

Espectros

*Ghostly Hauntings in Contemporary  
Transhispanic Narratives*

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# Introduction

## *Theories of the Ghost in a Transhispanic Context*

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Nuestros muertos quieren ser parte de nuestra conversación, no nos permiten olvidar, nos dicen que las comunidades que formamos en vida son parte también de las comunidades ausentes.

—Cristina Rivera Garza, in Mónica Maristain<sup>1</sup>

[Our dead want to be part of our conversation, they do not allow us to forget, they tell us that the communities that are no longer present are also part of the communities we create in life.]

The commonplace phrase, “the ghosts of the past,” evokes remoteness, something intangible that nevertheless is ever present, a sort of historical sublime.<sup>2</sup> As the Mexican novelist Cristina Rivera Garza reminds us in the epigraph above, ghosts and the talking dead constitute a historical relationship to a past that cannot be forgotten. *They do not allow us to forget*. The ubiquitous nature of the ghost in the present also constitutes an anachronism that seems to demand something of the future. *The dead tell us that the communities that are no longer present*—the historically and physically absent ones—*are also part of the communities we create in life*. Their presence is dialectic, yearning to be part of the conversations of the living, and imperative, a demand for uncovering what seems absent.

This presence of the absent is what keeps even a tyrant like Pedro Páramo up at night at the end of Juan Rulfo’s ghost-filled narrative: “Porque tenía miedo de las noches que le llenaba de fantasmas la oscuridad. De encerrarse con sus fantasmas. De eso tenía miedo”<sup>3</sup> [Because he was afraid of the night whose darkness invaded him with ghosts. Of locking himself up with his ghosts. Of this he was afraid]. Indeed, we could choose many examples from

the literary canon to introduce the ghost as a persistent trope in contemporary Transhispanic narrative forms,<sup>4</sup> but *Pedro Páramo* represents multiple dimensions of spectrality as it is interrogated in the chapters that follow. The protagonist Juan Preciado is sent by his dying mother to Comala, a town inhabited by the talking dead to claim what is theirs. “[C]óbraselo caro”<sup>5</sup> [Make him pay dearly], she urges. Thus, the motivating impulse for the narrative is a personal demand for justice that, upon Juan Preciado’s entrance into the haunted world of Comala, unveils a greater, collective traumatic experience—in this particular case, the aftermath of Porfirian oppression, the Revolution, and the *Cristero* Wars—which have turned the town into an underworld-like space nearly deserted by the living and populated by ghosts and their echoes. The spectral presence manifests a demand from the victims of traumatic historical events, something unfinished and ostensibly unresolvable by material means. *Pedro Páramo* speaks specifically to the Mexican context, and also more generally, to the realities of societies “gripped in the vicious circle of unresolved tragedies.”<sup>6</sup> Through its nonchronological, fractured temporalities, this novel communicates the difficulty of narrating the effects of corruption and violence on those whose voices have been silenced, the deep scars that haunt a society for generations, and the economic precariousness created by incomplete or uneven processes of modernization or progress.

### THE GHOST IN THEORY: SPECTRAL CRITICISM

The unfinished, unresolved, and fractured allude to the concept of undecidability that is central to theorizations of the ghost. While it is not our intention to provide an exhaustive introduction to spectral theory, a brief reflection on how the ghost has been defined in critical theory seems fundamental to begin the discussions that follow in *Espectros*. The ghost is neither dead nor alive, neither absent nor present, neither effective nor inoperant, neither actual nor virtual; it is both past and current, perceptible and imperceptible. It can be a translucent vision, an echo without a communicating body, something forgotten that remains in place, or a recurrence without a future. In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida describes the specter as a trace that evidences the ruptures in hegemonic discourse.<sup>7</sup> Derrida presents the challenge of examining the signification of that which cannot be defined, determined, or comprehended by existing and present categories of discourse. More importantly, as María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren note,<sup>8</sup> Derrida’s conceptual switch from ghost to “specter” drove theoretical focus away from questions of existence or non-existence and the afterlife (akin to spirituality and the occult) and brought the focus to its spectral quality—the immaterial conditions that can be felt, or the intangible that, through a “visor effect”<sup>9</sup>

sees us without being seen. Ultimately, for Derrida, specters are a perceptible manifestation of conditions that are immaterial and immeasurable and, as such, we should learn to live with them. In *Haunted Subjects*, Colin Davis uses Derrida as a point of departure to reflect upon the paradox of this ever-present nature of ghosts in the post-Enlightenment world: although we seem to be unable to rid ourselves of them, we also seem incapable of keeping them with us for any sort of productive exchange.<sup>10</sup>

However, sociologist Avery F. Gordon's groundbreaking book, *Ghostly Matters* establishes that the ghost is a conceptual means to productively reveal how hegemonic discourse excludes the story of loss and absence in historical trauma. Gordon's assertion is perhaps the most relevant for the discussions in this volume because of her preoccupation with the aftermath of oppressive and violent political regimes. Gordon establishes that social discourse fails to include violently silenced stories partly because humans are primed to pay attention to the visible, the present, the eventful, and not the invisible, the absent, or the non-occurring. Yet, the affective power of absence challenges the integrity of both the subject and the social body. The ghost, therefore, becomes a figure that uncovers how individuals and societies are impacted by what is not present, no longer present, or what could have been present. Gordon's representation of haunting is particularly relevant to Transhispanic studies because it approaches relations between power, knowledge, and experience in the domain of capitalist logic or state terrorism. She calls for an interruption of demands for ethnographic authenticity imposed by those who expect a "true" (and totalizing) narrative from a traumatized or abused subject. Moreover, she asks to what extent the inquirer is part of the history she investigates: because the ghost speaks to her in a different way than it speaks to others, she must ask herself how can critical language express a reflective interest not only in the object of inquiry but also in the investigator.<sup>11</sup>

The ghost implies a rupture with notions of the present as an immediately accessible, coherent, and self-contained timeframe when a call for justice for victims from the past becomes manifest in the present. Thus the ghost allows for the possibility of a transgenerational ethics, as it reveals an obligation to victims whose presence has been excluded from the historical record and hegemonic discourse. Spectral criticism also deals with questions of representation, as it grapples with how to represent the apparent and the non-apparent in written language or the persistence of the past in the present in audiovisual genres. In sum, the theory of the ghost conveys the notion of a present disrupted by attempts to verbalize images or words that contradict the coherent, unproblematic, and historically decontextualized character of the representation of social reality in hegemonic discourse. It is worth considering how spectral theories offer a productive approach for questioning dominant discourses and images in the contemporary Transhispanic world.

