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Art from a Fractured Past

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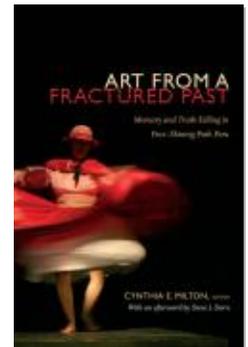
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AFTERWORD / STEVE J. STERN

THE ARTIST'S TRUTH / THE POST-AUSCHWITZ PREDICAMENT
AFTER LATIN AMERICA'S AGE OF DIRTY WARS

After an era of massive atrocity, much of it against unarmed people in the name of national salvation or social revolution, hard questions arise. First, even if one sets aside the problem of divided memory about the recent past, is truth-telling possible after a reign of violence so extreme it defies human imagination? Or is truth an illusion? Is it a conceit that merely restores a semblance of normalcy?

Second, if truth-telling is indeed possible, what can art—understood in the broad sense that includes literature as well as performing and visual arts—contribute to its making? How do we understand truth when considering the full range of expressive culture? What is the artist's truth?

Such questions have taken on urgency after Latin America's age of "dirty wars" in the late twentieth century. Whether one refers to dictatorial regimes of the 1970s and 1980s in Southern Cone countries such as Argentina and Chile, where rulers used a myth of war to gain freedom of action against citizens redefined into the enemy, or whether one refers to war regimes that indeed pitted state forces against armed insurgents, as in Peru and Central America in the 1980s and early 1990s, states organized "dirty" war. The dirty war was the zone of atrocity—torture, mystery disappearances, body hacking, massacres—where normal legal rules or cultural taboos did not apply, not even the rules of war. It was also the zone where states could contest the truth of the deed by denying knowledge or inventing cover stories. Dirty war granted the right to violate anybody who stood in the way, or who might serve as a frightening instructive example for others, or who might serve as an instrument of complicity or

intelligence. In the dirty war zone, the shock of the event that defies the imagination—the disappearance in Argentina that vanishes the person's identity and reality, the massacre in El Salvador that targets babies as well as others for graphic cruelty while turning the pueblo into a ghost town—could have positive value for the regime's goals. For the state and its paramilitary allies—and in the Peruvian case, for the Shining Path insurgents as well—the dirty war's acts of cruel intimidation, even if paradoxically denied in some instances, could educate people that yes, indeed, whatever the brutality required to impose it, a new reality of political rule and social order was arriving.¹

The toll of such dirty wars in Latin America was huge. The direct victims narrowly defined—the individuals murdered or disappeared or tortured—numbered in the hundreds of thousands. In just five countries—Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Peru—truth commission estimates of such victims have added up to a baseline of some 340,000 persons, and perhaps as high as 430,000 persons. (Note that this five-country baseline excludes other notable cases for which a quantified baseline is more elusive, for example the torture regimes of Brazil and Uruguay and the undeclared dirty war of Mexico in the 1970s, the Somoza regime's repression to stop the Sandinista insurrection followed by “contra” war to bleed the revolution in Nicaragua in the 1970s and 1980s, and the intensified cycle of armed conflict and state terror that took hold in Colombia from the 1980s.) Even greater orders of magnitude apply to those who suffered other forms of shocking violence, such as the mass raids and roundups that temporarily converted urban shantytowns in Chile into collective prisons of cruel and degrading treatment, the scorched-earth campaigns in El Salvador and Guatemala that drove rural villagers into exile and displacement, and the cruel retaliation-and-assassination raids against rural Peruvian communities that also generated massive flight. Put differently, the surviving families and communities directly affected by repressive violence amounted to millions of people. In some regions with large numbers of indigenous peoples in Guatemala and Peru, well-regarded truth commissions considered the scale and racial dynamics of the violence genocidal.²

By the 1990s and early 2000s, as dirty war regimes gave way—to fragile peace settlements in Central America, constrained democratic transitions in

the Southern Cone countries, the defeat of Shining Path and an eventual democratic transition in Peru—the post-atrocity predicament came into focus. Public policy issues defined one important dimension of the predicament. How should a society of profoundly divided political memory about the earlier regime document the truth of what happened? What did such truth-telling mean for the legitimacy of the post-atrocity regime? What did it mean for victims and their communities, or for justice? Would an official truth commission exercise build a foundation for additional truth-telling and justice or provide a formula for closure and neglect?³

Another profound dimension, entangled with the public policy issues but not reducible to them, was cultural. Here the questions raised at the outset of this essay and throughout this book proved crucial. Given the extremes of what happened, was truth-telling really possible? If fact-telling narrative alone was insufficient to grasp what had happened, how could the arts and expressive culture figure into the process?

At stake, both culturally and politically: the making of a new common sense and moral imperative in the wake of a devastating experience.

Not surprisingly, the Holocaust gave rise to some of the most profound and difficult reflections on truth and art. The problem is not the province of any one world region or historical experience. From a world history perspective, we may consider the problem of truth-telling and art the post-Auschwitz predicament, understood as an issue that unfortunately recurs in distinct contexts. As Saul Friedlander put it in a sensitive essay, the historian of the Shoah must resist “the temptation of closure” because the narrative must work with the “excess” factor. The analytical intellectual work may build a certain protective numbing and allow for valid and rigorous insight, but to work in this dimension alone may also amount to avoidance. There is something extra that defies words that belongs to deeper memory and meaning of the event—and that must break through to disrupt distance. A narrative that seals the story is misleading.⁴

This book matters substantively and theoretically. It matters because it raises profound questions about truth and art for the case of Peru after the Shining Path war of the 1980s and 1990s. It also matters because in analyzing Peru it enriches and troubles more general reflections on art and society.

