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Archiveras anarquistas: Corporal Testimony in the Work of Diamela Eltit

Abstract

There exists a constant within the trajectory of Diamela Eltit's contributions to New Chilean Fiction: the turn to the body's revelatory capacity as a corporal archive of human existence. Simultaneously exploring and rejecting the confines of the traditional testimonial reliance on language, Eltit moves the reader to a re-consideration of the truth-telling function of the biological materiality of the body, placing imperfect corporalities on display as a means of speaking, even where the voice itself may falter. This essay locates Eltit's move to the corporal within the trajectory of feminist criticism, the traumatic realities of the Chilean dictatorship and post-dictatorship periods, and the search for the recuperation of those bodily knowledges represented by the disappeared. Next, it turns to Eltit's *Impuesto a la carne* as her most recent re-visioning of the importance of corporal textualities, whether or not the subject-matter of the body's denunciation is connected to the dictatorship. Lastly, this essay reconsiders the rejective power of the traditional archive, analyzing the effect set models have on those who seek to tell their stories outside of the traditional testimonial model. I argue that the case of Diamela Eltit is an example of the way writers and producers of cultural texts which actively inscribe alternative memories of the past are resisting the authoritative power of the archive and subversively inscribing narrative memory onto bodily materialities, re-orienting the view of the corporal from an evidentiary showing to an active process of re-telling the past. Eltit's novels, inscribed with her corporal textual model, give voice to survivors, articulating an alternate historical model for the archive, embracing the biological and making it speak against the rigid abuses of authoritarianism.

Keywords

*Body; Diamela Eltit; Archival Power; Testimonio;
Chilean Post-dictatorship; Impuesto a la carne.*

*Horizontal direction betrays the first line or cut on the left arm.
It is solely a mark, sign or writing that is going to separate the hand that
frees itself by means of the preceding line. This is the cut by the hand.
Whereas – upward – the epidermis becomes bog/
barbered barbaric baroque
The second cut on the left arm is manifestly weaker. The blade has been
sunk into the skin superficially. This second cut is ruled by the first on
the left arm.
The distance that separates the two cuts is the surface of the skin that
appears and emerges rigorously following the very shape of the wrist.
(E. Luminata 153-54)*

With these words, Diamela Eltit inscribed the pain of the Chilean dictatorship onto the body, documenting the atrocities of 1983 not only onto the pages of her text, but the physical material of the corporal state. In *Lúmpérica* (*E. Luminata*), Eltit's narrative cuts across the tactile page in menacing slices, refusing to be complicit to conventional forms and models. The baroque language of Eltit's work forces her reader to enter the text, to decipher the abnormal codes, to make meaning from fragments of utterances, all generated from a centrally placed and undeniably present body.

Eltit's texts throughout her career have required this recognition of the corporal. In her first novel, *Lúmpérica*, Eltit forces the reader to face the bloody cuts on her page in order to enter the chaotic existence of the Chilean citizen living under dictatorship. This move toward the abject corporality of the sliced and wounded body has remained consistent throughout the trajectory of Eltit's work, with her 1991 novel, *Vaca sagrada*, exploring the tortured body through the incorporation of expressions of body dysmorphia and a marked examination of sadomasochistic relationships. Later, *El infarto del alma*'s denunciation of the Chilean mental health care system occurred via the photographic (re)presentation of the bodies of one facility's patients, drawing the reader to a consideration of the corporal evidence that betrays a differently normal interior psychic state. In her latest novel, *Impuesto a la carne*, Eltit transports the reader into the bloodied

and sickened existence of a mother and daughter suffering through multiplying maladies within the confines of an authoritarian hospital that repeatedly violates the sanctity of the body and the autonomy of the individual. All of these texts reveal a constant within the trajectory of Diamela Eltit's contributions to New Chilean Fiction: the turn to the body's revelatory capacity as a corporal archive of human existence.