## GHOSTS IN TRANSHISPANIC CULTURE

The connection between spectral criticism and the *topos* of the ghost is particularly relevant in the context of Transhispanic cultural production, since it connects under a single conceptual paradigm themes that have been examined separately under the umbrella of Gothic and fantastic genres, magical realism, testimonial literature, and historiographical metafiction. The centrality of the ghost in contemporary Transhispanic literature is readily recognizable. The tropes of the ghost and the talking dead haunt the development of modern narrative discourse: from Quiroga's short stories, to María Luisa Bombal's *La amortajada* (1938), to Carpentier's "Viaje a la semilla" (1941), to Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955). During the Boom, the ghost haunts exemplary texts of magical realism such as Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967) and Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus* (1982). Particularly in the case of Latin America, the ghost of the post-Boom and post-modern era appears to communicate something in connection with the region's tortuous relationship with modernity and its disadvantaged status in global politics. In the case of post-dictatorial regimes both in Latin America and Spain, the ghost is a means to create new versions of the past that subvert official versions of history and recognize those who have been erased from it.<sup>12</sup>

In *Cruel Modernity*, Jean Franco cannily observes little difference between Las Casas's accounts of *conquistadores'* atrocities in the sixteenth century and the "eerily similar . . . accounts of the massacres documented in the Guatemalan report of the Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, *Memoria del silencio*."<sup>13</sup> While ignoring the different political and ideological contexts of these forms of violence runs the risk of oversimplification, Franco reminds us that "in massacres there are no distinctions; the aim is to banish the memory of victims from the earth."<sup>14</sup> The disproportionate, asymmetrical nature of this violence not only attempts to eliminate a real or perceived threat but to silence even the recognition of its presence, to erase its traces. In this way, the recognition of that which has been disappeared constitutes a spectral moment. For example, the disappeared victim reappears in the form of photographs at protests, such as those from the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. These ghostly (re)appearances become accusatory acts that give evidence to the existence of the missing before a state that has attempted to erase them.

Franco's observation indicates the particular significance of applying spectral criticism to a Transhispanic context. Spectral criticism reveals a series of interconnected topics related to violence in the past, ranging from the colonial period to more recent times. It gestures to an ethics of memory counteracting the politics of closure and the silencing of the past. This line of inquiry addresses the physical or cultural colonization by powers that force

conformity and imitation of alien models for the sake of empire, proselytism, order, and progress upon the powerless. Revealed images and testimonials contest national narratives constructed and promoted by political institutions. Spectrality provides a framework to discuss the imperatives of modernization, progress, or ideology of the market and its imposition of the hegemonic discourse that erases the minority groups' voices. Finally, it provides a metaphoric vehicle to illuminate dispossession, violence, and terror imposed on a (infra)citizen class—historically the indigenous or *mestizo*—but also modern avatars of the (infra)citizen like the *subversive*, or, indeed, the entire population when precarious conditions of generalized violence proliferate, such as in the context of the *narco* wars.

Carmen Perilli defines the sinister as the characteristic narrative discourse of the late twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> In the horror genre, the sinister is understood as the perception of shock in reaction to a violation of the limits between life and death, reality and unreality, symbol and symbolized. As Rosana Díaz Zambrana establishes, sinister narratives are populated by characters who “han atravesado el límite terrible de las ausencias y las sombras . . . hablarán en elipsis de la crisis como una sombra que merodea la conciencia pero no debe o puede nombrarse como tal y de esta manera se edifica paralelamente un territorio de fracturas y caídas”<sup>16</sup> [have crossed the line between absences and shadows . . . they speak in ellipses of the crisis like a shadow that haunts the consciousness but should not or cannot name oneself and, in this way, a territory of fractures and falls is constructed]. As such, horror narratives produce ghostly characters that construct a form of narrative memory, a trope that allows one to speak *of* and *at* a history of violence and programed exclusions.

From this standpoint, history becomes the dramatic setting of a dialogue of the present with a past that later must be discovered by the characters themselves before it can even be narrated.<sup>17</sup> Diamela Eltit discusses executed citizens in spectral terms when she asserts that they are a warning that forces us to listen “because they correspond to limited discourses extracted from a space traditionally without speech. A double site of silence. The silence that death brings and the social silence that surrounds the powerless citizen.”<sup>18</sup> The search for lost histories forms part of an intention to avoid an unexamined past without imposing that the end result take the form of the search for lost stories—understood as revealing consciousness and political liberation.<sup>19</sup> This confrontation with the past reveals a spectral moment that is manifest in the narrative acts of later generations who are disconnected from direct knowledge of acts of violence or disappearances but who nevertheless attempt to make contact with them through material traces of abandonment, what Marianne Hirsch has called the “affiliative look” of postmemory.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, the ghost appears from the margins of the discourse of modernity—from uneven processes of modernization to more current neoliberal

economic policies. This is particularly relevant for the Transhispanic world because the conquest of the Americas began by establishing military empires and foreign markets, which in turn established the foundations of the modern world. Enrique D. Dussel proposes that modernity is a process that creates military and economic advantages for the European world over all other groups. The disadvantaged groups become "Other" and all opposition, resignation, or lack of participation in the modern world is viewed as a substantial flaw in the Other. The modern world, therefore, absolves itself of culpability for the eradication of the Other.<sup>21</sup> However, another spectral moment emerges when the Other is recognized and their forced institutional erasure is revealed. Modernity in the Transhispanic world is haunted by the Other who is segregated, disenfranchised, and excluded by processes of colonization and modernization.