Consider the most famous dictum on art and society in the wake of twentieth-century atrocity: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” For more than a half century, Theodor Adorno’s aphorism has drawn attention. It is irresistible because it seems to distill the contemporary predicament—the burden of living with the legacy of regimes of organized violence so massive and extreme, yet so closely associated with modernity, that they overwhelm our capacity to describe or comprehend, let alone accept and move on. The sheer outsized quality of the offense makes it incommensurable with what we think we can know in normal life. It creates a time beyond normal time. It imperils faith in the future and in progress, that is, modernity. What happened is a “crime against humanity” not simply for reasons of legal taxonomy but, more fundamentally, because it assaults the idea of the human. As Hannah Arendt put it, acts of radical evil seem to “transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power, both of which they radically destroy wherever they make their appearance.”⁵

Adorno’s remark sums up the shattering sensibility. After the times of radical evil that create experiences beyond the limit, human expression and artistic endeavor fall short. Representation is a mirage. To pretend that culture can redeem its own failure is an absurdity. To consider art possible is to fall into a consoling but barbaric illusion.

The power of Adorno’s insight, however, creates the risk of reifying his point into a clichéd universal truth rather than grounding it in a particular historical context. When Adorno wrote his words in 1949, the point was to shatter complacency—the unthinking belief, almost as an act of sacred faith, in return to a restored German culture in the Federal Republic. The broader underpinning was the sense that Auschwitz was the ultimate metaphor and climax of modern history. A history of catastrophe, evident since World War I, had brought humankind ever closer to the total society of the “open-air prison” accompanied by “reification of the mind.” Even in the West, culture was untruth and the cultural critic paradoxically imprisoned by the terms of the critic’s creation. The original German sentence that contained the provocation had aimed at this more complex point: “Cultural criticism finds itself faced by the final step in the dialectics of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and this also erodes the realization that states why it has become impossible

to write poetry today." Adorno labored for decades to create a philosophy of "negative dialectics" that stripped away the association of dialectics with an affirmative outcome.⁶

When Adorno declared the barbarism of poetry, he had especially in mind lyric poetry, or in broader terms the project of redemptive culture. His stance was more ambivalent and fluctuating—more paradoxical—than a flat aphorism. "That culture so far has failed," he had warned in 1944, "is no justification for furthering its failure, by strewing the store of good flour on the spilt beer." He built a life continually entangled with writers and artists, including some who wrestled seriously with what art could be after the disaster, and was himself drawn to the study of music and aesthetics. In his 1966 conclusion to *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno conceded that he had overstated the point in one sense—while understating it in another. Torture and suffering produce a right to scream and express, and "hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems." What remained valid was "whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. His mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz." Yet humanity also contended with a "new categorical imperative" whereby people had "to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself."⁷

In other words, Adorno wrestled with his own insight. He sought to salvage art in some way. He embraced the art of unsparing tension between reality and imagination—"the cleft between what human beings are meant to be and what the order of the world has made of them." Art had truth value insofar as it destroyed the lie. "The concept of a cultural resurrection after Auschwitz is illusory and absurd," he wrote in 1962. "But because the world has outlived its own downfall, it nevertheless needs art to write its unconscious history. The authentic artists . . . are those in whose work the uttermost horror still quivers."⁸

One contribution of this book is that in demonstrating the urgency and insight of the arts of truth-telling, it pushes us to contextualize rather than treat as universal the aphorism that hovers over narrative in the aftermath of atrocity. This point, a premise in the eloquent introduction by Cynthia Milton, gains force as recurring implication in the case studies that follow. In the long run,

Adorno's point was both to condemn art as an impossibility and to affirm it as the only possibility. Art risks falling into the lie of restoration and redemption. Yet it also proves indispensable to break the silence and indifference at the heart of the lie. This book pushes us to see and accept the enduring value of this paradox.

Consider the implications of this book for a second approach to art and society, focused on the artist. Latin Americans, wrote Jean Franco in *The Modern Culture of Latin America*, a masterful history of literary and artistic expression since the late 1800s, have "generally viewed art as an expression of the artist's whole self: a self which is living in a society and which therefore has a collective as well as individual concern." The idea of art for its own sake did not translate so readily into a cultural assumption about "the moral neutrality or the purity of art." The legitimacy of art as "a self-propagating tradition in which new movements may arise as a solution to technical problems" was stronger in Europe.⁹

Franco's point was subtle, more relative than absolute. It was about artistic technique, authenticity, and imperative in social and political context. The purpose was not to establish a simplified contrast between Europe and Latin America as aesthetic realms rigidly governed by individualistic versus socially minded artistic sensibilities, respectively. On the contrary, her analysis drew out the significance of European life experiences and cross-influences for Latin American writers and artists, and the irony that some adopted the stance of the superior calling or sought a kind of exile or mental refuge in art. Whatever the stance of the artist, however, the social question exerted a foundational influence on the legitimacy and subject of the work. Cultural expectation pressed the lettered person into the role of society's mentor. In this context, refusal to respond was itself a response. And the social question was profoundly explosive and unresolved—structures of injustice and backwardness provoked controversy, defining the national community proved conflictive and problematic, projects of nationalism and revolution caught the imagination. Hence Latin America experienced a history of artistic "fresh starts," ruptures rather than a working out of immanent artistic tradition. Artists assimilated, adapted, or invented techniques to respond to the "new social situation" that defined them.¹⁰

