brazil Builds exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1943) also contributed to the state sponsorship of modernism. Although there was not necessarily anything inherently Brazilian in this movement, critics found a sense of lyricism and tropicalism in the art that made it so. Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, of course, came to the forefront of this so-called “tropical modernism.” This phase of modernism was sometimes at odds with the first wave that developed from the 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna* that had emphasized combining modernist techniques with folkloric subjects, in essence cannibalizing a European movement to make it Brazilian. Modernism during Vargas would be perpetually tied up in a double-bind between demonstrating the modernist techniques associated with progress and national unity while satisfying international demand for exoticism, which often uncovered the racial and class tensions disavowed by *brasilidade*. Vargas’s cultural policy thus aimed for a modernism that expressed “national unity sem particularismos” (202), but the international market’s tendency to emphasize Brazil’s otherness sometimes conflicted with the regime’s xenophobia. Even when state institutions carried out research with the goal of “rediscovering Brazil,” the project of national unity subsumed racial and class differences under theories of *mestiçagem* and racial democracy.

In 1945, after Clarice had moved to Europe, Vargas was disposed and a brief period of democracy known as the Second Republic followed. When Clarice returned from her life in Washington, DC, in 1959, this democracy would only last five more years. Juscelino Kubitschek’s term in office is remembered for his developmentalist ideology and the heavy industrialization that he undertook, reflected in his slogan “50 years in 5.” The modernist

movement continued to exercise its influence, particularly in the construction of the new capital in Brasilia. Urbanization, proliferation of new media technologies, and the new music of Bossa Nova would have set the backdrop of Clarice's return. Concrete poetry also emerged in 1958, with the publication of their literary manifesto in the journal *Noigandres* (Dunn 31). Although their use of mass media and commercialism would differ from Clarice's writing, their attempt to revolutionize language and syntax, the focus on "object-words," and their use of "visual arts [to open] up new semantic possibilities outside of discursive or metaphoric expression" can perhaps be found in *Água Viva* (quotes from Dunn 32). Equally influential to her work might be bossa nova's tendency to foreground the subjective voice, to eliminate references to the public sphere, and to connect existential concerns to the structure or logic of the song, and a form of "ecological rationality, in which the protagonists and their natural surroundings 'converge toward an equilibrium of intimate communion and understanding'" (David Treece qtd in Dunn 29).

Before the military coup in 1964, Clarice published two of her most well-received works, *Laços de família* (1960) and *A Maçã no escuro* (1961). Then, in 1964, the same year of the coup, she published *A paixão segundo G.H.*, one of her most introspective and mystical books. The introverted nature of this text may have coincided with the increasingly difficult political situation. Following the 1964 coup, *Operação Limpeza* carried out by the military regime produced a culture of fear and surveillance designed to root out subversives. Tens of thousands were arrested as political prisoners, 195 were killed, and 144 were disappeared (Cowan 460). Compounding the trauma of severe burn injuries suffered in 1966 and her addiction to pain killers, we can speculate that the tense political and personal climate of her last decade would have impacted her writing. Clarice participated in the demonstrations of June 1968 known as the *Passeata dos cem mil* that protested the right-wing military regime. The regime responded with

violence, and the repressive environment reached its height with the Fifth Institutional Act (AI-5) that outlawed political opposition, closed the Parliament, suspended *habeas corpus*, and limited press through censorship (Dunn 2-3). As Lispector continued to publish a weekly manners column in *Journal do Brasil* from 1967 to 1973, she likely would have felt the pressure of the authoritarian government. Interestingly, following her abrupt dismissal from the journal in 1973, she agreed to a challenge from her publisher to write three stories about sex, published in 1974 as *A Via Crucis do corpo*. The nature of sexualized rebellion in these short stories with autobiographic interludes cannot be overlooked. Written around the same time, her 1973 *Água Viva* is, in comparison, a very hermetic text. We can deduce, however, that the similarities to modernism and concrete poetry render her apolitical, interiorized text political.

The impact of the concretismo movement on Clarice's work has not been studied and merits further examination. The first phase of the Noigandres group (1952-1956) was notably "phenomenological" (Perrone 26). The second phase (1956-1960), accompanied by manifestos explaining the form, gained a "mathematical" character (26). Both the qualities of phenomenological and mathematical writing are found in *Água Viva*. Although Lispector's self-writing is not visually experimental in the way that prominent examples of concrete poetry are, the works share the quality of attempting a "spaciotemporal juxtaposition of verbal material" (27). In the case of Clarice, this would play out in the spaciotemporal representation of her self, of representing her epiphanies and momentary sensations, as well as providing metafictional commentary on the attempt to capture her self. As Augusto do Campos defined the movement in a 1956 manifesto, concrete language was about the "tension of the word-things in time-space" (qtd in Perrone 33). Similarly, Clarice considers time to be her "fourth dimension" (*Água Viva* 5), and she tries to force herself "into the severity of a tense language" (7). Metafictionally, she

reveals that her stream of consciousness style is her “ way of avoiding any gaps between the instant and [her]self” (42).

Following Ezra Pound’s lead, concrete poetry was often more like painting or music and attempted to create a “language charged with meaning to the utmost degree” (Pound qtd in Perrone 28). This genre-bending search for representation that shifts from writing to painting and music pervades Clarice’s text: ““I’m going to make an adagio. Read slowly and peacefully. It’s a large fresco” (32). It bears noting that while concrete poetry had its origins in the rapidly modernizing city of São Paulo with the *Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta* of 1956, its influence was also felt in Rio. A second staging of concrete art in 1957 was held in Rio, as well as an exposition in 1959 by a splinter group of neoconcretists. Finding the concretists too rationalistic and dogmatic, the neoconcretists advocated for freedom for experimentation, a return to subjectivity, and participation of the spectator, all the while maintaining a belief in geometric forms and emphasis on the time-space dimension (“Neoconcretism”). Upon her return from the United States in 1959, the neoconcretists exercised a palpable presence in Rio, especially in the plastic arts, which not insignificantly, figure in *Água Viva*. It was in this year that a core group of artists (Amilcar de Castro, Ferreira Gullar, Franz Weissmann, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Reynaldo Jardim and Theon Spanudis) signed the *Manifesto Neoconcreto*. The return to representation and to connecting art and life would have been attractive, if not indispensable, features for Clarice’s self-writing. Yet the traces of anti-discursivity (for concretists were against discursive poetry (Perrone 49)), of exploring the *espaço em branco* (63), and of the foregrounding of the process of artistic construction, a key feature of the *poesia processo* splinter, can be seen in her work.

At this moment I would like to turn momentarily to examine how *Água Viva* employs modernist techniques and how this modernism is tied up with her concept of identity. This is to say that Clarice relies on modernist theories of representation, especially those related to phenomenology and mathematics, and that she employs a modernist vocabulary in the search of a written self. As explained above, Clarice came of age during a time when progress and modernization met their match in futuristic art. The outlines of the Modernist artistic and architectural movement are seen in her references to geometry, algebra, and sciences, revealing the influence of developmentalism. Reminiscent of Niemeyer curves, Clarice writes in a language of Modernism: “I write in acrobatic, aerial pirouettes” (6) and with “gestures [that] are hieratic and triangular” (12). Although hieratic and formalist art speak to the concept of nonrepresentation, the important connection between content and form is particularly relevant for her metafictional attempt to have her text reflect the process of self-examination, and for the text to reflect her living “bio” self. Clarice employs modernist vocabulary to represent the relationship between the individual and the exterior world, in her case, the progressive *Estado Novo*, when she states, “About me in the world I want to tell you of the force that guides me and brings me the world, of the vital sensuality of a clear-cut structures and of the curves that are organically linked to other curved forms. My graphicness and my circumvolutions are powerful [...]” (30).

Clarice’s debt to concretism is also evident, particularly pertaining to the concepts of “spaciotemporal juxtaposition of verbal material” (Perrone 27) and the constant use of synesthesia to compare writing with painting and music. She writes, “What I want in music and in what I write you and in what I paint are geometrical lines that cross in space and form a discordance that I can understand. It’s pure it” (53). This hearkens to the search for essentialism

behind “pure” forms of both the concretists and formalists. Since concretism is concerned with gestures and the process, Clarice’s self-writing takes on a metafictional and temporal dimension when she attempts the moment-to-moment unfolding of self-understanding: “One instant takes me unthinkingly to the next, and the athenatic theme keeps unfolding without a plan yet geometrically, like the successive figures in a kaleidoscope” (8) and “only in time is there space for me” (4). Rather than representation, her self-writing becomes abstract, for she writes, “I embody myself in voluptuous and unintelligible phrases that spiral outward beyond words. And a silence arises subtly from the clash of sentences” (14). Beyond mere representation, she hints at the influence of Brazilian modernism—referring to the ubiquitous symbol of the airplane—in her conceptual understanding of the self. “This text that I’m giving you is not to be looked at up close: it takes on its secret, previously invisible totality only when it is seen from a high-flying airplane” (19). This image of progress has consequences for the alienated relationship between the individual and society (or state), for she insinuates that the details of the individual can not be seen, but rather “It’s more a presentiment of life than life itself” (31). This image of the airplane also lends support to the idea that surveyance and surveillance were factors in the political consciousness of the time, especially with respect to the relationship between the individual and the national identity.

Rather than just simply reflecting the available artistic models and vocabulary of the time, Clarice’s use of modernism leads to theoretically innovative approaches to self-understanding and representation. This is to say that modernism is tied up with her identity and the possibilities of subjectivity. Even when attempting to examine how her experiences constitute an individual, recalling the random tidbits from her life—a television commercial she has seen (24-5), the suicide note she receives, momentary sensations, etc.—she fails to produce

any coherent identity that can be represented to the reader. Even for her, these experiences and sensations are lacking, and do not constitute a totality: “I, who am all this [...] know and experience only the echoes of myself, for I do not capture my real self” (11). Modernist art therefore becomes an appropriate method of self-exploration. Clarice testifies, “No, all this is not happening in real facts but rather in the domain of ...of an art? Yes, of an artifice through which there arises a very delicate reality that comes to exist within me” (13). In addition to asserting the revelatory function of abstract art, the mathematical language of modernist concretism provides a channel for self-examination. Clarice formulates a sort of algebra of the self: “‘X’ is what exists within me [...] Is ‘X’ a word? The word only refers to a thing and that is something I can never reach. Each one of us is a symbol dealing with symbols—everything is a point of mere reference to the real. We seek desperately to find a proper identity and the identity of the real” (65-6). Both Modernist art and the political Modernism that produced a compulsory, essentialized identity of *brasilidade* speak to an abstraction that moves away from particularisms, of symbols rather than representation, of the impersonal and homogenized place of the national subject. More concretely stated, we can speculate that the role of the proper Catholic mother as the feminine possibility of Brazilianness was too confining for Clarice, a Ukrainian Jew and independent, highly accomplished woman. The modernist language can, therefore, only lead to a crisis of representation. Again, evoking futurist and mathematical images of subjectivity, Clarice cannot accurately represent the self: “Parambolic [sic] that I am. I can’t sum myself up because it’s impossible to add up a chair and two apples. I’m a chair and two apples. And I don’t add up” (60).

Modernism is related to the structural use of metafiction in *Água Viva*. In keeping with concretist techniques, her metafictional unveiling of the aesthetic process is particularly evident

in her self-writing. She repeatedly makes statements such as “I’ve unglued myself from myself” (68). “I’m finding myself in my very self” (69). “And crazily I latch onto the corners of myself [...] I am before, I am almost, I am never” (11). This last statement, in addition to illustrating the temporality of being, expresses the failure of representation, of the persistent hope of capturing the self only to be perpetually frustrated, to be “never.” Clarice exhibits a crisis of representation, one that manifests itself in metafiction. She writes of her awareness of this impossibility, for example, “I achieve a state behind thought. I refuse to divide it into words [...] Is not using words to lose one’s identity? Is it to become lost in the essential, destructive shadows? (58, sic). Despite this frustration with representation, Clarice demonstrates a paradoxical tendency to avow the possibility of self-representation only to later disavow it, and vice versa. For this reason, Clarice frequently describes the search for self through different media, going from writing, to painting, to music, despite the fact that “it defies [her] ability to either paint it or write it” (7).

The metafictional dynamic inherent in her modernist approach also develops from the role of phenomenology in modernist art. Phenomenology becomes important because it is related to her focus on consciousness and sensations of the world, for rather than an attempt at direct, biographical representation, she is “after what’s behind thought” (7). This movement acknowledges the crisis of representation all the while holding on to the necessity and search for an alternative system of representation. It therefore has structural ramifications for self-writing produced in authoritarian societies, namely the pattern of wavering, of constant avowing and disavowing that accompanies the unexhausted search for the individual despite what I call a compulsory and essentialized national subject(ivity).² Phenomenology furthermore has a problematic relationship with the Cartesian subject, with Husserl favoring Descartes while

² Interestingly, phenomenology and its principle founders also coincide, interestingly, with fascist governments.

Heidegger rejected his cognitive theory of being. Similarly, Clarice oscillates between and Cartesian and a non-Cartesian self. While she is after what is behind thought, she reaches the conclusion that “I don’t think [...] I am.” (32). The metafictional quality of a phenomenological search for the self uncovers a sort of tautological structure, however: “This is life seen by life. I may not have a sense, but it’s the very lack of sense that a pulsing vein has” (8). This statement reflects the consciousness of the problem of self-representation, which leads to the Claricean paradox of representing through non-representation.

Clarice’s text disavows and deconstructs the nationally-oriented modernist possibilities for self-representation, pointing to an anti-essentialist autobiographical project. She writes, “It is useless to try to classify me [...] categories pin me down no longer” (7). If Clarice attempts to write a non-essentialized self, free from categorization, with a lack of personalized identity, this position can be juxtaposed with the homogenous, essentialized Brazilian subject created by the state. The political nature of essentialism is hinted at, with vocabulary associating a diminished subjectivity with violence of an ominous “they”: “They wanted me to be an object. I am an object. And object dirty with blood. And object that creates other objects and the machine creates us all” (71). Furthermore, she explicitly rejects the dominant cultural discourse of the time: “No, I was never modern” (69). At the same time, however, her incorporation of modernist vocabulary is evident, though she tries to make it her own: “My anarchy subterraneously obeys a law where I deal clandestinely with astronomy, mathematics, and mechanics” (31). The mere mention of a radically anti-state political philosophy and its association with her internalized, individual search for a freely realized self situates Clarice in the context of an authoritarian state. Not only does authoritarianism prevent open expression of individuality, in Clarice it also results in an extreme interiority, one that impedes a true subjectivity: “Only I don’t tell the facts of my life:

I'm secretive by nature. [...] I've looked into myself but I don't believe in myself because my thought is invented" (34). In the context of the military regime beginning in 1964, especially with the AI-5 that prohibited political opposition and subversion of state-sanctioned moral values, freedom of expression and individualism became impossible, ineffable, and limited to thought.³ As Clarice expounds, this is hardly a type of subjecthood, one in which she cannot even believe in the realization of her own self.

Surveillance through nation-building efforts of Brazilian authoritarian governments found its artistic counterpart in modernist art. Surveillance entailed centralization of the national state through the creation of a theoretical national subject, through population control, and repression of regionalism. Clarice, in turn, developed her own model of self-representation, one that employed modernist art techniques to contest this essentialized identity. Her self-writing was not without limitations, however, as her metafictional revelations show. Capturing an individual self was both aesthetically and politically impossible.

Clarice's insistence on the inevitable failures of self-representation may also be related to the surveillance state and self-censorship through increased interiorization and impersonalization. Once surveillance fortified the government's reach over the masses, surveillance became a key practice for maintaining compliance with political and moral values imposed by the state. All three authors were undoubtedly familiar with the atmosphere of the police state, the effect of which I examine in this next section. Diamela Eltit, in particular, deals with this omnipresent eye of the state in a direct fashion.

³ One strong example of the compulsory homogeneity is the fact that during the military dictatorship, it was illegal to question racial democracy (Lovell 400). Media and communications were censored to avoid any criticism and the 1970 census eliminated the racial question to avoid any documentation of inequalities. It is not a far stretch to speculate that other types of dissent and assertions of difference were also suppressed.

Surveillance and the Self: Replacing the “I” with “Eye” in *Lumpérica*

In 1973, following the coup d'état that ended with Salvador Allende's suicide and a violent takeover of his democratically-elected socialist government, Pinochet assumed control over Chile. Immediately, a crackdown on political opposition changed Chilean society and eroded political institutions. Arrests numbered in the tens of thousands, and in just five years 30,000 people had gone in to exile. By 1978, this number had risen to hundreds of thousands (Collier and Sater 360). One of the trademarks of the Pinochet regime was the creation of a secret police state under the name of *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional* (DINA), and later the *Central Nacional de Informaciones* (CIN). DINA involved some 10,000 agents, 20,000 to 30,000 informers, brutal torture centers, and even international bombings (361). Alongside this expansive surveillance state, the authoritarian government banned political parties, eliminated liberal media groups, closed the Congress, committed violent assassinations and punishments in plain sight, and imposed a strict night-time curfew that lasted several years (359, 361). The 1991 *Comisión de la Verdad y de la Reconciliación* acknowledged the degree of repression experienced under Pinochet, documenting over 2,000 deaths, but historians have suggested upwards of 3,500 or 4,500 were assassinated (Stern xxi).

Pinochet also consolidated his control through numerous decrees that attempted to redefine national culture and mores. He directed many of his speeches towards women and new organizations such as the National Secretariat for Women, with the goal of instilling conservative values in the domestic sphere (Pratt sp). In light of the intense political repression and constant interpellation of women as good Catholics and mothers, a paradoxical agency developed, with women protagonizing many of the symbolic protests against the authoritarian regime. Cacerolazos, or orchestrated, collective pot-banging, became a common form of political

demonstration, especially as neoliberal policies led to increased local poverty despite an expanding national economy. Performance art, such as the mock ballot boxes posted in public, impromptu murals (including the ubiquitous “No +” left to be completed by civilians), and the use of everyday objects to deliver art (for example, Pia Barro’s use of the “book object”) also became a form of resistance (Pratt). Critic Nelly Richard termed this neo-vanguard artistic movement as *escena de avanzada*. The group *El Colectivo de Acciones de Arte* (CADA), formed in 1979 by members Diamela Eltit, Lotty Rosenfield, Fernando Balcells, Raúl Zurita, and Juan Castillo, was one such group involved with this militant art. CADA combined multi-media,⁴ bodily performance,⁵ and social activism to protest the neoliberal economic and ideological oppression. CADA explored the newfound relationship between coded political expression and everyday life. Street-lines were transformed into plus signs using white tape in “Milla de cruces sobre el pavimento” (1985), milk distribution became a central theme in “Para No Morirse de Hambre en el arte” (1979), and a peaceful formation of airplanes dropping flyers lamenting “Ay Sudamerica” (1981) became works of art. References to politics were generally coded, though they can be found in the affirmation of Allende’s milk policies and in the publication of the “Viuda” photograph, which appropriated the eerie passport-image of the disappeared, as to acknowledge the quotidian, material consequences of Pinochet’s dirty war.

Lumpérica can be seen as another example of the use of symbolic and performative protests against the Pinochet dictatorship. While most critics have elected to read it as an avant-

⁴ This multi-media is related to the importance of seeing, which is derived in part from the use of photography in documenting the disappeared. Nelly Richard argues that CADA and the neo-avant-garde work employed “a new and insurgent *politics of the gaze*” (Interview 264). The question of memory was essential in any case, for “Rather than a ‘monument’ the *avanzada* elected the ‘document’ and envisioned a problematic connected to inscription, to remembrance, to tracing, to archive. The *avanzada* thus intervened in the question of how to inscribe memory in an age when history has been progressively voided of referent” (262). In this context, an alternative form of testimony developed.

⁵ The use of the human body as a canvas was also popular, for Self mutilation “expresses ownership of the body [... and voids] consumption as a traditional artistic community” (Fernández de Alba 572)

garde *testimonio* that evokes a Chilean collectivity, it can also be read as a form of self-writing. In particular, it sheds light on the how the structure of self-writing is impacted by authoritarianism and the surveillance state. Despite the cryptic style and experimentation with language and medium that allowed it to escape censorship, the presence of authoritarian practices interpenetrates both the form and content of *Lumpérica*. Affirming De Man's argument that the medium can shape the life story, Eltit constructs a narrative and multi-media structure that reflects the voyeuristic quality of surveillance. In Eltit's text, the dictatorship is evoked in the *toque de queda* that empties the Santiago plazas at night, in the hypervigilance of the security camera, and in the scenes of interrogation. The text also plays with similarities between the confessional nature of autobiography and of interrogation. Not only does this facilitate a reading of Eltit's text as self-writing, it also illustrates that surveillance has an impact on subjectivity and the construction of self.

What is interesting about *Lumpérica* in comparison with the texts by Arenas and Clarice is how surveillance technology infiltrates the project of self-representation. The text shifts away from narrative towards a written version of film and photography. This fusion presents interesting questions pertaining to how hypervisual culture shapes the self. Furthermore, Eltit's use of mixed-media—in contrast to the realist documentary—is metafictional, involving a sort of translation from one media to another. The relationship between mixed-media and metafiction is central to understanding *Lumpérica* as a moment of self-writing. It is a form of ekphrasis, or “a verbal representation of an imagined work of visual art, but with the term's modern inflection toward the process of the artwork's coming into being” (Christ, “Extravag(r)ant” 20). When applied to a reading of the text as self-writing, this definition connects ekphrasis and metafiction to the act of self-portraiture. In focusing on the process rather than the actual product, the

“coming into being” of the self is foregrounded in *Lumpérica*, and the metafictional representation of the process of self-writing must therefore be understood the closest approximation to writing the self in a system in which representation fails. Diamela Eltit’s exploration of the challenges of representation addresses forces specific to Chile during the authoritarian regime of the 70s and 80s. By highlighting the impact of surveillance, she draws attention to the gendered and sexualized dynamics of the autobiographical moment, whether expressed through narrative or visual technologies.

The metafictional dimension of Eltit’s self-writing develops out of the consciousness of the persistent gaze of a technologically advanced police state. The multiple textual layers are designed to express the complex forces involved in seeing and constructing identity, of the relationship between the individual and institutions in authoritarian societies. Scholar Robert Neustadt neatly describes the self-conscious structure of the book, which consists of: “*text*, presenting the image of L. Iluminada in the plaza; *textualization*, representing the process of filming L. Iluminada in the plaza; and *metatext*, critiquing the performance and cinematography” (“Diamela Eltit” 223, my emphasis). The self-representational aspect of this testimony can be seen in the metafictional and extratextual parallels between the book *Lumpérica*, the picture of Diamela Eltit with slashed arms, the use of the implied author “diamela eltit,” and the performance of the section 4.4 of the text in the film *Maipu*. As Neustadt describes, when “L. Iluminada examines her image in a mirror, Diamela Eltit performs an analogous repetition.” (“Incisive Inscriptions” 152). We can therefore read the incoherent mix of photography, poetry, stream of consciousness prose, film, experimental typography, and performance art as primarily a metafictional event. This alternative type of testimony, is, therefore, concerned with the process of inscribing memory and capturing the self. In contrast to the documentary testimony,

this is more of a meta-testimony, one that uses ekphrasis to address subjectivity in an authoritarian state. In particular, it is a testimony of the self in Pinochet's Chile.

Lumpérica can be conceptually understood as a type of self-writing with a mise-en-abyme structure: the flesh-and-blood author, Diamela Eltit, inflicts self abuse as a form of writing on the body; she allegorically represents the process of self-mutilation in her text; and she reads and performs parts of her book to a brothel audience, a performance that is filmed. Content and form become intertwined in representing the self in an authoritarian society. The experimental structure in *Lumpérica* thus bridges reality and writing, and we can therefore understand the "story" of L. Iluminada before the security camera as an allegorical "narration" of the relationship between the Chilean subject, such as Diamela Eltit, and the police state. Through these multiple levels of representation, the structure of the text and brutal repetitions of mutilation reflect (and reflect upon) the split of the body and language in torture, of the gendered and sexualized dynamics of interpellation, and the reduction of human subjectivity in surveillance.⁶ I will be making three points that elaborate upon the relationship between ekphrasis, metafiction, and Eltit's self-writing. First, I argue that visual technology changes autobiography, especially in the context of authoritarian governments. In the case of Eltit, the visual nature of the text can be attributed to the role of surveillance in the construction of subjectivity. Second, the incorporation of visual technologies and of the scopic gaze give the text a metafictional dimension. This use of multiple textual layers and ekphrasis is related to the failure of representation of the self, as well as the failure of self realization. Third, film bears particular importance for Eltit since it reveals the gendered and sexualized nature of the gaze—the cinematographic equivalent of prosopopeia—and the formation of the subject.

⁶ The photographs of disappeared and tortured persons can also be said to reflect a reduced subjectivity. Here I am referring to Diana Taylor's argument in *Disappearing Acts* that photographs represent people as specters, with a presence defined by absence.

Film, surveillance, and self-representation

Film plays a complex but undeniable role in the formation of subjects in contemporary societies. Questions of the gaze, of truth and realism, of presence and absence, and of the visual construction of memory have all resulted from scopic technologies. Critic Elizabeth Bruss has explored the impact of film on self-representation, arguing in “Eye for I” that autobiography and film are generally incompatible (296). Representing the first person voice is one of the greater challenges, for voiceover would remain separate from third-person images, the director rarely appears in the film, and it is not common for an actor to explicitly address the audience through the I voice. Meta-film is the closest approximation to self-portraiture in film, but it tends to be conceptual and abstract. Film is inherently lacking in terms of potential for self-observation or self-analysis (298), which in turn means that increasingly visual societies have a reduced number of cultural models of self-representation. Bruss elaborates, “if it is impossible to characterize and exhibit selfhood through film, then the apparent primacy of the self—its very existence—is called into question. The discourse [autobiography] that had seemed a mere reflection or instrument of the self becomes its foundation and sine qua non” (298). As her title reflects, the “I” has been replaced by the “eye.” In the case of authoritarian societies, I argue that film becomes an appropriate vehicle for representing this diminished subjectivity that develops out of surveillance.

Despite the technical challenges of self-representation in film, Eltit’s incorporation of photographs and cinematographic writing are fundamental for representing the process of subjectivity in authoritarian Chile, for understanding the relationship between the “eye” and the “I.” Although bureaucratic forms of surveillance has existed since at least the Inquisition, with modern authoritarian regimes, observation and interrogation have taken on a greater intensity

due to technological advances. The omnipresent security cameras function similar to the unequal gaze of the panopticon, and subjects of the state learn to self-police for fear that their actions could be recorded and (mis)interpreted by authorities. Monitoring of populations through film introduces new dimensions to self-awareness with respect to censured mores. This paranoia that accompanies film surveillance has implications for the formation of the subject. Evoking the process of interpellation, this “Hey you” call by a policing authority is thus intimately related to recognizing oneself as a subject.

Lumpérica illustrates the structural parallels between Elit’s particular form of self-writing and the subject formation in surveillance and interrogation. Serving as an allegory of Pinochet, the security camera is one of the authorities to whom L. Iluminada “confesses.” The camera occupies the same vertical space as the florescent sign that projects an image onto the people in the plaza, imprinting them with an identity from above and enforcing it with surveillance. It is the perfect allegorical representation of the connection between the illusion of agency in confession and its role as a policing institution, carried out by an “authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile” (Foucault qtd. In Gimore 60). Film is thus all the more important in Elit’s “confession” because it is related to the power of surveillance to prescribe truth. Similar to Barthes’s argument in *Camera Lucida* that photography exercises a greater claim to realism than reality itself, film would be irrefutable yet one-sided production of “truth” despite the potential for manipulation. Beyond simply playing an important structural role in the book, cinematographic techniques converge with narrative in order to represent the loss of voice and subjectivity in authoritarian societies. Metafiction and filmic vocabulary such as montage are used to express this lack of agency with regards to self-expression.

Eltit has several sections that explicitly address this production of truth and of the lack of power of the individual. In the chapter related to her multiform, perhaps allegorical, animal states, L. Iluminada is figurative horse that carries the lumpen around the Santiago plaza in the cold of the night. It is one of the more curious parts of the book both due to the animalistic version of self-representation and the incongruous, nonsensical paragraphs that result from linguistic chaos and the conflation of contradictory plots. In addition to the montage that weaves metafictional description of the filming of the plaza and direct narration of L. Iluminada's strange behavior, Eltit combines three different heteronyms of *montar*, used indiscriminately. The horse is mounted by the riders, the mare is sexually mounted and penetrated, and the cinematic images are mounted as to create filmic narratives. Such an improbable combination occurs in just a few sentences:

Pero relinchar, mugir, bramar antes que las espuelas se clavaran en sus ijares, solo un instante antes acudiendo a lo imperceptible, hacer que la veracidad del hecho se constituyese sólo por procesos reversivos o por qué no, *desmontajes* tecnológicos, cine tal vez o sonido puro. Las manos del profesional en el teclado, su entusiasmo ante su descubrimiento—mugió y bramó ensordeció con sus relinchos—Desecha bruscamente la *montura*, frena su trote, refuerza el anca, se repliega hasta los bodes de la plaza. Se echa de nuevo y lame esa pelambrea para dar lustroso aspecto a su apariencia. Retoza entonces sobre el césped, sus patas se levantan como en jugueteo, abre la boca de holicada forma dirigida hacia el farol por el brillar fortalecido de sus dientes. Se queda ahí como matando el tiempo pero en realidad ofreciendo su producto/ el animal incita a que lo *monten*. (54-55, my emphasis)

The importance of *montar* is that it connects an illogical text with technological manipulation by authorities and the production of “truth.” As Neustadt argues, the allegorical incorporation of surveillance and the “cutting” of filming links the “novel’s merging of incision and inscription [...] to a reorganization of reality, framing specific perspectives and re-presenting them, resulting in a ‘produced’ narrative” (224). Appropriation of a filmic vocabulary thus reflects the allegorical nature of the work, of the Benjaminian sense of loss of representation in which allegory is “todo aquello que representa la imposibilidad de representar” (Avelar, *Alegorias* 247). In other words, the influence of film on the structure is related to the idea of the impossibility of (self) representation.

In addition to the obvious montage of heterogeneous chapters and the retrospective “suturing” of flashbacks required of the reader, the fragmentary technique of film is also seen in the relationship between sound and image. For example, similar to the technological splicing of modern day sound and video tracks, *L. Iluminada*’s self-representation appears to undergo a separation. During her poetic rendition of *L. Iluminada*’s maneuverings in the plaza, her animal state changes, perhaps cartoonishly, from horse to dog, to cow according to a metaphorical sound-editing: “Por el sonido, su cuerpo cambia sus modales” (52). Editorial control is portrayed as usurping her role as a protagonist in her own self-writing. As if her testimony were a sound track being modified by a technician, “Habría que mejorarlo por laboratorio, con mezcla de voces, electrónicamente” (21).