Spectrality or haunting rises as an aesthetic opposed to conditions or moods generated by military, political, or economic violence in the context of modernity. It is an aesthetic that seeks ways to counteract erasure, silencing, and forgetting that eschews melancholic attachment to loss. It seeks to construct itself as an alternative to the linear, hierarchical, and rationalistic. It also looks to subvert potentially alienating realistic or documentary representations of the past by creating a deeper engagement with the realities suppressed by the simplified plots of market-driven cultural production. These contrarian aesthetics have been theorized from different yet interrelated frames of reference: rupture (Nelly Richard), the wound (Cristina Moreiras), and haunting (Jo Labanyi). We consider these discussions essential for beginning a critical discussion of the specter in Transhispanic cultural production.

#### SPECTRAL FORMS: RUPTURE, THE WOUND, AND HAUNTING

In *Residuos y metáforas*, a study of the state of post-dictatorship culture in Chile, Richard argues for an aesthetic of rupture. She calls for looking under and in the interstices of the dominant narratives for that which has been pushed aside, "the loose and disparate fragments of ongoing experiences: fragments that lack a formal translation in the communicative language that dominates current sociology."<sup>22</sup> This criticism of the "current," its logic, and its rhetorical strategies does not require merely contrarian, reverse representations of hegemonic discourse. Rather, Richard advocates for an oblique exploration: to construct "certain *representational maladjustments* . . . verbal disaffiliations . . . idiomatic ruptures"; a dissonant discourse that may introduce "signs of alteration and nonconformity into the routines of speech."<sup>23</sup> In other words, she advocates for a rupurist aesthetic—decentralizing, centrifugal—that attacks notions of hierarchical order and narrative organization so

that “[t]he aesthetic (defined as the will to form), the cultural (symbolic figurations), and the political (codifications of power and struggles over meaning) overlap and interact in the same space.”<sup>24</sup> Perilli describes this aesthetic in terms of searching for a history starting from “la discontinuidad de lo colectivo y la inscripción de lo individual fracturado”<sup>25</sup> [the discontinuity of the collective and the inscription of the fractured individual].

It is important to note that the residual or *rupturista* aesthetic described by Richard has nothing to do with the institutional demand for erasure and making a clean slate—through amnesty laws, forced obedience, or judicial immunity. In contrast, it refuses to treat cultural discourse as something that Stuart Hall called a “second-order mirror” in which the already existing is reflected,<sup>26</sup> which originates the unproblematized belief in the ability to retrieve historical past “as it really was.” For Richard, “residual” or “unsutured” discourse depends on forms of representation of late modernity and postmodernity with political or nonconformist motivations that question the balance between discourse and reality and challenges assumptions about our perceived capacity to communicate the surrounding reality. This questioning attempts to cast doubt upon the military and post-dictatorial regimes that publicly present the obviousness of truths such as social stratification based on individual abilities, metaforizations of the nation as family, and the free market and consumerist society as natural manifestations of societal economy.

In connection with Richard’s notions of suture and rupture, Moreiras draws a theory of interstitial residues in narrative that emerge from unhealed cultural wounds. *Cultura herida* [*Wounded Culture*], her study on Peninsular Spanish literature and film of the post-Franco period, traces both the violence of erasure from historical memory as well as “la violencia originada por la presencia de los residuos impresos en esa borradura, y que interviene inevitablemente también en las generaciones que no han vivido ese pasado”<sup>27</sup> [the violence that is originated by the presence of the residues imprinted on this erasure, and that inevitably intervenes as well in the generations who have not lived this past]. Such residues escape the institutional culture attempting to impose postdictatorial narratives that articulate new subjectivities that witness present reality without affective or ideological links to the past. Thus, the cultural landscape is constituted by the tension between the institutional requirement to narrate a present (while excluding its history and that represents itself as origin or foundational space) and those residual elements, hidden, nonsymbolized “residuos . . . impensables desde las políticas culturales, van dejando así estelas incorpóreas (no inscritas en la narrativa, pero contenidas en sus intersticios) que surgen a modo de fisuras sin suturar cuyas cicatrices se imprimen con fuerza desestabilizadora”<sup>28</sup> [residues, inconceivable in political circles, that leave behind corporeal wakes (not inscribed in



the narrative, but contained in its interstices) that arise from the unsutured fissures whose scars are imprinted with a destabilizing force].

Labanyi argues convincingly for an aesthetic of haunting, observing that "it is only by capturing the resistances to narrativization that representations of the past can convey something of the emotional charge which that past continues to hold today for those for whom it remains unfinished business."<sup>29</sup> She criticizes Richard's "rupturist" aesthetic because it "argues for cultural forms that keep open the wounds left by the dictatorship, restaging the trauma rather than resolving the narrative fractures through the production of a coherent narrative"<sup>30</sup> and the refusal to close the wounds prevents a productive dialogue with the past. For this reason, Labanyi argues for an "aesthetics of haunting, which listens to the voices from the past that have not previously been allowed a hearing, seems more appropriate in the Spanish case than an aesthetics of rupture, which is predicated on the classic notion of trauma as the blocking of recall."<sup>31</sup> She does not describe a voice that imposes itself over the victim's or that speaks for him or her, what Susan Sontag calls "the bad faith of empathy."<sup>32</sup> The vision of the past that Labanyi establishes manifests its dark points—its relative inaccessibility, its distortions—without positing it as an ineffable or nearly sacred experience whose only possible contact is emotional, as has occurred in some variations of trauma and Holocaust studies. Labanyi uses cinematographic examples such as *El espíritu de la colmena* [*The Spirit of the Beehive*] or *El espinazo del Diablo* [*The Devil's Backbone*]<sup>33</sup> that reject the realist aesthetic and embrace metaphor, suspense tactics, and characteristic themes of the horror film genre. Realistic and empathetic representations of the past presume its accessibility, and, by "plunging us into the past,"<sup>34</sup> these representations force the viewer to experience the past as detached from the present. Haunting aesthetics, however, operate with an indirect, deliberately unrealistic approach that acknowledges the difficulty of narrativizing the past. Moreover, its emphasis on the aftereffects of violence establishes affective links between past and present as well as the availability of this past to be repaired by a discursive act of justice.