In this perspective, long before the disaster of the Shining Path war, Latin

American artists found themselves pushed to engage the sometimes synergistic tension between art as a creative invention or refuge in its own right and art as an unsettling intervention inspired by a societal condition. Some navigated the tension by creating breathing room—explicit distinction between the civic statement offered in a role as society's guide or celebrity and the creative work that requires space for inventiveness, ambiguity, and play. The creative space was not reducible to a political pronouncement or gatekeeping mentality, even if the social question exerted a direct or indirect influence. Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*; 1967) said something profound about the great 1928 banana massacre in Ciénaga, the historical event that is the climax of the novel. But the world of Macondo did not reduce to the politics of banana labor. As he gained international stature, García Márquez would explain that as a Latin American whose novels had created a reputation, "the only choice I have is to be an emergency politician." To do otherwise was unacceptable, "considering all that is going on in Latin America." But this activity was not the same as creating literature. Yet he would also, on accepting the 1982 Nobel Prize and describing the political horror afflicting South and Central America, echo Jean Franco's point that the social question inspired literary technique. "Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable."¹¹

Put differently, Latin America situations sometimes turned Adorno upside down: barbarism inspired art.

Yet Franco's interpretation also emerged in a particular historical context: the long 1960s. Her insightful study was published in a revised edition in 1970, after a first edition in 1967. It expressed a certain convergence: the Latin America that experienced the upheaval of a politics of revolutionary projects with the Latin America that won a "boom" reputation in literature and the arts. This was the Latin America where political debate was often framed as structural reform versus outright revolution and where the artist's relationship to society had regained a strong political salience. The decade opened with the Cuban Revolution of Fidel Castro in 1959 and closed with the election of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1970. Meanwhile, García Márquez won international acclaim

for *Cien años de soledad*, published in 1967, and Latin American writers drew attention and translations as a world literary phenomenon. In 1967, the Guatemalan novelist Miguel Angel Asturias, whose novels of the dictator-president and Maya peoples of maize merged political and artistic sensibilities, won the Nobel Prize in Literature. In 1971, Chilean poet and Communist Pablo Neruda, who backed Allende and therefore withdrew his own presidential candidacy, won the Nobel Prize.¹²

The moment passed. More precisely, it gave way to nightmares. The long 1960s gave rise not only to the politics of reform versus revolution but also its antithesis: pocide. A wave of violent right-wing dictatorships took hold in South America in the 1970s and determined to create a new style of military rule: not a caretaking role but a project to root out once and for all the old ways of thinking, mobilizing, and doing politics. At their most grandiose moments, the new regimes styled themselves as the frontline leaders of the West and the Cold War. Their methods were both repressive and educational—not only torture, killings, and disappearances but also discourses of modernity, law, and progress. The new military juntas of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay aimed not only to rid society of Communists, and dissenters of the Left or Center who served as their unwitting allies, but also to create citizenries educated to accept a new technocratic order. Peru followed a distinct path to nightmare. A reform-minded military junta came into power in 1968 and gave way to a conservative junta in 1975, and then came, under pressure of social movements, a democratic transition and elected civilian president in 1980. But most important, the 1970s witnessed the ideological formation of Shining Path, at first an unimpressive leftist splinter party, and culminated with its launch of a revolutionary war that proved shockingly brutal, resilient, and expansive during the 1980s. Meanwhile, civil wars produced an inferno of violence in Central America, especially in Guatemala and El Salvador, where military regimes engaged in scorched-earth campaigns.¹³

The new era destroyed the earlier convergence. In a study aptly entitled *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, published in 2002, Jean Franco considered the long-term cultural consequences of the dirty-war dictatorships and civil wars that swept over Cold War Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. As violent regimes gave way to democratic transitions in the 1990s, what remained was a deep transformation consolidated on their watch: the rise of a more neo-liberal

scheme of economy and culture that altered the relationship of the individual to society. The market was the fundamental metaphor and relationship, and culture was now “overwhelmingly the province of entertainment and of comfort activities that in turn generate ‘lite’ criticism that never challenges the doxa.” The modernist and statist conceits that once undergirded utopias as well as the lettered artist or intellectual had collapsed. Commercialization reigned, and serious cultural work retreated to the margin. Despite the bleakness, Franco refused to end pessimistically, “for something is still alive among the rubble if only an effort of will.”¹⁴

The collapse was not altogether bad, since what destroys may also set free. Less suffocated by conceits of state and modernity and less tethered by political party or utopia, new voices of expression, dialogue, and insistence may arise from the margin and inspire new cycles of *testimonio* or bearing witness by indigenous peoples, women, human rights activists, gays, environmentalists, and outcasts of the underclass, such as prostitutes and homeless.¹⁵

A second contribution of this book is that it enables us to contextualize the crisis of high culture and the artist-society relationship differently, within a more holistic and culturally inclusive framework. The crisis emerged in distinct contexts and historical moments in Europe and Latin America. But Adorno and Franco also had something in common. Both worked fundamentally with high culture, although Franco was sensitive to the “seduction of margins,” and both provided evidence of its crisis. Their portraits of crisis, although pioneering and insightful, were incomplete.¹⁶

The arts of truth-telling analyzed in this book enable us to see the “something still alive among the rubble.” When we expand our range of vision to include popular culture as well as high culture and the brokers in between, we can discern what has *not* been lost. A space of insistence on art that engages the social question has continued to emerge in Latin America. But the space of artistic insistence is populated by different actors, including many of popular origin.

