Promises Beyond Memory

ARCHIVES, ART, *and the* AFTERLIVES *of* VIOLENCE *in* LATIN AMERICA

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For Paul

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INTRODUCTION

Moving Stories: A Chance Encounter

Rummaging in the archive, researchers repeatedly consult items never intended for their eyes. Certainly, there can be the uncomfortable sensation that you are intruding into other people's intimacies, reading their documents and contemplating their photographs—especially with letters, of course, words explicitly for the addressee.[1] So it was for me one day in Santiago, Chile, at the archive of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, an important organization that offered assistance to the victims and the families of the detained-disappeared during Pinochet's military dictatorship, when I came across a letter addressed to someone I know in the United Kingdom. Someone well known, that is: the film director Sally Potter. The case file I was consulting was that pertaining to a young woman disappeared by the regime in 1974, and the letter was from her father, reaching out as part of a campaign organized by the Vicaría to seek international support. It began:

Santiago, 30 May 1979

Dear Miss Potter,

In view of the laudable work that you and many others are doing to help the cause of the relatives of detenidos desaparecidos (detained-disappeared) in Chile, I write to you as a member of this group. It is very important for us to be able to count on wide international help to put pressure on the military government in Chile so that they might for once and for all account for the whereabouts of the thousands of people who have disappeared after being detained by the security forces. . . .

And it continues:

I am writing to you as the father of Carmen Bueno. My daughter Carmen was arrested by members of the DINA, the Pinochet regime's secret police, on 29th November 1974.

Señor Bueno continues to tell the harrowing story of his daughter's disappearance, and recounts the family's indefatigable efforts to uncover what had happened to her. I will return in detail to Carmen's story in chapter 2, but for now the point is that the letter in the archive, in addition to delivering its frisson of recognition, put me in an unusual position. I wondered what was the right thing to do with it. I was curious about whether Sally Potter had ever received it, and what she might recall. As it happened, she and I had recently been published together, where she had written precisely on the topic of letters, those exchanged between herself and John Berger, commenting that "distance is no impediment to closeness with John."[2] Encouraged by this sentiment, I responded to the letter not as simply a document in the archive, not only as a historical document with information of interest for my research, but as the letter that it still was. I undertook to send it on, just as if I had found an unposted envelope in the street and decided to carry it to the postbox, albeit in the form of a series of photographs that I sent via email. And I waited, with the hope that John Berger himself described as the excitement of a "little future" that accompanies posting off a letter or a parcel.[3]

Sally Potter wrote back to me. Of course, the story touched her: "This is heartbreaking," she wrote. The letter had never arrived in 1979, making me the tardy postal service that delivered it some forty years late. Had she received it, she assured me, she would have done anything and everything she could to help: "Solidarity is one of my favourite words." She ended her message beautifully: "Now, across the years, I feel deeply linked to Carmen and weep for her."[4]

The purpose of research in such archives—archives that comprise documentary evidence of widespread state violence, that is—is not usually to seek out individual messages to deliver to named recipients. Nor to make others weep. Rather, archives are usually interrogated beyond the initial purpose of the documents in order to understand more general historical patterns. An archive of state violence such as the archive of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad is an opportunity to understand historical features and practices such as how the systematic repression of Pinochet's Chile was organized following the coup on September 11, 1973: how the detainees were treated, how legal cases were brought and responded to, how resistance emerged and was sustained, and so on.[5] Such was the task undertaken by the team that has written the only extant book dedicated to this archive to date.[6] But arguably such research is also characterized by a desire to make connections, to consider those "missed appointments" with the past, and to bring these moving stories from the past into connection with the present, to make the past matter.[7] And if a sense of mourning accompanies and animates our research, it is because we too are moved by our encounters with the details of violence documented in the archive and are compelled to seek out new audiences for the stories found there. What researcher would not be affected by the precious personal stories of individuals subjected to incredible violence, the lists of names, the "ditto, ditto" of the archive, the mass of ultimately futile papers such as the habeas corpus filed and ignored, and of course the faces, the photographs?[8]

On the back of one of the portrait photographs held at the Vicaría's archive, another young woman—Jacqueline Drouilly Yurich—had written "this pretty smile of mine is only for my beloved Marcelito, 7 sept '70."[9] The loving inscription is betrayed by the context in which I came to see her smile, and hold that photograph. "What we mourn for the dead is the loss of their hopes," wrote Berger, on the very same page as he spoke of the anticipatory hope that accompanies the sending of a letter, of imagining its receipt.[10] Indeed. And in this atmosphere—of unimaginable violence, of mourning, of hopes lost—the research becomes a careful work of weaving that takes the stories that "belong to" others, but which touch and often inspire us, in order to lift them out of the archive and reconsider them. Not to fall into a collective melancholia, but for what they might collectively tell us, how they might offer a critical prism for an analysis beyond their time. Berger himself suggested as much, saying that we are charged with retelling the stories, of seeking out meaning, precisely because we are "beyond" that time and have the opportunity to offer a narration of them, to "grind the lens" through

FIGURE 1.1. Photograph of Jacqueline Drouilly Yurich and reverse. Source: FUNVISOL, with permission.

which they are seen. "Those who read or listen to our stories see everything as through a lens," he wrote, and "if we storytellers are Death's Secretaries, we are so because, in our brief mortal lives, we are grinders of these lenses."[11]