The aesthetic of the wound, rupture, or haunting all place into question the notion of an accessible past as well as its related realistic aesthetics. In doing so, these scholars also criticize the principles that late capitalism uses to justify imposing its hegemony. Labanyi suggests that we view modernity in terms of perceptions of the past in the present—beyond capitalist modernization.<sup>35</sup> In this context, the aesthetic of the ghostly becomes particularly relevant because it questions a state of commercialization that, in Idelber Avelar's words:

[N]iega la memoria porque la operación propia de toda nueva mercancía es reemplazar la mercancía anterior, enviarla al basurero de la historia. . . . El capitalismo transnacional impuesto en Latinoamérica sobre los cadáveres de

tantos, ha llevado esta lógica a un extremo en el que la relación entre pasado y presente está totalmente circunscrita en esta operación sustitutiva y metafórica. El pasado debe ser olvidado porque el mercado exige que lo nuevo reemplace a lo viejo sin dejar residuos.<sup>36</sup>

[Denies remembering because the purpose of all new merchandise is to replace the product that came before it, to throw it into the trash bin of history. . . . The transnational capitalism imposed in Latin America over the corpses of so many, has taken this logic to such an extreme that the relationship between the past and the present is completely circumscribed in this metaphorical and substitutive operation. The past should be forgotten because the market demands that the new replaces the old without leaving behind remnants.]

Avelar's discussion underscores how the presentist, disposable culture of capitalist neoliberalism serves as a cover of past violence and hinders addressing its legacy. Rupturist or haunting aesthetics represent a strategy to contest the denial of the past and inability to productively incorporate it. Significantly, in eschewing testimonial dimensions of discourse, the aesthetic of haunting does not deny the traumatic effect of military violence, the deconstruction of the state, or the impositions of global capitalism but rather focuses on untellable violence as a paradigm of the contemporary condition in an attempt to establish a more productive affective relationship with the lost or the unreachable.

### ESPECTROS

This volume brings to light the aesthetic of haunting in the Transhispanic context, thereby unifying preexisting theoretical directions and providing innovative critical readings that reveal the spectral's ability to create a dialogue with the lost past in the present. The contributors to *Espectros* examine the specter in different dimensions: haunted aesthetics as means of manifesting lingering effects of troubled histories and political legacies; haunting as form of representing the aftermath of individual and collective traumas; the ghost's relationship with still and moving images, especially in connection with those no longer present; and, finally, the spectral as a symbolic representation of economic pressures of capitalism. We consider this volume to be an introduction to the specter in narrative discourse as it manifests how a spectral aesthetic proves insightful in the Transhispanic context. The tropes of the ghost and the talking dead, and the broader ranging theme of spectrality, offer a fundamental, comprehensive framework from which to understand the social, political, and economic dimensions of cultural expression in the Transhispanic world. The editors recognize that the depth of ethnic and cultural phenomena that can be approached through the framework of spectral criticism is vast and it is our hope that this volume will become an

invitation for further analysis of the pervasive influence of the ghost and talking dead beyond the scope of this volume.

## NOTES

1. Cristina Rivera Garza, interview by Mónica Maristain, "Nadie que quiera escribir hoy, puede olvidar a nuestros muertos," dice Cristina Rivera Garza," *Sinembargo.mx*, July 7, 2013.

2. Early versions of sections of this introduction were presented at the opening of the seminar "Mapping Hauntings in Hispanic Literatures" at the American Comparative Literature Conference in Toronto in 2013, and at the XIX Bruce-Novoa Mexican Studies Conference in Irvine, California.

3. Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2002), 178.

4. We chose to use the term "Transhispanic" to describe the wide origins and contexts of this volume—to unbind the tenuous boundaries of a geocultural space that literary studies calls "Hispanic," and which implies a political, cultural, or linguistic hegemony. We recognize the internal diversity and tensions that may exist within political entities that have minimized the expression of ethnic and cultural groups within them. We also acknowledge that internal conflicts have generated their own diasporic cultures, which may or may not express themselves in Spanish. Therefore, while we recognize the existence of a demarcation commonly known as "Latin America and Spain," our understanding of "Transhispanic" does not assume the existence of an internal continuity or cultural cohesion, much less an organic identity, national, linguistic, or otherwise. "Transhispanic," under a spectral perspective, recognizes the existence of points of encounter and spaces of difference beyond the disciplinary necessities of confining and labeling a space through language, nation, or region, as is the case with the legacies of violence, be it political, economic, or cultural. Furthermore, by using this term, we seek to invite further discussion of spectrality within marginalized or minoritized groups in Latin America and Spain and their diasporas, beyond the modest reaches of this volume. As editors, we actively sought contributions that spoke to the spectral in indigenous and Afrohispanic contexts, as well as the treatment of texts written in languages other than Spanish or English, but were unsuccessful. It is our hope that this volume opens up the field of spectral criticism so that these traditions will also be treated. An example of this important work on the indigenous in the North American context is *Phantom Past, Indigenous Tradition: Native Ghosts in North American Culture and History*, ed. Colleen E. Boyd and Coll Thrush (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

5. Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo*, 65. This quote is also a type of literary ghost, as Élmer Mendoza's 2005 novel in homage to Rulfo is titled *Cóbrasele caro* (Madrid: Tusquets). *Pedro Páramo* has a haunting presence in many contemporary literary productions, such as Susana Pagano's *Y si yo fuera Susana San Juan* (México, DF: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998).

6. *Political Violence and the Construction of National Identity in Latin America*, ed. Will Fowler and Peter Lambert (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1. In this quote, the authors establish a parallel between the novel and Latin America as a whole.

7. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994: 2006) (hereafter cited *Specters* and printing year).

8. Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, "Introduction," in *The Spectralities Reader*, ed. Blanco and Peeren (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 9.

9. *Specters* (2006), 6.

10. Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, and the Return of the Dead* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 7–8. While Davis's work distinguishes between the proliferation of ghosts (and zombies, vampires, etc.) in "pop" or "mass" cultural productions that reproduce old *topoi* and hauntings grounded in psychoanalysis and existentialism, this distinction seems irrelevant in the Transhispanic context, where literature, visual arts, and film appear to share similar concerns.

11. Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
12. José Colmeiro, "Nation of Ghosts?" *452° F: Electronic journal of theory of literature and comparative literature* 4 (January 2011): 31, at <http://www.452f.com/en/josecolmeiro.html> (accessed May 17, 2013).
13. Jean Franco, *Cruel Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 6.
14. Franco, *Cruel Modernity*, 20.
15. Carmen Perilli, *Las ratas en la Torre de Babel* (Buenos Aires: Letra Buena, 1994), 47.
16. Rosana Díaz Zambrana, "Circuitos del fracaso: Lugares de negación y espectros en *Una sombra ya pronto serás* de Osvaldo Soriano," *Cincinnati Romance Review* 22 (2003): 83.
17. Lois Parkinson Zamora, *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 36.
18. Diamela Eltit, "Prólogo. Me fusilaron en Chena," in *Sobrevivir a un fusilamiento*, ed. Chérie Zalaquet (Santiago, Chile: El Mercurio, 2005), 15, quoted in Franco, *Cruel*, 168.
19. Eltit, "Prólogo," 21, quoted in Franco, *Cruel*, 168.
20. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 9.
21. Enrique D. Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995), 137.
22. Nelly Richard, *Cultural Residues: Chile in Transition*, trans. Alan West-Durán and Theodore Qvester (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 4; Richard, *Residuos y metáforas: Ensayos de crítica cultural sobre el Chile de la transición* (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 1998).
23. Richard, *Cultural Residues*, 5; Emphasis in original.
24. Jean Franco reflects on Richard in *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America and the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 266.
25. Perilli, *Las ratas*, 44.
26. Stuart Hall, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 236–37.
27. Cristina Moreiras, *Cultura herida. Literatura y cine en la España democrática* (Madrid: Ediciones Libertarias, 2002), 17.
28. Moreiras, *Cultura herida*, 29.
29. Jo Labanyi, "Memory and Modernity in Democratic Spain: The Difficult of Coming to Terms with the Spanish Civil War," *Poetics Today*. 28, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 107.
30. Labanyi, "Memory," 108.
31. Labanyi, "Memory," 109.
32. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004) 7, paraphrased in Labanyi, "Memory and Modernity in Democratic Spain," 111.
33. Francisco J. Querejeta, Victor Erice, and Ángel Fernández Santos, *El espíritu de la colmena*, directed by Erice (Madrid: Bocaccio Distribution SA, 1973); and Guillermo del Toro, Antonio Trashorras, and David Muñoz, *El espinazo del Diablo*, directed by Guillermo del Toro (Spain; Mexico: Warner Sogefilms AIE; US: Sony Pictures Classics, 2001; Columbia TriStar Entertainment, 2004).
34. Labanyi, "Memory," 113.
35. Labanyi, "Memory," 91.
36. Idelber Avelar, *Alegorías de la derrota: La ficción postdictatorial y el trabajo del duelo* (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2000), 285.

## Ghostly Encounters: Haunted Histories

Spectral theory is concerned with the notion of a present that is out of joint, divided from itself by a rift that makes room for the conflictive overlap of the present, the future, and the past, and alternative presents, pasts, and futures. In short, specters produce disjointed times. History has generally been understood either as a series of moments in coherent chronological succession, or as a causal process that brings to one necessary point; this approach makes history nothing but a collection of the stories of the victors, or about the progressive constitution of a nation or civilization. A certain traditional Hegelian vision, with its teleological interest in the present as the culmination of history, privileges contemporary hegemonic views, and invites an adoption of conservatism that leads to the preservation of current gains at the expense of those excluded from them. A classical Marxist vision of history describes an opening of the present only as a step ahead toward a utopian future in which the contradictions of capitalism are superseded, and history, at last, reaches its very end in the perfect harmony between socialist humanity and historical destiny. All these secularized scatological visions either privilege traditionalism or tend to represent the past as a breach that has been closed. When individuality is emphasized, the result is a liberal capitalist tale of personal autonomy and self-reliance; when collective action is promoted, differences, particular concerns, and heterogeneous articulations are usually effaced from institutional representations.

The critique of historiography from Friedrich Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin to Jacques Derrida and Avery Gordon has tried to upset these preconceptions, configuring a spectral approach to history as a space for ethical

exchanges that transcend the subjects' empirical presence in any given time. They invoke the appearance in, or interruption of, the present by undecidable, noncontemporaneous entities that fill the emptiness of modern time with inexhaustible meaning that makes moments break free of any teleological scheme. Ghosts press on the haunted the transformative recognition that something is to be done, that something *needs* to be done. For spectral history, time is always full with potential and responsibility; the unresolved or unregistered conditions of the past go on influencing the present; and the future is open and at the same time the depository of certain ethical obligations of those who are living to those that will come. The haunting of these entities on the margins of the present forces us to see ourselves as divided from our current moment, ourselves as the ghosts of our past and future. We are always living in someone else's future and someone else's past, and we may not even be contemporaneous with ourselves.

These notions compel us to reexamine our phenomenological parameters and contemplate the past as much more than just a moment whose potential was spent in one self-consuming shot. Instead of a depleted instant that is nothing but a milestone, the past is a constellation of possibilities, actual events and counterfactuals that operate as a persistent force that intervenes into and modifies the present, more often than not in a way that is not apparent or that is obscured or minimized by the ruling discursive paradigms. Spectral history encourages us to understand social and political struggles of the present as a disjointed reactivation, a return with a difference, an untimely actualization of the struggle and oppression in the past—a well-established tradition in Latin America, from Túpac Amaru II to the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) [Zapatista Army of National Liberation]. Thus the ghostly character of narrative in connection to history comes to the fore. Finally, spectral history explores the historical weight of affect, as it makes us contemplate the impact of historical processes in the emotional experience of individuals in a way that transcends the mere glorifying/vilification of rulers of the past, or the biased concentration on the experience of individuals that was registered in the archival record.