The diverse studies in this book make this point abundantly clear. Víctor Vich and Cynthia Garza invite us to consider how “high art” forms such as the novel and theater, respectively, may aim to collapse social distances and complacency. Storytelling forms that might otherwise be dismissed as “folk art”—the graphic novel created by Luis Rossell, Alfredo Villar, and Jesús Cossio, the *pumpin*

Carnival songs researched by Jonathan Ritter—acquire salience in this book as urgent art, a witnessing whose fusion of truth, poignancy, and imagination open up the viewer-listener to the sorrows of a devastating experience. Yet the collapse of a hierarchical aesthetic boundary between “high” and “low” does not suffice to capture the artistic climate and vitality. In the space of social insistence on an art of post-atrocity, new methodologies also emerge, as in Edilberto Jiménez’s ethnographic drawings, whose very premise is collaborative grassroots testimonial. New artistic actors appropriate a preexisting genre and adapt it to new publics, as in the filmmaking of Palito Ortega, who insists in his interview with Ponciano del Pino that his cinema, inspired by life and fear in Ayacucho, is uniquely suitable as a mirror in which highlanders can find themselves and their experiences. New brokers, including NGOs, promote grassroots art as valuable and indispensable, as in the community art and commemoration contests analyzed by Cynthia Milton and Ricardo Caro Cárdenas, respectively. And new necessities for cultural authenticity arise among social actors or officials “from above,” as in María Eugenia Ulfe’s striking depiction of the transformation of the *retablo*, the “popular” art of small painted open-door triptych boxes, into a giant stage for the ceremonial delivery of the truth and reconciliation report to the people of Ayacucho.

The collapse of strict high-low boundaries and the attendant emergence of new brokers to mediate artist-society relationships differently is not an altogether new phenomenon. One of the features of the political and cultural ferment in Latin America in the long 1960s was precisely the desire to expand the circle of valid artistic expression. Discovery and promotion of *lo popular* opened the aesthetic door to new styles and new artists—to “folk” expression and its creators. For truth-telling after the times of atrocity, what may be most revealing is not the crisis of high culture and the lettered city but the shifting balance among artistic actors who bring to their creative work dramatically varied social capital. Just as civil society actors who sometimes seemed marginal took on the burden of pressing the post-atrocity state not to settle for quick closure of human rights work related to truth, justice, and cultural memory, so it is that artists of popular or self-made background may shoulder more of the imperative to create an art that refuses the lie. In both cases, transnational and NGO connection has also

proved significant. The artists and brokers described in this book help us see and consider this shifting balance, but they did not come from nowhere.¹⁷

As Milton observes in her essays, after atrocity artistic expression offers different ways of knowing and bearing witness to experience—thereby pulling people into what otherwise might remain unknown or pushed aside. Art multiplies the expressive paths we can take to somehow imagine, apprehend, and convey truths of a reality whose “plus” factor (Friedlander’s “excess”) is so extreme it seems to defy the real and the believable. The essays in this book provide grounded case studies, important in their own right and in their diversity, of the ways artistic expression in a post-atrocity society can turn into the moral imperative of truth-telling.

Taken together, the essays also do something more. A third contribution of this book is that it demonstrates the deep interplays—a kind of intimate entanglement—of aesthetics, authenticity, and empathy in the making of artistic truth-telling claims for a postcolonial society. In a society such as Peru, where the “coloniality” of social relations outlasted Spanish rule and sparked not only conflict but sensibilities of national fragmentation, the barriers to truth claims were formidable. The social divides and conflicts were not only economic but also ethnoracial, not only national but also regional and linguistic-cultural, not only recent but also historically entrenched. Put differently, a central aesthetic challenge of art as truth-telling has been how to deploy authenticity and evoke empathy across profound social division, thereby creating imaginative “pull” into unfamiliar and difficult zones of experience. Creating such pull has not been a simple task, precisely because to a large degree the Peruvian nation, especially in its legacy of war and atrocity in the 1980s–1990s, remained a society of “still colonized” and “still colonizing” communities.

The book’s insight on intimate entanglements of aesthetics, authenticity, and empathy to create artistic ways of knowing and bearing witness to truth emerges cumulatively, as a leitmotif across the case study essays. Consider authenticity. Milton and Ulfe show in distinct ways that even for a blue-ribbon truth commission intended to provide a solemn nonfictional narrative of what had happened, an artistic aesthetic that evoked the “deep Peru” of highland society

proved fundamental—to prime rural highlanders to give their testimonies to a commission from Lima, to provide an anchor of legitimacy for the delivery of the report in the highlands, and to forge a space for continued truth-telling and social repair claims after release of the report.

Consider empathy. Jiménez and the team of Rossell, Villar, and Cossio show that to convey truths powerful enough to destroy the convenient lie, to undermine the impulse to look away from horror, and to reach across social divides, artists have coupled the ugliness of the story with aesthetics of humanization that invite the reader-viewer to continue onward. The artists came at the issue from opposite angles. Jiménez’s ethnographic drawings focus on the experience of rural *comuneros* (community residents) in Chungui. The depictions and texts are profoundly disturbing, but the shocks of violence come with techniques that invite the reader to identify rather than go numb—the collaborative first person voice that creates a you-are-there sensibility; the scene so poignant, as in forced conscription of children, that it undermines simple political othering of victims; the drama of human anxiety and problem-solving by villagers haunted by the fear that turning themselves in for protection and a new start will backfire, because others will assume they are Senderistas. The coauthors of the graphic novel *Rupay* focus on Lima-based journalists who were killed by Uchuraccay *comuneros* in 1983 as alleged Senderistas. They turn the Limeños into *simpático* subjects of a mystery story within a mystery story. The journalists joke about their own lack of physical fitness as they make the tough trek up the Andes to investigate an early war massacre in Huaychao, only to have their own disastrous fate in nearby Uchuraccay turn into the unsolved puzzle. The alternation of comic-book panels with occasional documentary photograph panels not only drives home the reality of the Limeño victims as (once) living human beings but also subtly reinforces empathy by avoiding the stereotyping of Indians. They are no longer the ignorant or savage *comuneros* who often inhabit the nation’s official narratives.