In the second section of *Lumpérica*, we are presented with a scene of interrogation that continues the analogy between film editing and the impossibility of self-representation in authoritarian societies. In this case, the fusion of film and narrative presents an immediate allusion to the oppression of the police state associated with Pinochet, notorious for its brutal

interrogation strategies. To make matters more complex, however, this scene is a representation of a confession within a confession, a metaconfession. L. Iluminada confesses to a man in a park who is interrogated over the words that were spoken to him: “Y fue una confesión lo que L. Iluminada le lanzó en medio de la plaza a ese que la escuchaba, envuelta en su traje gris, con la pelada baja y su boca casi en el oído del hombre que estaba preparado para ese acontecimiento” (45).

The person being interrogated is not L. Iluminada, rather it is a man that can be taken as a witness. The first-person voice of self-writing has all but been eliminated, with the surveillance supplanting the experiential voice. There is a narrative teleology in the interrogation, just as there is one in traditional autobiographies, but the difference is that in this case the state—not the individual—determines the history and production of “truth.” For this reason, the interrogated man must continue to confess, following the interrogator’s lead until satisfactory answers are given. L. Iluminada’s confession and self-writing is thus thrice removed. Her account is manipulated by filmic technology, told to a male stranger, whose witness account is denied by authorities. The shifting of frames between L. Iluminada’s first-person voice and the third-person witness within the same section mimics the confusion and stress of an interrogation, where a privileged narrative overwrites history. The confusion of perspective may also represent the jockeying for dominance of multiple narratives, voices, and subject positions (i.e. individual and subject of the state). In other words, if this serves as a conceptual or allegorical type of self-writing resulting from the context of an authoritative society, L. Iluminada’s confession is overwritten by authorities and filtered through the vision and structure dictated by the state. The scene of her self-writing is depicted through the state’s election of details and categorization of people, and the story is told through a ventriloquist produced out of torture.

This discourse of power is thus evident in Eltit's postmodern text. Although L. Iluminada is not the person being interrogated, she is rendered even less powerful because she can hardly speak, and a male character, the one being interrogated, speaks for her. Throughout the text, L. Iluminada is simply limited to the words "tengo sed," which Deirdra Reber interprets as a "sed lingüística" (457). The interrogation scenes enact a sadistic performance, with repeated bodily harm carried out both in interrogation and in the multiple takes of L. Iluminada's self-injuries. The conflation of interrogation and filming of the plaza scene makes it impossible to determine whether the injured L. Iluminada is an actress or a bag lady of the plaza. Consequently, the use of a directorial voice figures as the patriarchal attempt to control the narrative her bodily writing, that is, self-writing through mutilating her body. Even the structure of this chapter is manipulated to emphasize the displacement of the subject's voice by authority. The narrative voice suggests there are two different stories "Pero olvidemos lo superfluo, se constituye la cuarta escena: Pongámoslo de esta manera. La proyección de dos escenas simultáneas. 1. Interrogador e interrogado. 2. La caída de L. Iluminada" (46).

The incorporation of film, in particular the analogy of film editing, gives the text an important metafictional dimension that addresses the reader's reception of the text. The critic Suárez Velázquez suggests, "De hecho, el autor del guión que hace de L. Iluminada una imagen, propone leyendas para sus posiciones, la mira a lo lejos y formula lo que de sí tiene ese espectáculo. Se establece un intercambio de sentido con los espectadores" (67). While Suárez Velázquez's interpretation suggests that film opens up a space for the reader to collaborate in the creation of meaning, I believe that this use of visual culture paints a grimmer picture of self-representation, perhaps as can be intuited from the shadowy, lacerated image of Diamela Eltit. She is a specter, voided of a true story and voice, just as the renowned, ghostly photos of the

disappeared. The use of filmic structures, however, does serve as a form of resistance, for rather than allow her story to be controlled, the book resists the possibility of narrative coherence.

Instead of a straightforward narrative, the metafictional use of ekphrasis and multimedia reveals how available models of self-representation are restrictive, reflecting a diminished subjectivity, repressive discursive practices, and the limitations of language.

Film as sexualized gaze

Metafiction is used to attempt to both symbolically perform and to reflect upon the tropic process of prosopopeia. Like allegory's attempt to represent the irrecoverable objects of the past, prosopopeia attempts to resuscitate the dead (or, in Eltit's case, the non-subject of the *homo sacer*) by giving them a voice or face. And similar to metafiction, these tropes are explored through a vocabulary of film and the structure of the gaze. Eltit represents the specular gaze of prosopopeia as a phallogocentric trope.⁷ Interestingly enough, when De Man illustrates his definition of prosopopeia with Wordsworth's text, the image he employs of a paternal sun shining upon and reading the tombstone is analogous to the phallic El Luminoso shining letters on L. Iluminada. If the process of subject formation is so gendered and sexualized, represented as a violent penetration, how can women and other marginalized groups write the self? This lack of a feminine subjectivity would be particularly relevant to women who lived under Pinochet, for "[t]he constant explicit interpellation of women was a hallmark of the Pinochet regime." (Pratt np). I argue that Eltit's representation suggests that instead of allowing the masculine gaze to read the body, incomprehensibility is at once the solution and the continued problem of self-representation. Julio Ortega proposes that a different type of gaze is introduced by Eltit. Instead of the phallic eye, there is a type of multiple, contradictory visual representation, an "entre-ver":

⁷ See Dierdra's Reber's article for a survey of feminists theory that can be applied to *Lumpérica*.

“Los muchos ver-es acopian una subjetividad que rehúsa el repertorio establecido del sujeto situado [...] al ser re-vista, se convierte en indagación (ritual) y espectáculo (participante). Esta subjetividad femenina, así se manifiesta rehaciendo los términos de la representación. Lo femenino es lo no representado, esto es lo entre-visto, lo ya no subyugado [...] (lo femenino es lo olvidado, reprimido, por los discursos a cargo). Por tanto, la subjetividad no emerge en el dualismo [...] memoria/olvido; sino que se constituye en los cortes y recortes de la visión. (Ortega 65)

Prosopopeia and the filmic gaze, although seemingly a dominant theme in *Lumpérica*, are ultimately subverted in Diamela Eltit's work. The reader's participation ultimately does not “suture” together a coherent story. Fragmentation and the metafictional approach to self-representation are the only stories that can truly be gained from the work.

This “entre-ver” is conceptually represented in the text when L. Iluminada thrusts her eye on a tree branch. The effect of this, paradoxically, is “clearer” sight:

Pero si ella rozara un poco más su mirada con la otra y la dejara ir de largo hasta que el negro en ojo negro se frotara, entonces la vulgaridad sería la forma escrita. [...] Sacrifica la mirada, *se castra el ojo que la mira* hasta gastarlo y recentrarlo en su verídico rol.[...] Así botada y empapada tuvo la más clara de sus alucinaciones. (102-03, my emphasis)

The undoing of the duality memory/forgetting through the “entre-ver” is also evident in the form and content of *Lumpérica*.⁸ On the one hand the visual portrait that Diamela Eltit includes is one that nearly blackens out her face and identity, instead providing a fragmented image of her slashed arms. This is to say, she focuses on the dismembering element of self-representation

⁸ The phallogocentric dichotomy of memory/forgetting is also seen in some parts, for the film of her performance will be archived: “Rumas de papeles que ya son parte del pasado. La máquina en otro sector sigue su ritmo: la entintan y el hombre da la orden” (137). L. Iluminada realizes the failure of this testimony, for she “Lloró, pero no de pena, sino por impotencia de su producción. [...] Su cuerpo extendido para nada. Dejarlo más bien como borrador. Como ensayo. Eso fue en suma. Sólo eso” (135).

rather than the act of conveying identity and preserving its memory. Furthermore, it is difficult to establish an official story to be remembered for the L. Iluminada's night in the plaza since there are contradictory endings within the text.

Lumpérica can be read as multiple retellings of one conceptual performance of self-representation: L. Iluminada exploring reading and writing in the plaza through the projection of neon projections on the body and her attempt to control the "paper"/body through self-mutilation. The various possible conclusions of this mutilation ceremony presented in the text are difficult to reconcile, however. In what could be called a "sutured," phallogocentric plot,⁹ L. Iluminada gravely injures herself: she has enucleated her eye, been on the verge of losing consciousness, she has cracked open her skull. In this ending, she lies in the hospital. In this state, she is the perfect page to be written on or filmed, but she is also figuratively dead:

Sigue inclinada: su manifiesta cabeza en la cerviz de la cinematografía. La han observado desde sus mejores ángulos infundiéndole letra a letra, palabra a palabra, guiones y representaciones, hasta que con la lengua rota e hinchada pudo decir los más claros parlamentos reduciéndolos a memorias, su mente como archivo. Yacer así en una sala de hospital—deprendida de toda alma—[...] Así podría estar—ocupando ese lecho—mientras le indagan sus signos vitales y el instrumental verifica sus latidos. (70-71).

⁹ Alternatively, a non-phallogocentric plot would be impossible to summarize. As Nelly Richard has described it, "La trama no es sino un montaje de voces discordantes entre sí que rompen toda unicidad de punto de vista. Secuencias y planos que se van desarticulando y rearticulando a lo largo de la historia sin coincidir nunca en un final certero. La novela yuxtapone varias reescrituras de lo mismo, que se desmienten y se contradicen permanentemente hasta que las sospechas del lector traspasen del libro y se extiendan a sus afueras (el país entero), colocando en tela el juicio la fiabilidad—confiabilidad de cualquier palabra pronunciada en nombre de *la Verdad*. ("Tres funciones" 39)

Considering the severity of her injuries, this is indeed the more realistic of the two endings. However, it also shows the bleak possibilities of the trope of prosopopeia with respect to women's self-writing. "Truth" is literally and figuratively beaten into her, at the cost of the self.

In another possible ending, which is explained in the final chapter of the book, nothing truly happens. Following the ceremony L. Iluminada simply retires to a bench in order to watch her surroundings as the city begins to stir with the morning bustle. Despite its simplicity, this final chapter is crucial for understanding the overall book. It describes how L. Iluminada becomes aware of the imprinting of identity and name by the patriarchal light and how she traverses the public square to watch the flashing neon sign from all angles. She contemplates the alternating flashing of letters and considers every possible combination: "Que dos, tres o cuatro letras podrían caer si ella se paraba en un lugar preciso. Y era más aún, por la misma distancia, unas se montaba sobre las otras, dando origen a palabras completas, que más allá de un sentido claro o riguroso se establecían como nexos" (193). She examines the subversive potential within the language of the fluorescent sign by modifying the reception of the virgin paper/square/dress through her sexual writhing, by cutting off her locks, and by mutilating her body. However, she also realizes the futility of using words that "finalmente nunca le había correspondido en realidad" (193).

After experimenting with the different possibilities of imprinting with El Luminoso's letters, realizing that "le era imposible precisar con certeza una combinatoria exacta" (193), L. Iluminada takes out a mirror and simply examines herself:

Miró su rostro largamente, incluso ensayó una sonrisa. [...] Alejó y acercó el espejo. Se miró desde todos los ángulos posibles. En un momento lo dejó apoyado sobre el borde

de la baranda cercana para observar desde el suelo su rostro. [...] Miró su cara en el espejo mucho más diluida y cruzada frágilmente por las luces. (194)

This final representation of the scene highlights the parallels between L. Iluminada's reading of the sign's writing and our reading of *Lumpérica*. Just as her bodily movements scramble and create every possibility with the letters of the sign, the disorder of the text—including the confusion of genres, chronology, and perspectives—explores the limits of representation by scrambling any coherent plot. Finally, just as her reading ends with a metafictional moment—examining the sign writing on her from her mirror—the ultimate and best reading of *Lumpérica* is one that metafictionally examines her self-representation.

I propose, therefore, that the use of multi-media and multiple perspectives represent Eltit's attempt to faithfully represent her Self in spite of the limitations of language, narrative models, and the limited subject positions of authoritarianism and surveillance. The doomed nature of self-representation results in a filmic-based metatextuality that focuses on the gestures of the autobiographical project rather than the actual message.

The autobiographical process is repetitive, nonetheless, perhaps because writing, imprinting, and filming remain phallogocentric, incapable of capturing the totality of the subaltern experience. Fragmented in time, perspective, language and exposition, *Lumpérica* appropriates the cinematographic motifs of montage, mise en abyme, flashbacks, zoom, among others to construct an allegory of the textual act of self-representation.

Confession, individual memory, production of truth through torture and surveillance figure allegorically in the structure of the book. Moreover, the narrative blurriness, the constantly voiced “tengo sed,” and the mutilations refer, whether obliquely or explicitly, to the abuses committed by the dictatorship. By incorporating the mutilations, the forced confessions, and

interpellations of the State allegorically into the structure of the text, *Lumpérica* can be read as a metafictional testimony. More specifically, it is a reflection on the difficulty of creating and representing subjectivity in an authoritarian society where individual rights are limited. The analogies between metafiction and film in *Lumpérica* illustrate how discursive practices such as surveillance impact the structure of self-writing. Indeed, as evidenced by *Lumpérica*, life can determine the narrative model of self-representation, including when self-representation is no longer possible.

“Scrapbooking a Self: Collage and Metafiction in *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*”

If surveillance and torture determine the metafictional narrative structure and concept of self in *Lumpérica*, torture also makes its appearance in Arenas’s self-writing. His early text, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* explicitly engages with the role that torture plays in subjectivity, both that created by the state and that contested by the individual. In contrast to Eltit, Arenas uses metafiction through the inclusion of extratextual print material and through the metatextual epiphany produced in the moment of torture. His metafiction thus addresses the relationship between consciousness, discursive practices, “truth,” and the external, material world. His writing is not allegorical like Eltit’s, for whom torture has both a narrative and figurative/structural dimension reflected in the text. Torture occurs in *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* as a part of the plot, but one that speaks implicitly to how to interpret the use of metafictional use collage and his process of self-writing. It also bears noting that the use of collage is particularly metafictional since these materials signal to a reality outside of the fictionalized text, of materials found in archives and from local towns where Arenas lived. They represent the transcendental bridge that Phillip Lejeune views as a principal quality in autobiography, establishing Arenas’s authenticity and connecting his textual sense of being with

the autobiographical act of self awareness. In this part I analyze the process of what I call “scrapbooking a self.” By this I mean that Arenas’s use of collage works metafictionally to illustrate the process, models, and limits of constructing a self in Revolutionary Cuba.

El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas, published in 1975, is the second book of Reinaldo Arenas’s so-called *Pentagonía*. These five interlaced books are best known for representing his life in a more fictional and fantastical light compared to his renown autobiography, *Antes que anochezca*. Nonetheless, by virtue of spanning from his days as an imaginative child in the impoverished villages of Oriente, to his coming of age in times of homophobic repression in Havana, Reinaldo Arenas’s *Pentagonía* serves as a fictionalized autobiography of his 37 years in Cuba.¹⁰ Arenas, in fact, made it clear that this five-book series is both a “secret history of Cuba and a writer’s autobiography” (Soto, “Struggle” 60). Despite knowing the author’s intention, it is not always easy to understand how these texts can be read theoretically as self-writing, especially in relationship to key concepts such as the foregrounding of a self. At this moment I would like to focus specifically on *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* and the question of how this can be read as self-writing.

El palacio depicts a budding homosexual boy, Fortunato, who lives with his family of unstable single aunts and their illegitimate children, and his mute grandfather and domineering grandmother; it is sort of Cuban version of *La casa de Bernalda Alba*, with palpable sexual repression and economic and existential desperation. The text is highly literary, characterized by

¹⁰ While ordered in terms of chronology and geographical movement, each of the five books becomes increasingly political in its introspective dealings of the metamorphosing protagonists. The first book, *Celestino antes del alba*, constitutes a significant modification of the autobiographical genre in that it represents the perspective and psychology of the child protagonist through a highly antimimetic existence and narrative language. The second book, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, perhaps entails a similar approach, with the adolescent character being matched with a storyline full of sexual tension, unfulfilled desires, and fatalism. The third autobiographical novel, *Otra vez el mar*, is told from both an imaginary feminine and a poetic masculine perspectives, introducing the concept of gender in a more explicit light. The fourth book, written in the United States after his arrival with the Mariel Boatlift, *El color del verano* stages the overthrow of the dictator by a score of *locas*, thus providing a reading of politics of his life story.

Lorquian poetic descriptions, personifications of death, and visual typographic experimentation. There is also a clear political dimension to the text, particularly in Fortunato's decision to run away with the revolutionary forces, the depiction of economic hardships caused by political strife, and the inclusion of actual war bulletins. In spite of the clear references to history and to snippets from real newspapers from his town, it is difficult to discern an autobiographical project amongst the hundreds of stream of consciousness fragments that confuse the narrative voices of the many family members and that only hint at narrative events. The collage of voices is further complicated by the generic multiplicity, for the book ends with a theatrical version summing up the principal family tragedies. The text is also both literally and figuratively displaced, forced to wrap around fragments including newspaper ads, bulletins reporting on rebel advances, poems, and explanations or *apartes* made by the characters. Using multiple first-person voices, I propose that the book can be read as a type of autobiographical collage, a literary scrapbook of the self.

Quite different from traditional autobiographical writing, Fortunato's first person voice is transplanted by the competing voices. As for writing about himself through the eyes of others or in the third person, whereas in his first book *Celestino antes del alba* this technique can be attributed to the representation of psychological trauma, in *El palacio* it appears more of the result of a sort of self-fashioning from scraps, what I call "scrapbooking the self." It is thus easy to concede that interpreting this work as self-writing relies heavily on negative definitions of the self, on deconstructed notions of gender and sexuality, history, and writing. I want to explore, however, the possibility that this type of self-writing is also dependent upon the relationship between the state and the subject. In other words, that there is a connection between the

multigeneric and collage-like nature of *El palacio* and the nature of self-representation in authoritarian societies.

In considering the historical context in which text is written (1966-1969) and the period written about (1958), I believe that there is a relationship between the diminished subjectivity and freedom of expression and the hybrid nature of the text. Reinaldo Arenas provides little details about the text's completion in his autobiography *Antes que anochezca*, but the manuscript states that it was written over the three year period of 1966 to 1969. During this time, Arenas was impacted by policy changes, both good and bad. The initial period of Revolutionary rule until the crackdown following Castro's 1961 "Palabras a los intelectuales," was marked by a surge in artistic creativity. For example, literary experimentation and debate was facilitated by the short but vital publication run of "Lunes de Revolución" (1959-1961) and the creation of centers like the Cuban Institute of Art and Cinematographic Industry (Ocasio, *Cuba's Political and Sexual Outlaw* 20). Arenas was relieved from his agricultural/revolutionary duties after a remarkable performance in a contest in storytelling. Although he did not win the contest, his original tale, which he performed in lieu of a simple recitation, gained the attention of the contest organizers, who in turn offered him a job at the Biblioteca Nacional in 1963. His transition to the world of literature opened up opportunities, both personal and professional. He contributed both stories and literary articles to publications like *La Gaceta de Cuba* and *Unión*, sponsored by the UNEAC (Cuban Writers and Artist Union), and by 1964 he had befriended renowned writers Virgilio Piñera and José Lezama Lima. The tradition of contests set the stage for his national recognition as a writer. For example, his first novel, *Celestino antes del alba* was awarded an honorable mention in the *Concurso Nacional de Novela Cirilo Villaverde*, which resulted in its publication (albeit delayed) in 1967. Arenas would also go on to win mention in the 1967 contest

with *El mundo alucinante*, but political differences and disagreements over the anti-revolutionary content would cause Arenas to be denied the customary guarantee of publication.

Although *El Palacio* deals most concretely with the year 1958, in which Arenas briefly joined Castro's revolutionary forces and just a couple of months before they successfully overturned Batista, the political and artistic repression during the 60s would have impacted the form of his text. At the time that Arenas was establishing himself as a talented, up-and-coming writer in the Havana literary scene and benefiting from the increased organization of cultural centers and contests, he was also tangled in the web of increasing persecution of homosexuals under the revolutionary regime. 1961 marked the year of both social and artistic repressions, particularly related to "sexually deviant behaviors." Not only was prostitution outlawed, and "morally-lax" women rehabilitated through state programs, but the entertainment scene in Havana, often associated with homosexuality and capitalism, was the target of social reform. This was the year that Castro demanded revolutionary art in his "Palabras a los intelectuales," with the famous words "dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución nada." One of the most well known examples of the tightening censorship was the movie *P.M.*, which depicted Afro-Cubans dancing and drinking in a nightclub. The film was confiscated, and the sponsoring periodical, *Lunes de Revolución*, was accused of ideological misconduct and subjected to grenade attacks. The 1960s also coincided with the creation of the UMAP (Military Units for Aid to Production) camps in which homosexuals, Catholics, and subversives were forced to perform manual labor. It has been suggested that 1965 stands as the height of homosexual persecution in Cuba, and during this time Arenas lived a transitory life, changing residences frequently to avoid arrest. The years immediately following, precisely between 1966 and 1969, Arenas explored his homosexuality in the writing of *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas* and *Otra vez el mar*.

As Arenas describes in *Antes que anochezca*, he was under constant surveillance. His works were censored, confiscated and destroyed, and friends and strangers alike were involved in spying for the security state. Wanted for indecent public behavior, he was arrested for “corrupting a minor,” a charge that he felt was a cover for his anti-Castro writing. Once in prison, Arenas was tortured and coerced to confess. Similarly, in 1971 Heriberto Padilla was forced to write and deliver a self-incriminating confession after the counterrevolutionary tone and images of *Fuera del juego*.

Reflecting the turbulent atmosphere of literary and sexual expression, the fragmented nature of *El palacio* reflects a precarious self, and the extratextual incorporation of visual materials, collage technique, and multiple genres perhaps can shed light on the literary construction of the self in authoritarian societies. Theorists of autobiography have argued that the increasingly visual nature of culture has created tensions between the “auto” [self] and the “graphe” [writing] (Whitlock in Chaney 5). The implication of this is that Arenas’s inclusion of print material could be considered a response to the increasingly difficult task of representing the self in writing. While *El palacio* perhaps reflects a period of typical adolescent uncertainty in which there may not be a strong of self, it is also plausible that the collection of voices reflects the impossibility of a true subjectivity in revolutionary Cuba. If it is true that visual culture disrupts the agency of the author in representing him or herself, it is interesting that Arenas incorporates extratextual materials, many with visual images in the original, perhaps as a source of authority for constructing the self.

It is difficult to establish a pattern amongst the variety of materials, ranging from ads for wrinkle creams, Ford cars, and a local classified for a guarapera, to theater bulletins announcing certain movies of the week, and the numerous military reports. The veracity of these is assumed,

for in the acknowledgments section of *El palacio* Arenas thanks the archivists at the Biblioteca Nacional for their help in securing these materials, and he provides citations in the text indicating that they are indeed real sources. What is not known, however, is what his design was in scouring for these newspapers, whether he had remembered these periodicals, reports, and companies from his childhood, or whether he used them as memory devices. The journals are principally from the region of Oriente, such as the *Eco de Holguín* and *La Justicia*, and perhaps *El Norte*, both obscure journals for which it has been difficult to find records. The *Boletín Informativo* is likely a nationally released report detailing the rebel offense, all seven from November of 1958. These moments of Castro's revolution were likely significant for Arenas for several reasons, for they possibly coincided with his participation in the rebel forces, and at the least they depict the movement of revolutionary forces through Oriente as he may have witnessed it.

The scrapbook collection, however, is not limited to his own life, for he includes several pieces from the years 1930 to 1936, predating his birth in 1943. Notably, all of these are marketing for commercial products or theatrical advertisements, and they present a grand contrast between the Cuba under the Machado and Bastista regimes and that of bleak revolutionary times. There are also pieces of particular local flavor, including the announcement of the new Funeraria de José Nuñez Parra, the guarapera classifieds, and frivolous beauty advice for women.

Supposedly Arenas's intention was to duplicate newspaper advertisements and bulletins, including visual images, but this effort was declined by the editor and publishing company. Roberto Valero suggests that this attempt to include visual culture and authentic documents in his text was merely humorous (107). It is more complicated than this, for perhaps there is

something to be said about the connection between self-writing and this type of scrapbooking or collage. In a more global context we would attribute the inclusion of visual materials to modernity, to the poststructuralist failure of language and the fragmentary nature of the modern self. However, since we are talking about rural Cuba prior to and during Castro's revolution, it seems that technology, globalization, and urbanization are of secondary importance. Mixed medium must be theorized in relation to Arenas's representation of the revolution and of the individual.

Collage, although not stated as such, is related to a specific type of self-construction that has been theorized by Michel Foucault. Foucault identifies two different modes of self-narrative, the confession and the *hupomnēmata*. These first self-writings had different purposes, for the confession implied an apologia or argument of the self and the individual history, while the *hupomnēmata* of Antiquity was a memory book designed for a regular practice of reflection the oneself, others, and events that served to unify these fragmentary experiences into a self ("Self Writing"). Whereas both processes of self-construction can be found in *El palacio*, they exist as counterpoints. If confession is increasing associated with state-surveillance, interrogation, and destruction of the self in torture, all of which are depicted in *El palacio*, *hupomnēmata* in the form of collage comes to function as a process of (re)building the self.

It bears noting, in particular in the case of Arenas, that print culture has also affected self-construction in ways that go beyond literature. Valentín Groebner in *Who Are You?: Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe* traces the evolution of signs and print artifacts that play a role in identity. Groebner elaborates on how the new technology of printing changes the concept of identity to recognition by the other, that is, identification. He argues that "it is only through others looking at us that we become who we are" (36), and that

identity is a social process, not always democratic, that involves the decoding of signs. With the development of print culture the nature of identity-constituting signs has evolved beyond the symbols on coats of arms, wax stamps, insignia worn on clothes, family names, and the like in which *identitas* was sense of belonging to a community (27). An intermediate step in the evolution of identity signs was the importance of physical appearance, especially that of the face, and Groebner highlights the connection between the *voltus* (face) and *volo* (will), indicating the increasing notion of subjectivity as related to identity (29). However, with the increase in literacy and printing, counterfeiting and misspellings became more common, creating a crisis in determining the authenticity of signs. Thus the *firma* became more important than the *forma*, that is, identification supplanted identity (225); this crisis of authenticity entailed, perhaps, a loss of subjectivity/identity to the process of identification.

Foucault also contributes to the analysis of print culture, identity, and identification. For him, identity is based on a self-regulation (another type of self-recognition) that depends on an authoritative gaze. The panopticon was one such construction, but also we can also include official documents such as medical and court records that confer officially-sanctioned identities (*I Pierre Riviere...*). Foucault explains, “people’s bodies, behavior, and discourse are gradually besieged by a tissue of writing, by a sort of graphic plasma which records them, codifies them, and passes them up through the hierarchy to a centralized point” (*Psychiatric Power* 49). Written records create individualism (in tracking histories, progress, diagnosis, etc.), and the process of individualization has become a practice of print culture.

If intercalated print materials in *El Palacio* serve the purpose of authorizing the life and self of Reinaldo Arenas, of confirming his material existence in conjunction with others and his community, they also reveal a process of self-contemplation. The collection of scraps from

newspapers presents to the reader, however, the challenge of ordering what can be called the “museum of the individual,” influenced by Eugenio Donato (and reread through Groebner and Foucault). In “The Museum’s Furnace” Donato writes of the representational fiction of the museum, where artifacts serve as metaphorical or metonymical fragments of a totality that, when ordered and connected, should construe an origin and a history. Likewise, a similar fiction of the individual is pieced together from artifacts. More simply put, we, readers, and perhaps Arenas himself, attempt to deduce a self from looking at the movies he saw, the cosmetic products of his times, the cars he admired, and the revolutionary movement that he witnessed. Donato argues, however, that the concept of origin is an epistemological fiction, and in Arenas’s text it seems that it is nearly impossible to trace an individual story in these fragments. Certainly, rituals of gender and *cubanidad* can be found,¹¹ but the collage fails to authenticate him as an individual and rather serves to complement the dedifferentiation carried out through the many muddled voices of the family saga. Furthermore, the real images from the newspaper are used paradoxically, to create or at least bolster a fictional account rather than a “true life story” that we expect from autobiography.

Although Foucault’s memory book suggests, on the metafictional level of the text, an attempt to assemble a scrapbook of the self, the final pages of *El palacio* can be seen to undo the narrator’s work of constructing a history of stories and visual materials over some 300 pages.

¹¹ This collage-like nature of Latin American self-writing can also be understood through the lens of Diana Taylor’s theory of spectatorship in which visual culture diminishes the subjectivity of individuals. Taylor’s particular stance is that visual culture performs gendered and nation-oriented plotlines or rituals, many of which cast the viewer into a marginalized position of spectator. Taylor proposes that “Individual and state formation take place, in part, in the visual sphere through a complicated play of looks; looking, being looked at, identification, recognition, mimicry” (30). In the case of Arenas this spectatorship is harder to gauge, since the images that relay messages are not duplicated in his text. Commercial products are easier to imagine being accompanied by images that interpellate viewers as participants in standards of beauty, well being, and consumption. They stand in contrast to the dire economic situation of most of rural Cuban and to the austerity imposed by the Castro regime. Although the visual materials are often gendered and point to a national economic situation that recognized the illusion of self-fashioning promoted by the bourgeois public sphere, Diana Taylor’s concept of spectatorship may present an interesting parallel with

Having been captured by government forces for revolutionary affiliation, he is tortured and is about to be killed. In this moment of extreme pain Fortunato realizes that the voices of his family have been a product of his imagination:

Comprendió que sólo en la violencia y en las transfiguraciones podría hallar su verdadera autenticidad, su justificación [...] Y fue entonces, ahora, cuando comprendió que no era posible que todo aquello le estuviese sucediendo a él. Y fue entonces, ahora, cuando comprendió [...] que él hacía tiempo que había dejado de ser él para ser todos. (360-61)

Even if his own sense of being is to be found in others, a so-called relational self to use autobiographic terms, he is ultimately overwhelmed by the textual nature of a self constructed in language. The confession forced through torture had created language:

Había un inmenso almacén lleno de palabras. Había que ver aquello: millones de criaturas paleando, revolviendo, tratando de escoger, buscando, buscando mientras sucesivos derrumbes de palabras [...] los sepultaban. Y él se vio también en aquel inmenso almacén [de palabras]. (361-62)

This insight signals back to one of the collage materials, a random citation from a medical book about deranged patients of a mental ward: “La vida, un microbio macrobio. La vida, una lección lesionada. La vida, una inmensa cantidad de palabras palabreadas” (166).

Arenas’s inclusion of extra-textual materials thus works on two levels. On the one hand, the autobiographical strategy of Arenas is to be found in the metafictional use of collage. This is to say that the inclusion of print culture serves as a source of validation for his self, verifying his existence and providing artifacts from his life. On the other hand, the ending of the novel highlights the danger of the textualized nature of self, for language quickly spirals into fiction, into nonsense, and into nothingness. It bears remembering that, as leading scholar Leah Gilmore

has suggested, that autobiography “draws its authority less from its resemblance to real life than from its proximity to discourses of truth and identity, less from reference or mimesis than from the cultural power of truth telling” (qtd. in Chaney 3). As a sexual, artistic, and political deviant in the wake of Castro’s revolution, Reinaldo Arenas had little recourse to any discourse of truth or identity that would have authorized his self-representation, for these discourses are often controlled by the state. His best bet, as evidenced in *El palacio* was to use collage at a metafictional level, to illustrate the process of trying to piece together a self in writing. It has been argued that collage and hybrid genres destabilize representation by problematizing the referent. This in turn emphasizes the textual nature of our experience and questions the human subject as a source of knowledge (Juan-Navarro “Collage” 175). To apply this idea to Reinaldo Arenas’s book, his collage of print materials textualizes the concept of the self, and looking at this metafictionally, we catch a glimpse of his autobiographical process, which I think can best be described as a scrapbooking of the self.