We have selected three contributions in this volume to illustrate the historical dimension of haunting and the spectral in ways that point toward the connection of this trope with the affective dimension of material remnants, visual evidence, and the efforts of individuals and collectivities to address unresolved justice issues. Megan Corbin's "The Museum of Memory: Spectral Presences and Metaphoric Re-memberings," challenges us to confront the hermeneutic process generated by haunting beyond textuality. With her examination of the material fragments left behind by prisoners in the torture facilities of the Argentinean Junta, as well as the scarce remains of extrajudicial executions of the Pinochet regime left in Atacama desert, Corbin explores the tensions between desire for a unified, coherent narrative and the

reality of interrupted and fragmented echoes of a traumatic past, as well as the ensuing production of affective signification. Isabel Cuñado studies the connections between death and memory in the post-Francoist era through an analysis of four decades of ghost tales produced by Javier Marías. According to Cuñado's chapter, "The Bright Future of the Ghost: Memory in the Work of Javier Marías," Marías's work articulates the difficulty of enunciating the traumatic effect of a violent past, thereby creating a disjointed, paradoxical discourse about the (im)possibility of speech. In this context of structurally flawed communication, living with ghosts becomes an act of posthumous justice, and an acceptance of haunting is offered as a valuable memory practice. Writing in the aftermath of the unprecedented sentencing of dictator General Efraín Ríos Montt, Susana S. Martínez's "The Spectrality of Political Violence: Exhuming Visual and Textual Representations of Guatemala's Haunted Past in Tanya María Barrientos's *Family Resemblance* and Sylvia Sellers's *When the Ground Turns in its Sleep*," engages in a comprehensive study of Guatemalan American photography and fiction to advance that, in a context of criminal impunity, haunting provides the optimal theoretical framework to bear witness to the overwhelming silence and absence that follow politically violent processes. She further argues that haunting of a past that was never lived now marks the identity of second-generation Guatemalan-Americans.

## II

# The Persistence of Violence: Trauma as Haunting

The notion of open present, or acontemporaneity of the present to itself, implied in historiographical approaches to spectral criticism invites reflection about the traces of violent or otherwise traumatic episodes as haunting, and the impact of such haunting in the individual psyche as well as in subjective discourse production. Etymologically, "haunt" refers to a *place visited frequently*. From this definition sprung later the supernatural connotations of the term. Similarly, in one of his more celebrated yet baffling and unsystematic texts, *The Uncanny* (1919), Freud contends that repetition is one of the constitutive characteristics of the *unheimlich*, or uncanny. It is not just about the encounter with the alien or strange in a familiar context: this *unheimlich* must imply the repetition or duplication of an experience or object. Freud's *unheimlich* is the moment in which the consciousness of the modern subject experiences a temporary return of "savage" thought,<sup>1</sup> or, to express it in more neutral terms, magical thought, or causal connection between natural phenomena and transcendent experience. Under Freud's influence, narrative theory has tended to represent the *unheimlich* as repetition, duplication, or return. From this perspective, trauma involves an experience of the uncanny insofar as it entails an unexpected, painful encounter of a rupture with what the psyche conceives of as normal or foreseeable experience. It also entails the symptomatic, later return of this rupture. A popular view of trauma in narrative theory is the one articulated by Cathy Caruth,<sup>2</sup> who understands trauma as a re-exposition and re-experiencing of an event not fully registered by the consciousness in its first occurrence. Here, trauma necessarily entails a



return. Despite the relative lack of clinical evidence to support this perspective, it brings to the fore the role of narrative in connection to trauma. On the one hand, producing or receiving a narrative seeking to reestablish values of truth may have a therapeutic effect on a victim. On the other hand, the reproduction of an extremely painful event into a hierarchical structure of sense may trigger re-experiencing the trauma.

The common association of trauma to mind and behavioral sciences invites us to think of it as an individual experience, even though there have been approaches considering it a collective one. Dominick LaCapra<sup>3</sup> identifies foundational trauma as a form of haunting in processes of collective identity formation. This foundational trauma is an event, real or imagined, that configures the basis of the discursive formation of the identity of a specific group. In its more melancholic dimension, foundational trauma may involve an attachment to loss or to past injury that can have a limiting effect in the collective's members' development in the present.

The concept of foundational trauma is important to Transhispanic studies, which examines five centuries of biological and cultural genocide in the Americas, the enslavement and exclusion of populations of African descent, religious persecutions, modern and contemporary political traumas resulting from civil wars, oppressive regimes, torture, forcible disappearances, and exile, and the ongoing devastation caused by the operations of global capital in an era in which neoliberalism reigns unabated. Trauma affects not only the direct victims, but also their descendants, who find themselves haunted in an affective epistemological process of conflictive and incomplete recovery of the past that Marianne Hirsch conceptualizes as "postmemory."<sup>4</sup> Postmemory hinges between trauma as personal experience and the historical and sometimes mythical character of foundational trauma, while dealing with narrative and graphic exposure to the reality of violence against immediate ascendants in the family tree, and their outcomes, be they retraumatizing or working through processes.

Again, this is especially relevant to Transhispanic studies with the coming of age of generations born and raised—often in a context of geographical displacement—after episodes of violence against groups deemed *subversive*. There is, clearly, a thematic overlap between studies focusing on haunting as a historical experience, especially when following violent episodes and authoritarian regimes, and studies dealing with the representation of trauma's aftereffects.

In this section, we have selected studies that focus on the psychological, internal, individual experiences of trauma and its aftereffects, rather than the wider political and cultural approach dominating the studies in the previous section. In keeping with the spirit of this compilation, we have also sought to avoid vague discussions of the traumas following war, dictatorship, and repression as *haunting*, which would constitute a mere resort to derivative

metaphor as a definition. Rather, this section includes studies addressing explicitly the connection between trauma and the spectral, be it in its more common, anthropomorphic manifestation (the ghost) or in other alternative shapes.