Consider, finally, aesthetics. Garza’s study of the experimental theater of Yuyachkani presents an artistic transformation of the medium to break apart “normal” conventions of performing and viewing, and of daily life itself, that might otherwise enable us to draw distance from, rather than take common ownership in, the experience of violent power. But the main point is not aesthetic experi-

ment for its own sake, that is, for developing art in its immanent sense as technique and imagination. The point is to anchor violence within a longer history that renders it deeply authentic—the problem is entrenched in who we are as a *historical* people, it is not a passing issue of who we recently became. The point is also to achieve a dissolving boundary between “your body” and “my body” that can liberate an unknown capacity for empathic experience. In a different way, Ortega and del Pino’s interview-essay also points to multidirectional entanglements. What fires the aesthetic imagination is moral imperative—a social duty to create an artistic voice that can capture the true experiences of authentic Peruvians otherwise invisible, neglected, or stereotyped by the Lima-centric nation. What defines aesthetic success is that ordinary *serranos* (highlanders) can finally see themselves on screen in a manner that breeds recognition and identification. As Ortega puts it, the testimonial passion of his work derives from “a moral obligation to tell stories not created in my head, but by reality. I’ve lived through it in Ayacucho.”

The making of memory is also a making of silence. Memory is not simple recall of past events but an evocation of their meaning as human experience. In many post-atrocity societies, including Peru, the memory question—defining indisputable core facts and meanings of an era of terrifying violence—is conflictive and even explosive. It feeds struggles over sociopolitical legitimacy, social repair demands, legal and criminal accountability, and the future direction of politics and society. In a transitional post-atrocity society, one memory camp may use some alleged facts and meanings as a club to pound the other. Within a given community or memory camp that has suffered repressive violence, moreover, some themes may prove divisive and therefore place at risk the internal coherence needed to seek redress. In short, the sociopolitical “struggle” aspect of memory may yield sensitive taboo topics.¹⁸

In addition, the personal experience of trauma—the extreme humiliation and pain that undermines the person’s integrity and produces shame—may also yield difficulties of telling. Trauma can elude integration into a life narrative, turning the person into a divided soul, caught between the shattered self of deep memory of another time and the rebuilt self who navigates banal everyday time. Even if the person who rebuilds life finds a way to create a more integrated life narrative

and indeed feels compelled to bear witness, some aspects of experience may remain so sensitive and challenging that they also turn into silence.¹⁹

The arts of truth-telling, even if they open up alternative ways of knowing and bearing witness, do not escape the sociopolitical and personal dynamics that breed silence—the sense of danger that surrounds the taboo topic. In a society of memory struggles to shape the present and future, remorse about a person or a community’s past choices or actions is among the most difficult areas to engage. In the Peruvian case, the sensitive subject par excellence has been complicity in the making of the terror—whether in alignment with Sendero Luminoso and its beachhead of initial support in rural communities or with the state and its lethal dirty war campaign.

A fourth contribution of this book is that it enables us to “see” how silence, especially public speech taboos about known but unacknowledged secrets, inflected the making of art. For artistic truth-telling, like truth-telling more generally, the dialectics of memory and silence were powerful. Remembrance necessarily implied selectivity: a focus on what was most important to remember about the experience of violent repression and why. The opposite side of the same coin was silencing of some aspects of the past that might turn into a perverse instrument to deny key facts or to deflect responsibility for the victim’s suffering.

As with the other insights of this book, the mutual constitution of memory and silence is a point that gains force because it recurs, with variations, across several essays. Ritter’s nuanced study of *pumpin* song demonstrates that only with the *reemergence* of *pumpin* after its initial repression in the Fajardo countryside in the early 1980s did it turn toward a “testimonial” aesthetic, defined in contrast to an earlier protest aesthetic that had been partly instrumentalized by Shining Path and partly embraced by *comuneros*. In tracing the Sacsamarca community’s commemorative reenactments of military resistance to Shining Path in May 1983, Caro Cárdenas analyzes how social actors and sensitive themes generated a shifting dialectic of remembrance and parody on the one hand, silence and discretion on the other.

These chapters contribute to an exciting cluster of new microstudies, at once historical and ethnographic, of communities in the Ayacucho region. These microstudies draw out histories of community fissure and longing that laid a foundation for complex local engagements of Shining Path during the 1980s—

including transitory and partial bases of support, ambiguous stances of coerced complicity and “resistant adaptation,” transitions toward organized resistance—and community fratricide. The latter created a legacy of touchy community secrets after the war. As Olga M. González brilliantly demonstrated in her study of Sarhua and its famous art of *tablas* (painted boards), one may analyze art itself as a memory narrative whose silences—in this case, about circumstances related to the disappearance of one *comunero*, the assassination of another, and initial community responses to Sendero—opens the door to discovery of the deep inner history of a community and its necessary secrets.²⁰

In other cases, the point of art is precisely to expose the silence that looks away from other kinds of complicity or that becomes a different way of bearing witness to violent suffering. On both counts, Vich's study of Alonso Cueto's novel *La hora azul* is revealing. Adrián Ormache, the lawyer-protagonist, discovers a family secret that brings out into the open the reality of rape as military prerogative and weapon during the state's dirty war campaign in the highlands. At the same time, his attraction to the victim-survivor Miriam and her son (and his possible half-brother) Miguel brings him into contact with a different kind of silence—that of the victim whose silence speaks loudly about an experience beyond words.