Surveyance, surveillance, and torture have a profound impact on the creation of the national subject, on the individual’s sense of self, and on the ability to represent the self. In the works of Clarice, Eltit, and Arenas, metafiction is used to address the consciousness of the problem of representation and subjectivity in authoritarian contexts. The origin of metafiction can be seen to differ according to geographic location, type of government, and individual author, but each type of metafiction responds to the need to repudiate an essentialized national self. Resisting this compulsory identity, both in actuality and in writing, was illegal and dangerous in Brazil, Chile, and Cuba alike. Nonetheless, these authors appropriated vocabulary and models to forge their own type of self-writing. For Clarice, the Brazilian Modernist art movement likely provided a theory of representation and aesthetic experience that she could use

as an alternative to the imposed narrative of *brasilidade*. Eltit, on the other hand, incorporated film into her narrative as a way to comment upon the omnipresent gaze of the surveillance state. Arenas engages with collage as a way to measure his subjectivity, only to undo the own fiction of selfhood. In all three authors, the nature of the marginalized self is fragmented, alienated in language, gendered, and expressed through an abject body. This relationship between the body and subjectivity will be examined in the upcoming chapters.

The comparison of Clarice, Eltit, and Arenas leads to interesting conclusions about the nature of authoritarianism, of the role that the discursive practices of surveyance, surveillance, and torture have in producing subjects. In fact, this engages with a dispute between two of the existing schools of thought on authoritarianism, namely Henrique Fernando Cardoso's economic understanding of bureaucratic-authoritarianism and James C. Scott's belief in the power of the "hidden transcripts" that allow subalterns to fight back against oppression. My understanding of authoritarianism is one that works bottom up rather than top down. From the perspective of the individual, surveyance, surveillance, and torture are discursive practices that interfere in the creation of the democratic subject that has been associated with traditional democracy. While the individual authors may not address all three of these practices in any given work, the use of metafiction, as well as sexuality and word play, to compare the failures of representation and the reduction of subjectivity yields striking conclusions. At this point I turn to the next chapter to examine the problematic subjectivity produced by authoritarianism.

CHAPTER IV

CONFESSIONS OF THE FLESH: SEXUALITY AND SELF-EXPRESSION

Que sus muslos ilustren la lucha de contrarios. Que su lengua sea más hábil que toda la dialéctica. Salga usted vencedora de esta lucha de clases.

---Herberto Padilla, *Fuera del juego*

In *Justifiable Conduct* sociologist Erich Goode argues that deviance is a salient feature of self-writing. In turning to Latin America during authoritarianism, this deviance takes a sexual turn. Even when we expand geographically and chronologically, we find confessions of a sexual nature, ranging from Irene Vilar's accounts of more than a dozen abortions, to Cabrera Infante's sexual exploits on the beach, to Zoe Valdés's pornographic eroticism. Deviance may have always been a characteristic of the picaresque tradition, but sex is a particular topic of the second half of the twentieth century. Beyond simply reflecting sexual liberation movements, the sex portrayed is not just any kind of sex; it is taboo, promiscuous, and illegal.

What is the association between authoritarianism and sex? Clearly there is one, evidenced by hundreds of speeches in which authoritarian leaders exert obsessive control over gender norms and national mores. If the last chapter considered the influence of models of self-writing, this chapter takes into account the narrative constructions alternatively known as foundational fictions or national romances designed to advocate for the desired norms. Sex has been the site of state regulation since the days of the Inquisition, beginning with confession of innermost impulses and leading up to the more contemporary role of population control through biopolitical policies. If sex in contemporary autobiographies erases the clean, fixed boundaries between public

and private spheres, this dynamic parallels the relationship between national subject and private subjectivity. Sex thus reveals this problematic nature of subjectivity in authoritarianism. Sexually taboo representations signal the oppressive weight of being a subject of the state, for they replicate the discourse of the state in discussing sex publicly. But sex also contains a revolutionary force, with some authors able to employ the bodily sensations as a way of asserting individual autonomy. This chapter examines the distinct uses of sexuality, illustrating the continuum of the problematic subjectivity of authoritarianism.

Performed in a public square and in defiance of the State's surveillance, masturbation, orgasm, and orgy become techniques of self-expression. Curiously, these deviant and/or public sexual acts equally populate Diamela Eltit's allegorical self-writing in *Lumpérica*, Reinaldo Arenas's political memoir, *Antes que anochezca*, and Clarice Lispector's intimate and introspective tales. Thus, contemporary Latin American autobiography is marked by the foregrounding of sexuality. The recurring appearance of exaggerated sexual practices as a central motif in autobiography, such as when Eltit's symbolic protagonist L. Iluminada fornicates with the homeless masses or when Arenas engages in trysts with some 5,000 men, is a stylistic curiosity that can particularly be seen in texts coming out of authoritarian societies. The prevalent use of sexuality as a tactic of literary self-expression and a source of agency in oppressive environments thus serves as a starting point for examining contemporary innovations in self-writing. The bodily nature of these texts stands in great contrast with the traditional autobiographies of Spanish America, however, where the prudish and public autobiographies of politicians belatedly evolved to include the more private, gossip-oriented *petit historie*, as Sylvia Molloy observes in *At Face Value*. How can the graphic, corporeal, and experimental forms of self-writing in Latin American literature be explained?

This hyperbolic sexuality coincides with the advances of postmodernism and poststructuralism that have questioned the theoretical (and etymological) components of auto/bio/graphy, introducing new understandings of what constitutes the self and acceptable narrative models of self-writing, as examined in the previous chapter. Writing the self through the sex and the body, while perhaps diverging from traditional definitions of autobiography, represents an evolution in Latin American self-writing that has yet to be explored by critics. Simplistic understandings of autobiography, which limit the definition to a chronological, first-person account, have failed to consider the implications of censorship and limited personal freedom for the construction and expression of the self. However, the political dimension of such representation must be considered, for authoritarian political climates of the second half of the twentieth century necessitate the development of new forms and media of self-representation. The use of the body and sexuality becomes a frequent literary strategy that both parallels and protests the repression of speech and writing and the regulation of the body by torture and state apparatuses.¹

This chapter thus seeks to examine the use of sexuality as a discursive strategy in contemporary Latin American autobiography. It addresses the political, philosophical, and literary reasons for this tendency that may be particular to Latin American societies affected by authoritarian regimes.

Sexual Autobiographics

The increased use of sexuality in the postmodern and poststructuralist autobiography can be seen, on the one hand, as a natural progression from the reserved, political account of the

¹ Paradoxically, Menton observes a surge in these suggestive writings in what he considers to be a permissive stage of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 before the eventual crackdown on artistic freedom of expression. Consequently, it is overly simplistic and sometimes inaccurate to just attribute sexual writings to reactionary politics. I propose, on the other hand, that there is a recurrent provocation of sexual expression that comes out of the drastic changes in politics.

nineteenth-century to the gossip-oriented writings of the first half of the twentieth, followed by later self-writings in the age of sexual liberation and feminist movements. Certainly, there is an undeniable increase in sexual writings in the second half of the twentieth century, ranging from José Lezama Lima's infamous eighth chapter in *Paradiso* to Vargas Llosa and other Boom writers' allegorical use of sexual depravity, to Nelson Rodrigues's introduction of sexual vulgarity into mainstream Brazilian fiction. Although Arenas, Eltit, and Lispector each engage with the concept of sex in a different fashion, it is curious that self-writing, traditionally the most public of writings, evolves to exhibit sexuality, usually among the most private of subjects. Contemporary culture has become desensitized to what used to be regarded as obscene and/or pornographic, although it does not seem to me, considering the overtly political or coded nature, that the intention of these writers is to offend, titillate, or make their works more marketable. On the other hand, the use of the erotic body and sexual practices in the examples of Arenas, Eltit, and Lispector exceed the mimetic representation of traditional self-writings and test the uncomfortable relationship with truth and taboo, of the division between public and private. The exaggeration, whether quantitative in the case of Arenas or qualitative in the case of Eltit, discloses the use of sexuality as a particular rhetorical strategy or "autobiographic" (to use Leah Gilmore's term). In other words, sexuality becomes less of a representation of the self or one's identity as a means to contemplating and constructing the self. Sexuality exists, therefore, in the meta-literary plane, for it is not so important as to what sexual acts Reinaldo Arenas engaged in on Cuban beaches or the question of veracity surrounding Eltit's sordid and injurious public orgy so much as what can be accomplished through the inclusion of their sexuality.

Even if Foucault would argue that sexuality is intertwined with subjectivity, having evolved from mere physical acts to a element of one's being, the use of sexuality of these authors

becomes more of a dynamic of the writing than a source of individual essentialism.² Eltit's use of the body as a form of discourse is particularly convincing: when she recites her text in front of a brothel in the filming of *Maipú* (which is arguably a performance of *Lúmpérica* captured in the cinematic form), she is harvesting the performative and political power of sexuality. Similarly, when her character L. Iluminada masturbates, mutilates herself, and participates in an orgy with destitute vagabonds of the plaza, there is not so much to be said about who she is as a person or her history so much as the potential of self-expression that can be found in the symbolism of this act. That is, even if the improbable practices were thought to have occurred in actuality, they still fail to say who she is so much as express a sense of identification with such acts and publics. Similarly, that Clarice finds a structural expression in the female orgasmic rhythms, as argued by certain critics, suggests that sexuality is both a site of self-expression and understanding, that is, knowledge and agency are produced by the sensations and practices of sex.

Foucault has theorized that subjectivity, or the understanding of oneself as a subject—a process that is essential to autobiography—is based on the relationship between the micro-structures of the person (the body, the soul, and thought) and the macro-structures related to power and institutions. Sexual self-writing must have, therefore, political and personal means. In the case of Latin American autobiography, the expression of subjectivity through the body is further compounded by the unique legacy of the confession that is at once the foundation of autobiography and that resonates in the political unconscious.

In order to understand this peculiar use of sexuality in recent Latin American self-writing, I propose a series of hypotheses, which I will expound upon in this chapter. I argue, first, that the political unconscious associates state (re)formation with a sexual discourse due to the legacy of

² Arenas, perhaps, is the one exception to this, for it seems that his personhood is intimately related to his homosexuality, but I will later argue that he queers his writing as a discursive strategy.

the Inquisition and confession. As a result, the state-building process and its consequent policing of the body is expressed in sexual metaphors. Second, responding to the sexualized discourse of state reformation in authoritarian contexts, the genre of autobiography, also evoking its confessional origins, oftentimes produces a hypersexual self-expression. Finally, I demonstrate a specific Latin American literary construction of the self in which sexuality serves as a mediator between the national and individual dichotomy of subjectivity.

Sex, the Political Unconscious, and State-Building

Despite its use as a technique of literary sensationalism, sex is political. Sexuality has been a prominent site of policing by the state (and the Church), one that is not truly concerned with the actual sexual acts committed rather with the control of the production of truth and knowledge.³ As such, to protest political or cultural repression often involves “a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanism of power” (Foucault *History* 5). This transgression, the ability to engage and speak of taboo acts, and a focus on sexual pleasure seems to me to be an apt description of the project of the autobiographic writings of Arenas, Eltit, and in a more subtle way Lispector. We are, perhaps, unaccustomed to reading this type of writing as autobiographical. However, an examination of the dynamics of confession, autobiography’s origin, helps us to understand how these conceptual uses of sexuality do work as a form of self-expression.

Along with taboo and silence, repression is also associated with the third quality of nonexistence (Foucault *History* 5). The twists and turns of history would have it that our existence is very much tied up with our sexuality. I am not speaking so much of the meaning of

³ “[R]epression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age,” writes Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (5).

sexual acts as a process by which the individual is given subjectivity. Foucault understood confession to be a metonymical process in that it “substitut[ed] an individual life for an event in order to expand juridical power” (Tell 113). If metonymy is understood as taking a part for a whole, of erasing specifics in order to have a general form, as a metonymical practice, “[confession] unifies the divergent impulses of the body into a ‘coherent identity’ (like ‘sexuality’)” (107). If this rhetoricization (in the Nietzschean sense) of the subject was in large part determined by the need to establish a causality and interiority of a subject, such as the shift from crimes as isolated events to the study of criminality as an origin, so too sexuality has moved from discontinuous bodily sensations to an abstract origin or psychology that function as a site of knowledge and power.

If confession was one of the primary practices of examination through which metonymy produced the interior subject, the evolution of confession bears particular importance for Latin American societies under authoritarian regimes. The auricular confession of the past, as frequently imagined as a Catholic ritual of revealing sinful acts, transformed into an examination of thoughts, into human sciences (psychiatry, pedagogy, medicine), and ultimately into a “panoptic society of surveillance” (Tell 107). Surveillance societies therefore have as their roots the confessional tradition, as does the use of torture that was closely associated with Inquisitional confession. Furthermore, we can now see how sexuality is inherently a site of both state control and resistance.

The connection between sex and state in Latin America goes beyond a Foucauldian abstraction, for what can be called the “physicality of state-building” can be seen from colonial days to recent times. In order to understand the relationship between explicit sexual writing and the political context of authoritarian governments, it is necessary to draw upon the history of

policing the body and policing the public in Latin America, which is in turn connected to the history and nature of state-building. It is indeed the patterns of state-making that come to inhabit much of the political unconscious⁴ of many Latin American artists and writers, from the independence days to the contemporary moment.

The policing of the body in society and in discourse starts with the Inquisition, which Irene Silverblatt identifies as the first type of modern state. Although the Inquisition began in Spain as an institution aimed at policing heresy and Judaism, in Latin America the interrogation quickly evolved into the examination of sexual practices, deviancy, sodomy, seduction, and bigamy. The Inquisition was also involved in the production of truth and subjectivity, for the institution was concerned with establishing the truth about who people really were, as well as rooting out private practices and exposing private transgressions to the public. The techniques of this interrogation were notorious, including torture of/through the body and also for using torture or the threat of torture to get confession. Consequently, confession of the private soul and the threat of public, institutionalized harm to the body were never far apart, a connection that will reappear in the work of these three authors. Inquisition along with the confessional were, therefore, pivotal in connecting and blurring the private and public dimensions (especially of sexual activities), as well as establishing the body as a site of policing by the self and the state.⁵

Inquisition was not the only institution involved in the policing of bodies in public, even though it was the most prominent. What did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition fell

⁴ I use the term political unconscious in a general, non-Marxian fashion. Beyond models of narrative, certain frameworks of thinking derive from political situation. Hence, I wish to demonstrate that the bodily practices of Latin American society filter into the literature even in innovative writings.

⁵ For information on the Inquisition in Latin America, policing of the body, the confusion of public/private, and establishing the site of all these practices, see Bethencourt, Francisco, *The Inquisition: A Global History, 1478-1834*, Silverblatt, Irene, *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World*; Bennett, Herman L., *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico*; Boyer, Richard, *Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family, and Community in Colonial Mexico*; as well as Sweet, James H., *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770*.

to civil and ecclesiastical courts, ranging from illegitimacy, cases of seduction, rape, and deflowering. It can be noted that the concerns with sexual practices in these new institutions were intimately linked to social status, class, caste, and race.⁶ Sexual biopolitics was, and remains today, a way of defending whiteness and its privilege. After Inquisition was abolished between the 1820s and 1830s, coinciding with the formation of independent nation states, other institutions beyond the courts began to police boundaries as well. A central concern for this nation-state was precisely what type of citizens it would have. Sexuality, behavior, decency, legitimacy, came to be policed not by the moral regime of the Inquisition but rather with the goal of making good citizens. For example, a recurring theme for nation-states in this period was articulated through the terms of a familial structure that appear in numerous foundational fictions or national romances (a president as father, government employees as brothers, subjects as children of the state, women as dutiful mothers of the state; part of the job of these dutiful mothers was to raise good sons who would fight for the good of the nation).⁷

By the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, with the expansion of US as a world power with an eye towards Latin America and final abolitions of slavery in Cuba and Brazil, modernization of the nation-state became the principal concern. The turn of the century was a period of attempting to modernize geography, disease/medicine, and education, in other words, civil society. This is the period of vaccine campaigns, policing of prostitutes, and

⁶ Twinam, Ann, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America*.

⁷ This use of a family vocabulary was also being marshaled toward the creation of a strong military, yet though the military was envisioned as a place of fraternity, and homo-comradery, there was a real understanding that the homoerotic was never far from the scene. Thus it should not be surprising that the military was another institution that policed sexuality and the public, which gains particular importance in later military regimes, as can be seen in the staunchly homophobic “new man” of revolutionary Cuba. If I digress, it is to demonstrate the shifts from policing sexuality for purely moral purposes to state-building purposes; and by linking the way modern states described themselves as family, a very private institution, to raising men who would defend the country in the form of a modern army, a very public institution, I illustrate the concrete appearance of the confusion of public and private in cultural practices and the transference of the relationship between confession and bodily punishment from the religious to the state level.

attempts to create public parks and plazas that are off-limits to the homeless, beggars, and people of lower class origins. Implicit in all of these things I have just described, are questions of sexuality. Diseases spread because of bad populations and their lax sexual practices, and a heteronormative sexual metaphor therefore describes these governmental practices (i.e. the metaphor of penetration in vaccination campaigns: public officials penetrating private homes and penetrating the body with the needle). Modernization is, in other words, characterized by what can be termed the physicality of state-building. The state, under the guise of modernization, came to regulate the policing of sexuality, including policies determining how public space should be used and how it should be segregated.

What the so-called “anti-prostitution panics” spanning from the 1880s to the 1930s illustrate is that what was really at stake in policing sex was keeping the diseased and degenerative bodies under surveillance through the control of their population and spaces. The idea of creating public parks and promenades that would be off-limit to certain people, for example, is full of sexual concerns as well because by keeping unwanted people out it was believed that certain kinds of sexual practices would be reduced. In other words, if there were places reserved for only the elite and the well-bred, seduction, rape, deflowering, and probably most problematic of all—male sexual encounters—would be dramatically reduced.⁸ By attempting to regulate the spaces where prostitutes could be and by attempting to medicalize them and notify the public about diseases and dangers of prostitutes, it was paradoxically the elites and lawmakers who made prostitutes and prostitutions more visible in public discourse

⁸ For more information, see Green, James N., *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil*, Findlay, Eileen J. Suárez, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920*, Putnam, Lara, *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960*. Meade, Teresa A., “Civilizing” Rio: *Reform and Resistance in a Brazilian City, 1889-1930.*, Caulfield, Sueann, *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early Twentieth Century Brazil*, Caulfield, Sueann, Sarah C. Chambers, and Lara Putnam, eds. *Honor, Status, and Law in Modern Latin America*.

than they had ever been. Similarly, male to male sexual encounters were not more frequent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than they had been previously, yet through attempts to police public spaces in which homosexuals could have encounters, male homosexuality was brought into a larger discourse about the use of public space. In other words, to talk about plazas and public squares without also talking about what kind of people visited them, and even more, subjectivity is connected to spaces and politics. These ideas will prove to be particularly relevant in the works of Arenas and Eltit.

By entering the public discourse of political elites, deviant sexualities such as homosexuality or prostitution were not solely gaining negative exposure, for we must also recognize that these marginalized groups took advantage of the particular moment to also make their own claims regarding how they should be seen and understood by the public; a counterpublic was also created with their entrance into public discourse. For example, ten years after the anti-prostitution panic that occurred in the 1890s in Puerto Rico, Ana Roqué de Duprey's novel *Luz y sombra* was published. Though written in 1894, the book "in which she laid out her theory of women's right to sexual pleasure," could not be published until after the panic had ended (Findlay 108). Yet, this novel along with certain feminist newspapers in Ponce were part of a counterpublic discourse about women's sexuality and prostitution. Likewise, it is not a coincidence that shortly after the police force and judges were being asked to crack down on male-male sex relations in public plazas that journals like *O Snob* began to appear and celebrated homosexual culture in Rio de Janeiro. Though it was based in Rio, members of the journal came from all parts of the northeast of the country and the journal (which ran in the 1950s and 60s) had its origin in *turmas* that were groups of effeminate men who stuck together

for sociability and support. In other words, the public discourse about homosexuality that came from the state was being countered by another public discourse regarding homosexuality.⁹

We also know that with the advent of the television in the 1950s in Latin America, there is more of the tendency to view the body and sexuality in ways that had until then not truly been available. The catastrophe and violence of the WWII images, the damage done to human bodies becomes much more visible. In addition to the TV, during the first half of the twentieth century pornographic media grew in Latin America, with the first same-sex male pornography appearing in Brazil in 1914 (Green 32-33). Taken together, state attempts to regulate sexuality and bodies, individual attempts to celebrate sexuality and bodies, and changes in the visual media that marked the first half of the twentieth century, by the 1960s the idea of writing frankly about sexuality, although still taboo by Latin American standards, became a possibility for enormous experimentation. In a nutshell, 1959, taken as a breaking point for this study, was a moment that was ripe for sexually explicit discourse due to cultural, political, and technological events, and a modernist discourse about degenerate sexualities/bodies framed by state-building projects.

Although what I've outlined here pertain to three separate periods (colonial era, independence, nationalist modernization), each one is informed by what precedes it. What I am really interested in here is the last phase, that is, the modernization of Latin America and the changes that it brought about in the policing of sexuality and the boundaries between public and private. As can be seen, the modern nation-state is intimately related to the policing of bodies. By the time we get to the creation of the modern nation-state, we see less and less violent or physical reactions to sexual deviance. This modernization takes place in a profound moment of world history, one that produces desensitization to graphic images. Both WWI and WWII disrupt the idea of how the body should be seen, and the violence and catastrophe of these events find

⁹ For more detailed information, see James Green, *Beyond Carnival*.

their way into media and finally into moving images or motion pictures. At the same time that this is happening and being received in Latin America, another phenomenon that is taking place is the growth of pornography, magazines, and moving pictures. In other words, while there is the development of an abiding concern with policing sexuality through modernization and increased self-policing of sexuality, there is also a drastic change in how the body can be represented after images of death, pornography, and sex become more accessible. Counterculture, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s would also use open and liberal sexuality to protest the government repressions, such as in the drag queen theater of *Dzi Croquettes* in Brazil. Most authoritative governments, ranging from Castro's homophobic Cuba to the military regimes of Chile and Brazil, among others, enforced strict behavioral and gender roles (including dress and hair), as well as enacting strict laws related to reproduction and marriage. As Diana Taylor has shown in *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War,"* gender and sex were manipulated discursively to bolster the authority of these regimes.

Jean Franco's *The Decline & Fall of the Lettered City* offers several other possibilities as to explain these new, sexually explicit cultural productions and manifestations. Franco writes on the culture and politics of the Cold War era, marked by the collapse and overthrowing of leftist governments, the repression and human rights violations of military regimes, the process of mourning and grappling with trauma, and the erosion of individuality in the advent of neoliberalism. The confluence of all of these socio-political happenings has resulted in various literary tropes, such as the end of the utopia of the lettered city, the seductive potential of marginal groups, distressed bodies, and the problem of memory. Sex as a political allegory in literature develops out of several literary strategies. On the one hand, it became an analogy for revolutionary and anti-capitalist politics, with the right to one's bodily pleasure and expression as

a type of resistance, that is, “orgasm as liberator” (Franco 117). Yet the major works that Franco uses to draw these conclusions, notably Cortázar’s *Libro de Manuel*, present a generally leftist and macho vision. If sexual freedom is equated with masculine revolution, it also turns into a vehicle for expressing discontent with the revolution, for it can be interpreted as wasted energy and as analogous to the unequal power structures of society.

If I have established that state formation and modernization employed a sexual language, it can also be stated that sexual discourse impacts state politics through the manipulation of the public sphere. James Green’s *Beyond Carnival* demonstrates how the repression of public sex and sexual deviance is really a fight over the public sphere rather than over the specific acts themselves. Semi-public and clandestine sex has always existed, although the discourse related to it has changed. Green writes on how grassroots publications emphasizing the *petit histoires* of feminine gay men challenged the official military mores centered on the familial narrative and on the dichotomy of public masculinity and private femininity.

Confession and the Self

If we have established how the surveillance and use of torture are related to the Inquisitional confession, that the confession still resonates in the contemporary political unconscious, we must examine the consequence of this unconscious for the production of autobiography in these societies. Autobiography is also derived from the confession, as seen in the *Confessions* by Saint Augustine and Rousseau. However, traditional autobiography is not known for focusing on sexual transgressions in an explicit fashion, although Tell does suggest that “Augustine feared that the movements of his body might be the surface effect of a deep-seated origin called ‘the flesh’” (112), and thus the interiority created by the confessional act was linked early on to the creation of sexuality. Yet the three authors of this study are not necessarily

confessing an interior nature. What is it, therefore, that is self-expressive in confessing sexuality? What allows us to say that these works are more than just reactionary pieces designed to provoke the ire of repressive governments?

Sexual expression is the opposite of sexual repression, yet both are related to subjectivity. In the case of Foucault, the body in general and sexuality in particular are involved in the understanding of oneself as a subject. As he explores in the *History of Sexuality*, sexuality has been at the center of both self-observation and self-regulation. In *Uses of Pleasure* he traces the genealogy of the concept of sexuality, and he significantly comments that the grand genealogy of his work ends up being just as much about the evolution of selfhood and the ways in which subjectivity is produced. One of Foucault's wide-reaching conclusions is that the production of truth is related to sexuality. In Volume I he writes, "The essential point is that sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law and taboo, but also of truth and falsehood, that the truth of sex became something fundamental, useful, or dangerous, precious and formidable: in short, that sex was constituted as a problem of truth" (56). "Truth," or the pretense of truth, has always been a marker of the autobiographic genre, the autobiographical pact in Lejeune's words.

Poststructuralism has since rendered this idea obsolete, but one does expect to find moments of self-reflection, which are necessarily moments that are concerned with either truth or the production of truth. Hannah Arendt has shown, though, that state bureaucracies (with the Inquisition being the example par excellence in Latin America) control truth, for "categories created by the state appear as natural or self-evident rather than social and political productions" (Silverblatt 24). In authoritarian states, the nature of this power is no longer an illusion or invisible, and as a consequence, the categories of identity (such as race, class, gender, sexuality) that are often taken to be natural, reveal themselves as constructions imposed on the population.

This would be the dialectic between the individual and the state stipulated by Marx. Arguably, in an authoritarian state, the expression of the individual is considerably limited by both censorship and internalized repression.

Returning to Foucault's idea that repression creates power and knowledge (including "self-knowledge") out of sexuality, I argue the inverse, that Latin American autobiography employs sexuality as a tactic of self-knowledge in the context of political atmospheres in which power is so strongly and visibly manifested. Whether or not repression is always related to sexuality is beside the point; what is of interest here is how sexuality appears as a technique of self-expression whether authors provide mimetic representations of sex or choose to use sex allegorically. What is important about confession for subjectivity is the "discursive fact" or the "way in which sex is 'put into discourse'" (11). As Tell explains, it is the metonymic function, the rhetoricization of confession that creates an individual, and sex was a predominant topic of this attempt to establish an essential being. This practice of converting sex and the bodily realm into discourse and words bears important structural parallels with the tropological or figurative nature of prosopopeia in autobiography. There is an important difference between the rhetorical process of confession and that of autobiography, however. If autobiography often searches for a metaphor or substituting image of the self in the text, confession relies on a metonymical process to establish interiority. Foucault writes,

the project of a science of the subject has gravitated, in ever narrowing circles, around the question of sex. Causality in the subject, the unconscious of the subject, the truth of the subject in the other who knows, the knowledge he holds unbeknown to him, all this found an opportunity to deploy itself in the discourse of sex. Not however, by reason of some

natural property inherent in sex itself, but by virtue of the tactics of power immanent in this discourse” (*History* 70)

In reading these three authors, it becomes apparent, however, that their sexual acts say little about who they are, and that sex is a response to the power of the state and/or ideology. Given the appropriation of models of sexual discourse promoted by the state, ranging from the New Man of Cuba to the sexual metaphors used in torture by oppressive regimes, the way sexuality is used tells us much about the production of “truth” and the production of subjects and subjectivity.

In confession, the individual is obliged to reveal, is interpreted by an interlocutor, is required to follow a certain framework of confession—in essence is “individualiz[ed] by power” (58)—thus subjectivity is paradoxical, implying both a subject of one’s own knowledge and a subject of the state. Building on this understanding of the dialectic between individual and the state we can articulate a theory of the use of sexuality in Latin American self-writing, as both a form of self-expression and political strategy. A sexualized discourse produced by the dynamics of confession address both the individualizing power that Foucault speaks of and the subject that appropriates the confessional model to exhibit his or her autonomy. As I will demonstrate below, sex is described differently by numerous Latin American authors. These authors do not necessarily have the same concepts of self or same ambitions as public persona in writing autobiographic or self-reflexive pieces. However, the use of sex similarly speaks to power and the relationship between the individual and the state. As I will detail below, Reinaldo Arenas explores the state-sexuality relationship by rewriting the Cuban foundational fiction. This queer national romance is one that gives him a greater individual subjectivity in the context of severe political persecution based on his sexual orientation. Diamela Eltit likewise attempts to pervert

the Chilean national romance, this time through the use of what can be called political pornography. Eltit illustrates the repressive atmosphere, marked by torture, disappearance, and police surveillance, by appropriating the model of confession and interrogation. Her discourse is markedly sexual, though this pornographic use of sexuality demonstrates the lack of freedom and subjectivity that is available to express the self. Finally, and quite differently from the first two authors, we turn to Clarice Lispector to examine a more interior version of self-exploration. Although almost never explicitly political, we are able to see the continued use of antique technologies of the self, a rejection of the state-imposed confessional mode that has been shown to produce constrictive identities. Discontinuities, bodily experiences and pleasure, and the resistance of origins are strategies that permit relative freedom for self-exploration and the avoidance of essentialism. From Clarice's philosophical ponderings on capturing and representing the self, and by turning back once more to the other writers, we can then see how there more bizarre uses of sexuality are revolutionary in both a political and personal sense.