Karen Wooley Martin explores the immateriality of the vanished, the persistent haunting of two restless spirits that return, uninvoked, to two women struggling to come to terms with their families' involvement with the Junta in the novels *Perla* (2012), by Carolina De Robertis, an American of Uruguayan descent, and *Purgatorio* (2008), the last novel by Tomás Eloy Martínez, self-exiled from Argentina for nearly half of his life.<sup>5</sup> The spatial and generational distance from the traumatic event contrasts starkly with the claims to immediacy of the nonfictional *testimonio*. Charles St-Georges addresses the relationship of the second generation in a chapter about a lesser-known, straight-to-DVD film, by Paco Cabezas (2007).<sup>6</sup> St-Georges analyzes *Aparecidos* essentially as a political drama employing *topoi* from horror cinema. The film not only consists of the literalization of encounters with the "ghosts of the past" but also of a national allegory representing the retraumatization implied in second-generation recognition of the horrors of the immediate past and the impossibility to render proportional justice to its victims. In her chapter, Sarah Thomas contends that the ubiquity of the ghostly child in contemporary Spanish cinema evidences its privileged and problematic place in the modern imaginary for a nation that has engaged in much dialogue about how to articulate historical memory. Her study of *El espinazo del diablo* (2001) and *El orfanato* (2007) connects child revenants to themes of fratricidal violence, mass graves, child abduction, and the repeated, retraumatizing cycle of loss provoked by the unresponsive attitude of political powers that to this day continues to plague Spanish social and cultural life, and politics.<sup>7</sup>

The editors recognize that the spectral dimension of trauma is not limited to anthropomorphic forms, as in the geographical aspect of recent Colombian literature and film analyzed in Juliana Martínez's "Fog Instead of Land: Spectral Topographies of Disappearance in Colombia's Recent Literature and Film." From the standpoint of horror as affect, Martínez critiques the exploitative aspects of the *pornomiseria* genre made popular in Colombia in the 1990s, and analyzes more recent narratives by Evelio Rosero, Jaime Osorio, and William Vega to explore representational techniques that refuse to echo voyeuristic, mimetic discourses that reenact conflict and violence. Instead, their works focus on literal and symbolic disappearances in the topology of Colombia. Martínez calls this departure from the ontotopology of presence "spectral spatiality." Like Colombia itself, these narratives need to be understood as spaces haunted by the very uncertainty and unrest that violence (re)produces. Therefore, they advance and embody a spectral spa-

tiality that encourages novel ways of thinking about Colombia's recent history.

## NOTES

1. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, ed. Adam Phillips, trans. David McClintock (New York: Penguin, 2003), 149.
2. Cathy Caruth, ed., *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
3. Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).
4. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
5. Carolina De Robertis, *Perla* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Tomás Eloy Martínez, *Purgatorio* (México, DF: Alfaguara, 2008).
6. Paco Cabezas, *Aparecidos (The Appeared)*, directed by Paco Cabezas, DVD (2007; Buenos Aires: SBP Worldwide, 2010).
7. Guillermo del Toro, Antonio Trashorras, and David Muñoz, *El espinazo del Diablo*, directed by Guillermo del Toro (Spain; Mexico: Warner Sogefilms AIE; US: Sony Pictures Classics, 2001; Columbia TriStar Entertainment, 2004); Sergio G. Sánchez, *El orfanato*, directed by Juan Antonio Bayona (Llanes, Oviedo, Asturias, and Barcelona, Spain: New Line Home Video, 2007).

### III

## Still Images: The Living and the Dead

Death can be found in the origin of photography as a widespread modern, Western documentary practice, in the form of rather secularized rites of mourning and funeral commemoration of the departed. The professional creation, public circulation, and (semi)private consumption of mechanically reproducible images took place in a field defined affectively by ideas of remembrance and, sometimes, irreparable loss. Many of the qualities often associated with photography, such as stillness, memorialization, transparency, or affection were born or reinforced in the portraiture of the dead. Furthermore, and especially among the popular classes, a funeral photograph would often be the only extant visual witness of someone's passing through Earth. Thus, a complex cultural constellation emerged alongside the origins of photography, in which memory as timeless preservation becomes inextricably linked with the fragility of human life and the material precariousness of negatives and prints. Photography acquires a central role thanks not only to mourners combatting oblivion, but also to forensic and medical professions combatting the death of the body. Public institutions and policies of biological governance as well as state surveillance agencies played a fundamental role in producing and collecting photographic records of the dead. Classification protocols that make possible the creation and control of vast archives of prints coexist with the intense emotional investment of a few individuals in a few remaining photographs of one beloved person. Photography is a distinctly modern practice that lives spectrally in the unbridgeable chasm between presence and disappearance, conservation and loss, biopolitics and mourning, abstraction and individualization.

While socialization is predicated on the common perceptual experience of movement, in the case of photographic reproduction, one faces the uncanny immobility of a precise, two-dimensional, still replication of a human body. Roland Barthes describes a connection between photography and death when posing that the living subject in the frame undergoes a "micro-version of death"<sup>1</sup> and spectralizes herself when contemplating the observer through the portrait. As a future spectator, the observer recognizes her own mortality in the subject's absence; the portrait becomes "imperious sign of my [the observer's] future death."<sup>2</sup> Additionally, for Barthes, photography underscores the tenuousness of experience of others, because the photographic subject, according to Barthes, is a sum of multiple frozen instants, "a thousand shifting photographs."<sup>3</sup> In its fragmentariness, stillness, and particularity, the photographic album renders a loved person more accurately, while closeness and familiarity have impressed those who knew the subject with a false, unique image. This proximity is predicated on the disappearance of the dead and of yet-to-come extinction, and the mirage of transparency found in photographs only heightens anxiety in the face of a future that will not include the present or the past. As we contemplate pictures and feel haunted by those preserved in them, we are reminded that the best we can hope for is a future of haunting someone else through the same precarious practice of looking at photographs. In other words, the still non-existent specter comes back from the future to haunt us now.