This book draws out the dialectics of memory and silence in artistic truth-telling. At the same time, it does not claim to exhaust the full range of potential themes—and in that sense produces its own silences. As Milton notes, this book does not engage the memories of the military actors or Shining Path militants. These actors matter not only because they waged war but also because they generated sympathizers, not simply opponents, and suffered violence that could turn them into victims or even hero-victims in some eyes. Such sympathies and ambiguities fed the divisiveness of the memory question and complicated social responses to art. As Katherine Hite and others have shown, *El Ojo que Llora* (*The Eye That Cries*), one of the most moving memorials to victims of the war violence created after the truth commission's 2003 report, had great empathic power—but also, precisely for this reason, great capacity to spark conflict. Sited in a park in Lima's centrally located Jesús María municipality, *El Ojo que Llora* is a sculpture centered on Pachamama, the Andean Mother Earth, in the form of a giant sorrowful rock, of a type found on the Andean coast and dating to

pre-Inca times, within which appears an “eye,” a smaller rock that continually releases water. From the eye of the Pachamama, tears drip into a pool. To reach the rock, one must undertake a journey through a labyrinth bounded by bands of 32,000 smaller rocks worn smooth by Andean sun and sea, each representing a victim, and among them some 27,000 rocks with painted inscriptions of the names and ages of individual victims and their year of death or disappearance.

Yet who could legitimately be included among the victims? Should the names include Senderista prisoners subjected to slaughter in military raids? Should they include soldiers, some of whom had been drafted? Such questions sparked anger and led to physical attacks. The most notorious took place in September 2007 when assailants beat up a guard and proceeded to smash stones and throw orange paint on the Pachamama.²¹

An additional silence is regional. Did artistic truth-telling advance most intensely in metropolitan Lima and the Ayacucho region—precisely the two regions featured in the book? Lima was the cultural, media, and political center of the official nation that sponsored a truth-telling commission. Ayacucho was the highland region that gave birth to Shining Path as a coherent political group and that also drew attention as the region that first experienced genocidal slaughter. Yet the war expanded over time to other regions—not only to other highland regions such as central sierra provinces north of Ayacucho and east of Lima but also to jungle regions and Amazonian peoples such as the Asháninka, who also experienced devastating slaughter. To what extent was artistic truth-telling less pronounced, or less able to draw on state or NGO actors for support, in these regions of post-Shining Path Peru?²²

One of the pioneering contributions of this book, therefore, is not only that it enables us to see the ways artistic memory-making is bound up with makings of silence. Its insights also enable us to perceive and ask new questions—to begin to probe other silences.

What, then, is the artist’s truth? At one level, of course, the question is profoundly misleading. As this book shows, there are many artists and many artistic truths about the experience and meaning of violent atrocity—and its continuing presence, as something still foundational in the making of post-atrocity society.

Yet at a different level, that of aspiration and dilemma, the question defies such easy dismissal. In Latin America, whose artists and intellectuals have long wrestled with their relationship to the social question, the answer of “many artists and many truths” does not fully convince. Taken too far, it can sound like evasion, an unacceptable slide toward self-complacency. In the early twenty-first century, the unacceptability factor is all the more compelling because the era of dirty war created, as legacy and memory struggle, a Latin American version of the post-Auschwitz predicament. Indeed, one legacy of the era was an eclectic array of artistic actors from many social backgrounds, many of whom are themselves survivor-witnesses.

And herein lies the artist's truth. Art happens at the intersection of experience and imagination. In post-atrocity Peru and other post-atrocity societies of Latin America, Adorno's dictum in its more nuanced and paradoxical sense has come roaring back to life. It is the dilemma and aspiration that the socially engaged artist cannot avoid. How and why do we imagine what happened? Once we find a way to imagine what happened, how and why do we turn it into a moral imperative and life force?

The artist's truth is the dilemma itself. The impossibility of art as a medium to grasp fully an experience beyond limits does not cancel out its imperative as the only possibility. The danger that art will slide toward a redemptive project of closure does not cancel out the imperative to imagine the harrowing gap between what humans become and what they are meant to be. In entering that gap, art invites us to see and somehow take in as truthful experience that which is otherwise too difficult to stare at. It shatters, yet in so doing can prompt the difficult question that also affirms life: what will we do with the imperative created by this experience? The heart quivers, and yet it beats.

Notes

1. The international dimension of dirty war regimes was fundamental both within and beyond Latin America and has recently drawn renewed attention from historians.

For dirty war and the making of a new international regime of human rights, an excellent introduction is Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*; cf. Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 357–386; and for pioneering contributions from political science and anthropology, respectively, Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, esp. 1–38, 79–120, and

Tate, *Counting the Dead*. For reconsideration of Cold War connections, superb studies are Joseph and Spenser, *In from the Cold*, and Rabe, *The Killing Zone*; for work setting the Cold War within stretched time lines and a globalized history of Third World revolutions, respectively, Grandin and Joseph, *A Century of Revolution*, and Westad, *The Global Cold War*; and for locally grounded political understandings of transnational solidarity, Stites Mor, *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America*.

For Shining Path and its cult of violence, the scholarly pioneer is the late Carlos Iván Degregori, *How Difficult It Is to Be God*; cf. Gorriti, *Sendero*; Portocarrero, *Razones de sangre*.

For dirty war regimes as “policide”—a root-and-branch killing off of earlier ways of understanding and doing politics—see also n. 13 here. For a beautifully researched and vivid example that policide projects did not fully succeed, even in scorched-earth contexts that drove peasants into refugee status beyond national borders, see Todd, *Beyond Displacement*.