Simultaneously exploring and rejecting the confines of the traditional testimonial reliance on language, Eltit moves the reader to a re-consideration of the truth-telling function of the biological materiality of the body, placing flawed corporalities on display as a means of speaking, even where the voice itself may falter. This essay locates Eltit's move to the corporal within the trajectory of feminist criticism, the traumatic realities of the Chilean dictatorship and post-dictatorship periods, and the search for the recuperation of those bodily knowledges represented by the disappeared. Next, it turns to *Impuesto a la carne* as her most recent re-visioning of the importance of corporal textualities –an importance that remains regardless of whether or not the subject matter of the body's denunciation is connected to the dictatorship. Lastly, this essay reconsiders the rejective power of the traditional archive, analyzing the effect that set models have on those who seek to tell their stories outside of the traditional testimonial model. I argue that the case of Diamela Eltit is an example of the way writers and producers of cultural texts which actively inscribe alternative memories of the past are resisting the authoritative power of the archive and subversively inscribing narrative memory onto bodily materialities, re-orienting the view of the corporal from an evidentiary showing to an active process of re-telling the past. Eltit's novels, inscribed with her corporal textual model, give voice to survivors, articulating an alternate historical model for the archive, embracing the biological and making it speak against the rigid abuses of authoritarianism.

Corporal Textualities: The Rhetoric of Torture and the Re-Claiming of the Wound

While Eltit's early focus on the body in *Lúmpérica* can be interpreted as a tactic for communicating complex, baroque schemes via an alternate model in order to move her work past government censorship, the continuation of the body's centrality to her literary production merits further consideration. *Vaca sagrada*, representative of Eltit's body of work in the 1990s exhibits an ongoing focus on the body, specifically writing from an exploratory sexuality, which can be read as a reacquainting with the corporal self in the period of the post-dictatorship. Eltit's re-examination of the imperfect body during this period clearly intersected with feminist concerns at the time. Her participation in anthologies such as *Escribir en los bordes: Congreso Internacional de Literatura Femenina Latinoamericana 1987*, evidences her early commitment to the body as a repository of historical testimonial values:

Esta antigua voz dominante, incubada artesanalmente *en el cuerpo* de la mujer indígena, ya violada, ya obsecuente, ya aterrada, portadora mayoritariamente de la modificación étnica y cultural en nuestro continente, sometió a las otras voces, voces indígenas al estatuto de la indigencia materna, y, al mestizaje, necesario para el repoblamiento, al cerco límite de la despropiedad histórica. (17, emphasis mine)

Additionally, the 1990s in feminist literary thought produced the theory of Judith Butler, whose philosophical redrawing of the relationships between biological sex, desire, gender, performance, and discursivity in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) ushered in a new era of consideration of the sex/gender distinction, explored in profundity with relation to the corporal by Elizabeth Grosz in her 1994 study *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Both North American and Latin American feminisms in this period moved toward a re-consideration of the specific position of the body in culture and society, a central focus that Eltit also maintained throughout her work in this period.

Eltit's work, specifically located in Chile, also exhibits a marked influence with respect to the country's authoritarian past. On September 11, 1973, Chilean military forces, led by CIA-backed General Augusto Pinochet, staged a military coup against the government of President Salvador Allende. This signaled a significant change in the course of Chilean politics that would have a lasting effect for decades to come. The coup began seventeen years of authoritarian rule by the Pinochet dictatorship from 1973 to 1990.¹ During these nearly two decades, the Chilean people lived under a militarized government and the power of Pinochet, who held both the position of commander-in-chief and chief of state. The Pinochet regime's rule was marked by the systematic violation of the rights of Chilean citizens, many stemming from the way Pinochet's secret police² "acted above and outside the law" (Ensalaco x). Due to its misuse of power, the Pinochet government's policies left a legacy of human rights violations, including torture, unlawful detentions, and disappearances which led to an ellipsis in the historical record and a painful absence of information still felt by the people of Chile today.

This absence of information revolves specifically around the bodies of those who were tortured and those whose corporal evidence of political wrongdoing was intentionally and systematically "disappeared." This period of Chilean history produced a changed schemata for the discussion of the body, a poetics which forms the basis of Hernán Vidal's study *Chile: Poética de la tortura política* in which he argues that the dictatorship created "nuevas normas rompiendo toda norma" (101) and that the politics of the dictatorship ultimately boiled down to the biological, "de carne y hueso" (108). These new norms, this differently oriented view of the biological, emerges in the work of Eltit via an emphasis on the corporal material as a means of evidencing a past truth and,

¹ As Mark Ensalaco notes in his text, *Chile Under Pinochet* (Ensalaco, 2000), there exists a debate as to the official character of the regime, with scholars vacillating between characterizing it as a dictatorship or a Bureaucratic Authoritarian (BA) regime. For the purposes of my paper I will be referring to the Pinochet government as a dictatorship.