Although many arguments discussed above already figure prominently in image theory and criticism, here we choose to emphasize their more spectral or funeral dimension. For the purposes of this volume we connect the spectral image with the concept of haunting as a presence of that which is absent, as established in the introductory chapter. The chapters by N. Michelle Murray and Marta Sierra account for the ways in which photography can expand its scope to include, appropriate, or revindicate figures traditionally absent or deliberately excluded from hegemonic representations of society. The stark photograph of a dead woman washed ashore a Spanish beach, and its use on the cover of a *noir* novel dealing with the immigrant experience are the starting point of Murray's chapter, "Framing and Feeling Immigration: Haunting Visuality and Alterity in *Ramito de hierbabuena*." Murray notes that, while the presence of the abused migrant haunts Spanish culture, the narrative treatment of this ghost by the Spanish authorial voice in *Ramito de hierbabuena* seeks to dominate it through romantic idealization and generic conventions. Murray's analysis demonstrates how narratives of individualized violence belie and efface collectivized forms of migrant exploitation, and how the migrant's voice is hollowed out and possessed by the Spanish authorial discourse. In her "*Memento Mori: Photography and Narrative in Cristina Rivera Garza's Nadie Me verá Llorar*," Sierra brings to the fore the usage of photography for the purposes of biopolitical governance and institu-

tionalization. She investigates the relationship of photographic documentation of marginalized prostitutes during modernization in Mexico to argue that Rivera-Garza reveals and contests (re)iterative "spectral elements of hegemonic narratives."<sup>4</sup>

NOTES

1. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 14.
2. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 97.
3. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 12, 110.
4. See page 154.

## IV

# Invisible Hands: Specters of the Market Economy

Since its earlier theoretical formulations, the association of capital processes to invisibility or imperceptibility emphasizes a mysterious or spectral character in market transactions. Adam Smith's model of capitalism is based on the free-ranging operations of a metaphorical "invisible hand." Karl Marx observed how workers' self-commodification generates goods with a surplus value that transcends their use value. Consumption economy has evolved in a way in which individuals are no longer defined in terms of their work, but either through the possession and use of goods subject to obsolescence or through access to consumable experiences. The expendable and the temporary underscore the evanescent, phantasmatic character of the consumerist experience.

In a manner analogous to its mythical "invisible hand," free-market politics moves in the direction of governing individuals through laws unknown to them. Along with invisibility and esoterism, the combination of defacement, dispossession, and exclusion of the masses is an integral part of this system. Market economy boasts a marked aspirational character based on media-manufactured desires and values, as well as a multiplicity of possible worlds and experiences; those subjects or communities that do not manifest the patterns of success, well-being or mastery of oneself profiled by the market see themselves excluded by this system. The commons are assaulted in the name of the supposed efficiency of private management and global standardization—which is not an impediment to revert them to state control or turning them into a publicly shared liability after episodes of gross, and

often self-interested, mismanagement by the heroes of the neoliberal narrative. Therefore, massive dispossession is consubstantial to market expansion.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding the possible benefits of capital expansion for later generations (the much-touted *creative destructions* of capitalism), people frequently live under invisible and distant threats, frequently exposed to the shock of manufactured crises while inside a system that claims to privilege and reward individual liberties and freedom of choice. In this context, any political aspirations opposed to dominant paradigms become increasingly branded as *terrorist* or *antisystemic*, while any alternative ethics to the individualistic paradigm are caricaturized and placed beyond the restrictive moral frontier of self-care and volunteerism as a broadcastable experience.

The chapters chosen for this portion of the volume emphasize different aspects of the spectral character of modern capitalism: the fetishization of raw goods in an export economy, in which a certain commodity comes to stand for development and modernity; self-alienation in the neoliberal moral paradigm; and exclusion and simulacra as manifestations of the spectral in modern capitalism. We commence this section with a compelling re-examination of one of the foundational novels of modern Venezuelan narrative in Juan Pablo Lupi's "*Cubagua's Ghosts*." By stressing the unique geohistorical circumstances during which the novel was written, Lupi shows how the hallucinatory trip to the past and the theme of the specter serve to link the colonial enterprise to the birth of the petrostate. Lupi considers that Enrique Bernardo Núñez's novel, published in 1931, (re)incorporates into the narrative portions of the historical archive that are missing from institutionalized discourses of history, thus establishing this tale as a ghostly haunting of the ills of (neo)colonialism and historical amnesia. Moving to more recent literature, in "Portraits of the Walking Dead: Transgressing Genres and (In)visible Demographics in Maurice Echeverría," María del Carmen Caña Jiménez focuses on *Diccionario esotérico* (2006), one of the more challenging works of the new generation of Central American novelists of the current century. Her chapter explores how neoliberalism as economic war "has been domesticated by the practices of subnational diegetic actors." Her approach goes beyond traditional readings that locate the spectral as a narrative strategy that demands closure of mysteries and enigmas of an unresolved past, becoming instead an eschatology where the spectral rematerializes in a tangible space where dead organisms "exist simultaneously with the breathing body."<sup>2</sup> Victoria L. Garrett and Edward M. Chauca analyze the spectral quality of the power dynamics of neoliberalism in "Haunting Capitalism: *Biutiful*, the Specter, and Fantasies of the Global Market." According to the authors, *Biutiful* (2010) exposes the specters that haunt the dominant power structure: undocumented workers, political exiles, the spiritual world, and the gray market, represented through both ghosts and living characters. Their chapter examines the characters' precarious existence as an indictment on the short-



comings of the current political and economic status quo. Moving on to analyze the spectral nature of the power structure of late global capitalism, the authors argue that globalized capitalism haunts the characters through insatiable fantasies and consumerist desires that manifest themselves through repetitive simulacra.

#### NOTES

1. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
2. See pages 209–10.