Such a task is fraught with important questions of responsibility, with ethical and political consequences. Writing about these stories and events involves making decisions at each stage, not least because our research process inevitably cuts into the past, shaping how it is re-turned and how it reappears in the world. If there is a responsibility to "take our turn," to be part of the intergenerational work that allows stories of past violence and, perhaps more so, of past *resistance*, their passage through time and space, it is also the case that, when we seek to fulfill a promise to remember, we assume a curatorial role vis-à-vis the past. In caring for it, we inevitably engage in fashioning it, editing and rearranging it like curators, conferring value on what we preserve and what we present. Our writing is marked by our own attentions and so too our inattentions, as it is by our contemporary political contexts and concerns. Likewise, it is marked by our aesthetic proclivities and judgments, as well as the technologies we have at our disposal. Indeed,

since no promise to remember can truly hope to reconstruct the past without marking it in the process, "taking our turn" is never a perfect recirculation of past experiences and is not well understood as circular. Fritsch has offered the figure of the ellipsis that appears—and disappears—in Derrida's *Rogues*, understood as a mathematical figure, an oval cut from a cone (at an angle to its axis), as the better image.[12] The nonlinear and "bobbing rotation" of an elliptical wheel describes the turn we take better than a circular one, not just because we are likely to leave something out—as in the other sense of the word *ellipsis*, to omit something and so to fall short—but also because we are obliged to "take a turn" that in its re-turning risks veering off course.[13] Some of the most creative and influential recent writing on archives has argued that the inadequacies of the archive as a record of the past leaves no option but to embrace that veering, to engage in "critical fabulations," imaginative work that elaborates on fragments in order to begin to address—and so redress—the gaping absences in the records of violent pasts. Saidiya Hartman's point is not a methodological imperative that suggests that all archives must be approached through fabulation, however; rather, it is that in order to produce the prism for analysis, critical work must decide what route to take when faced with the lacunae and constraints of traditional archives, including allowing ourselves to pursue the risk of a speculative, creative dimension to the promise of memory.[14] Embracing, in other words, the responsibility of the role we assume as we move these stories, setting them in motion.

Promising Archives

This book arises from research I have conducted in Latin America over the last decade, where, as part of projects to consider the different forms and forums for the work of memory taking place in the aftermath of violence, I have spent time at several archives, with documents such as the files of Carmen Bueno (to which I turn in more detail in chapter 2) as well as interviewing the archivists and other workers who have set up these institutions. Arising as a mode of "answering" past violence, each of the archives exists and understands itself as an important pedagogical resource for educating present and future generations, but also as having critical force, standing guard against the reemergence of the conditions of erasure in which the materials were gathered. Each has been constituted and maintained in order to offer resources for explorations of several different kinds, for retellings of past atrocities, and for promoting deeper understanding. But this minimal description barely begins to convey the affective and the political investment

in these archives, the collective outrage, the forms of solidarity, and the political hope they embody. They are first and foremost "archives of dissensus," to use Ann Laura Stoler's term, ones that have collected papers, testimonies, and other materials without attempting to explain the *arkhē*, the commencement of violence, nor to make commands over how its retelling should proceed.[15] They reject the power formations that establish archives as technologies of rule, seeking instead to build an archive that "invites dissension . . . allowing other defiant political visions, aesthetic possibilities and affective reflections."[16] These archives seek to arm the future—wisely, as it turns out—against those who will ignore or willfully rearrange the past.

These are archives that mean to invite new explorations of the past, promoting, as each of them does, an expansive use of their collected materials unconfined by the discipline of history. They are themselves infused with the potentiality of archival imagination, where the notion of returning is also a rereading, a restaging of the past that invites an attentive creativity that pushes at the boundaries of the very idea of the archive, inviting the breach.[17] Insofar as this is true, these archives are not only "answering" past violence but posing ongoing questions to both the present and the future. In this they are key examples of what some have recently started to call "transitional" or "justice" archives, but ones I will approach in an expansive sense of what that might mean.[18] Before I set out why and how I wish to situate the work of the archives in relation to other sites and modes of attending to the past—within an ecology of related endeavors—I will briefly introduce the three archives at the center of the research.

The FUNVISOL archive in Chile, where I found Señor Bueno's letter, was not conceived at the outset as an archival project at all, but results from the decision to preserve the papers of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad as records of a labor whose purpose was immediate and urgent: to help those targeted and affected when, following the coup of 1973, hundreds of people detained by the military failed to reappear. Established under the auspices of the Catholic Church to offer legal advice and representation, as well as financial and social support, to the relatives of the detained-disappeared and others affected by the detentions and violence, the Vicaría can be understood to have taken on the administrative and protective role that the state reneged on for those it targeted. Resisting the Chilean state's attempt to cast out these citizens, its workers offered their services precisely to insist that these people remained part of the citizenry.[19] When the organization closed in 1992, it had amassed more than 47,000 individual case files, and more than 80,000 documents. The preservation of these papers as the main holdings of the FUNVISOL

archive conferred value upon them and established them as shared "social objects," and indeed the archive has become a valuable resource, consulted not least as a source for legal cases pertaining to the human rights abuses perpetrated.[20]

By its very existence, the archive confirms and seeks to extend the solidarity that was practiced by this remarkable organization in the past. While it is of course a reluctant archive that never wished to exist, it has been consulted repeatedly within trials of perpetrators by family members looking for information, and of course by academic researchers. To preserve these materials was a decision intended to offer the opportunity for such uses, to enable the legal, genealogical, scholarly, and creative rearticulations that arise from the work of those who consult it. So, although it is true that there is nothing inherently celebratory or "promising" about the archive as such, FUNVISOL shelters the documentation of past violence as a gift, a resource open to new explorations and new routes through its holdings.[21] Moreover, its maintenance insists upon the ongoing inclusion of those who have died, and their families and friends, within political discourse, providing as it does the conditions and materials to make that hope possible. However incomplete and incoherent an archive may be—with often frustratingly scattered contents, absences, or lack of authorial guidance—the gamble is that there are or will be those who seek out its holdings, enfolding those whose lives and experiences are captured there into the nation's understanding of its People. In this the archive is, as Arjun Appadurai has written, more like "an aspiration than a recollection."[22] He suggests, "We should see all documentation as intervention, and all archiving as a collective project. Rather than being a tomb of the trace, the archive is more frequently the product of the anticipation of collective memory."[23] A speculative endeavor itself, in other words, the FUNVISOL archive imagines a future in which its collection has an important continuing role to play. By exploring it and seeking to propose an analysis of what it could be said to shelter, my work means to respond to and affirm that hope.