² Pinochet's police were referred to by the acronym DINA.

ultimately, communicating such truth. The ‘new norm’ of the body, as an object upon which society’s politics and struggles are enacted, re-codes the corporal as a repository of historical knowledge imbuing it with a new archival function to be accepted as norm.

While Eltit’s use of the body in her texts has remained constant, the consideration of this element has varied within the field of literary studies. Currently, theoretical considerations of literature appear to be returning to, or perhaps renewing, their focus on the material side of the equation, and distancing themselves from the purely post-structuralist approach. Recent anthologies from Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, as well as Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman are re-examining the role of the material, including the materiality of the body, from multiple disciplinary perspectives, asking what specific truths the biological object itself contains, along with its testimonial function. Eltit’s latest novel dialogues with this new movement by placing an even heavier emphasis on the corporal, imbuing it with a new memory power of its own.

Impuesto a la carne: Blood with Memory, Organs with Power

In *Impuesto a la carne*, Eltit explores the subjectivity of a mother and daughter, seemingly two separate beings, but continuously referred to as one existence, fused together via corporal mergings. The mother, born again at the moment of her daughter’s emergence into this world, exists tethered to the corporality of her daughter. She is referred to as resting underneath the ribs of her daughter and is a constant guiding force for the latter’s decisions and explanatory narrations. These two women “bajas,” “feas,” “ancianas,” and “anarquistas,” have already lived for two hundred years and stubbornly resist the corrosive power of the hospital and its doctors (allegorically to be read as an oppressive governmental force and its generals) both of which seek to systematically rob the women of their internal organs and blood. Refused the diagnostic medical treatment they would benefit from, the women are submitted to random blood

drawings and surgeries, which leave the mother “perdida, pálida y perdida” (63) with “perforaciones en cada una de sus venas” (66). As her blood “está perdiendo el color” (66) and becoming less red with every forced blood-letting, the mother’s senility grows and her cognitive function and memorial capacity diminishes. Surgery leaves the daughter disoriented and unable to recall just what may have been removed from her body. In *Impuesto a la carne*, procedural removal of blood signals a removal of memory, and surgical loss of organs triggers a reduction in autonomous power. Both serve to alter the memory function of the body, diminishing its archival capacity.

The potentially contagious and abject bodily fluid that is blood, in Eltit’s novel, is a subversive element in society that needs to be monitored, controlled, and normalized. This work is undertaken by the authoritarian hospital, which creates a market economy that places blood (and organs) in demand and pillages the bodies of non-conformists until they turn into non-thinking mignons (fans) of the system, or die resisting.³ Possessing blood with which to navigate society assures for both mother and daughter the ability to retain “un espacio histórico oscuro para los dos, un sitio tranquilo que nos permita elaborar una lista completa y rigurosa de recuerdos” (114). The implication of this is that blood not only has a memorial capacity (having sufficient blood meaning one can remember the past, the lack of blood triggers a paralyzing senility), but ultimately is the necessary material at the base of any memorial endeavor, of any archival task.

While blood in the text signals memorial capacity, organs give the body the power to resist the authoritarian regime. These biological materials generate in the possessor the strength to put such blood memories to use in resisting the power mechanism of the politically motivated state archival system. As professed by the daughter in *Impuesto a la carne*: “nuestros órganos podían ser los voceros de la historia” (127) and “entraré en mi cuerpo como en un libro para

³ The market for blood in the text also calls to mind a possible reading of the novel in line with new studies that focus on the marketing of memory and a critique of this market’s effects in post-dictatorship in Latin America (see Bilbija and Payne).

transformarlo en memoria. Quiero preparar mi cuerpo para convertirlo en una crónica urgente y desesperada” (129). The body (tissues, blood, organs) is the site from which to resist, to speak, to record.