Reinaldo Arenas's Foundational Fiction: Queering the Nation

In 1987, incapacitated by AIDS, without strength to write, and facing imminent death, Reinaldo Arenas dictated his autobiography. The history of his life, recorded on more than thirty cassette tapes (Soto *Reinaldo Arenas* 21), was published two years after his suicide with the title *Antes que anochezca* (*Before Night Falls*) (1992). In addition to being the first Caribbean autobiography ever published by an openly homosexual writer (ix), the book gained notoriety due to its shocking portrayal of homoeroticism and its vehement criticism of Fidel Castro.¹⁰ The epilogue of the book contains the "Carta de Despedida," the final note that he wrote before killing himself. Arenas ends his book and his life with an explicit denunciation of Castro:

¹⁰ The English translation topped the 1993 list of New York Times bestsellers while the Spanish version was out of stock after three printings over a period of six months. (Clark *Autobiografía y Revolución* 134)

Pongo fin a mi vida voluntariamente porque no puedo seguir trabajando [...] Sólo hay un responsable: Fidel Castro. Los sufrimientos del exilio, las penas del destierro, la soledad y las enfermedades que haya podido contraer en el destierro, seguramente no las hubiera sufrido de haber vivido libre en mi país. (343)¹¹

As a result of the dramatic, rhetorical culmination of the *Carta de Despedida*, Arenas's autobiography has been branded a political testimony. The shameless fusion of private and public matters in his narrative, and the consequent generic hybrid between autobiography and *testimonio*, provoked diverse reactions on the part of literary critics. On the one hand, it was praised for the representation of the economy penury and the quotidian oppression under the Castro regime, above all in documenting the “concentration camps” of the *Unidad Militar de Ayuda a la Producción* (175)—the regime's attempt to “rehabilitate” homosexuals through forced labor—and in signaling the hypocrisy and latent homosexuality of the Cuban Revolution's ideological machismo.¹² On the other hand, the decision to use an exaggerated homoeroticism, either as emblematic of his own identity or as a counter-revolutionary discourse, was attacked. Pereira, a known homosexual who defended the regime, once commented that Arenas “nos restriega la cara con su homosexualidad” (59), “deforma torpemente los hechos” and impoverishes the narrative with gossip and personal defamation (56-57). Although critics tend to either reduce the book to its contestatory politics or to its sexual adventures, *Antes que anochezca* provides a complete self-portrait, a chronology of his life from childhood to his death in 1990 (Estévez 861). Furthermore, *Antes que anochezca* is a work that is highly conscious of existing literary models and of the power of representation, especially of the use of sexuality.

¹¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

¹² Roberto González Echevarría writes, for example, “More important, it is a record of human cruelty and the toils of one individual to survive them. Anyone who feels the temptation to be lenient in judging Castro's government should first read this passionate and beautifully written book” (33).

Composed of seventy chapters and the Carta de Despedida, *Antes que anochezca* narrates the life of a *campesino* from Oriente, his grade school experiences and admiration of the revolutionary forces during the initial Castro uprisings, his entrance into the literary circles and gay societies of Havana, a series of persecutions and arrests by the police, a portrayal of the lives of his marginalized peers, his harrowing escape from Cuba, and his exile in the United States. In spite of the variations of tone across the diverse chapters—ranging from the magical realism of his childhood, the testimony of human rights abuse, and the picaresque parody of the daily lives of homosexuals—Arenas’s autobiography conforms with the autobiographic tradition of constructing an apology of the self through a coherent, narrative thread that “determina los hechos que se eligen” (Gusdorf qtd. in *Autobiografía y Revolución* 107, 134). The majority of extant criticism has ignored the creativity that Arenas exercised in the structuring and the articulation of a textual being. These critics tend to trivialize Arenas’s identity by simplifying it to the trilogy of homosexual, writer, and Cuban dissident.¹³ Even though these three facets of his identity undoubtedly flow throughout his text, even more important is the interrogation of oversimplification of his self-portrait as “una azarosa aventura en un bosque penetrable de penes, [que deja] atrás la señal de su semen y de su escritura” (Cabrera Infante qtd. in Gutiérrez 110).¹⁴

¹³ In *Reinaldo Arenas o la destrucción por sexo*, for example, Guillermo Cabrera Infante writes that “[t]res pasiones rigieron la vida y muerte de Reinaldo Arenas: la literatura no como juego, sino como fuego que consume, el sexo pasivo y la política activa. De las tres, la pasión dominante era, es evidente, el sexo” (qtd. in Orbán 246). This reductionist error, especially with regards to the exhibitionist homosexuality of the text, is due in part to the role that homosexuality played in the politics between the United States and Cuba. In other words, in terms of international relations, “homosexuality comes into focus only to signify something forever beneath, beside, or beyond it” (Epps 231). The manipulation of the gay issue by the author occurred in 1982, when Arenas collaborated with the ultraconservative senator Jesse Helms in the congressional hearing in which the two decried the homophobia and human rights abuses of Cuban socialism (Wilkinson 295). Castro also was involved in the diplomatic manipulation of the discourse on homosexuality, denouncing it in a similar fashion as the Stalinist ideology, as a symptom of capitalism (Epps 238). The same manipulation of the discursive space of homosexuality occurs in Arenas’s textual exaggeration. His inverosimilar promiscuity functions as a “desperate cry” for deaf ears (Riera 59); it also has been compared to civil rights protest, for “When gay people fuck and suck in the street, that too is a revolutionary act” (qtd. in Ocasio).

¹⁴ Another critical approach deals with a *queer* reading of the text, this “homotexto,” to use Gutiérrez’s term. *Antes que anochezca*, with its misogynist and even homophobic representation (Carmelo Esterrich in Ellis 131),

Without a doubt, homosexuality plays a political role in the autobiography of Reinaldo Arenas, and the dozens of sexual encounters, the multiple ejaculations, and famous calculation of having engaged in sexual relations with more than 5,000 men function as a literary strategy that normalizes homosexuality and converts Cuba into an island of gay men. Arenas is obscene on purpose, and he exercises the power of the word in order to desecrate Castro's vision of the "New Man" of the Cuban Revolution.¹⁵ However, analyzed from a literary perspective and taking into account the tradition of autobiography, Arenas's text employs a curious mix of private and public information, converting the private act of coitus into a political act. Although autobiographic writing has perhaps become increasingly forward over the decades (and centuries), a progression from the representation of the exemplary citizen and public figure in nineteenth-century autobiographies to the inclusion of the *petite histoire* or private gossip of the early twentieth century (Molloy 18), the introduction of the *petit mort* (orgasm) by Arenas ought to be considered a stylistic innovation of self-writing.¹⁶

If homosexuality and obscenity are heterodox strategies for autobiography, sexuality as a national discourse does occur in the literary tradition of foundational fictions. The importance of

internalizes the dominant ideology (Clark "Antes que anochezca 220), and is decidedly not a queer text (also see the article by Alarcón-Negy). Although some consider the homosexual representation to be a strategy in which Arenas finds a political agency, and that the text is queer by virtue of deconstructing sexual dichotomies (Kaebnick 107), I am more interested in how homosexuality figures as a literary technique. Another consequence of this queer reading has to do with the disagreement among the critics pertaining to the victimization of the protagonist. For Enrique Del Risco, Arenas downplays his status as a victim through the use of laughter, pleasure, and the grotesque in order to not be reduced to a gay-martyr-writer (255, 257). On the other hand, Sandra Barros argues that Arenas employs a "[a] rhetoric of victimization" based on his marginality (45). In my opinion, the global representation of his text is not one of victimization considering that he constructs a positive image of himself as belonging to a lineage of Cuban writers. Furthermore, although one cannot deny the suffering that he experienced and represented in the documentary sections of his text, Arenas generally represents himself heroically.

¹⁵ In agreement with Brad Epps, "the revolution becomes a struggle over signs, and against a codification whereby any play of difference, any arbitrariness, ambivalence, or ambiguity must be rigorously reworked: a man is a man" (243). Arenas reaffirms this gender ambiguity with his repeated representation of sexual trysts between men.

¹⁶ Similar to autobiography, traditionally "[n]ation-forming writing is not supposed to call too much attention to its tics, its little idiosyncrasies, the disturbing signatures that obstruct the message, the transparent calling" (Ruben Ríos 103). Ironically, Arenas's sexuality has the unintended consequence of obscuring his allegorical rewriting of Cuba. I propose that Arenas's eccentric nature fits in with his national vision and derives from his literary influences.

this relationship between homosexuality and literary models is that it signals a prominent literary quality in the autobiography of Arenas, especially that of writing the allegorical nation.

During the last three years of his life, already debilitated by the end stages of AIDS, Arenas dedicated himself to completing his life work, including the conclusion of his *Pentagonía*—five books narrating “secret” histories of post-revolutionary Cuba—various manifestos and propaganda written about and from exile, and his autobiography. In both his suicide letter and his autobiographic text, Arenas compares the act of writing to the state of being alive.¹⁷ Not only was it an incessant activity for him, at times the writing became a metonymic substitute for him, “una prueba de que [...] existía” (Arenas 239). Moreover, in the case of the prohibited manuscripts and the myth that surrounded the author as he ran from the police, writing acquired even more substance than the fugitive person.¹⁸ Furthermore, if writing is a form of life, Arenas also equated the end of his artistic career with a physical death, and with the *Carta de Despedida* he killed himself literally and in literature, ending both his life and that of his protagonist. At a first glance, the literal concept of “writing one’s life,” necessarily a live writing according to the autobiographic theory of Cervantes’s character Ginés de Pasamonte, appears to be an idealization of the trope of prosopopeia, which gives life to a dead entity through language. However, more than a preoccupation with the referentiality of his autobiography, Arenas gives a figurative dimension to his death, as can be seen in his final words: “Cuba será libre; Yo ya lo soy” (343). From this perspective, his autobiography, although obscene and hyperbolic compared to literary norms, can be included in the Latin American autobiographical tradition in which the

¹⁷ His passion for writing is evident in his immense body of work. During his short life, and without counting the numerous documents confiscated or destroyed in Cuba, Arenas published eleven novels, a poetic trilogy, various essays, his autobiography, and six dramas (Clark, *Autobiografía y Revolución* 134).

¹⁸ This confusion between the flesh-and-blood person and the fictional character, as occurs multiple times in his life, also becomes a philosophical topic for Arenas. Another moment of historical substitution occurs when he identifies with the protagonist of his book *El mundo alucinante*, in which he rewrites the history of a rebellious Mexican friar. According to Arenas, his real life is quite literary, for “Yo, al entrar allí, decidí que en lo adelante tendría más cuidado con lo que escribiera, porque parecía estar condenado a vivir en mi propio cuerpo lo que escribía” (222).

individual is postulated as an allegory of the nation. In stating that Reinaldo Arenas was a marginalized citizen, an anti-hero of the island—in contrast to nineteenth-century autobiographers—the innovation of Arenas’s text derives from his postmodern adaptation of the foundational fiction. In spite of his social status, Arenas continues this tradition of metonymically constructing himself as the Cuban nation.

What does it mean that an individual like Reinaldo Arenas inscribes himself as an allegorical nation? Frederic Jameson perhaps exaggerates when proposing that all postmodern literature takes the form of a national allegory (Molloy 15), but in the case of Arenas, the traditions of the foundational fiction and nineteenth-century autobiography exercise a decisive influence on the structure and themes of his first-person account. On the one hand, Arenas exhibits his private life in a public space, thereby converting his sexuality into a political strategy in order to construct a “utopic” version of his country. On the other hand, this transition from the *petite histoire* (gossip) to the *petite mort* (orgasm) is due to the intimate relationship between eroticism and the nation that characterizes foundational fictions. Although it is necessary to reformulate some of the concepts of the foundational fiction as to include Arenas’s homosexual and anti-genealogical “national romance,” this type of literary model helps us to understand the role that sexuality plays in *Antes que anochezca*.

Arenas’s allegorical project is not simply limited to his autobiography, for his fictions further demonstrate his attempt to write an alternative national history. For example, in *El color del verano*, the island of Cuba is set adrift in the sea—a Free Cuba (Cuba Libre) in the ironic sense—only to later sink due to the political indecisiveness of the people. Considering the political motivation that stimulated his creative work, his autobiography also illustrates moments of self-reflection related to his desire to rewrite the nation. Arenas viewed history as a fictional

construct, based on a random order and selection of documents and facts. As an author, he was intensely interested in the role of fiction in the writing of history:

A mí me interesan fundamentalmente dos cosas en el mundo de la narrativa. Uno, es la exploración de mi vida personal, de las experiencias personales, de mis sufrimientos, de mis propias tragedias. Y dos, el mundo histórico. Llevar esa historia a un plano completamente de ficción. Interpretar la historia como quizás la vio la gente que la padeció. En ese plano de re-escribir la historia a través de la ficción o de la parodia podrían situarse *El central* o *El mundo alucinante* o *La Loma del ángel*. (qtd. in Manzari 47)

This fictionalization of history also characterizes both autobiography and the national romance, as well as the Cuban literary tradition (Luis, *Literary Bondage*).¹⁹ These two “subgenres” use allegorical writing to represent the textual search for origins and to postulate an identity through the use of synecdoche and select memories. Lineage, traditions, and the development of the character-nation figure historically as the basis of these national narratives. If there is a difference between autobiography and the foundational gesture in *Antes que anochezca*, it lies in the the role of eroticism in allegorical writing.

As Doris Sommer argues, national romances are organized around the concept of erotic desire, a rhetorical strategy aimed at representing the future breeding stock of the nation and at creating an erotic attraction to these characters: “one libidinal investment ups the ante for the other. And every obstacle that the lovers encounter heightens more their mutual desire *to* (be a *couple*, more than our voyeuristic but keenly felt passion; it also heightens their/our love for the possible nation in which the affair could be consummated” (48, my emphasis). Arenas, writing at the end of the twentieth century, appropriates the national romance that combines *eros* and *polis*

¹⁹ I will use this term interchangeably with “foundational fictions.”

in order to reconstruct the Cuban nation as a gay paradise. This “desnudarse en/ante el texto” (Ledbetter ctd en Jiménez 19) is analogous to the voyeuristic passion of the national romances and, in theory, Arenas intends to excite the readers with a homoerotic version of Cuba. This sexualized representation of the country also explains his description of US homosexual couples as banal, a contrast that is necessary for the founding gesture of a new, erotic Cuba.

Notwithstanding the different historical contexts, the homoeroticism, the promiscuity, and marginality, I propose that the erotic strategy of Arenas’s book follows the model of foundational fictions.

Foundational fictions surge, in part, from a vacuum of cultural authority that accompanies the imagination of the new nation. In the reorganization of a socialist state under Fidel Castro, there is yet another moment that is ripe for imagining a foundational romance. With the romance, the authors of these fictions imagine a hero that embodies the values of the nation and the (re)productive force of this national project. Similar to Arenas, these heroes tend to be feminized as to cast them in a different light from the bellic and macho men that are associated with the devastating wars of independence (Sommer 16). Moreover, if for these nineteenth-century writers love “was the cure to the pathology of social sterility” (46), in *Antes que anochezca* coitus is the cure for creative and existential sterility of the dictatorship. In these traditional foundational fictions, the hero’s productive force serves to overcome the sickly childhood of the nation (2). Arenas obviously cannot replicate the heterosexual motif of biological reproduction. However, he modifies this motif of childhood illness—as seen in his “leucemia y batista general” y la “castroenteritis general” that appear in his book *Leprosorio* (qtd in Nagy-Zekmi 219)—by construing himself as an indestructible hero (when inside the island) who only succumbs to AIDS in exile (and thus the symbolic association that he makes between Fidel Castro and his

own illness).²⁰ This modification of the erotic tradition of the national romance also occurs in the literature of the Boom that was coetaneous with Arenas: “The great Boom novels rewrite, or unwrite, foundational fiction as the failure of romance, the misguided political erotics that could never really bind national fathers to mothers” (27-28). As a result, the Arenas’s fiction follows yet another literary tradition of rewriting, and in *Antes que anochezca* Arenas shares the Boom’s vision of the failed biological family but exceeds it with the new homosexual eroticism.

As Sommer expounds, the foundational fictions utilize “a *generative* rather than a *genealogical* claim” (15). This is also true in the case of Arenas, who traces a literary and historical genealogy in which he himself is included. In his elaboration of a textual self, Arenas compares himself to various historical protagonists. For example, he hints of a comparison when writes of Christopher Columbus as one of the “incesantes rebeldes amantes de la libertad y, por tanto, de la creación y el experimento” but who fell out of favor, returning to Spain in chains (116). Similarly, he fashions himself as a modern copy of the Dominican friar Servando who was incarcerated for his independence efforts. He also describes homophobia (and consequently his own history) as a continuation of the “official” history of Cuba. For example, in the chapter “El central” Arenas establishes parallels between the history of the persecution of gays, natives, and black slaves, writing “[a]hora yo era el indio, yo era el negro esclavo” (154). In the “epic” of the book *El central*, Arenas assumes the role of a ventriloquist imitating the voice of Bartolomé de las Casas (Barquet 112). This rewriting of literary and historic texts can be considered a type of “anxiety of influences,” which can also be seen in the emphasis he places on his importance as a writer and historical figure, such as when he forcefully details the incorporation of his written

²⁰ Ironically, en the *Pentagonía*, the hero of these allegorical fictions is construed as a Christ figure. In *Otra vez el mar*, the protagonist commits suicide but returns to life in the fifth installment of the five-book series (Barquet 115).

self (that is, the manuscript of his autobiography) in the archive of Princeton University's Firestone Library (Arenas 13).

The problem of authority figures as much in autobiography as it does in foundational fictions. Facing the responsibility of constructing a new, ideal culture, existing cultural models become problematic. The problem of authority (“autoridad”) encompasses both connotations of the word: that of the problem of power and that of wanting to be a writer. In both subgenres intertextuality—or better yet, the cannibalization of other texts—is the foundation upon which authority is established and inscribed.²¹ In the words of Sylvia Molloy, Latin American writers have the habit of “reading, translating, quoting and misquoting, borrowing and adapting, in sum cannibalizing texts written by others” in order to give “veritable ontological support” to their own writing (*At Face Value* 32). This crisis of authority in writing can also be seen in the examples of foundational fictions given by Doris Sommer in her chapter “Plagiarized Authenticity of Sarmiento's Cooper” and in the admiration that José Martí felt for European novels.

This so-called *mise en texte* also occurs in *Antes que anochezca*. In contrast to the nineteenth-century authors who only looked to European predecessors, Arenas equally cannibalizes Latin American Boom writers. Taking into account the psychoanalytic theory postulated by Harold Bloom in “Anxiety of Influences,” Arenas incorporates prominent Cuban authors into his text as symbolic father figures. I argue that Arenas attempts to imitate, but with his own unique style, his preferred models—Virgilio Piñera and José Lezama Lima—who are postulated as father figures in a symbolic literary genealogy in *Antes que anochezca*. The

²¹ In the literary criticism concerning *Antes que anochezca*, only one person, to my knowledge, has mentioned the concept of cannibalism. However, in this context cannibalism refers to the deconstruction inherent to the act of queering or to carnival, that is to say a “queer cultural cannibalism,” and does not deal with literary cannibalism (Mehuron 47).

organization of the chapters is such that it creates a sequence or figurative genealogy, and after the chapters specifically dedicated to these two authors, there appears the chapter “My Generation,” in which Arenas includes himself among the great Cuban writers (namely homosexual Cuban writers). With respect to the global structure of his narrative, Arenas places Piñera and Lezama Lima precisely in the middle of his book, after the representation of his childhood in which he omits a formal, biological genealogy, and immediately preceding his most testimonial and erotic section. The timing of this literary genealogy is significant because it allows for his literary initiation to coincide with first sexual experiences, as his polemical homoeroticism is most forcefully detailed after these three chapters that delineate the tradition of gay writers.

The literary models of Piñera and Lezama Lima become, therefore, the axis of authority from which Arenas writes the history of Cuba as a homosexual romance. This influence of authors also serves to give Arenas the literary authority with which to undertake such a bold and hyperbolic representation of his sexual encounters. For example, when Arenas narrates the dialogue between Piñera and Lezama Lima upon encountering each other at the same brothel (a dialogue that highlights sexuality and writing style)—“Así que vienes tras la caza del jabalí” (dice Lezama Lima) “No, he venido, simplemente, a singar con un negro” (contesta Virgilio)—he symbolically inserts himself (and interpellates himself) into this dialogue by representing his own sexual exploits throughout the following chapters (111). We can even imagine his own participation in this conversation, as if he were responding to Lezama Lima’s question, with the hypothetical response of “No, I come to fuck 5,000 men.” If Arenas cannibalizes these two authors, perhaps the exaggerated eroticism and the imaginative representation of a gay Cuba can be attributed to their influence. Lezama Lima’s *Paradiso*, for example, even seems to represent a

similar vision: the amorous adventures of a sickly boy in the Cuban paradise, as is most visible in his infamous, pornographic Chapter 8. More than a common sexuality, Arenas identifies with these men given his high opinion of their “heroic accomplishment” in publishing despite the literary censorship of their era (110). Arenas also wants to be seen as a national hero, and he achieves this authority through the emulation of the works of renowned writers.

Arenas embarks on a literary state-building through the homosexualization of Cuba, demonstrating one possible relationship between the individual self and the state. His *Pentagonía*, which he declared to be an alternative autobiography, further supports this idea by showing the range of autobiographic possibilities, with representations oscillating between the national self and the individual. Given the sexual nature of foundational fictions, it can perhaps be concluded that the degree of nationalist self-portrayal may be stronger in Latin American literature due to specific literary models, as well as the analogous confessional legacy in the physicality of state-building.

Diamela Eltit’s Political Pornography

In the dark plaza in Santiago de Chile, Eltit paints an absurd yet symbolic orgy of the destitute, nameless subjects. In ritualistic, repetitive movements, bodies pass against each other, move over and under, and rub and beat themselves against objects of the park such as the rough exterior of the trees and against the cold cement. Desire is the label given to the impulse that motivates this frenetic activity, thereby sexualizing the process by which they squirm to receive the baptismal light of the fluorescent sign. If this process of naming and baptism is resonant of a sacred, religious practice, it is confronted by profane movements and a demonstrative bodily presence, where injury and pleasure are associated with a lost, individual essence. These masses are branded, receiving a new but self-less existence, commodified by the patriarchal state that

can be attributed to Pinochet's neoliberal, conservative, and authoritarian regime. In this scene, the body is performative, exhibiting a paradoxical agency for these subjects deprived of subjectivity.

This scene reads as a cross between theater of the absurd and political pornography.²² The history of political pornography as expounded by Lynn Hunt in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* helps us to shed light on possible meanings of this physicality (and politics) of self-writing. It comes to no surprise that the use of political pornography peaks during times of revolution and change.²³ However, what is interesting about Hunt's analysis is how political pornography serves to reveal the various family romances that bolster the political imaginary of these times of upheaval. Revolutions that seek to end vertical hierarchies often invoke a negative Oedipus complex to symbolically play out their desire to eliminate the father and establish a fraternity amongst siblings. However, following Freud's Oedipal narrative, the woman is a particular misfit in these fantasies, for they have traditionally been excluded from the social contract but nonetheless represent a threat to masculinity, whether the male-centered patriarchal rule or homosocial revolutionary one. With women relegated to the privacy of the home, public women, from prostitutes to the queen-figure, have been denigrated during times of social upheaval. This is because public women, seen as masculine, sexually deviant, and bestial, represent the threat of dedifferentiation and disorder (and in Freudian terms, must be controlled with the incest taboo, which results from the guilt of parricide and the consequent patriarchal law instituted in order to appease this guilt). The representation of female sexuality, therefore, speaks volumes on the anxieties of women in the public sphere.

²² The scene is doubly pornographic, for in addition to the graphic and obscene representations of sexual acts, the filming and editing of the process are also depicted.

²³ It ought to be noted, though, that political pornography was more intellectualized, elite before the advent of mass reproduction in which the political debate was replaced by mechanical eroticism.

The exclusion of women from a fraternal society becomes illustrative for the work of Arenas, for example, for the vilification of his mother occurs alongside his reformation of the Cuban foundational fiction. As is to be expected, his queered version of Cuba is one that is homosocial, if not homoerotic, with most of the women portrayed cast in a negative light. His project is also notably lacking a reproductive genealogy (as would be found in traditional foundational fictions), but is instead replaced by an artistic and cultural lineage. Interestingly, to a certain degree his politics, when seen through the lens of the family romance, are not so different from Castro's politics, although his sexual and identity politics could not be more different.

Political pornography often assumed the shape of the confessional. The inverse is also true, with confessional-inspired genres, such as autobiography, taking the form of political pornography. The body politic and social structure have been represented metaphorically through the body since antiquity. This bodily representation has often been a barometer of the health of the current political order, with the body's orifices playing a prominent role in expressing anxieties over destabilization. The degeneration of state formation, gender bending, among other anxieties, have been represented a border tensions along the apertures of the body.²⁴ Movements in which the government undergoes a secularization is subject to even more extreme versions of bodily representation, usually grotesque and taboo. As Lynn Hunt points out, pornography, which has its roots in the writing about prostitutes (in essence, the writing about public women), is closely related to the confusion of public and private spheres that we also see in

²⁴ Mary Douglas elaborates on this idea: "The human body is always treated as an image of society... and there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension. Interest in its apertures depends on the preoccupation with social exits and entrances, escape routes and invasions. If there is no concern to preserve social boundaries, I would not expect to find concern with bodily boundaries... Consequently, I now advance the hypothesis that bodily control is an expression of social control—abandonment of bodily control in ritual responds to the requirements of a social experience which is to be expressed" (qtd. in Frappier-Mazur 132-33).

autobiography. Because of this incursion into the public view, women are often deformed in pornography, and probably all the more so in political pornography, with the portrayal of taboo sexuality (such as incest), masculine habits (such as an active role in sodomy), and animalization. Men, on the other hand, are often effeminized, represented as diseased, revealing the anxieties surrounding the degeneration of the body politic. Political pornography, therefore, goes beyond the mere erotic, for the voyeuristic position of the viewer is designed not solely for titillation, but also to judge. These representations reach a culmination in Eltit's *Lumpérica*, with the taboo, sadistic, and grotesque sexuality related to the political discourse of her self-writing.

If we have seen monarchs and authoritative figures cast in the role of the father, and revolutionary movements emphasizing fraternity and equality enact a symbolic Oedipal killing of the father, the family romance in *Lumpérica* is less easily fleshed out. The surveillance camera, with its baptismal role, enforcer of the law, and vertical positioning, can be associated with the father of the family romance. Furthermore, we can understand the denigration of L. Luminata, through her metaphorical animal scenes (when she is precisely in heat), her taboo and multiple sexual encounters with the vagabonds, and the shearing of her hair and self-mutilation are all related to the simple fact that she is a woman assuming a public and political presence. Similarly, when the flesh-and-blood Diamela Eltit performs these acts of public, self-humiliation, kissing a homeless man, washing the floors of a brothel, she is appropriating the monstrous image of the public woman as to assert her own public agency. Beyond just the monstrosity of her public appearance, the political nature of her resistance and her potential role as organizer and instigator of the lumpen figure in the radical and taboo representation of her character. Furthermore, the scene is sexualized through the tension of both a pornographic performance and voyeurism through the lens of the camera.

To attempt to delineate a family romance in the pornography of *Lumpérica*, we can begin with the absence/virtual presence of the father that characterizes Freud's Oedipal myth. Also, it is worth noting that Freud saw the Oedipal complex to be extremely wide-reaching, forming the basis of religion, politics, society, and art (Hunt 143). The most important premise of this myth for political organization is that of the familial construction of law. Freud suggests that once the son has killed the father and rival for the mother's affection, he is subsumed in guilt and compensates by establishing an incest taboo, essentially the law of the father, that forever distances him from the mother. In *Lumpérica*, the familial dynamic is one of a virtual father, whose law is manifested in security cameras and state of surveillance. The lumpen of the plaza and L. Iluminada are cast in an incestuous role, similar to the use of incest to figurative represent revolution and re-hierarchization of society.

Perhaps deviating from psychoanalytic narrative models, however, as to add a unique representation of the authoritarian figure of Pinochet, the sexual dynamics between the figurative daughter and father are those of rape and defiance. Even in the opening paragraph of the book, it seems that the encounter is violent, with the light of the patriarchal sign "fraccionando sus ángulos," "languideciéndola hasta la acabada de todo el cuerpo" (7). The encounter is best described as sadistic, for ecstasy is the end result, despite the violence:

dejará ir sus pasos hacia la plaza pública, elevará sus ojos hacia el luminoso, se aligerará de ropas, abrirá sus piernas tendido de espada en el cemento y de deseos se habrá consumado en otro, hasta que el mismo cemento, por dolor de la pose, le rompe la piel y ése entonces se verá en cada una de sus llagas y la piel decorada brille con la luz del luminoso.... (13)

It is also a figurative strip-tease, for L. Iluminada “con las ramas de los árboles que les lamen el rostro y ella se frota en su Madera por el puro placer del espectáculo” (8)

The body politic, in this case the body of the masses, is similarly presented in a sexual fashion. De-differentiation due to neoliberalism and consumer culture is symbolically portrayed as an orgy, in which floating identities and signifiers are traded during their interaction and illumination by the light:

Ellos se tocan y manoseados ceden. Nombres sobre nombres con las piernas enlazadas se aproximan en traducciones, en fragmentos de palabras, en mezclas de vocablos, en sonidos, en títulos de films. Las palabras se escriben sobre los cuerpos. Convulsiones con las uñas sobre la piel: el deseo abre surcos. (9)

It is interesting to note that this work begins with a baptismal scene by the imprinting light (an “alfabetización virgen” (10)), not so different from traditional autobiographies, but certainly a perverted version of one. Her birth into citizenship is one marked by pain, incoherence (“restos de lenguaje, retazos de signos”; “balbucea” (10)), loss of an original self, and violence. Writing is interpellation is sexual penetration is baroque decoration (where high culture or consumer culture is tacked on to these zombified masses as to simulate a presence²⁵). Appropriation of the sexual power and pleasure, as well as the paternal writing is one of paradoxical agency, for the masses are converted from “vencidos en vencedores” (10). If the sign announces that “se venden cuerpos,” this self-prostitution similarly represents this appropriation.

Similar to the Marquis de Sade, the limits of pleasure are taken to an extreme, mixing grotesque bodily harm with pleasure when the vagabonds “bajan los pantalones para recorrerse una a una las llagas abiertas que ya no responden a ningún tratamiento...al sentirlas junto a su

²⁵ [various critics have used Benjamin to theorize the effects of trauma as best seen in the use of photography of the disappeared, where memory centers around irrecoverable traces of being and absence].

piel sana, esas mismas piernas supurantes lo mancharán de nuevo en su limpieza” (13). Even the bestiality or the pornographic representation of various animals in heat, that raise their haunches to the homeless, in the plaza are unconventional and taboo depictions of sexual acts. Hunt has shown that the *reductio ad absurdum* of Sade, in which anything passes as pleasure, often encodes political views of an alternative society. Here we know that these animal scenes are symbolic renderings of L. Iuminada’s attempt to gain “su hegemonía entre el lumpério” (55) through the allegory of a horse that needs to be mounted or tamed. We also have seen that the interaction with the light is portrayed as sexual and sadistic. What becomes interesting, however, is the apparent struggle between the two sexual possibilities that function as political allegories:

Mas, ¿quién la montara? ¿quién le clavara espuelas? ¿quién la doliera? ¿qué lumpen se tomara ese derecho? ¿qué piernas? ¿qué ancas se las pusiera sobre las suyas? Esa elección la turba al quebrar bruscamente la constante, si no hay más rostros que el de la luz eléctrica que está rigiendo la plaza en vela. ¿Y si fuese la luz quién la gimiera? ¿si tan sólo la luz se la montara? [...] el penetrante metal se lo saltara por el corcoveo de ese golpe eléctrico, único/infalible que le corrigiera hasta el pensamiento por la efectividad de su asolada, que la tirara sobre el pavimento en espasmódicas muestras del encuentro. (58)

Here we that, in contrast to Pinochet’s narrative of his role as the supreme, patriarchal leader of the country, he is portrayed allegorically as a rapist, an incestuous father of the national romance. The sexualization of the masses also serves to illustrate potential disorder, for transgressing societal norms and laws supporting Pinochet’s rule.