The speculation entailed in the setting up of an archive has taken an ambitious scale in Colombia, where, as part of the stuttering attempts to bring about a cessation to the violence of its decades-long armed conflict, the government tasked the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (CNMH) with the extraordinary work of creating an archive of archives, literally a gathering of all the archives that exist around the country. The aim, enshrined in law, was explicit that the gathering of such information would aid the nation toward the "clarification" it needed as to how and why the widespread and horrific

armed conflict occurred. As I discuss in more detail in chapter 3, the CNMH archive was imagined as part of a transitional program that would gather all available knowledge from across the various territories of the country, digitalizing it to ensure its availability as widely as possible. The academic researchers at the head of the project, themselves well read in the philosophy of history and violence, including Walter Benjamin's writing on the philosophy of history, were deeply aware of the risks of such work, and of their responsibility in attempting to deliver on so ambitious an endeavor.[24] From across the country, they collected the accounts of those who had witnessed the atrocities, or their aftermaths, and materials that helped convey these accounts in various ways. Understanding that the archive's materials would be overwhelming and risk being the sky-high pile of debris on which Benjamin's angel of history fixed his gaze, the center also produced many reports on different incidents in the armed conflict, seeking to set out their understanding of them succinctly but within an analytic frame. Yet at the same time, they understood that their assignment was precisely not to "narrativize" the archive ahead of time. Instead, they sought to construct the "archive of archives" as a gift for the future, as a proposition to which future actors might respond, and indeed, which requires that response in order to breathe life "back" into the archival body. As such, the archive is a supreme example of Derrida's concept of *survivance*, explained in his last seminars as the possibility of living-dead machines: "*a dead thing that resuscitates each time* a breath of living reading [*sic*], each time the breath of the other or the other breath, each time *an intentionality intends it and makes it live again* by animating it."[25]

That the archive holds but does not really seek to enclose, that it is porous in that it exceeds its boundaries, calling out for and requiring the reader or user to fulfill its purpose, is also highly pertinent for the third archive chosen for the research, located in Argentina. The point is reflected in its very name: Memoria Abierta, "open memory." This archive was always conceived of as a resource that protected the knowledge built up by the groups that organized themselves to resist the violences perpetrated during the last dictatorship (1976–83). Understanding the importance of the information built up by those active in challenging the military state actions, a network of organizations—including the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora, CELS, APDH, Familiares, and SERPAJ—established Memoria Abierta as an umbrella organization to coordinate and strengthen the links between them, motivated in large part by the concern that the democratic government of the time was turning its attentions to a notion of

reconciliation, a term that in Argentina carries negative associations as it was understood as the state's euphemism for terminating the pursuit of justice or legal investigation of past atrocities.[26] These civil organizations fought strenuously against that course of action, and one of their responses was to seek to organize the documents held by each of their organizations, to pool their knowledge, as it were, and ensure their availability for widespread deployment whenever the need arose. The archive of Memoria Abierta is actually dispersed therefore among several organizations and buildings, all of which are searchable nevertheless through its single integrated catalogue. Alongside this coordinating work, at the heart of the archive, and what its key workers regard as their greatest achievement, is the audiovisual archive of witness and survivor statements. Set up at a time when Argentina's so-called amnesty laws made the prosecution of perpetrators seem unlikely, this ambitious project sought to interview all those willing to set down their stories. Its resulting collection of video testimonies is extensive and is now regarded as exemplary for similar projects, with the expertise of the team requested across the continent. This project explicitly prepared the archive for those seeking out testimonies, whether these would be in relation to the hoped-for trials—which finally arrived with the Kirchner government (2003–7) and has seen over a thousand people convicted of crimes against humanity—or in relation to other projects that might constitute their own forms of juris-writing through their distinct modes of informing public understanding and opinion.[27] Memoria Abierta is open in its very structure, therefore, being a network of organizations that formed in the context of the imposition of limitations on prosecutions, that furthermore and explicitly invites users to consult its holdings with an explicit hope that in doing so its contents will circulate in other contexts within and beyond Argentina. The porosity of the archive, then, an always relational calling beyond its own boundaries, is built into the structure and constitutes the promise of Memoria Abierta by design.

If the archive is by definition an attempt to "pre-occupy the future," as Jacques Derrida commented, an attempt to determine our future preoccupations ahead of time, these archives of dissensus are playing the same game.[28] Despite their distinctive conditions of emergence and contents, all share a heightened reflexivity about their role and purpose. They understand the critique of the archive that has repeatedly drawn attention to the omissions and constraints of archives, especially where the archive is the trace of the exercise of or encounter with hierarchical power, repeating its modes of registering and capture, classifying our worlds and simultaneously committing elisions and exclusions.[29] Insofar as a society's understanding of its past, and

the future's understanding of our present, is at the mercy, in this sense, of the archive, these archives assert themselves onto the scene. "Which documents, which images, which stories do we want to send forward into the future?" they ask, as they select, organize, and maintain their contents, seeking to insist that these should be granted passage and have a chance to survive, to be perused, to be chosen for the future's attentions. As such, the archives that I have visited and studied embody an optimism and are structured around a promise, albeit one without guarantees. It is a promise *beyond memory*, moreover, since these archives' desire is not merely archival, as it were, not only a wish that the names, facts, and circumstances of violence are documented and remembered. They are also animated by past an-archival concerns and future an-archival moments, alive to the implications that the archive is not definitive nor over, so must remain open and attentive "to what exceeds it, to what is anarchival in the archive, to that moment or decision . . . when we affirm or promise a text for the future."[30] Moreover, if the archive is imbued with an optimism, it extends beyond the fact that the past is recorded, has been written down or otherwise inscribed, sheltering it and making it available to be recalled. It hopes too that the facts and stories held there might also be consequential, that they might reverberate, and move across the boundaries of the archive in order to act somehow, now and in the future. These are the political and ethical stakes, reflecting the importance attached to memory work that performs a work of care for the past in the name of a more complex reparation than the term *memory* is usually thought to imply. Certainly, this hope is intensely felt in societies such as Argentina's and Chile's, where the biopolitical caesuras so violently enacted by the last dictatorships still reverberate in civil society and political discourse, and in Colombia too, which is still attempting to fully emerge from the decades of armed conflict that produced such horrific scenes of violence, despite the strides made by the 2016 Peace Agreement.[31] In my analysis, I underscore the dynamics of preservation and desired intervention that accompany the selected archives, sites, and activities I have been privileged to study, exploring how they conduct their memory work in order to enter this wager on—and for—the future.