The medical system described in the text, in its brokering of body parts and its obsessive retrieval of blood units and organs (whether it kills the ‘donor’ or not) depicts a corrosive system of consumption that seeks to produce non-thinking subjects emptied of memories and completely given over to the logic of the hospital/*patria*. However, it also reveals the subversive threat held by such corporal objects, “órganos que la patria o el país o la nación entera se encargaron de ocultar, debilitar y destruir” (155). Both mother and daughter, still in possession of enough of their corporal interiorities, resist the corruptive power of the medical establishment and dare to speak from their bodies, offering their blood and organs as the last hope of giving their testimony regarding their struggled for (and endangered) historical existence.⁴ These two-hundred-year-old bodies, with their ages consistently underlined throughout the novel, represent not only the bicentennial in Chile, but the important relationship of mother and daughter. Eltit comments on the centrality of this relationship to the text:

en esos tiempos históricos de 200 años, pensé que esas dos mujeres podían hacer resonancia con otras vulnerabilidades. Yo ya he trabajado literariamente la relación madre e hija, porque me parece estratégica, pero esta vez se me abrió un punto que no había pensado, que era la madre como un órgano vital de la hija, una penetración mucho más orgánica. (PZ n.p.)

In the text, organs are not only a source of resisting power, but have a specific memorial capacity in and of their own. The fusion of mother and daughter, the constant play on the definitive lines that separate the two subjects results in the latter’s declarations that “mi madre ya se acomodó en mí. Encontró

⁴ In her review of the text, Sandra Cornejo identifies the strategy of speaking from the body and its centrality to Eltit’s latest text: “Otra ‘estratega de la existencia’, me refiero a Marguerite Duras, ha dicho que ‘no se puede escribir sin la fuerza del cuerpo.’ A partir de una idea tal vez afín, *Impuesto a la carne* se convierte en la narración posible del vaciamiento de un organismo (un territorio) para lograr de esta manera, aún desde la precariedad de un cuerpo devastado, dar testimonio” (n.p.)

su espacio definitivo en mi interior hasta convertirse en uno de mis órganos vitales... Mi madre es mi órgano más extraviado y el más elocuente” (183) and “mi organomadre pretende amplificar su lucidez en la irreprimible historia de mi cuerpo” (183). The mother’s knowledge, her strength, is located in the tissues of her organs and becomes a biological part of the daughter, only to be threatened to be removed surgically via the violent slicing of the organic matter of the body. The threat presented by the biological, as well as its obstinate resistance to control by authoritarian forces (the *médicos*), is underlined in the text as the daughter triumphantly declares after an unexpected (and unconsented to) surgery that “me operaron mal. Dejaron a mi madre adentro de mí” (149). Blood, organs, and tissues all merge in this text and produce a renewed commitment to the testimonial function of the body, but also underline the body as a link in an ancestral lineage that also holds its own historical value, deserving of a space within the national archive.

Archiveras anarquistas: The Body as Archive

The mother and daughter protagonists of *Impuesto a la carne* are self-proclaimed “*archiveras anarquistas*”(64) whose mission is to testify to the historical truths held in their bodies. Their resistance to the ravaging of their bodies is not only a defiant act in resistance to death, but a concerted effort to retain control over their corporal materialities in order to pass on knowledge of the past to current and future generations of Chileans. Such a mission needs to be explored within the context of the power structures involved in archival work in post-dictatorship Chile, a space marked by powerful debate and politicking. Given the legacy of human rights abuses of the Pinochet government in Chile, this debate takes on personal as well as political dimensions. As Michael Lazarra asks in the prologue to his study *Chile in Transition: The Poetics and Politics of Memory*: “Who is authorized to speak about the past, and in what register? What steps are necessary to achieve truth and justice?” (1). Such questions reveal the

tenuous nature of the reliance on a determined model for narrating one's experience. In his discussion of the Rettig Commission's⁵ charge to document "the truth of the past as rigorously and irrefutably as possible" (*Reckoning* 102), Steve Stern observes that the process:

yielded encounters with family experiences, documents, and forensic evidence so powerful they outstripped powers of narration or representation. The rather restrained and juridical tone of the report, justifiable as a narrative strategy creating irrefutable factual truth about a controversial issue, underscored the paradox. In a world of experiences beyond normal limits, that which was inspiring and that which was horrifying were difficult to convey in words. (*Reckoning* 102)