One thing that is different from Sade’s use of extreme and graphic sex acts is that the dedifferentiation accomplished through sodomy differs from the homogenization that occurs in *Lúmpérica*. Women are cast in a misogynic position in Sade, whose utopia described in his

parodic political pamphlets (intercalated in his novels) was one in which all women were prostitutes, vesicles of men's pleasure. The sexual contagion in Eltit's work is along the lines of class, however, and not along gender. We can interpret the outcome of the orgy in the plaza as the transition of an elite woman (reading Diamela Eltit's actual actions into the allegorical representation of them in *Lumpérica*) into a bag lady when she shears her hair in the early morning light. This economic protest is not surprising considering the Pinochet and the Chicago Boys' institution of neoliberalism, a drastic reorganization of the Chilean economy.

Due to the poststructuralist nature of the text, and the slippery nature of her language, many things related to self-writing are sexualized. These include the confessional dynamics of autobiography, the solidarity underlying *testimonio*, the physicality of torture, the interpellation and repression by patriarchal law and society, and the nature of writing itself. In addition to the use of sexuality as a political tool of resistance, *Lumpérica* theorizes the gendered and sexual nature of self-writing and writing in general. In other places I have discussed the phallogocentric nature of prosopopeia that is illustrated by Eltit. Here I would like to turn to the use of the body as a technique to represent the self and the gendered limits of this type of writing. It ought to be noted that these are not the first texts to create a parallel between autobiography and the body. Sidone Smith provides a fitting fictional example of the bodied nature of women's self-expression in her book *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*. The short story by Isak Dinesen, "The Blank Page," involves the self-portraiture of a royal family through the exhibition of bloodied nuptial sheets hanging in the Spanish convent. In a row of soiled bed linens framed on the wall of a foyer, a final hanging, without any physical evidence of sexual initiation, becomes a form of self-expression by virtue of a refusal to "speak" or to participate in the established models of womanhood (and models of representation of this identity). The blank

canvass at the end of a row of bloodied ones both serves to illustrate how self-writing depends just as much, if not more, on the metatextual and the strategies of expression than what is actually said (an expressive form rather than a representative-based self-writing). Similarly, in her analysis of the sati-suicide, Spivak examines a case in which the body becomes a form of writing, as the victim's menstruation becomes a non-negotiable, perfectly understood language to communicate a single and indelible interpretation of her history. By killing herself during her menstruation, she made impossible the cultural interpreting of her act as the result of an illegitimate pregnancy. Theoretically speaking, Spivak thus suggests that the body is a site of contention for the subaltern in/on which they are not overwritten, overdetermined by the hegemonical forces inherent in a culture, language, or genre of representation. As these two examples suggest, the female body can be particularly prominent in what is allegedly a phallogocentric form. Simply put, the body surfaces as a site of self-representative agency in a form dominated by elite, white males and official histories.

There is an interesting connection between Eltit's use of the body in self-representation and questions of subalternity and the example provided by Spivak. In one of the starting points of her essay, Spivak examines the discontinuity between the two senses of the words represent and re-present (70). The debate is inspired by disagreements over subjectivity, ideology, and self-knowledge from theorists including Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Marx, and Althusser. The word represent has been used to mean both the political notion of standing or speaking for a person. On the other hand, re-present is related to rhetorical or symbolic substitution, particularly in philosophy (of the self) or economics. As Spivak points out, the two should not be elided, and there is a paradoxical relationship at play between the homogenizing political representation (as in identity politics) and the individualism of the desiring and knowing subject. Although both are

important for the process of subject-constitution, certain theories can shift the balance between the two. Poststructuralism, for example, by denying the representative power in signification, can have consequences for genres of representation, such as that in autobiography. In other words, if the portraiture of self-representation is rendered impossible, then perhaps the other meaning of representation, as in proxy, gains greater currency.

Although Spivak insists that the two sides are absolutely discontinuous, *Lumpérica* as an example of poststructural self-writing plays with the conflation of the two, as is appropriate in a neobaroque work that follows the multiple significations of signs. Diamela Eltit does not explicitly use the word representation, but her text deals conceptually with the connection between politically constituted subject and the political representation of this identification and the individual subject of one's own understanding. Eltit, by showing the destruction of the individual in Chile's repressive society, depicts the anonymous, communal nature of the subjectivity created by law and ideology. The body becomes a central site of this self-writing by the subaltern, as it does for the disempowered masses under authoritarianism. The subaltern can act, but cannot speak. The body, however, becomes a way of contesting the hegemonic interpretation of the subject constituted by law. As Spivak's example of the sati-suicide shows, society still imposes a normative interpretation onto the act, but the body provides a source of agency that language systems cannot provide. In other words, we are looking at a bodily syntax as opposed to a linguistic one.

In order to recapitulate the above, the body is used in Eltit's innovative self-writing as to explore the dichotomy between the two types of subjectivity. Neither pole, being the subject of the law and the rhetorical subject, exist unproblematically. However, the neobaroque illustration of a post-structuralism's undoing of the unique, individual subjectivity also shows various

political reasons for this particular construction of being. Eltit uses the body to illustrate revolutionary stance in front of Pinochet's politics. The body can be read as both a type of language that is assertive in the face of symbolic oppression. The body is also the means for allegorical protest, as histories of political pornographies illustrate.

“I Want to be *Bio*”: Clarice Lispector and the Alternative Senses of the Self

If Arenas uses sexuality metonymically, to convey how he is representative of a queer Cuba, and Eltit employs sex allegorically to portray marginality and nonconformity, in Clarice sex functions as an analogy for the process of coming into being through language. Her protagonist in *Um Sopro de Vida*, Ângela, equates her peculiar way of speaking with sex: “Batuba jantiram lecoli? adapiu quereba sulutria kalusia. I enjoy speaking this way: it is a language that resembles an orgasm. Since I don't understand, I hand myself over” (qtd. in Moser 333). Clarice Lispector's work thus involves a unique, often metaphorical brand of sexuality, being a pervasive topic but lacking graphic depiction. Although sex for her, like Reinaldo Arenas and Diamela Eltit, is related to her exploration of marginality, that is, of intimacy with strangers, criminals (the rapists in “Pig Latin”), and the taboo (as in elderly sexuality in *A Via Crucis do Corpo*), Earl Fitz aptly points out that her sexuality is determined by her poststructuralist understanding of the relationship between language, being, and desire (*Sexuality and Being*). The “pulsating eroticism” that marks her texts further becomes important for this chapter connecting sex and politics, for in her sexual writings she “transgress[es] the prohibitions that separate the permissible from the forbidden, constantly dissolves barriers, psychological as well as cultural [...]” (Fitz 63). As we have seen, this transgression is related to the existence of subjectivity and selfhood, particularly in repressive contexts.

Sexuality and sex in Lispector are, however, different from the pornographic and testaments of sexual deviance we have seen so far. Furthermore, direct references to politics are hardly found in her numerous texts, and this relative silence is indicative of her self-censorship. Perhaps the most political thing about her work is the challenging of gender preconceptions in the context of staunchly conservative gender expectations of Lispector's time and the manipulation of gender codes by military regimes. This conservative backdrop can be seen, for example, in the fact that the image of the pregnant actress Leila Diniz exposing her abdomen on the beach in 1971 became a radical symbol of the women's liberation movement ("Brazil Explained"). Significantly, the scandalous image of former guerrilla Fernando Gabeira wearing a woman's bikini on the beach at the end of the 70s became a symbol of transition to democracy, as well as illustrating the shift from class politics and armed resistance to gender-bending as a strategy of cultural assertion. This is to say, emphasizing bodily maternity and androgyny, which occurs frequently in Lispector, is political in the way that sexuality is for Eltit and Arenas. Clarice's reputation as a sexual writer sometimes seems at odds with the words on the page. For all the talk about her "passion" and writing of the sensations of limit experiences, it can be difficult to uncover explicit mentions of sex that would translate as sexual in isolated quotations. In turning specifically to her self-writing in *Água Viva*, the search for sexualized representation yields little material and suggests that perhaps critics have read Lispector's other works as autobiographical and have imposed these readings onto *Água Viva*. At best, the combination of the physical sensations of introspection and the metaphysical exploration of the Other are perhaps reasons critics elect to see a sexual innuendo in Lispector's work. As Fitz writes, "Lispector's texts seldom allow the reader to retreat for long from the lubriciousness of language, from its capacity to stimulate, arouse, and transform us. A text like *The Stream of Life* can, in this

respect, even be read as a verbal simulacrum of sexual ecstasy and orgasm” (87). At worst, Cixous’s insistence on using Lispector as a model of women’s writing makes her and others view the rhythm of the book as following the cyclical pattern of the female orgasm. In particular, Cixous reads desire as a prominent theme, based on the word “quero.” I find this to be a rather intangible and hence irrelevant quality in discussing the use of sexuality as a form of self-expression.

Many of these instances of sexual language are figurative and serve to provoke images, such as “an orgy of words” that characterizes her self-reflections (70). At times these analogies are both mythical and erotic, such as when the internal self-examination is equated to “tearing the snarled roots of a colossal tree from the depths of the earth, and those roots [are] like powerful tentacles, like the voluminous nude bodies of strong women wrapped in serpents and carnal desires of realization...” (13). What is present, however, is the use of unconventional bodily metaphors, with the concept of labor in particular: “Don’t you see that this is like a child being born? It hurts. [...] Coming-into-being is a slow, slow, good pain. It’s a full stretching to the point where the person can stretch no more” (51, also see 35). The unveiling of the maternal body, with uncomfortable contact with the parts and fluids of breasts, milk, and placentas, is revolutionary for her time. Similar to Leila Diniz’s revolutionary exposure of motherhood, Clarice’s embodied maternity functions similar to the way that sexuality does in the other authors, performing deviance from conservative norms. The combination of motherhood and sexuality would have been particularly shocking. Peixoto in *Passionate Fictions*, in fact, finds “mothering” to be characterized by violence and transgression. The reader’s imagination is also responsible for some of this transgression, as when we imagine the motherly implied author of in

“O homen que apareceu” of *A Via Crucis do Corpo* welcoming a man off of the street into her apartment alone, only to later disavow any happenings by describing her actions as maternal.

As this example shows, sex is often to be inferred or intuited. One critic, Diane Marting, addressing the sexual woman of Clarice’s text, aptly calls her writing “psychosocial” (153) due to the use of dialogue and the introspective, lyrical nature of her prose. Sex is what connects people intimately, and sex therefore serves as the means to knowing oneself in relation to others. Female protagonists in Clarice’s work appear as “newly sexed” women (149), representative of liberatory culture of the sexual revolution but not necessarily serving to convey a feminist agenda. While sexual acts are not necessarily relayed in detail, they are often associated with transgression of social norms, as in rape, sex work, promiscuity, and violating gender roles. This, along with the psychosocial nature of sexuality, point to a greater connection to the Brazilian political landscape of the time. The adjective “psychosocial” is highly significant. Marting appears to use this descriptively, but this approach to sexuality mirrors the politics of the time, when deviant sexuality was considered to be a “biopsychosocial” threat to the nation. The state repression of Brazil undertook an elaborate moral campaign as counterculture replaced leftist resistance that had focused on class politics and workers movements. Sex became a threat to national security. As Benjamin Cowan documents,

By the 1970s, national security theorists stressed degenerative, ‘perverse’ sex as a primary weapon of the ‘subversive’ and/or ‘communist’ enemy against which they so fanatically inveighed. Young men’s ‘deviant’ sexuality, ‘free love,’ and countercultural expressions of sexual ‘liberation’ became, in the discourse of the ESG, pathologized sources and symptoms of Brazil’s vulnerability to communist ‘penetration’ and ‘subversive’ warfare. (463)

This sexual counterculture has also been called the *desbunde*, which both paralleled global, hippy “free love” and disheveled styles, as well as more marginal cross-dressing and open displays of the body. In Brazil, however, this new exhibition of sexuality produced a paranoia that incited fear at the level of national security. Rehashing earlier state rhetoric concerning the sexual potency of the national stock of men, government officials felt that the “feminization and ‘hystericization’ of 1960s and 1970s youth” were political threats (464). These transgressive behaviors were discussed in institutional policy, for “Subversion became—to use the terminology of one ESG ‘expert’—a ‘biopsychosociological’ deterioration of young people’s physical, mental, and political integrity” (463).

If subversive sex threatened the conservative mores championed by the military regime, it begs the question of how Clarice’s writing escaped censorship that had begun with the AI-5 of 1968. Some of Clarice’s peers, such as Nelson Rodrigues and Rubem Fonseca, whom she acknowledged as vanguards in sexual writing in Brazil, were censored (Fioratti np). Clarice may have claimed to not be able to write so openly sexual (see Peixoto), but the frequent theme of sex and its unconventional flavor in her writing seem to be daring enough, considering the political context, that she would have been considered indecent had her writing not been so abstract and had censorship operated more efficiently. In all likelihood, the Clarice’s elite nature, both her social standing and writing style, is the reason that she was not considered a threat to begin with. In a process that was disorganized until around 1975, Clarice may have also been lucky in terms of time, writing in the early stages of artistic crackdown. In the initial process, only items of mass interest, and particularly television, music, and theatrical pieces garnered the attention of censors. The variation of sexual experiences in her work, ranging from “heterosexual,

homosexual, autoerotic, or androgynous,” are, however, revolutionary in their transgression of norms (Fitz 87).

While Clarice’s work does not exhibit the biopolitical national romances that can be read in Arenas and Eltit, we see the lyrical and spiritual side of her writing merging with sex in the expression of inner subjectivity. Clarice’s coupling of sex and being is thus done in a way that is very intuitive of Foucault’s understanding of repression and subjectivity. While the psychosocial nature of her lyrical texts certainly reflects the national debate over subversive sexualities, her focus on the individual experience points to the use of sexuality as a means for exploring a subject position that is not repressed. In other words, sex works in her texts to explore an individual sexuality as liberated from national preoccupation with the sexual subject. This freedom is an impulse that underlies her writing, expressing what Fitz calls the “lonely struggle to free herself from fake modes of being” (87).

If Diamela Eltit uses sexuality in an allegorical manner, Clarice uses sex metaphorically to explore subjectivity, principally the negotiation of the subject/object or self/other dichotomy that defines the power dynamics of being. Sexuality is also featured as a source of epiphany and sublimity that characterizes the process of coming into being. The use of sexuality as a theme or metaphor is intensely interior and personal in Clarice’s work, in contrast to Arenas and Eltit’s use of sex as an autobiographic to express the political and national dimension of self. One possible reason for this difference is that, as a product of an earlier generation, Clarice seems more inclined to observe the patriarchal codes of respectability, demonstrated by Marta Peixoto’s comparison of the intercalated autobiographical commentary of the author, cast as a maternal figure, alongside the more salacious short stories of *A Via Crucis do Corpo*. Peixoto speculates that Clarice would have like to be able to write more openly about sexuality, and that her work

hints at the impossibility of doing so without feeling that she cheapened her literary merit with the sensationalism of sex. It bears noting, that this most explicitly sexual book was the response to a direct challenge by her publisher to write three stories about sex.

Clarice's sexuality therefore diverges from Eltit and Arenas due to its rhetorical potential for "revealing a lack of unity and an essential ambiguity" (Felman qtd. in Fitz 63). Sexuality in *Lispector* is intimately related to the search for the self, both in self-knowledge and in the attempt to express or represent a true image of being. In other words, even when sexual acts are categorically mentioned or are evident, (such as the desire and pleasure expressed in *Água Viva*, "Onde Estivestes de Noite," and *Perto do Coração Selvagem*), sex parallels the relationship between self and language and therefore "accentuates [the characters'] need to express a unified and coherent self, a goal which, as a function of language, is never totally achieved" (67).

The use of sexual metaphors to express mystic experiences in literature, as well as confession, is well known. Also related to confession by women and bodily representation is the element of hysteria. In her article "Policing Truth" Leigh Gilmore illustrates how autobiography served as a form of discipline. She writes of how the confession was developed in the Middle Ages to enforce the ideology of the Church, used to judge and punish heretics and hysterics (56). The confession further preserved the patriarchy by limiting, through the control of language, the value of woman's mysticism. The language of hysterics was developed, and the confession became the vehicle for containing this feminized religious experience by subjecting it to the scrutiny of the church fathers and relabeling it as madness. In this light, the confession is essentially a discourse of power and, according to Gilmore's interpretation of Foucault, of gender. In the *History of Sexuality* he writes that "The confession is [...] a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence)

of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile” (qtd. in Gilmore 60; find in Foucault). Indeed, Lispector seems to recognize this in her novel, *Um Sopro de Vida*, which critics like Fitz have read as a novelized form of ontological speculation framed in the (gendered) dialogue of confession.

The religious confessional tradition led to the development of an overtly sexual language of female mysticism. This eroticism arose from both the woman’s attempt to accurately narrate the visionary experience that exceeded the representational capacity of language, and from the man’s attempt to control the impact of the experience by displacing the “libidinous” female from a position of authority in the Church. This becomes relevant in the context of Lispector’s writing given her incessant attempt to escape the hegemonic system of language. Her writing has, furthermore, been associated with hysterics and madness (see for example, “The Madness of Lispector”). In addition to the frequent motifs of maternity, the female body, and orgasm, another hysteric trait is that of silence (Goulart Almeida 104). In *Água Viva* Clarice writes of this silence: “Listen to me, listen to the silence. What I tell you is never what I tell you but something else. Capture this thing that escapes me” (8). Hystericization, which can be interpreted as either a focus on sensations of the womb or feminine pleasure, and on a certain madness or deviance particular to womanhood, is a rhetorical strategy both in that it allows her to escape behavioral norms and the confines of language through powerful metaphors of transcendence.

If I have examined the confessional roots and bodily representation in Lispector at length, I do so in order to demonstrate a different type of self-writing and constitution. Recalling Foucault’s ideas in the *History of Sexuality*, repression is marked by taboo, silence, and inexistence (5). Furthermore, although the use of confession created the illusion of subjectivity

(in the form of a rhetorical creation of sexuality), this type of individual self was created by institutional power. It is a paradoxical type of subjectivity, one that belongs just as much to the subject of a state as the autonomy of the interior being. Almost as if she instinctively understood this, Lispector's self-expression is one that seeks true freedom of speech and being, oftentimes through the foregrounding of her body and sexuality, especially one that often included maternity. Foucault does hint at this alternative type of self-writing. Inspired by Nietzsche's ideas on genealogy or effective history, he identifies an ancient technique of self that was designed to deconstruct the "coherent identity" created by the state by focusing on discontinuities, surfaces, and events (Tell 110). As Tell elaborates,

While the confession functions metonymically, substituting an "artificial unity" for discontinuous somatic sensations, the antique techniques of self expose that unity as an "empty synthesis." And by exposing one's identity as an empty synthesis, the ancient techniques of the self make possible an aesthetics of existence. That is, they make it possible for one to reorganize both life and body—not according to abstract origins like "sexuality" but [...] by recovering the "evential" character of the body [...] "left oneself free" to describe one's body after the manner of one's own choosing. (111)

For Foucault, this was an important step in resisting power and implanting identities. As I have demonstrated with Arenas and Eltit, focusing on the taboo and sexual body instead of an interior sexuality served as a form of political resistance.

A metonymical process, of the literary reduction of person into narrative that is inherent in the autobiographical act, can be seen in Lispector, although it is an alternative, liberating type of rhetoricization of the self: "I embody myself in voluptuous and unintelligible phrases that

spiral outward beyond words. And a silence arises subtly from the clash of sentences” (14). In contrast to the rhetoricization of Foucault’s confessional model, she “renounce[s] having meaning” (18). Clarice not only questions mimetical representation, she also questions the very nature of subjectivity and the rhetorical nature of self when she asks, “Is not using words to lose one’s identity? Is it to become lost in the essential, destructive shadows?” (58). Attempting to avoid categorical identities, she writes the self in a manner that is both disordered and bodily: “Visceras tortured by voluptuousness guide me, fury of the impulses. Before organizing myself, I have to disorganize myself internally” (55). She is explicitly “topical,” eschewing essentialized identities and electing to focus on sensations rather than concepts of being: “I was thinking only on the surface of myself” (54)) Clarice is also “evential,” focusing on the time instances that unfold in the moment of writing. She embraces the empty synthesis mentioned by Tell, for she is uncategorizable, remarking, “It’s useless to try to classify me: I simply slip away not leaving, categories pin me down no longer” (42). As to visualize such an “athematic theme” of being free from the “fictitious unities” of society, she describes herself as instances that form “successive figures in a kaleidoscope” (8). This disorder is related to the process of coming into being: “it’s not necessary to have order to live. There’s no pattern to follow and there’s not even pattern itself: I am born” (28). This process of being can be seen to be related to the maternal act of giving birth, affirming the association of maternal and prenatal images and subjectivity: “I’m going to go back to the unknown within myself and when I’m born I’ll speak of ‘him’ or ‘her.’ For the time being, what sustains me is the ‘that’ which is an ‘it.’ To create a being from oneself is very serious. I’m creating myself.” (35). In contrast to traditional autobiography based on the individualizing power of the confession, she writes of an “I, impersonal, who am *it*” (60). Her vision of self-writing does not include a narrative or a retrospective view of the self. Biography

is replaced by biology: “Does my life have no plot? I’m unexpectedly fragmentary. I’m little by little. My story is to live” (59).

In comparing the essentializing nature of confession centered on sex, we see how Clarice’s bodily writing is a counterpoint of Arenas and Eltit. Arenas evokes his essentialized homosexuality to queer the Cuban nation, thus working from the individual subject up to the authority that inscribes the subject. Eltit similarly addresses the process of subject formation and the sexual nature of interpellation through political pornography. For Clarice, there is no nation or subject, just sensations. By virtue of being disorderly, ephemeral and transient, and focusing on surfaces, *Água Viva*, focuses on autobiographical subjectivity rather than the autobiographical subject.

I believe *Água Viva* to be a special type of self-writing, a practice of self-examination and questioning free from external interpellation, one profoundly shaped by Clarice Lispector’s unique and intimate relationship with writing. In contrast to the bureaucratic nature of being a subject of the state, for Lispector, writing became an essential activity, a type of life-affirming gesture, very much like her character Ângela expressing her passion for words: “I like words. I want to write words so clasped together, one in another, that there are no spaces between them and me” (qtd. in Fitz 16). As such, writing was not so much an orchestration of plots and characters, even when pertaining to her autobiographical “I,” but a form of living through introspection and writing. Such a vital practice entailed a stream of conscious style, of allowing thoughts to happen, to be recorded and then analyzed. The comparison with the role of sexuality in the works of Arenas and Eltit allow us to see Lispector’s bodily self-writing as an alternative form that avoids the trap of the state-individual dichotomy. Perhaps this gesture is, in itself, political, for as Elizabeth Lowe argues, in *Água Viva* Lispector “initiates a whole political

process that lives beyond the text” and she “wages her revolution with silence, creating spaces around words that allow her protagonist to follow her own text” (qtd. in Fitz 150), that is, creating her own understanding of being rather than being made a subject.

In this chapter I have presented multiple theories related to the sexual nature of autobiographical texts produced in the context of repressive, authoritarian regimes. I have argued that the foregrounding of sex can be attributed to various causes, including the confessional legacy, the physicality of state-building, the sexual liberation of the countercultural movements in the face of sexual repression of governments, and the influence of various literary traditions. Given the prominence of foundational fictions in Latin America, in which the male hero is equated with the nation, it may be no surprise that autobiography also deals frequently with the relationship between the national and individual selves. Some writers, however, find themselves at odds with these existing literary models and national identities. For these writers the use of a personal and taboo sexuality can function as an “autobiographic” to reassert individual autonomy. This is to say, sexuality, traditionally a private matter, is extremely political in Latin American self-writing. On the other hand, sex is also used introspectively as to probe and redefine subjectivity. Since confession uses sexuality to create a subject, a similar process is inevitably explored in the structurally parallel practice of autobiography. Whether demonstrably political, as in the case of Arenas and Eltit, or exceedingly introverted in the case of Lispector, sexuality becomes a central element in the process of self-examination and representation. Despite the lack of freedom in the face of censorship and repression, and of the impossibility of representation in the aftermath of poststructuralism, contemporary writers of autobiography find sex intricately involved in the aesthetics of the self. With the heightened role of biopolitics in authoritarian rule, sex becomes a fighting ground for subjectivity, revealing the tension between

autonomous individual and national self. As we will see in the next chapter, this fight for subjectivity and sovereignty is also carried out in language.

CHAPTER V

TORTURE, DISLOCATED WORDS, AND THE PERFORMANCE OF LINGUISTIC SOVEREIGNTY

Esto no es una dictadura señores esto es dicta
blanda.
---Augusto Pinochet

Authoritarian states in twentieth century Latin America suffered a collective dysphasia. The term “dictatorship” was all but excised from the popular (or permitted) vocabulary, replaced by a different semantic claim: “democracy.” Regimes were often careful to present themselves as legal, constitutional, and democratic (Dávila 155). Rhetoric was an indispensable tool for the new states, all sides invoking the discourse of “revolution, reorganization, and salvation” as claims to legitimacy. The dysphasia came about as the need to disavow brutal realities. The lack of free speech, fear of being monitored, and harsh punishments for dissidence broke words off from their prior meanings. “Dislocated words” thus refers to the connection between bodily violence and the disjointed nature of meaning, acknowledging the displacement that occurs in the deconstruction of language, both in theory and in torture.

All the while heralding “democracy,” or at least the “dicta blanda” in the case of Pinochet, or “dictatorship of the exploited against the exploiters” in the case of Fidel Castro, bodies painted a grimmer picture of reality that words could not attest to. This combination of dysphasia and violence constitute what can be called the “performance of sovereignty,” that is, the visible, palpable, and linguistic manifestation of power.

In the attempt to solidify power and reorganize the state, language and bodies were controlled and threatened as to demonstrate unquestionable authority. This “performance of sovereignty” through subjecting bodies to pain occurred in both torture and the staging of public displays of violence. Of the countries in this study, Chile, in particular, gained a notoriously bloody record, with 3,197 known cases of executions or disappearances during the reign of Pinochet. Repression was quick, with approximately 1,500 civilians killed within just the first six weeks after the coup. Furthermore, 320 to 360 of these people were summarily killed, many in plain view on the streets (Kornbluh 161). Public venues of national symbolism were turned into torture chambers. Most notably, the National Stadium and Chile Stadiums held prisoners—some 7,612 during the initial weeks—instead of soccer matches (161). Cadavers served as warnings to the general population, many appearing in the rivers and streets rather than disappearing (162).

Since the Brazilian military reorganization included the judicial branch in their sweeping measures, with dissidents facing prosecution rather than execution, violence occurred to a smaller degree in Brazil. This did not lessen the violence of interrogation, however, and the manifold ways of torture experienced by 17,000 victims have been extensively documented in the report *Nunca Mais*. Over the course of the two decades of military rule, 353 people were killed, and thousands were tortured. Like Chile, at times the violence engaged with national symbols, such as when 10 left-wing activists were incinerated alive in a sugarcane plant in the north of the state of Rio de Janeiro. In Brazil, whose National Security Doctrine would serve as a later model for other regimes, terror was an effective system of silencing, in particular through the elaborate networks of espionage and extensive definitions of subversion. In addition to the Serviço Nacional de Informações, each branch of the armed forces had their own surveillance network, and these as well as business-financed groups such as Operation Bandeirantes carried

out wiretapping, informant networks, data analysis, and detentions (Dávila 43). Participation in “subversive” cultural trends, such as organizing unions, listening to “Black music,” or debating racial democracy could lead to being monitored or exiled (51).

Surveillance networks in Cuba are also notorious, as expressed in Herberto Padilla’s poetry in which lapel flowers carry microphones and neighbors spy on one another.¹ In addition to measures of internal monitoring and surveillance by the Comités de Defensa de la Revolución, repression under Castro included incarceration of dissidents, arrests under false pretenses, and extreme forms of censorship. Torture also extended outside of detention centers, figuring into the state’s “rehabilitation” program. Part economic stimulus, part disciplinary measurement, “between 30,000 and 40,000 young people were interned [in UMAP labor camps].” Of these, “72 died of torture and abuses, 180 committed suicide and 507 were hospitalized for psychiatric trauma” (Fuentes qtd. in Guerra 268). Violence in its various forms is a characteristic of authoritarian societies, though as the comparison shows, it ranges from “war” deaths at the beginning of revolutions and coups, to fear and paranoia to effect psychological violence, to the substantial threat of death.

This indisputable violence produced two trends for self-writing. On the one hand, silence, and consequently most critics have noted a relative absence of autobiography in Latin America. On the other hand, testimonios protesting the abuses of these governments and Operación Condor.² These texts are, perhaps belatedly, gaining a greater presence, such as new publications by Ariel Dorfman, Marcelo Figueras indicate. However, a third type of self-writing exists, namely that of experimental writings in which language play serves as a means for exploring the

¹ I am indebted to Dr. William Luis for alerting me to the works of Antonio Vallardes, Angel Cuadra, and Rafael Samuell-Muñoz dealing with oppression experienced under Castro, as well as for the preceding Padilla reference.

² The violence associated with the right-wing Operation Condor, as documented in the so-called “Archives of Terror” in Paraguay is astonishing. Across six countries of the lower southern hemisphere, some 50,000 persons were murdered, 30,000 disappeared, and 400,000 incarcerated (Calloni, np).

self and subjectivity in the context of authoritarianism. In these contemporary autobiographies written in authoritarian societies, loquacious leaders meet their match in verbose self-writings.

Dictators and authoritarian rulers talk to no end, with speeches numbering in the thousands. The linguistic bombarding undertaken by the state impacted society in tangible and intangible ways alike. Beyond the obvious censorship of speech and press, we can speculate that spoken violence and absolutism stifled the linguistic agency of civilians. The testimony given by the homeless schizophrenic to Diamela Eltit in *El padre mío* (1989) is one such example.

Rambling for hours on end, with his own voice displaced by the echoes of the vocabulary, ideals, and paranoia of the state, his speech brings to light just how internalized the state discourse could be. While *El Padre Mío's* speech may be considered an extreme example of the overpowering rhetoric of the state, it nonetheless illustrates how language becomes more problematic in self-writings under authoritarianism. As a result of the lack of expressive freedom, the inability to determine meaning, and the disjuncture between official history and individual reality, representation is made difficult, if not impossible. However, language is also a battleground for subjectivity, in the fight over existing as an autonomous subject instead of a subject of the state. For this reason, dislocated language is a prominent characteristic in the texts by Arenas, Clarice, and Eltit, as evidenced in the collapse of literal and figurative meanings, nonsensical passages and neologisms, the extensive use of metaphors and other figurative tropes, and visual typographic experimentation and word play. This wordiness, both in the sense of excess and in the literariness of the language, coincides with the obsessive control of language by the state through discourses and proclamations. Both sides thus demonstrate an inherent linguistic instability, that is, of the problem of sovereignty as it manifests itself in language and of the creation of realities and agency through words.