From "Archive Versus Repertoire" to Ecologies of Practices

In writing about the porosity of the archive I also wish to emphasize that the archive is of course only one modality of attempting to enact a promise of memory, to fulfill a sense of obligation to past lives lost to violence. As Diana Taylor put it some years ago in her influential *The Archive and the Repertoire*,

the study of cultural memory in Latin America, and elsewhere, needs to reach beyond archives, to attend to what she termed the *repertoire*, the embodied practices that are as important in the transmission of knowledge.[32] It is worth recalling her argument that embodied memory practices have been delegitimized over written forms of documentation both theoretically and historically, meaning that nonverbal practices—she mentions indigenous forms of dance, ritual, and cooking—have not been considered forms of knowledge.[33] If colonial authority was routed in written forms of authority, the rift between the supposedly enduring (the archival) and the ephemeral (the repertoire) has continued to be articulated, shoring up the hierarchical relations of coloniality. Against this history, Taylor's central thesis was that both the archive and the repertoire should be understood as "important sources of information" in a "constant state of interaction," working "in tandem . . . [and] alongside other forms of transmission."[34] Our study of cultural memory must be expansive, she argued, and go beyond texts and archives to consider the roles, for example, of political protest as performance, of theater and of visual interventions. It is an argument that has become familiar and implicit not only in Taylor's own more recent work but across the now rich and expansive subdisciplines of performance and memory studies.[35] So do these axioms inform the approach I adopt in this work, not least in the sense that it became necessary for my research to leave the archive, as it were, to explore where the stories *from* the archives also appear and circulate beyond its perimeters. It is for this reason that I will wander not only through but away from the archives introduced above, setting them in relation and contrasting their modes of archiving the past, especially artistic practices such as those of Colombian contemporary artist Erika Diettes discussed in chapter 4. It goes without saying that institutionalized archives do not have a monopoly on feeling obliged to attend to the past, and engagements and reinscriptions of the past into the present are much broader than those we meet within the archival stacks. There is no archival "house arrest" that encloses traces of the past within explicitly archival institutions; the promise of memory is performed multiply and variously in what I understand as a much wider "ecology of practices," a phrase I borrow from the work of Isabelle Stengers, to whose thought I return below.[36]

While it may be tempting to regard the repertoire as the domain of anti-hegemonic resistance to the archive, this was never Taylor's view; the distinction will certainly deconstruct if interrogated, she noted, not least because the idea of the archive as unmediated and unchanging is "mythical."[37] As I have intimated in introducing the archives above, not only are these

archives themselves modes of resistance, but also the work of selecting, classifying, and presenting the archival is a social process, contested and enacted as a mode of intervention that is itself embodied. Conversely, many embodied practices refer to and include "materials from the archive" that shape them without determining them absolutely, as with Taylor's example of the relationship between the text of a play and the performance of it.[38] There is no question, then, and as I also illustrate throughout this book, that the distinction between the archive and the repertoire exceeds any simple "text versus body" distinction. Many of the practices I consider in this book, similarly, have a relation to an existent archive, are themselves forms of archiving or constitute complex requests to be archived. And sometimes, even where their concern is ostensibly anarchival, even anti-archive, they remain nonetheless to be marked by a *concern* with the archive and with the future at which its promise of memory aims.

Beyond the archive, the scenes of my own research have been various—including the art gallery, the cinema, the memory museum, the law court, the ex–detention centers that have become sites of memory—as my concern has been how within these forums, people gather to establish or to (re)-consider their relation to the past. As my research has taken me between these different spaces, I have become intrigued by how the various types of forum and their respective modes of approach differ from each other. I ask, in other words: How is violence recalled or conjured up differently, how is it dramatized via distinct means, how is it approached, propositioned, and judged according to the specific constraints and prompts from the space in which it appears? This vocabulary and line of questioning anticipate my use of Stengers's arguments.

This is not the place to provide an extended exegesis of Stengers's thought, but a few thoughts might help attune the reader to some of the arguments to be found in what follows.[39] Given that the "work of memory" entails a plea for facts from the past to be returned, remembered, and passed on, its various activities are motivated by a desire that people will connect with that past and continue to be concerned with it. In order for any such '"connection"—or *rapport*, a "relation that matters" as Stengers also puts it—and "concern" to be produced, moreover, requires some sort of forum or gathering in which an assembled company can be brought before those facts and convinced of their import.[40] Yet there can be no certainty that those gathered will in fact be concerned, or that they will be concerned in the manner that those arranging the forum imagined, that they will, in our case, pledge to remember or "learn from the past." If no rapport between the evidence brought

from the past and the imaginations of those present arises, if no connection is achieved or if it goes awry in some sense, the promise of memory "fails." This is certainly the risk within art forums, in museums of memory or galleries exhibiting work by artists, where the promise of memory requests the attention of visitors who are under no obligation to be concerned with the presentation of past events. Since there are no guarantees of engagement, artists and curators deploy all manner of strategies to attract our attentions, to infect us with their concerns and purpose, to produce an encounter and to make us care, as they do, for the past.[41] Even transitional justice mechanisms like truth and reconciliation committees, or criminal trials, that gather people within quasi or actual legal forums, have to engage in what Stengers terms *dramatization*—laying out evidence, calling up precedent and performing acts of persuasion—in order to convince their audiences of the truths at stake. The "force" of law and the obligation of those present within a court to be concerned with the presentation of evidence from the past are insufficient. In order to connect audiences to events, to connect juries or judges to evidence, to connect evidence to rules, there must be a dramatization that employs the appropriate apparatus to achieve engagement and convince those present.[42]