2. The baseline numbers of the dead, disappeared, and tortured in the five countries amount to a verified *partial* accounting through national or international truth commission reports. The truth report numbers that yield some 340,000 victims as a reasonable low-end number are as follows: Argentina—8,960 disappeared; Chile—40,277 disappeared or killed or tortured (the dead and disappeared amounted to 3,197 in 1990s reports, and 30 additional cases in a 2011 report; prisoners politically imprisoned amounted to 27,255 in a 2004 report, and an additional 9,795 cases in a 2011 report); El Salvador—over 22,000 dead or disappeared; Guatemala—about 200,000 dead or disappeared; Peru—69,280 estimated dead or disappeared. These figures total 340,517 victims. Yet as the reports for Argentina and El Salvador acknowledged, truth commissions wrestled with evidence that many more cases had occurred than those that had been individually denounced and sufficiently documented to certify officially. As the Argentine report noted, “we also know that many disappearances have not been reported, because of lack of relatives of the victims, because of preferences to remain quiet, or because of living in places far from urban centers, as the Commission learned in visits to interior regions where many relatives of the disappeared indicated to us that they did not know where to go in past years.” (See the opening of chap. 2 of the report, as cited in the online edition below.) The Chilean report on torture made a similar point about the difficulty of coming forward for those who had suffered extreme humiliation. For two countries—Guatemala and Peru—the commissions included in their figures an estimate methodology to supplement direct individualized case work. If one holds to a conservative methodology for the other three countries, reasonable adjusted estimates are as follows: for Argentina, 20,000 disappeared is the midpoint in the commonly accepted range of 10,000–30,000 disappeared; for Chile, 64,000 dead, disappeared, or

tortured takes account of 60,000 as a conservative baseline (midway between 50,000 and 70,000) for torture and 4,000 as a baseline (midway between 3,500 and 4,500) for deaths and disappearances; for El Salvador, the widely accepted estimate is 75,000 dead. These adjustments would raise the five-country total to 428,280.

Under the circumstances, the range of 340,000 to 430,000 victims is a reasonable order of magnitude for the dead, disappeared, and tortured in the five countries. It is probably understated, moreover, in view of lack of systematic accounting for tortured persons who survived, except in the case of Chile. For the five countries as a whole, the time frame under consideration may be construed as a two-decade period from the early 1970s to early 1990s, with variation in the specific dirty war periods of specific countries. It should be noted that other countries that engaged in dirty war followed time lines that spilled somewhat outside this range. In Brazil, for example, the military toppled a democracy in 1964 and its repression hardened notably in 1968, while in Paraguay, the regime of Alfredo Stroessner dated to 1954 but joined the 1970s transnational scheme of South American dirty war known as Operation Condor. For Latin America as a whole, one may think of the dirty-war era under consideration here as the “long” 1970s–1980s, while recognizing that chronologies of individual countries varied.

For the official reports and figures for Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Peru, respectively, see the following websites, www.desaparecidos.org/arg/conadep/nuncamas/indice.html, accessed June 10, 2012; www.indh.cl/informacion-comision-valech, accessed June 10, 2012; www.usip.org/files/ElSalvador-Report.pdf, accessed June 10, 2012; shr.aas.org/guatemala/ceh/mds/spanish/toc.html, accessed June 10, 2012; and www.cverdad.org.pe, accessed June 10, 2012. For additional background on the Chilean case, where figures developed through a cumulative process involving four different official reports—a foundational truth commission report in 1991 on deaths and disappearances, a follow-up report on deaths and disappearances in 1996, a new truth commission on political imprisonment and torture in 2004, and a follow-up to consider additional cases of torture, deaths, and disappearances in 2011—and where the torture report also prompted criticism by some shantytown residents and human rights activists about the exclusion from consideration of massive and brutal violence during shantytown raids, see also Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 65–98, 286–297, 325–329, 390–392n. 3; 465n. 72.

3. For distinct approaches by two influential activist intellectuals, see Zalaquett, “Balancing Ethical Imperatives and Political Constraints,” and Juan E. Méndez, “Accountability for Past Abuses”; for tension between truth-telling as a formula for closure and as a wedge for expanding work, Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*; for truth commissions in comparative context, Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*. For pioneering research on shifting responsiveness by judicial actors, including both domestic and transnational dynamics,

see Collins, *Post-transitional Justice*; Huneeus, “Judging from a Guilty Conscience”; Lutz and Sikkink, “The Justice Cascade”; Sikkink, *The Justice Cascade*. For an insightful and sobering cautionary tale on international justice, Cruvellier, *Court of Remorse*.

4. Friedlander, “Trauma, Transference and ‘Working Through’ in Writing the History of the Shoah,” 52.

5. For quotes, see Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” in *Prisms*, 34; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 216. For thoughtful discussion by literary scholars of the Adorno thesis, see Bernard-Donals and Glejzer, *Between Witness and Testimony*, and for an interesting inversion, Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction*, 211–212. For Adorno’s thought in context and its significance and controversial aspects in his own era, see sources in n. 6 here.

6. For quotes, see Adorno, *Prisms*, 34, and for the German sentence that frames the Auschwitz-poetry problem in a manner more complex than the short stand-alone sentence in English translation, Adorno, *Gesellschaftstheorie und Kulturkritik*, 65. That the translators were aware that the “remarkable syntactic flexibility” of German can create an intrasentence thought process—a dynamic tension of thinking within the sentence—in contrast with English syntactical convention is clear from the prefatory essay by one of the translators, Samuel M. Weber, “Translating the Untranslatable,” 13. For the masterwork on dialectics, see Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*. I thank Geneviève Dorais for research assistance on Adorno and his intellectual circles and acknowledge my intellectual debt to three key works that set Adorno’s life and thought in context: Claussen, *Theodor Adorno*, esp. chap. 8 (note date, lecture style, and context of Adorno’s essay “Cultural Criticism and Society,” 261); Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, esp. pt. 4; Jäger, *Adorno*; and for superb analysis of Adorno’s dictum, attentive to language and to Adorno’s dialectics and overall thought, Hofmann, “Poetry after Auschwitz.” I follow Jäger’s translation, *Adorno*, 186, in my rendering of the complex German version of Adorno’s dictum. For useful scholarly readers on Adorno’s thought and work, see also Huhn, *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*; Gibson and Rubin, *Adorno*; see also Adorno, *Can One Live after Auschwitz?*

7. For quotes, see Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 44; Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 362–363, 365. See also n. 8 here.