Perhaps the foregrounding of language in autobiography should not come as a surprise given the central role of language in psychoanalytic theories, ranging from Lacan to Irigaray, that deal with the formation of the individual in symbolic systems. Philosophers have also dealt with the role of language in both our immediate experience of the world and in representation. According to a holistic view, languages are believed to “structure our lives and disclose the world around us” (Medina 44). In turn, representation of the self and the world in self-writings must therefore negotiate one’s relationship with language. That said, in contrast to the ludic texts of this study, the intelligibility of autobiography has long been taken for granted. Autobiography, especially when defined as a genre, has generally implied an uncomplicated approach to representation. Even when formal qualities such as narrative plot, chronological time, or the first-person voice have been omitted, the tendency to assign a “truth value” to memory ultimately depends on the notion of communicability. On the other hand, trauma studies, in attempting to document ineffable and otherwise silenced experiences, have addressed the limits of representation, opening up the possibility for interpretations that emphasize interior experience over facts. In this vein, privileging the subjective and the personal process of writing memory, as discussed in the earlier chapter on metafiction, oftentimes leads to different understandings of “truth,” ranging from truth as an elusive value, as an epistemological construction, or as relative, located at the level of the individual rather than society.

Truth-value is not the only concept to be tested in contemporary autobiographies. Due to poststructuralist and postmodernist theories, any representation of the self brings into play both the awareness of the linguistic dimensions of the “I” voice and of the process of translating the self into language. Building on JL Austen’s theory that the I voice of illocutionary acts is performative whereas other persons are constative (Medina 21), I posit that self-writing performs

something in addition to telling a life story. This has profound implications for reading self-writing, especially where censorship and subject position complicate the relationship with realism and referential language. In this chapter, I will argue that the speech act of autobiography is related to the illocutionary force of this “I,” and the act of writing the self is an assertive performance of subjectivity. However, asserting the self in language is not a simple matter, as these texts will show. Judith Butler writes, “as Benveniste has shown, the very conditions of the possibility for becoming an ‘I’ in language remain indifferent to the ‘I’ that one becomes. The more one seeks oneself in language, the more one loses oneself precisely there where one is sought” (30). Linguistic uncertainty, in addition to disclosing the role of torture in authoritarian societies, thus presents itself as a solution for this perpetual double bind of the subjectivity of the first-person voice.

This chapter deals with the manifestations of linguistic and symbolic dominance—exercised in torture and interpellation—in self-writings. It is heavily informed by the ideas of Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain* and Judith Butler in *Excitable Speech*, especially in connecting language and the body to individual subjectivity, with subjectivity referring to a continuum between personal autonomy and the subjecting of people by the state. Idelber Avelar in *Letter of Violence* has also read these two theorists together to argue that law is pain inscribed onto the body. Taking these theories as a starting point, I argue that the linguistic indeterminacy in contemporary self-writings illustrates the breakdown of language analogous to that which occurs in interrogation, where the state forges a “reality” by manipulating “truth” and asserting linguistic sovereignty. Although pain itself does not necessarily occupy a principal role in the writings of Arenas, Clarice, and Eltit, nor were all of them subjected to torture (Arenas being the exception), the dynamics inherent in torture and in war can be found in a widespread and

undeniable performance of sovereignty carried out by authoritarian regimes. In understanding the performance of power to engage in similar techniques of domination and silencing, as well as understanding law and authority to be created by subjecting certain civilians to pain, I will use terms such as interrogation and torture as standins to refer to this broader practice of a state's violent control over language and reality. Before examining this performance in more detail, however, the concepts of linguistic sovereignty and the use of pain to delimit "reality" merit further clarification.

Scarry's analysis of war and torture is important because it establishes that the fight over power is located at the site of the body (51). Through pain, language, which serves to express the self and one's experience of the world, is controlled by another, and in the case of torture, destroyed (4). The basis of this control is that pain exists in a dichotomy with language, with pain being unrepresentable, without referent (5), and intransitive, that is, devoid of a relationship to objects and the exterior world. While on a less extreme scale than torture, I posit that even terror reduces a person to the fear of bodily harm, for in shifting the focus to the body, linguistic freedom is reduced through self-censorship. Linguistic sovereignty, or the control over the production of meaning, stems from the power of creating, through pain and terror, a dichotomy of a disembodied voice and a voiceless body, corresponding to the agent of the state and the tortured subject, respectively. As Scarry argues, "[this] political situation is almost by definition one in which the two locations of selfhood are in a skewed relation to one another or have wholly split apart and have begun to work, or be worked, against one another" (37). In torture, language and one's concept of "reality" are deconstructed. Scarry describes this as "ontological split" that occurs with extreme pain, where the torturer-proxy of the state rejects the confession, knowledge, and experience of pain that are "indisputably real to the sufferer," rendering them as

nontruths (56).³ This represents a performance of linguistic sovereignty, for extreme pain and the inability to speak cause the subject to cede to a different, “incontestable reality” that supports the state (27). Scarry thus outlines how “the infliction of pain in torture is inextricably bound up with the generation of a political ‘fiction’ [or ...] conferring facticity on unanchored cultural ‘constructs’” (161). Power therefore depends on the act of denying the reality of another, of creating a hierarchical position from which to decide an arbitrary “truth.” Simply put, linguistic deconstruction of the subject works in tandem with absolute authority.

Torture, war, and what I see as the performance of linguistic sovereignty by the authoritarian state are all marked by this “obsessive display of agency that permits one person’s body to be translated into another person’s voice, that allows real human pain to be converted into a regime’s fiction of power” (18). In representing their experiences in self-writings, the authors of this study use dislocated words as both a way to convey this lack of agency and to assert and defend an individual linguistic sovereignty. On the one hand, we see writing that can be viewed as analogous to a forced confession, where speech wavers, stumbles, repeats itself incessantly, and is forced into contradictions, inconsistencies, backtrackings. This nonnormative speech will prove important for the writings of Arenas, Clarice, and Eltit, for it reveals the impact that authoritarian power has on language and the subject. The marginal subject positions of the autobiographical protagonists, often without proper names or first-person perspectives and often displaced by other voices, also indicate the extent to which the violence of the state provokes the deconstruction of the linguistic subject. Not only are protagonists often unable to speak in their writings or to represent thoughts and experiences, even when they are capable of uttering words, in the context of the absolute voice of the state they are unable to speak with

³ Here we can imagine how individual truths and personal histories in authoritarian societies are similarly denied by official discourse.

authority or control meaning. Even the more mundane expectations of autobiography, such as depictions of the landscape and of people, face a problematic representation, for terror and torture, “rather than destroying the concrete physical fact of streets, houses, factories, and schools, [...] destroys them as they exist in the mind” (61).

In turning to the individual texts, all very divergent in tone, structure, and content, I will demonstrate the problematic relationship between language and representation of the self. Despite their differences, I argue that all three authors produce self-writings that perform as speech acts. These assertions of linguistic agency combat the moments of nonrepresentation of their text that surge out of linguistic repression. This nonrepresentation, figuring in instances of nonsense, in the collapse between literal and figurative meanings, and in absurd constructions, demonstrates the crisis of language that defines authoritarianism. I begin with Reinaldo Arenas, who in *Otra vez, el mar* undertakes a testimonial approach to self-writing. However, this is a complicated *testimonio*, where the precarious nature of language provokes his turn away from realism, and where unnarratable moments of trauma prevent a full textual realization of an autobiographical self. While Arenas’s linguistic experimentation is used to portray Cuban society, in the case of Diamela Eltit we see how the performance of linguistic sovereignty affects the individual. Eltit’s text illustrates how the discursive practice of torture permeates out into greater society and reaches the individual subject, in particular through interpellation as a subject of the state. Her protagonist, L. Iluminada, resists this interpellation, though, through a bodily and nonsensical writing. Finally, Clarice’s writing in *Água Viva* can be read as a continuation of many of the ideas expressed by Eltit. Clarice shows how subjectivity is produced through the power of language. Perhaps more than the other two authors, however, she proceeds to exercise a different type of subjectivity based on a nonnormative language. In examining the different

texts, it becomes apparent that subjectivity, an all-important concept for autobiography, is dependent on language. Furthermore, language peculiarities signal the discursive practices that define authoritarianism profoundly affect subjectivity and the self.

Wordy Words about Castro's Cuba in Arenas's *Otra vez el mar*

The final book that Reinaldo Arenas wrote while in Cuba was *Otra vez el mar* (1982). This novel tells of a vacation retreat of a young Cuban couple during September 1969 and of the homosexual temptation involving another guest, all the while providing reflections on the Cuban political and natural landscape. The text is divided into two parts, which present entirely different styles of writing and perspectives. The first narrates the wife's memories of the six days of vacation in a stream-of-consciousness prose. The second part consists of six "cantos" belonging to Héctor. The cantos can be described as a mix of poetry and typographic experimentation dealing with the sea and desire, snippets alluding to the novel's plot and (auto)biographical information, and intercalated, nightmarish stories of a political and satirical nature. The disjointed nature of the second part is ultimately attributed to Héctor's deranged mind, for the final words illuminate the reader to the fact that Héctor is alone in his car, that his wife is an imagined character, and that he is about to drive his car into the walls of the tunnel leading into Havana. Such an experimental mixture defies easy description, though Francisco Soto reads the work as a postmodern *novela testimonial* (or mockumentary, to use current terms), a Cuban *Rayuela*, and a parody of Genesis ("The Pentagónia" 97). The 400-plus page book was written three times over the course of 16 years, between 1966-1974 and finally published in 1982. Treated like contraband, it was stashed in various places, was twice lost or confiscated, and was later smuggled out of the country. Based alone on the tremendous effort that it required to come

into existence, we can gather that this was a fundamental part of his self-writings of the *Pentagonía*.

This book is considered one of the most important works to be critical of the Cuban Revolution (Soto, “The *Pentagonía*” 4). In contrast to the first two novels of the series, this text explicitly references the impact of the Revolution on Cuban society, including satirical prototypes of documents, decrees, official mores, and the reorganization of society (such as mentions of labor camps and bureaucratic positions). If the principal difference in the origin of testimonio versus autobiography is that of the juridical witness versus confessional subject, in *Otra vez el mar*, we perhaps have both of these perspectives, principally relayed through the imaginations, memories, interpellated thoughts, and farcical documents that exist in the mind of the protagonist. To a certain extent, this book is a testimony of consciousness. Rather than a representation of one’s self, we can read this work as internalized testimonio in which we view the “*act of identity-formation that is simultaneously personal and collective*” (Yúdice 42; my emphasis). However, instead of focusing on the subaltern or the importance of solidarity, I take the role of the collective in *Otra vez el mar* to be the relationship between institutions of the state and the subject. We can imagine from the control sheets and political speeches rendered in capital letters how he envisioned himself as interpellated and made into a bureaucratic subject. This testimonial character is, therefore, not necessarily antithetical to the autobiographical moment, especially if we view the book metafictionally, as the mimesis of process rather than the mimesis of product, as Soto (via Linda Hutcheon) has pointed out (“The *Pentagonía*” 52).

If I elaborate at length on theoretical approaches to testimonio, it is because they suggest a possible understanding of Arenas’s extreme experimentation with language, typography, and structure. Working from a postmodernist frame, George Yúdice proposes that testimony works

“beyond representation.” In this sense, silences, narrative contradictions, and creative licenses taken by the informant are perhaps just as or even more important than the historical and cultural information portrayed. Similarly, for John Beverley (*Beyond Representation*), rather than serving to represent truthfully, the testimony is motivated by the struggle for hegemony. In other words, language play, a prominent characteristic of these self-writings coming out of authoritarian societies, can be interpreted as the struggle for power between the state and the individual. The agency of the subaltern subject is therefore created through “marking frontiers, limiting access, distinguishing the speaking subject from the target of speech,” as well as decentering language (Sommer “No Secrets”139). Beyond recognizing the text as a documentation of power dynamics, I want to now turn to reading the *Otra vez el mar* as a speech act that at once reveals the formation of an autobiographical literary self and exercises linguistic agency. Moreover, this hypertextuality is a speech act that is directly related to the struggle over linguistic sovereignty in the context of authoritarianism.

In *Otra vez el mar*, language, subjectivity, and autobiographical writing converge. The fight for linguistic agency, as I will show, plays out primarily in the obstacles that Arenas faces as he represents a more traditional element of self-writing: the national landscape. It bears noting that despite its experimental nature and postmodern preference for process over product, the text does exhibit some of the characteristics that Sylvia Molloy identifies in twentieth century Latin American autobiographies, namely the inclusion of *petit histoire*, as seen in the minute (and sexual) details of the trip, and of Arenas’s childhood reminiscences, found in the nostalgia for his days as a young adult on Havana’s beaches. As Molloy points out, this more personal form of first-person accounts was often motivated by the need to demonstrate nostalgia for a nationally-specific landscape, often regarded as a paradise lost, a generalization that certainly holds true for

Arenas. Geography and particular spaces of memory are prominent in representation (and incorporated metaphorically into structure), as is the portrayal of the community through an “entre nos” attitude, incorporating the memories of others and oral traditions witnessed by the autobiographer. This tradition helps to understand the confluence of geography, testimony, and decentering of the first-person voice in Arenas’s self-writing.

In Arenas’s case, however, this national landscape is complicated, full of double meanings, confusion, and symbolism. The sea that figures so prominently in *Otra vez el mar* is at once the setting of his coming of age in Havana and, with its rhythmic ebbs and flows, a symbol of the sexual desire, release, and persecution, all of which are central topics of the text. Nature is both the source of memory and the springboard from which to discuss the intrusion of the authoritarian state, an intrusion that riddles the past with linguistic and ontological uncertainty. Amidst his attempt to recall the color of the sea, Arenas describes, for example, how the intermittent lights on the horizon are unidentifiable, how they are either the pleasant, social bonfires of groups meeting on the beach or the threatening flood lights used for surveillance (235). Likewise, a proliferation of birds, both the animal and the homosexuals denominated by the slur *pájaros*, prance around and copulate on the beach, thus continuing the landscape portrait and introducing the notion of linguistic indeterminacy through this scene. The dubious nature of reality under Castro is thus found in immediate experience—in geography—and in national language.

If this nostalgic portrayal of the sea serves as a central motif of the work, its poetic representation is interrupted by many sources of anxiety related to life under Castro. Particularly in Héctor’s part of the text, the voices, documents, and laws distract from the idyllic landscape that would constitute a traditional element of autobiography. This interruption is, in fact,

addressed in a metafictional comment in which the narrator cites the impossibility of continuing this type of narration:

¿Y las vastas y serenas aguas fluyendo? [...] ¿Y el paseo en calma por la despoblada costa donde el mar consuela? ... Jamás podré relatar esos estados de quietud. Jamás podría relacionar pacíficamente esa belleza sin traicionarme. Jamás podré enumerar los diferentes colores del crepúsculo sin que en mis palabras no encuentre latiendo el desequilibrio de una angustia que llega quién sabe de dónde. (235)

In fact, much of the second part of *Otra vez el mar* could be read as if the autobiographer were sitting down to reproduce the landscape of his coming-of-age, only to go off on tangents, trailing off into resounding voices, memories, and daydreams.

At the center of my analysis of this impossibility of representation, is the second Canto, in which we see the progression from the poetic representation of the sea and references containing biographical information to a nightmarish, hypermanic portrayal of Cuba. I argue that a crisis of representation unfolds in several strategies of dislocated language and word play. First, Arenas resorts to a sci-fi imaginative representation and linguistic indeterminacy as to portray the horror, terror, unreality, and nonsense that characterize the authoritarian society of his time. This is, of course, a different version from the official history of the Revolution. In addition to this qualitative exaggeration, I analyze linguistic play at the level of the word, for Arenas alternates between meaning and nonsense, and he frequently employs the tropes of hyperbole, onomatopoeia, and irony to express linguistic uncertainty.

In the Canto Segundo, as Arenas digresses from the representation of the sea, he creates the tale of a phallic Mamá Grande—a dictator with extraordinary powers, a hyperbolic parody of

Castro—and her construction and subsequent destruction of society.⁴ We see how society is organized through institutions and biopower (for example when she rehabilitates prostitutes to work as public accountants of parasites); how masses are mobilized through a forty day speech, galvanized against the fugitive, libidinous couple; how weapons, gallantry, and war create state power; and even how this symbolism imposes standards of behavior onto the populus (with the submissive dog taken as the incarnation of state values) (243). This representation of Cuba's authoritarian society departs from realism, however, and while the Mamá Grande clearly alludes to Castro, exaggeration trumps realism. Elaine Scarry argues that the pain of torture is often experienced on a cosmological level, and here we see that Arenas, in attempting to represent this past, depends on this cosmological expansion to express the collapse of the autonomous subject. In his version, Cuba expands to the galaxies that populate science fiction, and extreme power is understood through the analogy of nuclear science. As if destroying the autobiographical author's ability to distinguish between literal and figurative representation, the Mamá Grande's powers, in contrast to the standard figurative usage, literally reach the stars, which she blows up. She carries out a bionuclear war, setting off bacterially infected bombs in her pursuit of a persecuted couple. And significantly, her ultimate weapon is constructed in an "atomic second," that its, before even beginning the project (246). This example of irony here extends beyond just the use of playful language to illustrate extreme situations, for we see the collapse of time that Kamau Brathwaite associates with catastrophe in *MR (Magical Realism)*. The inability to engage with realist descriptions illustrates the pain, trauma, and censorship experienced by Arenas, as well as his struggle for linguistic authority.

⁴ The name Mamá Grande, the same as Gabriel García Márquez's protagonist, is a testament to Arenas's intense rivalry and antipathy felt towards the Colombian writer.

The content, structure, and diction of *Otra vez el mar* suggest that the power of authoritarianism infiltrates language, and thus discourse and oppression are prime topics of this linguistically effusive chapter. The story of Mamá Grande deals with the official proclamations that play such an important role in the performance of sovereignty. While *Otra vez el mar* explicitly denounces the conditions of Cuba under Castro, attesting to “los típicos andariveles de la época: bombas, tiros, discursos, gritos, amenazas, torturas, humillaciones, miedo, hambre (229)—this story’s true potential to protest lies in its linguistic excess. Ultimately, just bearing witness is not enough, and more extreme language is used to convey the degree of terror and repression. Scholars of testimony, such as Sarah Kofman, have written both on the frenzied need to speak and the impossibility of doing so. In the case of Arenas, particularly in his striking language, we can interpret his story of Mamá Grande as representative of this impassioned, urgent need to re-present his experiences under Castro. On the level of the word, his attempt at representation relies on the disjunction of irony and the excess of hyperbole, both quantitative and qualitative, to document the oppression that he experienced. In part this exaggerated language develops out of authoritarianism’s tend to monopolize discourse and construct “reality.” Significantly, Arenas acknowledges an internalized censorship that develops with the lack of free speech, which he viscerally reflects upon when he asks “Es que no puedes vivir sin la palabra?” (224). He also recognizes the constraint of official rhetoric, of “las mil palabras inútiles que obligatoriamente debes pronunciar día a día” (224-5). Out of this lack of linguistic sovereignty, the subject’s relationship with language is complicated. As to confirm this instable subjectivity, in one instance of this second Canto, the position of speaker and the object oscillates: “Pues en estos pueblos miserables, dices, me digo, digo/ te hago decir...” (218). Speech is not owned, rather it is official discourse regurgitated, internalized, and imposed.

An uncertain subject necessarily produces an unstable language. I want to present two specific passages at length that illustrate the relationship between language and sovereignty. The first relates the speech given by Mamá Grande while the second deals with the proclamations and rationing laws that she ushers into effect.

Así, omnisciente e iridiscente, en medio de las trompetas, a trompicones, turulata y tropical, arribó, tarareante, a la tribuna colosal. Ya allí, embobinada y envalentonada, siempre bolluna y bullanguera, bilonguera (aunque científica), espesa y específica, a empellones, peyorativa, desbordó el torrente de su onomatopeya.. ¡Era ella! ¡Era ella! La brillante, la bella, aplaudida y contundente, térmica y epidérmica, fluorescente y estridente, embullada aunque abollada, hidráulica e hidrocefálica [sic], descocada y descalabrada, girando y eyaculando en su propia pelambre, y tejiendo la urdimbre, ella, toda estambre, toda timbre, cual calandria en regia jaula de alambre, descalabrada cantando...Resumiendo aquel gran texto estatal—cuarenta días con sus noches duró el discurso diluvial. (247)

This passage strikes at all of the ideas addressed thus far: language, biopolitics through scientific control of populations, law as established through pain and discourse, the potential agency of sexualized writing. Arenas significantly describes this speech as a “torrente” de “onomatopeya.” In this trope, words do not have meaning other than the sound of their syllables. It is paradoxically referential and non-referential at once, representing sound rather than meaning. In the second passage, we see this discourse-turned-tongue twister once again:

Luego, a fin de finiquitar el fin de los difamadores e infames fugitivos, diáfana y farsante, fúlgida y fantasiosa, fungiendo como font font en fanfarria sin final, anuncia, frenética y desenfrenada, en breve resolución por ella misma firmada, que la cuota de chícharros será

en unas tres partes cortada a fin de costear el costo de la construcción de una contadora-escrutadora-compiladora-de-contradicciones-menores. Automáticos, todos la donaron y aplaudieron. (245)

On the one hand, facing the linguistic totalitarianism of the regime, it is as if words simply do not suffice, causing him to resort to long lists of adjectives and redundant constructions. His verbal insistence perhaps comes out of the struggle to not produce a narrative that desensitizes the reader. As Avelar explains, the “‘resistance to language’ often observed in testimonies of survivors is not a simple resistance to all language but rather a particular linguistic strategy whereby the proper name [i.e. referential language] wages a war against the gregarious power of the sign, against the facile dilution of experience in metaphor, against the tranquilizing effect of all dictionaries” (47). Here, metaphor refers to the process of making the uncanny familiar, or in the case of testimonio, rendering the ineffable banal. This fight against dilution and against the desensitization of representation explains, in part, the striking hyperlinguistic and alliterative prose.

The passage above is also interesting for the fact that it demonstrates the role of normativity in this society, with the subjected masses praising actions and decrees even though they suffer from the immediate consequences of the perpetually-intensifying law of total abstinence put into effect by the atomic dictator. This is taken to such an extreme by Mamá Grande, that the masses, in order to subsidize the state oppression, are forced to vomit the food that they had already eat, and “el básico ingerido en el pasado” y “el básico no vomitado” become crimes, “unanimously” approved, and punishable by death (247).

This disparity between words and meaning, between the applause of the masses and their inhumane treatment, affirm Marguerite Feitlowitz and Mary Louise Pratt’s arguments that

authoritarian discourse is incompatible with reality (22; “Overwriting Pinochet” np). Arenas, in turn, illustrates authoritarianism through satire precisely because it does not adhere to realism. This *reductio ad absurdum* in the list of punishments meted out by Mamá Grande significantly shows the pain associated with law: “Y aquel que no colaboró fue colgado. Y aquel que dudó fue estrangulado. Y aquel que se sonrió fue exterminado, y alguien que por un momento parpadeó fue electrocutado. Y alguien que pestañeó cuando se ejecutaba a los ajusticiados fue perdonado y solamente enviado a perpetuidad a un campo de trabajo forzado” (245). In all of the passages above, the oscillation between asyndetic (where conjunctions are emitted and sentences run on) and polysyndetic writing (where continual adjectives intensify the effect) conceivably reflects both the panic and anxiety that characterized his precarious existence in Cuba and the urgency with which he needs to testify.

Arenas further examines the collapse of meaning that occurs when the discourse of the state and individual reality do not coincide. Beyond the satire of compliant masses in the example above, significant due to the role of normativity in the creation of meaning, Arenas also plays with nonsense. At times, his text spirals out of control, engaging in typographic play. For example, in the portrait of the Cuban landscape, where he writes about the March sun, his words, poetic images, and text alike begin to “spin”:

El sol de marzo.

[...]

y marzo girando,

[...]

Ráscame la cria, cri, cra, crack.

Ráscame la crorrk, cros, cros, crossk.
 Grítale a los perros, sube más la radio.
 Cántale aún más alto,

croc, crac, croc.

Ladra, ladra ladra,
 ponte en cuatro patas,

ladra, ladra, ladra
gramoñosf, gramoñosf, gramoñosf.
¿Te gusta así o lo prefieres con poquito de agua herrá?
¿Te gusta así o con encabalgamientos endecasílabos?
¿Te gusta así o con vaselina simple?
Dime como te gusta
para decírtelo siempre de otro modo.

¿Pan?
Flan.
¿Yuca?
Basuca.
¿Maúlla un gato?
No, ladra un perro.
¿Ladra un perro?
No: un centenar de gatos. [...] (227-28).

Here we see not only the failure of language, but also that of textual coherence and the erosion of the principles of cooperation that would otherwise create meaning through pragmatics. In this dialogue we not only have the two people who are unsuccessful in their attempts to listen to one another and describe reality, we are also faced with a “primitive” and privative language, one resembling that produced by the pain of torture. Although we can infer from other writings the context of some of these images—perhaps the dogs of his childhood in rural Oriente, of the radio that his grandmother always listened to, the sound of the local factory, memories of first sexual encounters—we can, alternatively, easily imagine this conversation as a torture session, where speech is made difficult, where pain and pleasure are conflated by the torturer, and where fragmented sounds and experience form memories.

Through dislocated words, Arenas is able to isolate images pertaining to the performance of sovereignty, especially those dealing with the manipulation of reality through language.

Arenas’s reflection on this type of representation points to both his awareness of the traumatic nature of his experience—frequently expressed in terms that express bodily pain—and the need to testify: “Pero, ¿y ese *bramido*?, ¿y ese *estruendo*? ¿esa horrible forma de narrar, ese *ahogado*

y furioso traquetear, ese avanzar *enfebrecido* y reiterativo, esos *gritos*, esas aleaciones, esa manera tan horrible de contar, será lo que habrá, si acaso, de quedar?” (243-4, my emphasis). Similarly, Arenas recognizes the power of memory and of the revolutionary potential of this sometimes nonsensical representation in which his description of nature fades into tortured writing: “Los árboles ya habían sido liquidados, borrados no solamente de las regiones y las fotografías sino también de la zona conservadora de la memoria—ese artefacto reaccionario” (242-3).

These passages, paralleling the sounds and memories of torture, lead up to the story of Mamá Grande’s punishments, thus connecting the word, power, and the body. This construction of the second Canto is therefore significant since, as Avelar reminds us, law is simply pain inscribed on the body. The forceful regurgitation of food that has been consumed is an example of the power play that exists in torture, which is designed to “make everyone aware, though the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign” (Avelar 27). Rather than any realistic portrayal of Castro’s numerous “Palabras” or security measures (as occurs in *Antes que anochezca*), Canto Segundo is primarily about this display of the “unrestrained presence of the sovereign.”

In *Otra vez el mar* we come to see the fight over linguistic sovereignty that results out of authoritarian measures to exert control over societies. Not only does Arenas’s writing reflect the painful nature of giving testimony, it also illustrates his understanding of subjectivity. When Arenas describes how the same nuts and bolts of Mamá Grande’s super-weapon were going to “betray” its own operation (246), or how “Una ola de furia atomizada cubrió la ciudad previniendo que alguna alcantrilla antipatrótica pudiese dar cabida a los fugitivos” (242), he demonstrates the problematic subject-state and subject-object relationships that characterize his

experience. Although clearly a form of satire, the politicization of the sewer indicates how absurd and illogical the state's interactions with subjects are. Furthermore, given the indeterminacy of language, multiple meanings are possible, either equating those who harbor fugitives with sewers, or giving the drain human qualities. And if sewers are anthropomorphized, what does this lack of contrast between human and object say about the state's treatment of subjects? In addition to the use of satire, the privileging of testimonio over a direct autobiographical voice is suggestive of Arenas's subject position as well. Instead of speaking from the position of "I," Arenas leaves fleeting signs of self-reference in the voices of other characters and bureaucratic documents. Generally considered to represent subaltern subjects, here the testimonial voice also points to a lack of linguistic agency in authoritarian societies. Furthermore, the visible presence of official discourses and documents, such as the control sheet that reviews a laborer's conduct and Mamá Grande's speeches, highlights the power the state exercises over the control language and reality.

After recounting Mamá Grande's epic speech, Arenas comments explicitly on his story as if he were reflecting upon his writing from the perspective of the author. An italicized quotation stands apart from the rest of the text: "La historia, una inmensa cantidad de palabras palabreadas" (248). Significantly, these words also appear in *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, the book preceding *Otra vez el mar*. While this citation suggests that he approaches history with a narratological understanding, it also evidences the primary importance that he assigns to language as a maker of reality. Written while living a precarious and persecuted existence under Castro, *Otra vez el mar* thus responds to the state's performance of linguistic sovereignty through a linguistic performance of its own. In the power struggle over language, where the subject of the state is reduced to a body through pain, Arenas fights back with an

imperfect but urgent speech. The rhythms, sounds, and cosmological viewpoints all suggest a body in pain. He in turn compensates for the lack of voice and representative potential with excessive words and exaggerated descriptions. Moreover, he reveals his shortcomings in metafictional moments. Nonetheless, when read as a counter-performance, *Otra vez el mar* is a speech act, a testimony of his fight for linguistic sovereignty and right to an autonomous recording of memory.

Interpellation as Interrogation: Body versus Voice in Eltit's *Lumpérica*

Diamela Eltit first conceived of her book *Lumpérica* when she drove past a vacated plaza in Santiago and was stuck by the silence of the night. The military-enforced curfew had emptied the public space of people, perhaps with the exception of homeless wanderers. Perpetually interested in studying marginalized people, she considered them to be photographic negatives of a society that could uncover certain, hidden truths about society ("Foreword" 6). The figure of the vagabond negotiating this silencing through bodily performance would function in *Lumpérica* as a means of examining the nature of the voiceless Other. However, in the case of authoritarian Chile, with the *toque de queda*, disappearances and violent crackdowns on the ideologically suspect, the lack of linguistic agency illustrated by the "lumpen" in the plaza could, arguably, be said to be indicative of the general population as well. In *Lumpérica* the nocturnal void of the plaza thus serves as an allegory of the linguistic void experienced when absolute rhetorical power creates subjects of the state. The text represents the body/voice dichotomy performed in torture and the role of language in interpellation, as well as the difficulty of representation under repressive conditions.