As this implies, what is termed *evidence* is not self-evident precisely because it has to be set in motion, *moved* in order to move those who gather around it. "Evidence is what is used to persuade," writes Thomas Keenan of US legal trials, for it does not decide and "nor does it settle or conclude or determine"; rather, evidence is a *question*.[43] Indeed, the seemingly unmediated evidence that comes before a court—witnesses, photographs, bones—calls for a *staging*. In relation to art, as I will have occasion to repeat throughout this book, no artwork "speaks for itself," which is not at all the same as saying that the conclusions to which they may lead us are arbitrary. And to return to the archive, unless it can get *out* of itself, whether through technological innovation—such as digitalization—or through the attentions and creativity of intermediaries like researchers, artists, curators or lawyers, it will struggle to be a forum that can gather interest and persuade others to make its contents "matters of concern," to recall Latour's influential argument. "The critic is . . . the one who assembles . . . who offers the participants arenas in which to gather," he wrote.[44] Thus it has been important, for my purpose, to consider how the archives are consulted, deployed, and referenced elsewhere, as when academics—myself included—or lawyers consult the archives to research a case, or a curator uses an archival image within a museum exhibit. That these different spaces or forums each have their own specific arts of

dramatization, their own apparatus promoting different modes of attention, different possibilities for persuasion as well as different constraints on what is admitted as relevant, means that both what and how one comes to be convinced—and the implications of that conviction—varies (which is not to argue that these truths are necessarily contradictory, nor even that they are isolated from one another). As mentioned, Stengers speaks of an "ecology of practices," and it is in this sense that I approach the spaces and forums where this research has taken place.[45] Through the chapters that follow, I consider their modes of problematization, their methods of animating those problems and their modes of paying attention to them in order to explore how these practices conduct their attempts to gather others, to persuade or provoke them (or merely to interest them). Attending to a diversity of practices, then, appreciating their divergences while allowing the shared resonances that exist between them to be heard, *Promises Beyond Memory* seeks to place the archival work that takes place within institutions that understand themselves as archival within these several related endeavors.

Outline of the Book

Academic work has its part to play in the ecology of practices that engage with the promise of memory, providing as it does another opportunity for stories from the past to circulate and be enfolded within conversations elsewhere, carrying these stories to new forums and new readers, aiding their survivance. Chapter 1 revolves around the question of which stories are proffered the chance to survive—or not. It takes the reader on a journey to return to those stories of past violence, opening with the trip I made to Chacabuco, an abandoned nitrate mining town in the Atacama desert, some 100 kilometers from the coastal town of Antofagasta, which was used by the Pinochet regime in 1973–74 to house an estimated 1,200 political prisoners. If the purpose of that trip was to search for stories, for how places hold stories, it became more about the complexities of how stories are articulated and passed on, how accounts of the past—along with the objects, photographs, even ghosts that may also be said to preserve stories—have to appear, be perceived, be invited, or made to speak. This is a precarious, contingent, and complex process. While multiple stories may exist potentially—and really—in a place-as-archive, they are crystalline, needing to be discovered and turned in the light to be revealed. Once these potential stories are actualized, furthermore, in order to stand a chance of surviving, they need witnesses of some sort, who must pay attention, be willing and able to receive and

carry them elsewhere. All these requirements are complex and fraught, and also, as this chapter explores, interrupted and constrained. On that visit to Chacabuco, I was traveling with my research partner, Mario Di Paolantonio, with whom I shared the enormous privilege of meeting and interviewing—unexpectedly—two survivors of the detention center, who with much generosity and good humor, remembered their time there for us, passing the baton between themselves as they sought to give an account that could convey the horror as well as the extraordinary creativity and political camaraderie of imprisoned life. Simultaneously, they located their remembrance within the conditions of its telling, mindful as they were of the resonances of their story with other situations and peoples in past and in contemporary Chile, that is, with the former mine workers and the Mapuche and other indigenous peoples. Exercising caution over claims of ownership of the themes their stories raised, the care they took over setting down their stories for the record is punctuated by the sense of a future reception through which new entanglements might be ushered forth.

Returning to the FUNVISOL archive with which I began above, chapter 2 concerns the case of Carmen Bueno Cifuentes. The chapter is an extended exploration of how a single casefile that lives in the archive might be asked to tell the story of a disappearance. How might the documents and photographs held there speak of the forms of radical exposure to state power that she and her relatives experienced at that time? What does the sheer number of legal documents, which accrued as the family pursued every avenue to try to locate her, tell us? Can the typeface *talk*? What can a consideration of the photographs offer? Remembering Foucault's comment that the archive holds the details of ordinary people only because they were captured in the "flash of power," the chapter considers the documentation of Carmen Bueno's disappearance as indicative of a power struggle around the very idea of a People's democratic sovereignty.[46] Having experienced a modern existence in which the state shielded their lives, the detained-disappeared and their families were subject to the dictatorship's attack and distortion of their place and status in relation to the nation-state. If biopolitics had disciplined and invested the bodies of those who constituted the People as such, a military coup that hands power back to a dictator-sovereign also necessarily involved a scrabbling back of those forms of investiture. But this retraction—like the dissolution of the king's body in Eric Santner's provocative analysis of the transition to modern sovereignty—was never destined to be a neat achievement, precisely because just as becoming the People requires them to respond to those forms of investiture at the level of the flesh—at the level

of their hopes, desires, and expectations for life—so too the removal of that positionality imposed a profoundly disorientating shock. My focus is on what insights gleaned from the archive might tell us about that symbolic investiture and its attempted removal, as Carmen's family refused to surrender their status as citizens, pursuing a battle about how the bodies of the disappeared were to be understood. A twist in this tale moves the consideration onto another form, and forum, of representing the People, as Carmen herself was an image-maker, involved in Chile Films, and her boyfriend, Jorge Müller, kidnapped at the same time as Carmen and also one of the *desaparecidos*, was the cameraman for the famous film that captured the events preceding the coup, *The Battle of Chile*.[47] Thus the chapter considers what cinema's potential is to continue the exploration of the contortions of attempting to be a citizen at that time in Chile's history.