8. For quotes and Adorno’s clarifications of his stances on art and lyric poetry, I am especially indebted to Müller-Doohm’s trenchant analysis in *Adorno*, esp. 356 (“cleft”), 403–404 (“resurrection”), 405, 470–474; also helpful is Nikolopoulou, “As If.”

9. Franco, *The Modern Culture of Latin America*, 11.

10. See Franco, *The Modern Culture of Latin America*, 11–12, for quotes.

11. For “emergency politician” reflection, see Dreifus, “Playboy Interview”; and for speech, given on December 8, 1982, “Gabriel García Márquez—Nobel Prize Lecture,” at www.nobelprize.org, accessed April 6, 2012. For a fascinating cautionary tale on the dangers of reducing life to the politics of banana labor or its famed literary expression by García Márquez, see LeGrand, “Living in Macondo.”

12. If read as a document of the era, Franco, *Modern Culture*, is a fine example of this convergence; for the “reform versus revolution” sensibility, a good starting point is Petras and Zeitlin, *Latin America*; for the Nobel Prize in Literature, see list at www.nobelprize.org, accessed April 6, 2012.

13. For overview of events, see Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, and the other sources cited in n. 1 here; for the concept of ponicide specifically, see Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*, esp. xxii–xxiii, 31–32, 180–181n. 27, and for nuances in relation to “genocide,” Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 99–105.

14. See Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, 261, 275, for quotes.

15. Franco herself offers a perceptive analysis in *The Decline and Fall*, 201–219, and for classic formulation of the making of new cultural hybridities in Latin America, see García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*; cf. Monsiváis, *Mexican Postcards*. The most internationally well-known subaltern testimonial voice from Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s was that of Rigoberta Menchú of Guatemala, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 but whose testimony also sparked controversy about truth; for an excellent discussion, see Arias, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, which responded to Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*; for the testimonial text in its influential English-language edition, see Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*.

16. Franco, *The Decline and Fall*, 201.

17. In my research on the Chilean case of democratic transition, one of the central conclusions I arrived at is that conflictive synergies between civil society actors and state actors proved crucial for cumulative advance on issues of truth, justice, and human rights memory but that the creative synergistic moments were transitory. During this up-and-down history, civil society actors often carried the burden of pressing the memory question and insisting on widening human rights work rather than settling for a point of closure. For the Chilean case and related comparative and international perspectives, see Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 360–383. For suggestive recent research that documents widening circles of social actors who resort to artistic technique, irrespective of recognition of their work as “art,” to push memory issues and awareness into the public domain even as relations with state actors remain problematic, see Stites Mor, *Transition Cinema*; Feld and Stites Mor, *El pasado que miramos*; Jelin and Longoni, *Escrituras, imágenes y escenarios ante la represión*.

18. For theorized discussion of memory struggles as labor opposing distinct selective frameworks of meaning, and thereby binding the making of memory with the making of silence, from overlapping but somewhat distinct perspectives, see Jelin, *Los trabajos de la memoria*, and Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*; and for perspective on silence as a form of communication, Jaworski, *Silence*.

19. On silences within intimate familial and intergenerational contexts, see, aside from the sources in n. 18 here, Jelin and Kaufman, *Subjetividad y figuras de la memoria*,

esp. Kaufman, “Lo legado y lo propio”; for silence as personal defense against humiliation, in the aftermath of torture and sexualized violence, as a major finding within the Chilean truth commission process on political prison and torture, Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 293–297; on the self divided between “deep” life and “normal” everyday life, I am greatly indebted to Delbo, *Days and Memory*, and the brilliant elaboration inspired by Delbo in Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*.

20. González, *Unveiling Secrets of War in the Peruvian Andes*; for other pioneering microstudies, see del Pino, “Uchuraccay”; Gamarra Carrillo, *Resiliencia social y cambio en comunidades campesinas afectadas por conflicto armado interno*; Heilman, *Before the Shining Path*; La Serna, *The Corner of the Living*; Theidon, *Entre prójimos*; and for microlevel research from urban and art history perspectives, respectively, Tamayo, “ANFASEP y la lucha por la memoria de sus desaparecidos (1983–2000)”; Ulfe, *Cajones de la memoria*. On “resistant adaptation” as a lens for considering community stances toward Shining Path, see Stern, *Shining and Other Paths*, 119–257, esp. Degregori, “Harvesting Storms,” and del Pino, “Family, Culture, and ‘Revolution’”; also Degregori, *How Difficult It Is to Be God*, chap. 5.

21. Hite, *Politics and the Art of Commemoration*, esp. 42–62; see also Drinot, “For Whom the Eye Cries,” and Milton, “Defacing Memory.”

22. On the memory question in the Asháninka context, see Villapolo Herrera, “Senderos del desengaño”; and for broader contexts of expansion of war into the central sierra and selva regions north of Ayacucho on the one hand and as far south as Puno on the other, Manrique, “The War for the Central Sierra,” and Rénique, “Apogee and Crisis of a ‘Third Path’.”