The problem of language in Eltit's work is directly related to the experience of powerlessness before the state, an experience that she describes as "inexpressible, part of a story

that [...] seems interminable.” (“Foreward” 4) . The hypertextual presentation of this work can therefore be seen to come out of the trauma of Pinochet, in particular out of the struggle for linguistic agency. In *Lumpérica*, language play illustrates a breakdown in the ability to communicate, as do the metaphors of animals in pain, the mute lumpen, and the echo of torture in the words “tengo sed” uttered by L. Iluminada. Ronald Christ, who translated the text into English, provides a thorough catalogue of her linguistic experimentation. Her techniques include: “breached syntax [...], illicit grammar, vulgar and foreign speech, bastard spellings (cacography for calligraphy), dismembered syntax and diction” (209), as well as inversions (especially verb and subject order), displacements, cinematographic effects, fragmentariness, neologisms, and spoken collisions (210). Visual experimentation occurs with the variations of fonts, and unusual line spacing, and disruptive punctuation. Christ observes that this “splicing punctuation [...] omits syntactical signals in favor of rhetorical punctuation [...] that, like most else in the book, culture the ambiguity of more than one reading” (214). The multiple meanings, spliced words, and parenthetical isolations suggest a breakdown of communication. *Lumpérica* is quite often a vague text due to the combination of nonsense, poetic images without context, and the lack of linearity or plot to clarify recurring images, which the reader uses to piece together meaning. I want to argue, however, that the book’s content and form reflect (and reflect upon) the performance of linguistic sovereignty that occurs in torture and that serves to bolster authoritarianism.

In *Lumpérica*, Diamela Eltit demonstrates the forging of reality that occurs in interrogation and interpellation alike, thus connecting the climate of terror and oppression in authoritarian societies to the structuring of power in torture. Moreover, the analogies that she draws between these two discursive practices explain how individuals who are not tortured are

nonetheless impacted by the performance of power. The two scenes of interrogation both explicitly and implicitly portray how the process of forging reality occurs in torture and how this constitutes a performance of linguistic sovereignty. Illustrating the important role of language, she describes interrogation as “vocablo sagrado” (47), and her narrative significantly allegorizes this setting as a theatrical performance, where actors do not have the autonomy to speak freely, where torture controls the script and produces scenarios in order to control truth and knowledge. The topic of conversation encompasses the minute details of the plaza: who is there, what they are doing, what social relations unfold there, and what objects constitute a plaza. The mundane nature of this description contrasts with the torturer’s urgent need to discover the words uttered by L. Iluminada to the man who breaks her fall. Time and time again the unknown man is asked to repeat his answers, each time in greater detail and from different perspectives. In the first chapter on interrogation, the narrator reveals that the man is conscious of the power play involved in interrogation. The agents of the state audibly play tapes that provoke the fear and threat of an absolute “truth,” suggested by the sound coming either from the recording of his session or a behind-the-scenes reviewing of tapes to corroborate his information. Despite the fact that the interrogator demonstrates that he already has knowledge of the events from surveillance, he continues to prod and demand better answers. The subject is aware that “Algo en definitiva se había roto. Las preguntas se trivializaban cada vez más... Tal vez era humillarlo o el preeámbulo para llegar a algo significativo y entonces él estaría tan cansado que diría, suplicaría y pediría agua, porque su sed sería entonces insoportable.” (45) As can be seen here and the echos of “tengo ted” throughout the text, pain creates “truth.”

In the interrogation scenes we see the consolidation of power through the creation of false agency and illusion of guilt, followed by the creation of arbitrary reality. If the first

representation of interrogation illustrates the use of pain to wield power, in the second representation, questioning is further exaggerated in order to point out the manipulation of reality. When discussing hypothetical detail pertaining to L. Iluminada's actions and words in the plaza, the interrogator flexes his sadistic manipulation of knowledge and pain. "Pudo ser así, dijo el interrogador, pero no fue eso [...] ¿Y qué era pues?, replicó el interrogado, parece que usted mismo tiene la respuesta. [...] No estés tan seguro de ti mismo. Tengo mucho tiempo. Tarde o temprano tambalearás tú también, se te producirá el bache y entonces me dirá llorando" (128). Despite showing complete willingness to cooperate, although professing poor memory and not knowing L. Iluminada's intentions, the man's confession is deemed inadequate, impossible, and untruthful. The interrogator proposes a different version of the events in the park, which the man denies to the point of caving from exhaustion. His thoughts demonstrate the artificial nature of the discussion: "Era como una escena circular ensayada una multiplicidad de veces. Una escena errada, inútil. Pensó en romper este círculo, alterar el punto de vista, pasar a otro asunto desenmascarando la fragilidad de la base [...] socavar su agotamiento" (131). The interrogator desires to create a performance out of this questioning. He acknowledges that he knows every word said by L. Iluminada but that he wants to hear the subject repeat the scene, with the "inflexiones de voz" and "gestos," an enactment that, by forced confession, makes the subject a guilty agent of these false accusations (134). The interrogation scenes of *Lumpérica* thus confirm the transitive nature of reality that is theorized by Scarry, where actual events are displaced by fabricated versions that support the regime.

In concluding the interrogation scene, Eltit proceeds to use allegory to comment on this transitive reality. By seamlessly shifting the narrative of the interrogation into an analogous scene of filming, she emphasizes the performative nature of sovereignty. Reflecting the

precarious nature of the reality asserted by authoritarianism, the dialogue of interrogation fades, rather inexplicably, into a discussion of how L. Iluminada's fall was part of a movie. In other words, the narrative structure becomes transient as to reflect the transitive nature of reality in interrogation. Words such as "ensayada," "programada," "toma," "guión," "producción" refer both to the interrogation and its allegory of the filming of L. Iluminada, where an insubordinate actor and the director of the film fight to influence the production. By displacing the scene of interrogation with the discussion of movie editing, and in doing so without the use of explicit connectors or an indication of comparison, Eltit establishes a metaphorical relationship between the two.

In a similar fashion to this narrative collusion, Eltit also establishes parallels between the forging of reality in interrogation and that of interpellation. The final chapter of the work facilitates an understanding of how dislocated language is related to the performance of sovereignty in her work. In this scene, L. Iluminada sits on a bench in the plaza observing the emptying of the square and the commercial sign that continues to advertise a product long after the *toque de queda*. The disjointed nature of the commercial propaganda and empty plaza leads L. Iluminada to observe how "su programación no tenía la racionalidad de Chile que paraba su ritmo nocturno" (190). Furthermore, this disconnect and voiding of human activity renders the space unreal. Once again evoking cinematic or theatrical metaphors to describe this fluid reality, she writes that "La calle aparece así como un *escenario* desde la plaza y por eso mismo, los peatones, *actores* que lo cruzan. Es un *escenario* fantasmagórico" (186, my emphasis). Fixating on the light, in particular on the significance of the flashing word fragments and letters, she begins to contemplate the pragmatics of the scene, that is, on the impact of this symbolic imprinting of messages onto bodies. If the events of the plaza depict the lack of voice and

subsequent bodily and written resistance by the subjugated lumpen, the flashing light allegorizes the process of reconnaissance theorized by Bordieu. In this process, subjects are created in language via “suggestions or insinuations that produce the sensitivity and readiness to respond to symbolic power [that] are typically issued and received unconsciously, escaping the knowledge and control of speakers” (Medina 171). Judith Butler also theorizes interpellation as a non-cognitive, unconscious process. If interpellation can be expanded to include “communicative performances [that] are full of subliminal messages that mould the subjectivity of the new individuals who are brought into language” and based on what Bordieu calls “*silent and insidious, insistent and insinuating*” injunctions (qtd in Medina 170), we can see how El Luminoso carries out an act similar to interpellation. In other words, the light that shines down creates subjects by imposing meaning on their bodies and demonstrating its superior power. Eltit, via L. Iluminada, deconstructs this normative process. Reading the signs as a form of language, she realizes that “el encendido de las luces en el edificio es irregular, no dando lugar a ninguna cábala” (187). Without a coherent message or recipients, the light can be seen in a performative or pragmatic dimension. Rather than focus on the object of advertisement, she focuses on the interpellative power of the light. This linguistic performance of sovereignty used by the state to hypostatize “reality” can thus be seen to extend beyond the practice of interrogation to be found in the subliminal messages, excessive rhetoric, and terror experienced by the population.

This performance of linguistic sovereignty by the state and its subsequent deconstruction in the bodily writing of L. Iluminada provoke a breakdown of language in the text. As to illustrate this fluidity, literal versus figurative senses are often indistinguishable. For example, linguistic indeterminacy figures in the confusion of homonyms and the splicing of words into new words, as if words were not an intelligible, self-contained unit of meaning. As examined in

an earlier chapter, the text makes it impossible to limit *montar* to a single reference, alternating between the acts of riding a horse, the montage of film, or a sexual coupling. The instability of heteronyms and their context is related to the lack of personal linguistic autonomy, for according to Frege, “[s]enses are intersubjective presentations or appearances and, therefore, they are *dependent upon subjects* to whom the referent or designation is presented” (Medina 49, my emphasis). In terms of philosophies of language, the concatenation of homonyms signals the lack of an inferential pattern, meaning that neither convention nor context serve to clarify speech. This can be read in two ways. On the one hand, the lack of reference between word and object (or experience) means that communication is not possible. On the other hand, disempowered subjects may not have the authority to (re)set language norms that determine meaning. Hence, we can argue that the lack of subjectivity profoundly impacts the various signifiers used to describe and reference.

The lack of linguistic agency under authoritarian rule likewise figures in the structure of *Lumpérica*, particularly in instances where Eltit eliminates context that would be necessary to establish meaning. For example, interrogation can be confused with filming, vagabonds are indistinguishable from actors, and so on. Interestingly, and highlighting Eltit’s use of ambiguity, the language used in the depiction of the square could equally apply to a scene of forceful questioning such as: “Sometieran a ella”; el “antagonismo entre el observado y lo observado crea una evidente tensión”; “falsificación sobre falsificación recompuso. Ella en el medio del artificio tal vez tampoco era real. [...] Hasta ella misma era el exceso.” (191). In other words, both the scenes of El Luminoso’s interpellation and the police interrogation depict the creation of reality through linguistic sovereignty. It is precisely through this decontextualization and metafiction

that the interpellation scene of El Luminoso shining down on bodies develops strong parallels with interrogation and serves to criticize the performative nature of power.

Ambiguity and lack of context in *Lumpérica* perform what Marguerite Feitlowitz calls “a lexicon of terror.” Cataloguing the double meanings of words associated with torture and their euphemisms coined from everyday objects, she proves how authoritarian regimes appropriate language, displacing conventional meanings in order to dissimulate power. Authoritarian rhetoric does not fit the reality experienced by the people, and *Lumpérica* reflects this linguistic disconnect, for syntax and content are frequently ambiguous. This “lexicon of terror” explains the avant-guard tendency to veer towards abstraction and performance, to create art in which the “significance lies with the manipulated sign, not the signified,” as explained by artist Catalina Parra (qtd in Christ, “Afterword” 207). Eltit herself attributes the prominent trope of ambiguity as a product of living under the dictatorship. She states that “it is important to take shelter in every possible ambiguity bestowed by the habit of writing with words and, from there, to emit a few meanings” (“Foreward” 6), as if “shelter” or autonomy can be found in linguistic freedom. Rather than reduce Eltit’s writing to an “*arte povera*,” the insistence or persistence of certain signifiers “should be read as textual/textural reoccurrences that accumulate meaning” (Christ, “Afterword” 212). Ambiguity is a form of linguistic assertion, for “her exerted force on repeated words, crammed into unusual contexts, bid to new uses, unites differences as it mobilizes meaning” (212). Like the textured brush strokes of impressionist paintings, to use Christ’s analogy, this accumulation of meaning and the piecing together of recurring images lends itself to an interpretation of the work as a performance of linguistic agency.

Notwithstanding the performative potential of ambiguity and linguistic fluidity, more than anything, they signal the problem of the lack of verbal agency. The lack of conversational

and contextual cues in *Lumpérica*, as well as frequent nonsense, are an example of what Judith Butler calls “impossible speech.” According to Medina, “Butler emphasizes the ‘political salience of impossible speech’, that is, of silences and of apparently nonsensical forms of expression, because they can be indicative of symbolic oppression: they may indicate ways of being in language that could be liberated and expressed if certain censorship were lifted” (178). The linguistic uncertainty and lack of a first-person voice arise from the symbolic domination that authoritarianism enacts, and accordingly, hypertextuality results as a response to the discursive practices of authoritarianism. Eltit addresses the lack of agency implicitly, both in her descriptions and in her more experimental representation of interpellation. She speaks of this loss of subjectivity, depicting the subjects of the state as automatons: “Cuando ya no era ella misma, sino la que el espacio había construido a partir de su permanencia, lo que el luminoso le había donado al meterse ideas en la cabeza de tanta letra que le había tirado sobre los ojos.” (191)

Interpellation illustrates the process by which the law subjects individuals, and in *Lumpérica* we see the noncognitive version theorized by Judith Butler and Bourdieu rather than Althusser’s formulation of the “Who, me?” scenario. In the text interpellation names and gives citizenship. Subjects are implicitly told who they are in the eyes of the state. Light shines down with authority, the “rayos del luminoso...como documentos” (20). The recognition by the state creates subjects, for “el luminoso los confirme como existencia, es decir, los nombre de otra manera [...] verificando la pérdida voluntaria de sus anales ciudadanos” (16). Interpellation solidifies power: “El luminoso que va a regir esta nueva identidad, los pálidos que la adquieren, ella que se sumete” (32).

Interpellation objectifies, eliminates the subjective self-determination of a person. When the commercial sign shines upon L. Iluminada they “plunder” all of her referents:

Saquéanla de todo referente &
más que la luz de la plaza, aguarda el lumpérico juicio/
del toda inexpresable. (176)

Furthermore, as if waiting for judgment, she is essentially inexpresible, voided of language. In the attempt to represent her self or speak freely, modifying the state's writing with bodily etchings, L. Iluminada:

Ha trastocado su particular orden dificultando toda certeza/
arrepiente el signo, toda información es resentida y todo
documento
es transitorio. (177) duda de veras

While the meaning of these passages is, fittingly, elusive, the nature of her linguistic agency is tied up with concepts such as un-documentation, disorder, doubt, and transience. Language and reality alike are seen to be fluid in comparison with the reified but nonrepresenting words controlled by the state.

Similar to Scarry's analysis of torture, the performance of sovereignty in Eltit's allegorical interpellation illustrates the duality of language effected by power. Namely, the power of language lies in the fact that it acts on the body through the silencing force of pain. Language is voided through wounding: "Ripio de lumpenesco orden desata la estriada hazaña/ atomiza sacándolos de sus referentes—que la herida permuta por sus cicatrices" (179). In depicting interpellation and bodily pain together, Eltit illustrates the similarities between torture and rhetoric in society, namely that they both are used to construct reality. Interpellation is described as a form of interrogation, and in the square the protagonist is

Interrogada hasta el depósito de inconformismo
Ilantea (172)

The analogy established between interrogation and L. Iluminada as a “contemplated being” in the plaza is also important for what it reveals about the creation of subjectivity through pain and voice, even if it merely occurs through terror and interpellation rather than actual physical violence. In *Lumpérica*, the state’s control of voice and writing, represented by El Luminoso’s projection of letters, is always accompanied by bodily mutilation. Likewise, when the words of power are uttered, it has a bodily effect: “Está dicho / Sangra” (174).

Splicing, one of Eltit’s most original forms of word play also illustrates the dichotomy of voice and body. This particular strategy of dividing words performs the deconstruction of language in pain. Eltit allegorizes this dichotomy through a peculiar style of writing, as well as analogous lacerations carved into the arms of the protagonist and implied author “diamela eltit.” Language itself reveals a corporal dimension. Several examples include:

“Muge/r/apa y su mano se nutre final-mente el verde des-ata y maya se erige y vac/a-nal su forma”(142),

“Anal’iza la trama=dura de la piel: la mano prende y la fobia *d* es/garra” (143)

and “Muge/r’onda corp-oral Brahma su mano que la denuncia & brama.” (144)

Woman, as a relatively more elevated subject position, is split into the verb “to moo.” The enlightened Brahma disintegrates into “brama,” into shouts or bellows. Division disassociates mind from body or otherness (analiza to anal, des-maya, the human bacchanal turned in to vaca, corporal versus oral), and on multiple occasions the split renders her abject, anal. Splicing occurs as if the protagonist were unable (perhaps under the constraints of torture) to finish her speech, as if she were unable to finish the enunciation of “mujer,” uttering “muje” before speech turns into the sounds of torture. Yet another option is that the protagonist lacks the verbal agency to convey rhetorical markers of communication, including simple separation of words, and it is as if her story could not be dictated into a normative language, hence vac/a-nal instead of bacchanal.

Furthermore, some modifications transform her from being the subject of the verb, *desgarra*, to the (animalized) object, *es garra*. This verbal experimentation therefore reflects the dichotomy of subject and subjugated that is negotiated in the performance of linguistic sovereignty.

In other moments, such as the dislocated words of section 15 that most closely approximate nonsense, the text takes a bodily turn as language spirals out of control. For example: “*enuncia su esparcido émbolo matriz de rasgados tópicos anuncia y matiza del más dorado material la ambigüedad soleada suele contener evocaciones + la himen se vierte en lumen y se zumba*” (181). Furthermore, L. Iluminada’s attempt at self-expression through bodily writing is nonetheless silenced through pain or animalization: “*La piel se parte de manera fría, la sangre es apenas un resquicio, la convención engaña + la alegría en cambio aflora: la sorpresa de la grafía a todas luces disuelta en trinos retóricos*” (180). The oxymoron of “*trinos retóricos*” conveys the impossibility of exercising linguistic sovereignty in the face of severe bodily repression.

The deconstruction of language that occurs in her painful performance has also been used to account for the ludic, poetic scenes in which the protagonist is represented in animal forms. Beyond continuing the analogy of speechlessness, such as the dog choked by a collar or the warbles of a bird, the use of metaphor points to a strategy of written resistance in the use of neobaroque language. Hypertextuality, elaborate metaphors, double meanings, and unusual word choice all characterize this style. Interestingly, the neobaroque questions the presumed naturalness of reality, for as Sarduy explains, metaphor is “*el doble devorador de la realidad, desplazador del origen*” (62). Analogy, where similarities are established between two disparate objects, reveals the creative—not reflective—nature of language. Rather than be undermined by the lack of signification, the hyper-rhetoric of baroque writing permits a “*trama de significados*

posibles” (57), and in turn, a greater linguistic agency in the face of absolute meanings attributed to hegemony and power. Further connecting the neobaroque to her theoretically innovative self-writing, Eltit’s text expresses the desire to have more linguistic power, to test the limits of language “Para que esos dedos entintados la trazaran entera, estamparan su indeleble huella” (106).

In *Escrito sobre un cuerpo* Sarduy analyzes how modern art, especially the baroque, interrogates subject-object positions. In this vein, Eltit’s use of the neobaroque style is all the more relevant for representing the performance of sovereignty, symbolic domination, and the transient nature of reality. The nonsensical parts that coexist alongside neobaroque language are also indicative of subject position, for according to Butler, “rules of intelligibility that establish boundaries between the intelligible and the nonsensical are ‘rules that govern the inception of the speaking subject through its differentiation from the unspeakable Other’” (Medina 179). The hypertextuality and experimentation therefore suggest a lack of linguistic agency granted by society and the state, and in turn Eltit’s self-writing becomes a testimony of the absence of verbal agency. In both her neobaroque style and in artistic resistance of the Chilean Escena de Avanzada, without recourse to language, bodily resistance and performance are tactics of agency. As if to illustrate the connection between body, nonsense, and the neobaroque, Eltit’s writing on the body is described as “se vuelve barro, barrosa, barroca la epidermis” (145). Eltit also addresses the political expediency of bodily self-writing and of the performance of disordering and a-normativity. If the interpellation creates voiceless subjects through the body, that is, “ciudad-anos,” with a bodily writing, they are able to resist this interpellation: “Se tiran nombres para reformarse + apodos sobran en esta repartida de tanto cabo suelto de identidades que ya no se sabe qué ciudadano gesto los hubo envilecido de llamarse” (178). *Lumpérica* and

the writhing and writings of the plaza can thus be read as assertions of subjectivity and attempts at creating individual sovereignty in language.

Clarice: Countercurrent in the Stream of Life

In *Água Viva* Clarice explores the relationship between the body, senses, and language in self-writing. Clarice's highly abstract work nonetheless belies an awareness of the struggle over linguistic sovereignty that occurs in authoritarian societies, a struggle in which she engages in order to write her self. Whereas I previously illustrate the impact of the politics of Brazilian modernism on her form of self expression and representation, in this chapter, I argue that Clarice's work obliquely reveals the power struggle over language and subjectivity, one that is particularly heightened in the context of the authoritarian state. Although she does not deal with these theoretical or political terms, or even deal explicitly with the notion of power, her text evidences a particular understanding of subjectivity and the role of language in subjecting people to the state. These hints filter through images and words that are likely indebted to specific, cultural manifestations of power experienced under the military regime during the 60s and 70s. For this reason, despite the aleatory narrative thread, long digressions, and perplexing analogies, her text alludes to the use of bodily oppression and silencing undertaken in torture and interrogation, practices that are used by the state to carry out the performance of linguistic sovereignty.

In the years preceding the writing of *Água Viva*, Clarice bore witness to the Brazilian military's performance of power. She participated in the *Passeata dos Cem Mil* against repression, she experienced firsthand the state censorship while working as a journalist, and she would have been aware of the existence of kidnappings and extrajudicial assassinations. While *Água Viva* attempted a non-biographical type of self-writing, aiming for complete interiority and

separation from the external world, this does not mean that the traces of authoritarianism were entirely excised. Furthermore, while her reputedly narcissistic and extremely anxious personality would have encouraged extreme introspection (Moser 313), the images of confession in her text suggest that existing discursive practices of the state have an influence on a writer's understanding of self and its literary construction. Although it may initially seem like a stretch to read a cultural consciousness of the dynamics of forced confession in *Água Viva*, images of bodily harm and torture abound. It is also striking how forcefully she alludes to confession, in particular to the oppressive, normative nature of this practice.

Clarice evokes the vocabulary of confession and interrogation in describing the process of self-representation. Struggling to adequately write the self, she writes, "I haven't found anyone to account to" (50), as if she needed a figure of authority to confer upon her a certain agency of expression.⁵ She also refers to the content of her writing vaguely as "truths" and "secrets." We can easily interpret her confession as revealing truths of the self, but more important than content and subject material is how she highlights the power structure of confession, of the confessor's ability to judge and condone what is said, as well as to police "truth." She is aware of the problematic nature of this authority, pointing out "But truths do not have words. Truths or truth?" (42). This subjecting power of confession produces hesitation, and she writes of the fear that divulging such information could harm her subjecthood:

what I cannot and do not want to express keeps being the most secret of my secrets. I

know that I'm afraid of the moments when I don't use thought and it's a momentary

⁵ The need for the presence of a confessor is interesting considering the role of the narratee in *Água Viva*. Although critics have disagreed about the identity of the textual "you," ranging from the pseudo-character and "narrative shadow-boxing partner" proposed by Browler (113-14), the fictionalization of a former lover of Clarice as a literal reading of the text suggests, and the split of the self into being and Being, to use Heideggerian terms (Payne 769). I would argue, similar to Payne, that at times it can be interpreted as the division between the autobiographical writer and her textually reproduced self. The presence of the "you" nonetheless reflects the historical dimension of self-writing, especially the influence of the epistolary form of the confession, in which the self depends on external recognition in order to come into being.

state, difficult to reach that, all secret, no longer uses the words with which thoughts are formed. Is not using words to lose one's identity? is it to become lost in the essential, destructive shadows? I lose the identity of the world within me and I exist without guarantees.[...] and the meaning of me and of the world and of you is not obvious. (58)

Her language here is significantly ambiguous. It is impossible to tell if she associates her linguistic agency with essence or nonessence, with deconstruction or construction of her self, or whether "thought" breaks with official reality or whether "thought" refers to the reality forged by the state, and whether identity means being subjected or liberated. She suggests that there is a relationship between normative language and a concrete, recognizable identity as a subject. However, this identity comes with a cost, for as she continues on, she points to an awareness of the dialectical relationship between interrogator and interrogated, and of the dominating discourse in which she ceases to exist. As Clarice writes, even though she is not referring to torture, this linguistic dominance is one that separates self and Other. In a subjected position, she is silenced: "I've entered into such strong communication with you that I've stopped existing. You have become an I. It's so hard to speak and say things that cannot be said. It's so silent." (43) Scarry writes of this absolute power in her theories on torture, where the torturer exercises final authority over truth, over what constitutes reality, and even the existence of the confessee. Confession thus orders the relationship between the state and the subject, but in such a way that the agency of the subject is an illusion. This is a dependence that Clarice resents, for she is preoccupied with a non-pragmatic form of freedom (Jose 5), as can be seen in the words "Fui ao encontro de mim [...] Simplesmente eu sou eu. E você é você." and "Construo algo isento de mim e de ti—eis a minha liberdade [...] sou sozinha, eu e minha liberdade" (qtd in Jose 5).

As can be seen, truth and freedom are words that she uses on several occasions. Significantly, she associates these concepts with power, with what she calls “the Order.” Furthermore, this entity is associated with fear and self-censorship. She writes anxiously, as reflected in polysyndetic prose “What is this I’m writing you? [...] But I go on and pray and my freedom is ruled by the Order—I’m no longer afraid.” (53) And, inversely: “Now I’m frightened. Because I’m going to tell you something.” (53). In these moments we witness the threatening nature of confession, of the sheer power that the interrogator exercises over the body, subjectivity, and freedom of the person confessing. Direct external references are not necessary to convey that her notions of subjectivity and interrogation, articulated through metaphors of torture, have been impacted by external events and discursive practices.

Clarice represents the relationship between her ineffable thoughts and subjectivity in a way that is analogous to the fear and pain of interrogation and torture. Clarice’s writing conflates language and pain, for she writes of the “tender nerve ends of the word” (6) and of words that “must create an almost exclusively bodily meaning. [...]” (5). Approximating the confessional act in her self-writing and in portraying images related to interrogation, her subjectivity is associated with the power coming out of symbolic dominance and pain. Clarice juxtaposes the body in pain with the voice: “And here I force myself into the severity of a tense language, I force myself into the nudity of a white skeleton free of humors” (7-8). As if the state’s recognition of the subject were a form of demarcation on the body, she writes “I leave these tortures of a victim with the indescribable mark that symbolizes life” (29). In yet another passage, confession of the self requires images of pain: “It bespeaks arms entangled in legs and flames rising and I passive like a piece of flesh that’s devoured by the sharp hook beak of an eagle that stops its blind flight. I express to my self and to you my most secret desires and with

the words achieve a confused, orgiastic beauty” (16). In this last sentence, the sexualized nature of her words points to the power of conventional language, recalling the female mystics of medieval confessions, where the patriarchal control denied the knowledge and spiritual authority of women by labeling them as hysterics. The concept of a secret conveys the threat of pain by which knowledge is “extracted” (or created) in confession, as well as a subversive state, of not being in accordance with the law. The combination of images of the tortured body, the confession of a secret, and the fear to speak freely all point to an awareness of repressed linguistic agency in authoritarian societies.

Significantly, the destruction of language in torture and the subsequent struggle to represent pain manifests itself in the use of metaphors, which abound in *Água Viva*. More than equating self-exploration and self-expression with the metaphor of interrogation, some of the more curious parts of the book suggest the difficulty of representing of pain. Her world is alternatively reduced to pain or expanded out cosmologically, illustrating Scarry’s thesis that “The very temptation to invoke analogies to remote cosmologies [...] is itself a sign of pain’s triumph, [...] bringing about, even within the radius of a several feet, this absolute split between one’s sense of one’s own reality and the reality of other people” (4). Not only is her internal state completely interiorized and inexpressible, as examined above, but also the representation of her self (and of her self in the world) fits a pattern that Scarry attributes to the deconstruction of the linguistic subject. The split between different realities aptly characterizes the metaphorical depictions of her world, many of which are incompatible with our realities as readers. According to Scarry, this is “a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe” (35). This oscillation between pain and cosmology lends much meaning to Clarice’s text. There

are passages with an immediate sense of pain: “Suddenly, I’ve split in two and doubled over, as with an intense labor pain—and I saw that the girl in me was dying [...]” (54)—only to transition, inexplicably, to passages on flowers or animals, for example. The supposed mystical nature of Clarice’s writing, of her visions of Persian deserts, of turrets, of her communion via cockroach in *A Paixão Segundo G.H.* may, therefore, be read as something that is not necessarily representative of any spiritual belief. Rather, it may equally reflect the deconstruction of language that occurs in the context of the authoritarian rule of the military absolutism.

Clarice’s text provides also clues to the nature of subjectivity as it is related to normativity, an all-important factor in the creation of meaning. For example, normativity is addressed in one of the few passages that relate to the exterior world, in her dream of a commercial for the beverage Zerbino. In this commercial, people act like automatons, drinking the same soda in the same fashion and sighing loudly with delight. The last person interjects at the end of the commercial, stating that he did not like the taste, despite having copied the actions of others. Normativity and censorship are at the heart of the Zerbino commercial, as well as power, for “Zerbino was an institution stronger than man” (23). Censorship in society and the production of truth in torture thus converge in the dream, which can be read as an allegory of her self-writing. The commercial, along with other disparate images that allude to the uncomfortable nature of confession, contribute to the impression that she is unable to express herself freely, that she is reduced to silence. As if she were like the lone protagonist of the Zerbino commercial, she pleads with the reader: “Hear me, hear my silence. What I speak is never what I speak but something else.” (21) However, true self-expression seems limited by censorship, and she claims defeat: “And who am I to dare to think? What I have to do is give myself over.” (55).

Normativity and “morality” are fundamental for the development of the subject, and Clarice addresses the nature of conforming when she describes herself with words like “taboo to myself, untouchable because forbidden” (61). Similar to shifts in sovereignty performed in torture, in *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche illustrates how the state uses morality to assert its power and subject individuals. “For Nietzsche,” Butler writes, “the subject appears only as a consequence of a demand for accountability” (Butler 46).⁶ Nietzsche theorizes an “economy of paranoid fabrication” that occurs when institutions create “singular and intentional agents” through the phenomenon of guilt and culpability. In other words, there is a backward-operating concatenation, where the morality and normativity that drives authority requires a singular subject that can be interpellated through the construction of guilt. Judith Butler correctly points out the paradoxical nature of power, where the moral subject’s guilt and agency is created precisely to dissimulate the power of the state. Through the illusion of agency, the state becomes a “neutral” party that is designed to judge the subject (78). As if she were aware of this power structure, Clarice can be seen to reject this role of the moral subject, especially when she writes, “I’m tired of defending myself. I am innocent” (36) and “I refuse to be vanquished” (77). Furthermore, she performs an reversal of power in deconstructing the issue of guilt. Her silence and secret is disassociated from the concept of guilt that would subject her to the state: “I leave hidden what needs to be hidden and what needs to spread out its secret. I fall silent. Because I don’t know what my secret is. [...] It’s not a defamatory secret. It’s simply that: secret.” (52-3). She also attempts to liberate herself from this restricting form of subjectivity, and she recognizes the power in doing so: “Yes, what I’m writing you isn’t anybody’s. And that nobody’s freedom

⁶ Nietzsche calls this “metalepsis by which the subject who ‘cites’ the performative is temporarily produced as the belated and fictive origin of the performative itself” (Butler 49).

is very dangerous.” (68). And “Now I shall write you everything that comes to my mind with the least possible policing.” (69).