As mentioned above, chapter 3 moves to Colombia where—drawing on interviews with members of the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, conducted with the invaluable help of my research team on that project—I explore the methods by which the Center attempted to fulfill the task of creating an "archive of archives" of the violence that had (and has) caused decades of suffering. This remit, stipulated by law, and incorporated eventually into the 2016 Law, was vast and destined to be unwieldy. With extraordinary care and intelligence, the team—working under Gonzalo Sánchez, the first academic director—created a subtle methodology by which to reach out to communities across the country, to listen and help articulate the experiences of the people of Colombia. The chapter reflects upon the logic of this work and the archive at its heart, showing how in building this archive, from which so much was expected, the team had to address key difficult questions: How can an archive be created that could do justice to the complexity of the armed conflict while fulfilling the remit to provide clarification on how the country arrived at this situation? Which objects need to be included in an archive so that it can bespeak the experiences of those who have lived and those who continue to live through it? How could the archive be inclusive of those who did not believe they held an archive, maybe did not believe in archives?

The task was not without its challenges and controversies, especially as the leadership of the Center changed with the change of government and few of the original personnel remained. Interestingly for the perspective developed through this book, the Center was also then given the further task of developing the script and curatorial plans for a national museum of memory, now in the process of being built in Bogotá. The chapter discusses how the

team responded to this proposition—with bemusement at first, then as an intellectual challenge to imagine how a museum might embody the promise of memory into the future. The chapter attends to the draft of a conceptual script for the museum that the team produced, attending to how it attempts to avoid the dangers of presenting a closed narrative or of "over-naming" the violence. Since the proposed museum is still in the process of being built, the chapter closes with a consideration of Colombia's only other purpose-built museum of memory, Medellín's Museo Casa de la Memoria.[48] Although this museum speaks only to its locale rather than the nation as a whole, it provides an interesting complementary discussion to the new museum, attempting as it does to create something akin to a collective account and a collective memory without foreclosing the complex and necessary continuing debates around memory in Colombia's context.

The questions of aesthetics and ethics within the museum, with which chapter 3 ends, is taken up in the following chapter, which considers the challenges in pursuing artistic response through a focus on one contemporary Colombian artist, Erika Diettes, as she seeks to respond to the devastating violence that her country has experienced. By reflecting with her on several different projects that she has completed and one that is still in process, it suggests that as Diettes attempts to do justice to the stories and the objects that are gifted to her in the course of her art-making, she must wrestle with the *force* of art, its potential promise but also its potential power to do harm. Through her series of installations—*Sudarios, Río Abajo, Relicarios,* and the *Oratorio for the Disappeared*—Diettes has sought to offer insights into the stories of the armed conflict without ever telling them as such; indeed, several of her works arise from working with the survivors but do not present the stories, preferring an approach which is often itself peculiarly archival, arranging images and objects created with materials given to her by relatives of the disappeared and murdered within installations that are beautiful but enigmatic. Chapter 4 draws on my interviews with Diettes over several years and demurs from overly optimistic arguments for the role of art, not least because images—especially photographic images—also risk gifting violence precisely the visibility that it wants. Such exposition is part of the monstrosity of violence, as Jean-Luc Nancy phrased it.[49] Moreover, as Nancy argued, images necessarily withdraw from the viewer and thus cannot be approached naively, not least because whatever attempt we might make to receive an image in its uniqueness, even the declarative "I am" of a photographic portrait, will ultimately be undermined by the references it cannot but simultaneously make to all other images, what Nancy calls the "colossal and labyrinthine

phototheque."[50] Because making art after violence is a process of making decisions that must face and negotiate such dangers, Diettes exercises the utmost care. She has felt the need to tread carefully, to work sensitively with the survivors in long processes of preparation and creation before attempting to "give shape to the unimaginable," placing her artworks into public galleries and spaces where others are invited to engage and contemplate with them. The chapter traces her several thoughtful projects, ending with a discussion of the *Oratorio for the Disappeared*, a hillside installation she is currently constructing in the countryside outside Medellín, approached as an exploration of a positive project for what we came to call "tender forgetting," documentary but simultaneously anti-archival in its purpose.

Turning to Argentina, chapter 5 furthers these themes of the relations and distinctions between different forums and their modes of presentation, drawing explicitly on the thought of Isabelle Stengers to understand the modes of staging the past as forums that operate within an "ecology of practices." Based on interviews and observational research with key personnel—including archivists, artists, forensic anthropologists, lawyers, psychologists—the chapter considers the various sites and modes of conjuring up the violence of the last dictatorship. While each of the forums within this ecology addresses the violent past, what is presented and mobilized as evidence, what is dismissed as irrelevant, and what is "successfully" accepted are dependent upon the practices, constraints, and concerns of the forum. The circulation of truths about Argentina's dictatorship are consequently always situated forms of world-making and emerge variously from a range of sites and scenes of emergence, entering into an "ecology of practices." Within the resulting web of interconnections, the archive constituted through the work of Memoria Abierta occupies an interesting and important space, one that is clarified through the contrasts this chapter highlights; in the midst of this ecology, the archive plays its important but understated, facilitating role.

Chapter 6 focuses on the aesthetic interventions that have—gradually, over decades—taken place at the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos, ex-ESMA since it became a site of memory in 2004. In the time that I have been researching there, the philosophy of what to do with the buildings has altered and the risk of images has been taken, so that a series of encounters have been staged for the visitor. With a focus on the Casino building itself, where over 5,000 prisoners were secretly imprisoned during the 1970s, the chapter considers the ways in which the images have intervened at the site, how they make propositions to the viewer, how they negotiate the concerns about their presence there. The chapter asks how these interventions seek

to give form to what has been termed the "formlessness" of terror. It asks, moreover, how these operate in a mode that distinguishes the space from other spaces in which the horrors committed during the dictatorship period appear, including legal courts. It is striking that this most controversial and resonant of buildings now houses footage from the trials, projected onto the walls in the very spaces where the kidnapped were held in "kennels." How does the redeployment of legal forums within a site of memory alter the way in which the visitor is asked to participate, and to judge? How does this intervention differ from the often opaque contemporary photographic works that have also been shown as a temporary exhibition? And how to think about the contentious performance piece by Polish artist Wojtek Ziemilski, staged in 2019, that featured a film of an actor portraying a perpetrator in which he attempts to articulate an apology, continually breaking down and being unable to speak. Drawing on an interview conducted with Ziemilksi, the chapter considers how this piece raised the question of how the perpetrator (or *represor*) is scripted within contemporary memory works, how "impossible scenes" such as this are infrequently imagined but may be conjured up in the spaces of artistic intervention as the artist did here, deliberately drawing on the anachronisms his outsider status afforded him.

As a whole, *Promises Beyond Memory* explores moments and spaces where events from the past are reinscribed within the present through intentional acts, creative endeavor, and various modes of curation. It bears repeating that as the archival institutions studied here show, the promise to remember is not fulfilled merely by the act of collecting and preserving. If these archives enshrine an optimism that the future might dwell upon and learn from the past, they rely also upon a fundamental wager that their contents will be attended to, that the stories contained there, and any lessons that the architects of the archives believe they contain, will remain of interest and be heard into the future. Without being able to direct those future attentions, however, the archive must live with a profound uncertainty about how its collections relate to the fulfillment of its promise. How the spirit of the archive—the spirit that is, in which it was established, constructed, curated, and maintained—survives into the future, will rely upon those who respond to that wager, who cross its threshold, or otherwise feel its reverberations. Who will respond? Where will these stories travel to, and how will they be "turned" as they are presented? How will inscriptions of the past move beyond memory, beyond the facts of what happened, in order to prompt deeper reflection and provide a convincing analysis of the past? How will curatorial and artistic imaginations (both within and beyond the archive) facilitate or

prompt reflections on the past? Will they be aligned with or challenge the archival impulse? Into which other spaces will these stories move and how will they be deployed there? Each of the chapters explores these questions in different ways. Throughout, *Promises Beyond Memory* seeks to avoid a simple celebration of archival projects, and to hold in question any simplistic notion that memory is a bulwark against the repetition of political violence. Its proposition is that memory requires active engagement, and more specifically, forms of dramatization that are necessary in order to ensure stories from the past a form of survivance. That passage "forward" will not be confined to one site, but there will be a myriad of sites and actors involved, with their own parameters, concerns, and approaches. Beyond the mere repetition of facts, these will certainly involve modes of engagement that also run the risk of failure, of missteps, and of controversy. Indeed, these risks inevitably accompany the retellings, restagings, and recirculations that are, as I have argued, not actually circular. To acknowledge them is important both ethically and politically, as an openness to a democratic future subtends an openness to new dramatizations of the past, to grant those in the future the opportunity for new debates about how the refracted past appears.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 On affective frissons in archival research, especially those documenting past violence, see Russell, "Affect in the Archive." The affective impact of archival "finds" is also beautifully discussed in Campt, *Image Matters*.

2 Potter, "Afterword," 382.

3 Berger, *Our Faces, My Heart*, 33.

4 Personal communication, January 2019.

5 The full name of the archive is Fundación de Documentación y Archivo de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad, FUNVISOL.

6 Bernasconi, *Resistance to Political Violence*.

7 The notion of "missed appointments" is one I borrow from Kaja Silverman; see *Flesh of My Flesh*. I have written Silverman's notion in my previous book, *Art of Post-Dictatorship*.

8 Sharpe, *In the Wake*.

9 My translation. Jacqueline Paulette Drouilly Yurich (FUNVISOL, SAD139) was kidnapped on October 30, 1974, from a friend's home in Santiago. She was twenty-five years old and three months pregnant. Her husband, Marcelo Salinas Eytel, was arrested the next day. They remain disappeared. See "Jacqueline Paulette Drouilly Yurich," accessed September 18, 2023, https://www.memoriaviva.com/English/victims/drouilly.html).

10 Berger, *Our Faces, My Heart*, 33.

11 Berger, *Our Faces, My Heart*, 31.

12 Fritsch, "Taking Turns." See also Derrida, *Rogues*.

13 Fritsch, "Taking Turns," 154. Fritsch argues that "accepting an inheritance means promising to restate it in a different context, to remain faithful to it in such a way as to inevitably change it." Fritsch, "Taking Turns," 159. See also Bell, *Art of Post-Dictatorship*, 59.

14 Hartman's "note on method" states that her book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* "elaborates, augments, transposes and breaks open archival documents" in order to "yield a richer picture of the social upheaval that transformed black life in the twentieth century" in the United States. Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, xiv. See also Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts."

15 These are the meanings of the word *archive* with which Derrida begins his discussion of *Archive Fever*, an oft-quoted warning that although the concept of the

archive "shelters itself from the memory of the name *arkhē*," it also shelters itself from that memory, which is to say, "it forgets it." Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

16 Stoler, "On Archiving." Stoler is writing speculatively about how the Palestinian archive of the Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies at Birzeit University might create an archive that invites ways of imagining and sustaining dissensus. I don't claim that these archives are archiving dissensus in all the possible senses that Stoler explores, but confine my claims to those I develop in following chapters.

17 In the same way that Hochberg describes many of the endeavors she analyzed in *Becoming Palestine*.

18 See Viebach, "Transitional Archives"; Rangelov and Teitel, "Justice Archive."

19 See my article "Documenting Dictatorship."

20 Ferraris, *Documentality*; Accatino and Collins, "Truth, Evidence, Truth"; Hau et al., "Registration and Documentation."

21 Hochberg, *Becoming Palestine*.

22 Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration."

23 Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration," 16.

24 See, for example, Alcalá and Uribe, "Constructing Memory Amidst War."

25 Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign*, 131, emphasis added.

26 Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, Mothers of Plaza de Mayo—Linea Fundadora, Center of Legal and Social Studies, Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained for Political Reasons and Service for Peace and Justice.