In the attempt to create a different type of subjectivity and self, linguistic nonnormativity is a key technique of resistance. Language play is a salient characteristic of this text, although given the simplicity of her words, it is more challenging to understand how she creates such complex images. Clarice aptly describes her writing as “a brainstorm [where] one sentence barely relates to the next.” (69). By asserting a nontraditional language, Clarice refuses to recognize the symbolic dominance of the state and thereby asserts her own sovereignty. Metaphor in particular signals her turn to linguistic insubordination. Not prone to neologisms like Arenas and Eltit, the prominent quality of Clarice’s language, rather, is her use of metaphors and analogies. She constantly creates images that either represent her understanding of her self or of what she is momentarily experiencing in her self-writing. This use of metaphor continues to reflect the problem of subjectivity and power, for as Scarry explains, writing about pain requires figurative language and a reliance on analogous constructions in order to translate their interior reality into words (16). Clarice pushes figurative language to an extreme, however, for her use of the construction of “I am ...” is frequently followed by uncanny objects. Apples and chairs, prowling jaguars, a cat devouring her placenta, and anthropomorphic roots of a tree, are some examples of this comparative nature of self-representation. From a poststructuralist perspective, this dependence on figurative language appears related to the problem of representation. And indeed, she speaks algebraically about her being: “[...] ‘X’ is what exists within me .[...] It’s unpronounceable” (65). Nonetheless, finding language to be incapable of reproducing reality, she elects to transcend language norms, forgoing intelligibility for the sake of a potentially greater representation.

Clarice's version of linguistic freedom relies heavily on metaphors, which are significant in terms of expanding language, furthering the potential for representation. Metaphors do depend on linguistic certainty, on distinctions made between literal and figurative senses, a distinction which is based on collective agreements of proper usage. Clarice goes beyond familiar idiomatic language, however, resorting to invention: "To interpret and shape myself I need new signs and new articulations in forms which are found both on this side of my human history and on the other" (15). The epitome of this linguistic creation is her equation of herself with the sum of apples and chairs, a rather inconceivable or untranslatable depiction. The ostranenie of her metaphors relies on pragmatics to determine meaning, making it an effective form of asserting her linguistic agency. In other words, if her writing frequently resembles indirect illocutionary acts in that they destabilize conditions of truth value and reference, meaning is established through the context of the proposition. Clarice explicitly recognizes the pragmatic, collective nature of language, that language works because of conventions:

Each one of us is a symbol dealing with symbols—everything is a point of mere reference to the real. We seek desperately to find a proper identity and the identity of the real. And if we understand each other through the symbol it's because we have the same symbols and the same experience of the thing itself: but reality has no synonyms. (66)

Figurative language is dependent upon the principle of cooperative communication, on the assumption that meaning requires a shared intentionality of language and establish overlapping psychological states (Medina 102). However, José Medina argues, "Metaphor is not a psychological event but a discursive process; what defines metaphor is not an intuition, an instantaneous affair of subjectivity" (126). Rather than a moment of pure, creative expression, figurative language still operates under the constraints of rules of usage. What this means in the

case of Clarice's frequent use of metaphor is that she is indeed engaging in the process of manipulating discourse and the normativity that supports it.

Metaphors occupy an important part in the philosophy of language. According to Medina, "metaphors also have a central ontological function, namely, the redescription of reality" (128). And Clarice is very direct about this being her intention, "I invent you, reality" (61). Clarice's propensity for analogies seems to reflect Nietzsche's theory of the social dimension of metaphors. He writes, "What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding." (Nietzsche qtd in Medina 124). "Fixed, canonical, and binding" are precisely what Clarice's images are not. More than anything, her experimentation plays with the transitive nature of language and reality, both of which respond to power and hierarchies. New metaphors, which unveil the fluidity of symbolic systems, serve as forms of resistance: "I then deliver myself to a heavy life of heavy symbols, like ripe fruit. I choose the wrong similes, but they pull me along in their web" (13). If Clarice demonstrates a metafictional awareness of her frequent incommunicability, she nonetheless sees them as central to her self-realization in writing. Ricoeur suggests that metaphors inaugurate a way of being for us (Medina 130), and through metaphors, she is, as she states in her own words, "being and making [her]self at the same time" (24). She embraces a lack of normative language in order to assert her own sense of autonomy. That she eschews set language patterns reveals both her assertion of individuality and a likely awareness of the cultural dynamics of self-writing and self-making.

Clarice asserts her linguistic sovereignty through original metaphors and “dissimulated citationality” that allows her to create new meanings. This dissimulated citationality occurs through the repetition of images and words, as to create new linguistic conventions within her work. Like Wittgenstein’s illustration of the language game of the beetle in the box, Clarice’s frequent images undertake the exercise of pointing a finger at an unknown entity, which we also repeat without truly knowing what this entity is. In engaging the reader in this language game, she thus demonstrates an absurd linguistic sovereignty, where nonsense serves as a path towards freedom of expression and self-representation. Clarice writes with a “non-word” (14), and she is not concerned about making sense but rather wants “an invented truth” (14). The impact of this dissimulated citationality is that “from the lack of meaning will be born a meaning” (17). At times it does seem that Clarice keeps her perspective in check, though, recognizing the limitations of nonsense. Although metaphors do have the ability to “transfigure reality” and “creat[e] [her] in turn,” rendering her “whole again,” the problem is that her linguistic agency is an “anonymous creation of an anonymous reality justified only as long as my life lasts. And [...] afterward, all I have lived will amount to the experiences of a poor, superfluous being” (15). Furthermore, it is a process of “abstracting oneself and scattering into nothingness” (75). However, this annihilation of the subject of the state seems more desirable to her, for she writes so that her “‘Freedom’ frees itself from the slavery of the word.” (76)

Rather than a life-story associated with reference or truth, Clarice posits a different type of self-writing, one based on a speech act. If her writing is sometimes nonsensical, the power of “invention of pure vibration, without meaning except that of each bubbling syllable” is that her act of writing is an assertion of linguistic sovereignty and individual subjectivity. She is explicit about the speech act value of her writing, characterizing the overall text as a performative “thing-

word”: “Will I end here this ‘thing-word’ by my own voluntary act? [...] I’m transfiguring reality” (53). Similarly, in writing about mirrors in one of her metaphors, she states “No, I haven’t described a mirror-I’ve been one. And the words are themselves, with no discursive tone.” (65). Words are not reflective but rather performative. For this reason, she describe her text as “an onomatopoeia, a convulsion of language [...] not a story but only words which live off of sound.” (19). Clarice significantly finds inspiration in the power of the word “is,” of the irreducibility of the verb to be. “[T]he most important word in the Portuguese language has but a single letter, ‘é,’ ‘is’. It is” (19). As if foreshadowing Judith Butler’s concept of performative speech, she claims to write with a “promiscuous language” (25), one that is transient in the sense of producing a reality through the control of language.

Through language play, *Água Viva* at once engages with and resists the power dynamics that characterize the state’s performance of linguistic sovereignty through which subjects are created. In exploring her self in writing and in asserting her autonomy, she repeatedly employs metaphors that are associated with the body in pain and the power of voice. Moreover, Clarice recognizes the illusion of individuality in the practices of interrogation and confession, of the paradox of how language both creates a subject and limits what can be contained within this subjectivity. In turn she addresses the transitive nature of discourse and reality with a constant use of unusual metaphors. In engaging with nonnormative language and flouting rules of communication, she is able to escape the oppression that is routinely carried out through symbolic oppression. Experimenting with language games allows her to assert an absurd linguistic sovereignty. Perhaps it is not a coincidence, therefore, that the English version of the title echoes Wittgenstein’s belief that “words only have meaning in the stream of life.” Similarly, for Clarice it could be argued that being only has meaning in the stream of life.

Authoritarianism and Linguistic Sovereignty

Symbolic domination or sovereignty of the state arises out of the real or perceived threat of bodily violence carried out through the practices of interrogation, torture, and interpellation. During the times of authoritarianism, brutality is often on display, as in the mutilated and bullet ridden corpse of Chilean singer, Victor Jara, left in the streets. In other cases, corporal punishment, as in the labor camps in Cuba, the mass detainments in soccer stadiums in Chile, and violent crackdowns of protests in Brazil, bodily harm is a vivid part of the public imagination. The fear, censorship, and normativity produced by the performance of sovereignty understandably have an impact on the voice and subjectivities of individuals. As examined in both the last chapter on sexuality and in this one on torture, the body is a central site for the control of the state. By subjecting bodies to pain, political justification and authority (the illusion of legitimacy, even) is, perhaps paradoxically, created. Beyond simply using the body as subject of biopolitics, or control of behaviors, the body is essential because it exist in a dichotomy with the voice of the autonomous subject.

Language, therefore, in both voice and writing, is a source of power. The truths that bolster a regime, and in particular the absolute and arbitrary nature of their rule, are dependent on discourse. Authoritarian rulers disseminate words in such as way as to demonstrate this authority. Their verbosity is juxtaposed with the silence or incommunicable pain associated with repressed bodies, thus explaining the prevalence of torture and interrogation, summary executions, and censorship that characterize any coup d'état. These societies are thus marked by aleatory linguistic rules, arbitrary "truths," and the threat of randomized bodily harm. This performance of sovereignty therefore has the effect of silencing the person. Pain in torture, as Elaine Scarry demonstrates, destroys language, and because language is destroyed, the self's

relationship with the world is destroyed. For this reason, literary display of dislocated words that often seems so detached from the world and from mimetic representation is quite revealing of society. The role of torture in the relationship between individual subject and state, as outlined by Scarry, reflects the same dynamics that exist in the terror of the authoritarian state, in particular in the performance of sovereignty.

In conclusion, there is a relationship between torture, linguistic sovereignty, and hypertextuality in self-writing. While dislocated language reflects the presence of authoritarianism, it also serves as a form of resistance when used as word play. Eschewing the dichotomy of sovereign subject/subject of the state, nonsense and language games present themselves as a third way. For this reason, the illocutionary, performative force of autobiography is what defines this “genre.” It is not what it says but what it does. It is not the message but rather the continued, persistent assertion of “I” in the face of subjugation.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: STATING THE SELF

Severo Sarduy once remarked that Latin American autobiography is “in the closet,” and in a sense he is right (Molloy, “At Face Value” xi). Perhaps an even more fitting metaphorical space, though, would be the closeted space of the torture chamber. The writing of the self is undoubtedly impacted by the experience of living under an authoritarian regime. Such is the case of Cuba during the Castro government, Chile under Pinochet, and Brazil under military rule. Not only are there the obvious challenges of repression and censorship; autobiographical writers also evidence a cultural unconscious shaped by the discursive practices and narratives that create subjects of the state. In other words, since ideologies—and the culture, structures, events, and rituals that transmit them—find their way onto the autobiographical page, there are glimpses, even if only coded, of the markers of authoritarian society. From the hypersexuality, metafiction, and linguistic indeterminacy of these writings, I explore the impact of the discursive practices of biopolitics, vigilance, and interrogation as seen in selected works from Latin America.

Surveillance, surveyance, and torture are practices that define authoritarianism and its forceful reorganization of the nation. They are practices that produce subjects of the state, as Foucault has argued in his works on the panopticon, biopower, and confession. For example, in *Discipline and Punish* he demonstrates how the surveillance of the panopticon prison created self-policing subjects. Furthermore, as states grew in regulatory power, this monitoring took place in documents, such as those of medical and legal discourses (see *I, Pierre Riviere...* and *Psychiatric Power*). In addition to a self-awareness carried out by self-policing, rituals such as

the confession created an inward turn and the illusion of essentialized identities. Foucault argues, however, that behind the confessional narrative of self-determination, power structures determine the appropriate topics of self-analysis, only to subsequently judge and regulate subjects based on this discourse. In this vein, sexuality, particularly in the form of deviant sexualities, became the principal topic of confession, figuring as the normative force of this century, as analyzed in the *History of Sexuality*. From these theories we can extrapolate that repressive states use torture and confession, surveyance of national bodies, and surveillance in order to assert their power and subject the masses. The body—monitored, manipulated, and punished—thus becomes a fundamental site of control through the performances of sovereignty.

In this study I have relied on the works of Reinaldo Arenas (Cuba, 1943-1990), Clarice Lispector (Brazil, 1920-1977), and Diamela Eltit (Chile, 1949-) as case studies from which to understand larger trends in Latin American autobiography. While their styles could not be more different, ranging from Arenas's vivid and playful imagination, to Clarice's poststructural, mystical propensity, and Eltit's Neobaroque treatment of marginality, the use of similar strategies of metafiction, hypersexuality, and dislocated words is striking. These works, including *Antes que anochezca*, *Celestino antes del alba*, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, and *Otra vez el mar* by Arenas, *Lumpérica* by Eltit, and *Água Viva* and *Um Sopro de vida* by Clarice, were all published under authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, all three authors expressed varying degrees of dissidence with the policies of the state. As is well known, the governments of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990), Fidel Castro (1959-2011), and the Brazilian military (1964-1985) were all characterized by censorship, brutal repression, extraconstitutional measures, and summary and grisly executions. Such extreme conditions resulted in notable experimentation with self-writing.

In Latin America, the difficult material conditions of individuals in the face of authoritarianism can also be found to contribute unique innovations in self-writing. During these regimes mimetic self-writing was replaced by more indirect forms of expressing the self. Not only was the threat of censorship a force in limiting realistic depictions, the degree of trauma experienced led certain writers to turn to silence rather than evoke a re-presentation of the past. Moreover, although Gustavo Pérez Firmat supposed that the I voice is weaker in Spanish,¹ it may be more than just a linguistic attribute of self-standing Spanish and Portuguese verbs that do not require subject pronouns, for the I is more tenuous in a non-democratic society. In considering subjectivity to be a continuum between the autonomous individual and the subjected person of the state, the “I” voice becomes a declarative assertion of agency. “Yo,” or “Eu,” is a dispensable pronoun in these languages, one that is perhaps even more diminished when living under authoritarianism. When representation, in both the literary and political senses, fails, the I-voice also fails to have representative power, neither referring to oneself nor containing political agency.

Innovations in contemporary autobiography are influenced by literary trends, which are themselves influenced by historical circumstances. As Earl Fitz has argued, poststructuralism’s attack on metaphysics had profound consequences for the notions of causality, identity, the subject, and truth (*Sexuality* 17), and these categories are indeed precarious in modern self-writings. Contemporary writers do away with the concepts of origin, fixed identities, and of historical objectivity, leading James Olney to theorize that the auto/bio/graphic etymological parts have been deconstructed. Furthermore, in response to poststructuralism, theorists of autobiography have introduced radical parameters of self-writing that transcend the limits of genre. Benveniste, for example, set the stage for theoretical redefinition, illustrating the lack of a

¹ Remark made at the SEMLA conference in Durham, NC in November 2012.

representative function of the first-person pronoun, with the “I” serving not to depict but to signal the moment in which a subject spoke of him or herself. Paul de Man published the seminal argument that autobiography is a tropic gesture of prosopopeia, a textual personification of the self identified by a reading of autobiographical moments in the text. The theory of prosopopeia opened up new possibilities for understanding autobiography across the globe. A calling to life of the textual self by the real self, this specular structure rendered genre-based criteria obsolete. Even lead deconstructionist Derrida dealt with self-writing and perhaps anticipated its metafiction turn, which he understood as “the need of not just passing through the ear, but through all autobiographical-implied-ear, always listening to its own talking (I narrate my own story to myself, that means that I am listening to myself speaking)” (Deanda Camacho 70).

Taking off from this deconstructivist position, autobiography is now regarded as a speech act. Elizabeth Bruss was the first to redefine autobiography as a speech act, including the values of truth, identity, and representation. Her use of the speech act is thus concerned with capturing an authentic autobiographical gesture. Bruss’s speech act theory allows for identification of self-writings while dispensing with genre categories, yet her definition sheds little light on the illocutionary force of these writings. I argue however, that applying speech acts to autobiographical theory can be pushed further, especially in situations where representation breaks down due to trauma or censorship. The texts of this study can be read as illocutionary acts in that they perform rather than reflect or describe mimetically. Hence, even if personal biographical information and the “I” voice are absent, it is still possible to assert a self.

In contemporary self-writings, the deconstructed components of *auto*, *bio*, and *graphein* are at times distinct philosophical questions, at times the same. Self and identity have been

influenced by the fragmentation of modernity, with new understandings of personhood as fluid and discontinuous rather than stable. Furthermore, subjectivity is held to be a complex dichotomy between the collective and individual forces and factors of identity rather than a simple life story. Fragmentation from trauma and an awareness of the phenomenological limits of consciousness also figure in postmodern representations that eschew essentialized notions of autobiographical subjects. Whereas the *bio* element has traditionally depended on the linear narrative structure of a chronological history, contemporary autobiographers frequently reject this model, questioning its representative power and contemplating the shape and image of one's identity/ies. New types of media, such as film and photography, compounded by poststructural theories, have also influenced in the creation of new models of selves, leaving many authors to grapple with the referentiality of the written word or the visual image. Several of the texts in this study represent this quandary as an inescapable trap between imperfect representation and the totalizing nature of reality. Yet, if language is privative for the subject, so too is the increasingly bureaucratic nature of being a subject of the state. In fact, Henrique Fernando Cardoso equates authoritarianism with bureaucracy, for this system entails a reduced potential for individual agency due to the shift from a personal sense of identity to impersonal identification. The role of discursive practices must therefore be read alongside literary evolution, for both have contributed to the unique forms of contemporary self-writing.

The use of poststructuralist and postmodern autobiographical theories allows for the recovery of Latin American texts that have not be recognized as self-writing by traditional definitions, in turn challenging the assumption that autobiography is a western genre that, generally speaking, is foreign to Latin American literature. Interestingly, critics are not all together wrong in valuing collective, national questions over the individual in making this

assessment. Where they do err, however, is in regarding self-writing as merely a narcissistic text, as separate from questions of the nation. The particular demands of autobiography are such that this relationship between experience, subjectivity, and writing take into account, consciously or unconsciously, the discursive practices of the time.

In any case, in order to elucidate a theory on authoritarianism's impact on self-writing, poststructuralist and postmodernist theories applied to autobiographical works provide the vocabulary, perspectives, and literary strategies that allow, first, for these texts to be recognized as self-writing and second, for the traces of authoritarianism to be isolated. Serving as an entry into the study of contemporary self-writings, postmodernism and poststructuralism ultimately lead to the unveiling of constructed practices related to the self, confession, and creation of subjects. Furthermore, by illustrating the fluidity of meaning, they uncover the performance of (and struggle over) linguistic sovereignty that characterizes the dichotomy of individual and state.

While postmodernism is a problematic concept in Latin American literature, its focus on the relationship between art and the discursive practices of authoritarianism allows for autobiography to be theorized organically from within, taking into account specific geographical and historical contexts. The discursive practices studied by Foucault, including surveyance (biopolitics), surveillance (the panopticon), and torture (sexual interrogation and confession), have an impact on the formation of the subject, and can we not argue that these practices profoundly affect the role and structures of language as well, especially in the space of self-writing? I argue that the deconstruction of the auto/bio/graphic elements in the Latin American context is directly related to these discursive practices. Linguistic oppression in the performance of sovereignty affects the agency of the first-person subject, surveyance controls the *bio*, and

surveillance produces a metafictional style of writing. The ultimate impact of authoritarianism is thus a crisis of representation.

The power of the state exercised in these practices leads to a crisis of representing the self, one that plays out in metafiction. In these authors we see techniques of metafiction in collage, ekphrasis and multi-media, and self-referential examination. By understanding metafiction to serve to illustrate the frustrated process of self-writing, we see how available cultural models are shaped by authoritarian society. For example, surveillance technology and visual culture associated with film entail the disappearance of narrative models that use the first-person voice, for a reflective self is difficult to depict in this medium. Artistic models are not without their own ideological implications, as can be seen in Brazilian modernism's quest to define an essential *brasilidade*, which in turn imposes national culture in the attempt to homogenize society. Furthermore, as Valentin Groebner has theorized, models of the self can also be found in bureaucratic documents, meaning that identity becomes easily entangled with recognition by the state, as illustrated in the parodies of official documents included in Arenas's texts. If the examples above illustrate the impact of surveyance and surveillance on models of self-writing and of the material conditions that led to self-policing, these works also reference torture and interpellation, through which regimes flex their power and exercise control over meaning and reality. Torture in particular bears a special relationship with autobiography due to the form's confessional origins and self-writing's importance for testifying in the process of reconciliation.

Across the various works discussed, all three authors provide glimpses of the practices of surveyance, surveillance, and torture. With Arenas being persecuted and later imprisoned for his subversive homosexuality and censored texts, and Eltit protesting through the social art and

symbolic performances of CADA and the Escena de Avanzada, it is no surprise that these two authors have more explicit mentions of the repressions of the state. Clarice, insulated in part by class and age, deals with the state in a much more indirect fashion. Nonetheless, her vocabulary borrows from that of confession and torture, and her images speak of state-enforced normativity and policing. Moreover, metafiction itself can be equated with the inward turn provoked by the panopticon effect of surveillance.

While metafiction signals the difficulty of representing the self, an analysis of sexuality reveals the problematic subjectivity that characterizes authoritarian societies. These writers write sexually, in ways that reflect both their sometimes-shocking singularity as individuals and their participation in the countercultural movements beginning in the late 60s in response to the regulation of sexual bodies through state policies involving gender roles, reproduction, and marriage. Sexual writing, given the role of biopolitics and surveillance, is a way of asserting individuality in the face of official mores, and these authors resist the national romances that support authoritarian rule and they reject essentialized identities created by discourses of power. Their autobiographies necessarily include the state, but their self-writings are a form of resistance and a way of combating the restrictions placed on the self. We see how Arenas writes a queer foundational fiction and how Eltit produces a political pornography as part of challenging the position of the subject of the state. Political pornography, beyond serving as a form of disobedience, conveys a position with respect to the family romance of the nation, in this case, criticizing the paternal figure of Pinochet through sexual means. Clarice, in contrast, rejects this metaphorical, essentialized subject created in the regulatory discourse of confession through focusing on discrete sensations. Furthermore, the scandalous body is not necessarily sexual. The physicality of maternity or androgyny also were considered devious from Catholic norms, as

evidenced in the Brazilian *desbunde* countercultural resistance. In these texts sexuality is also related to language and marginality, with bodily writing responding to the phallogocentric nature of the hegemonic control of symbols. Sexuality is, however, primarily a barometer that measures the relationship between state and individual.

The concept of subjectivity is understood as a spectrum between the autonomous subject and the subjugated object, a range that finds its parallel in Foucault's argument that man is at once an empirical body and a transcendental mind (*The Order of Things*). This transcendental-empirical double further becomes the structural basis of the divide between tortured body and bodiless speech. Torture, as understood by Elaine Scarry, deconstructs language through pain. I argue that a similar performance of sovereignty characterizes language in authoritarian societies due to the effects of torture, interpellation, and terror alike. In other words, the omnipresent permutation of institutional power in everyday facets of these societies has an impact on the use of language. This is not to say that this is indicative of civilian speech writ large in authoritarian societies but that, at least in the autobiographical moment, the production of the subject through language recalls the dynamics of torture that lies latent in cultural unconscious. These contemporary self-writings thus hint at a sustained cultural legacy of confession, where truth and knowledge are produced from bodies and policing. The Inquisition, as the first modern institution, used confession to create bureaucratic and naturalized categories of subjects, creating a legacy with modern day permutations in authoritarian practices.

The demonstration of sovereignty that is carried out on bodies also depends on the manipulation of language. In authoritarianism there is a disconnect between the gruesome realities entailing physical violence and the language used to describe the political landscape. Incessant speeches forge the aggrandizing narratives and "realities" of the state, as to disavow

the violent reorganization of the nation. If rulers speak nonstop, citizens cannot speak freely or at all, creating a body-voice dichotomy that parallels the theories laid out by Elaine Scarry. By using extreme measures of violence, contestatory speech is silenced, and linguistic power operates without checks. Authoritarian regimes exercise dominance over the control of meaning, beginning with the words used to describe the government (like “democracy”). Secondly, the appropriation of vocabulary as euphemisms for their violence employs what Marguerite Feitlowitz calls a “lexicon of terror.” This double speak creates an instability of meaning. With disjunctions between signifieds and signifiers, representation is a Sisyphean task. The fragmentary, chaotic, bodily language of these texts is a testament to the forces of authoritarianism, and of the problematic nature of the formulation of “truth.”

Dislocated words and linguistic indeterminacy thus reflect the fight over linguistic sovereignty. This verbal instability both indicates the existence of repression and functions as a way of asserting the self around the textual echoes of these discursive practices. If meaning and reality are forged out of power, then eschewing normative language opens up the possibility for greater representation of the self. Metaphors, hyperbole, irony, neologisms, and multiple meanings are all techniques of linguistic subversion. Nonsense also occurs in these works, often to reflect the ineffable nature of trauma experienced under authoritarian regimes. Word play becomes a source of agency in that it violates the norms that sustain power. In Wittgenstein’s view, “the process of language learning is, therefore, a process of acquiring autonomy or gaining control in normative practices. This process consists in a gradual shift of responsibility and authority, a developmental progression *from other-regulation to self-regulation*” (Medina 99). Once again we see the role of discursive practices in the formation of self, for language and meaning are intimately tied to self-regulation in a system of linguistic norms. This normativity is

generally discussed as a form of censorship and self-policing. In the case of these three authors, where language rules are not followed blindly, there is an obvious failure of institutional censorship. But beyond simply making nonsense a subversive act, the significance of linguistic indeterminacy lies in the fact that it points to the potential autonomy of the (linguistic) subject.

If this study began with deconstructivist approaches to self-writing leading up to autobiographical definitions related to speech acts, in following the analysis of the impact of authoritarian discursive practices, the notion of self-writing as performative comes full circle. Non-mimetical writing can reflect society in the sense that it conveys the limits of communication and self-determination in the face of authoritarianism. The linguistic precariousness that characterizes authoritarian societies is contested through performative speech that asserts autonomy. Contemporary self-writing, more than saying something, is an illocutionary act that does something. In examining the relationship between self-writings and the political contexts, this project offers new definitions of authoritarianism and autobiography; but in isolation, either of these are perhaps false questions. Ultimately, this is a project that deals with the relationship between the state and the self, and how individuals negotiate the repression of being subjected. As we can see in the texts of Arenas, Clarice, and Eltit, they act out with the body and sex, and they use nonnormative language to introduce chaos into the programmed discourse of the time. In the face of the state, they effectively state the self. Stating the self implies an assertion of subjectivity above the textual ruins of more traditional markers such as the “I” voice or a narrated life story. Speech acts, the performative use of language rather than descriptive use, become necessary when representation fails. Whereas poststructuralism is considered a product of the crisis of modernity, a parallel crisis develops in the case of authoritarianism. Truth, official history, and meaning are unstable categories that are used to

bolster authority and reorganization of states. Stating the self thus also acknowledges the pressures of the state that impact autobiographic writing.

The supposed dearth of self-writings in Latin America stems from the disappearance of more traditional markers of autobiography, such as the loss of the first person voice and chronological narrative. Contemporary self-writings are necessarily more abstract, encoded, and private, particularly in the case of non-hegemonic writers. This project continues the literary history carried out by Sylvia Molloy in *At Face Value*, beginning where her book left off, in 1959, with the advent of the Cuban Revolution. Molloy traces the evolution of self-writing from the portrayals of leaders of the state and literati to the inclusion of women and subalterns (as in the case of the former slave, Juan Francisco Manzano). Alongside this shift, self-writings grew increasingly more personal, culminating in the frankness with which contemporary writers portray sex and the body. The writers examined by Molloy began to introduce structural experimentation, as with the erosion of chronology and a narrative teleology, but in the second half of the twentieth century we see the crisis of representation culminate in the use metafiction in place of mimesis. Considering these trajectories, the third quality that I have identified, dislocated words or dysphasia, points to a level of experimentation that remains rather unusual for the field of autobiography, which holds on tightly to the idea of representation, likely due to the continued belief in the representative function of “I.”

Over the course of this study, it becomes apparent that not all works equally exhibit the techniques of hypertextuality, hypersexuality, and linguistic indeterminacy. In keeping with postmodernism’s break with “grand narratives,” societal factors affect individuals differently and variations of authoritarianism exist from country to country. Furthermore, we see a return to realism, as is particularly evident with Reinaldo Arenas’s shift from ludic Boom and post-Boom

writings to his more straightforward rewriting in *Antes que anochezca*. In a parallel fashion, and as a result of the decline of the experimental Boom novels and a return to realism, referentiality, and readability, the *testimonio* flourished in Latin American literature, particularly in the late 1960s and 1970s. Two events in particular legitimized—and popularized—the form: in 1970 the Casa de las Américas established a prize for testimony and in 1992 Rigoberta Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her 1983 *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*. In equal parts the result of the championing of politically committed art in the aftermath (and politics) of the Cuban Revolution and the height of postcolonial and subaltern studies in academic circles, the *testimonio*² was designed to give voice to the oppressed, marginalized, and culturally ignored populations as well as to document and protest human rights violations stemming from the violence of state repression, civil wars, and economic and racial colonization (specific events include the 1968 Tlateloco Massacre in Mexico, the Dirty Wars of the Southern Cone, and massacres of indigenous groups in Guatemala). It bears noting, that despite the overlap in dates with the books by Arenas, Eltit, and Lispector, most *testimonios* were either not written from within a country during authoritarian rule or were not protesting the policies of the state. In many cases, testimonies were not produced organically, rather they involve an editor-*gestor* interviewing subaltern subjects as to explore the concept of the “Other.”

This study is limited to works written while living under authoritarian rule and that involve a foregrounding of the self rather than the Other. Many others examples of self-writing were written in exile or in the aftermath of oppression, though these conditions result in textual differences. The return to realism and readability likely occurs due to the need to “recover” the

² Other prominent examples of this form include *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966) by Miguel Barnet, *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (1969) by Elena Poniatowska, *Si me permiten hablar* (1978) by Domitila Chúngara, *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* (1980) by Jacobo Zimmerman, and unacknowledged precursor *Quarto de despejo* (1960) by Carolina María de Jesús.

past in the wake of trauma, and for this reason memoirs, focusing on the creation of a individual teleology from these recollections, have become increasing common over the past couple of decades. The current memoir boom in English and Latino literatures appears destined to spread to Latin American literature.

Authoritarianism makes writing about the self difficult, if not impossible. Yet strategies of metafiction, hypersexuality, and word play allowed writers to harness the performative power of self-writing. Moreover, subjugating discursive practices are employed by most states in varying degrees, and these “autobiographics” can be found in works written outside of authoritarianism, such as the details of sexuality and abortion in Irene Vilar’s *Impossible Motherhood*. As poststructuralism continues to have a widespread impact, experimentation with structure and more complicated notions of the self leave open ample creative possibilities for contemporary autobiographical writing. In analyzing the relationship between artistic models, the state, and self-writing, this project aims to pave the way for further autobiographical studies in Latin American literature. It suggests that structures and understandings of the self will continue to evolve, and that in the intersection between literary trends, discursive practices, and performative speech acts, more instances of stating the self can be found.

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