27 This is a suggestion I have made previously. See Bell, "Between Documentality and Imagination." As of September 2023, Argentina's Attorney General's Office reported 3,732 people charged, 1,159 convicted, and 178 acquitted of crimes against humanity. Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024, "Argentina: Events of 2023," https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/argentina.

28 De Baecque and Jousse, "Cinema and Its Ghosts," 39. Derrida says: "When I speak about my past, whether voluntarily or not, I select, I inscribe, and I exclude. I don't believe there are archives that only preserve; this is something I try to point out in a short book, *Archive Fever*. The archive is a violent initiative taken by some authority, some power; it takes power for the future, it pre-occupies the future: it confiscates the past, the present, and the future. Everyone knows there is no such thing as innocent archives."

29 A wealth of literature has added in the last decade or two to the discussion and critique of the archive, reflecting upon the power and inequities with which they are entwined, especially of course where these are state or police archives. A few of the numerous possible references that have been useful to thinking about researching archives critically and creatively are Azoulay, *Potential History*; Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men"; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*; Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*; Weld, *Paper Cadavers*; Hochberg, *Becoming Palestine*.

30 Naas, *End of the World*, 128.

31 Colombia is an unusual case, as many have commented, because it has attempted to implement transitional justice mechanisms despite the fact that it cannot be

said to be beyond conflict. See, for example, Garcia-Godos and Lid, "Transitional Justice and Victims' Rights." A package of peace agreements was finally reached at the end of 2016 between the government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC-EP (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo; the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army) meaning that more than five decades of conflict came to a fragile close. The public referendum on the agreement had been rejected by a small margin in October 2016, and it had needed to be revised before it was approved by parliament. It was a partial peace agreement, moreover, since other groups including the equally established ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, the National Liberation Army) were not a part of that agreement, and the peace established has been continuously challenged and complicated. Voices of opposition to the peace process have not diminished, while social leaders and activities have been targeted and killed in alarming numbers, paramilitary groups have murdered former FARC-EP members, and violence associated with the illegal drugs trade continues. Some dissident members of the FARC re-formed in 2019, to which the state responded preemptively and necessitating more talks and peace negotiations. These have led to an agreement in 2023 to cease violence until June 2024, which as of March 2024 has held, again precariously.

32 Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 26.

33 Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 18.

34 Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 21, 31.

35 Taylor, *¡Presente!*

36 Derrida uses the phrase "house arrest" to refer to the domiciliation of archives. He argues that the notion of the archive itself "holds" the history of the term *arkheion* within it, that is, the place where documents are held, the home of those superior magistrates, the *archons*, who had the right also to interpret those documents. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

37 Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 19.

38 Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 21.

39 I have written about Stengers's thought elsewhere, however. See, for example, Bell, "On Isabelle Stengers' 'Cosmopolitics.'"

40 Stengers, "Speculative Philosophy and the Art of Dramatization."

41 I am thinking here of Mihaela Mihai's arguments that artworks—in her case literature and cinematic interventions—can be understood as forms of caring for the past, and for the future. Mihai, *Political Memory*.

42 Stengers, "Speculative Philosophy," 202.

43 Keenan, "Getting the Dead to Tell Me," 45.

44 Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?"

45 Stengers, "Introductory Notes." I am also drawing here on Stengers, "Cosmopolitical Proposal."

46 Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men."

47 *The Battle of Chile* (dir. Patricio Guzmán, 1975).

48 As of March 2024, the museum remains unfinished, its construction halted due to a lack of funds.

49 Nancy, *Ground of the Image*.
50 Nancy, *Ground of the Image*, 107.

1. ENTWINED TELLINGS

Epigraphs: Orlando "Caliche" Valdés Barrientos, interview, Santiago, 2016; Berger, *Our Faces, My Heart*, 31.

This chapter is a lightly edited version of an article previously published in the cultural studies journal *Third Text*.

1 Hirst, "Geoglyphic Art." Hirst is citing Briones-M, "Geoglyphs of the North."
2 Ex-nitrate mine Chacabuco. Constructed 1922–24. Number of workers 1,700. Population 7,000. Annual production 180,000 T/M of nitrate. 1940 Stopped functioning as nitrate mine. Declared Historical Monument 1971.
3 Somewhat as Bergson's arguments about the co-emergence of perception and memory-images. The recollection is "created step by step with the perception itself," as he writes (indeed, his analogy is "as the shadow falls beside the body"). Bergson, *Key Writings*, 144.
4 Germany's development of a synthetic nitrate in the 1920s spelled the end of this industry, which suffered, as one of the captions in the theater's museum puts it, "a slow and inexorable death."
5 Caliche is the raw material required to produce saltpeter.
6 This is how the accompanying text for the display describes the workers at the mine.
7 As the accompanying text describes them.
8 Cavarero, "Narrative Against Destruction," 14.
9 The title is a quotation from Rosa Luxemburg, who in her very last words had the revolution "speak" to those who thought they had suppressed the uprising in Berlin in 1919 and restored "order." She wrote: "Your 'order' is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will 'rise up again, clashing its weapons,' and to your horror it will proclaim with trumpets blazing, 'I have been, I am, I will be!'" Luxemburg, "Order Prevails in Berlin."
10 For decades, Miguel Herberg's involvement in gaining the footage and conducting the interviews has been overlooked, as his voice was dubbed over in the film. The cameraman, Peter Hellmich, who worked with Herberg, is credited in the 1974 film.
11 My translation.
12 Martin-Jones, "Archival Landscapes."
13 Martin-Jones, "Archival Landscapes," 713.
14 Former prisoner Alberto Gamboa recalls the suicide of Oscar Vega González in his memoirs of Chacabuco. Gamboa, *Vida de perros*.
15 Despret, "Talking Before the Dead."
16 Gordillo, *Rubble*.
17 Benjamin, "Storyteller," 89, 90, 96.
18 Benjamin, "Storyteller," 91.
19 Benjamin, "Storyteller," 91.
20 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 34.