Stern's observations reveal the nature of the documentary function of testimony (and the archive) from the Rettig Commission as both powerful and limiting in its endeavor. In stating that the commission's charge was to document as "rigorously and irrefutably as possible" (102), Stern alludes to the official nature of the truth-finding mission. Although removed from the juridical atmosphere of a court, the testimonies given in the commission needed to be linguistically coded and narrated in such a way as to lend themselves toward irrefutability. Stern himself underlines the limits this need posed on the survivor's ability to tell her story in his coding of the tone of the report as

⁵ In the early years after the dictatorship, Patricio Aylwin's government deployed a human rights commission, the Rettig commission, to investigate his predecessor's regime for state violations of the rights of its citizens which had ended in death (Borzutzky xvi). The commission sought information documenting the truth of the circumstances which led to the death of those who were *detenidos desaparecidos* (detained disappeared). It sought to record explanations for the death of those who were executed and killed as a consequence of political violence (Lira 5-6). The commission's aim was to gather, document, and report information. With the Rettig commission, the Aylwin government's goal was to establish an "official truth" (Lira 5) which would fill the ellipsis left by the Pinochet regime. A state-sanctioned act of archiving information which also had political undertones, the Rettig commission formed a part of the Aylwin government's larger political agenda whose goals were to provide reparations to victims, and "to guarantee legal, social, and political conditions that would prevent the recurrence of human rights violations" (Lira 5). Through the establishment of the Rettig commission, the Aylwin government set a precedent in terms of a discussion of the Chilean post-dictatorial historical archive. It recognized the existence of a lack of information and put forth a project whose aim was to fill that void with an official, documentable truth.

“juridical” and “restrained,” as well as by underscoring the commission’s need to *create* factual truth.⁶

Stern’s discussion points to the downside of reliance on set models to record history in instances where victims are asked to recount the unthinkable. Such difficulties have not gone unnoticed by others who study memory in Chile. Michael Lazarra introduces his analysis by stating that he is:

interested in probing these more ‘convulsive’⁷ zones of memory (e.g. collaboration, exile, torture, and disappearance) that not only present tremendous difficulties for narrative telling but also challenge the writing of a smooth and evenly scripted ‘official story’ (4).

These “convulsive” zones of memory disquiet a positivist framework for historical inscription in the archive of information recounting state violence. They signal a space where officially sanctioned juridical testimony as well as that given in truth commissions fails. They also demonstrate a lack of agency on the part of those voices that were previously marginalized, mistreated, and silenced during the dictatorship. Stern’s comments regarding the Rettig Commission show that power mechanisms remain in play and retain control even after the end of dictatorship. They show how the archive itself is a mechanism regulated by power.

This issue of power is taken up by Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever*, where he explores the notion of the archive as it manifests itself in three dimensions: the physical archive, the historical archive and the ontological sense of the archive. In his study, Derrida posits that the archive in all of these dimensions is an entity that both enjoys an authoritative power as well as limits the creative power over itself to those who have the authority to access it. The archive is not open to all, but rather, is closed to many:

⁶ Stern’s observations arguably apply directly to a discussion of the 2001 Report on the Disappeared as well as to the human rights commission on the cases of torture.

⁷ Here, Lazarra is using Steve Stern’s terminology from his tri-part study on Chilean Memory: *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile, Reckoning with Pinochet, and Battling for Hearts and Minds*.

the documents, which are not always discursive writings, are only kept and classified under the title of the archive by virtue of a privileged *topology*. They inhabit this uncommon place, this place of election where law and singularity intersect in *privilege*. At the intersection of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a scene of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible. (3)

Derrida attributes this privilege, this process of compiling the archive, to what he calls the “power of *consignation*,” stating that:

consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or *secret* which could separate (*secernere*), or partition, in an absolute manner. The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together. (3, emphases in the original)

Thus, any process of compiling an archive is one that includes some and excludes others, in an effort to achieve a sense of unity, a singular outlook on the past. It is an act of searching, of gathering together of disparate elements which, when taken together, achieve a unified vision. In the case of Chile, the assembling of the archive has been undertaken by the state, which employed a series of transitional justice mechanisms that have served to create an archival formula for remembering. For Derrida, the assembling of an archive, in its inherent act of exclusion, is an act of power. One must possess that power in order to have access.

Impuesto a la carne itself recognizes the power-wielding action of creating an “official” historical narrative. Throughout the text the two women are anticipating the arrival of a day of commemoration in which they are invited to speak, in which “tendremos el exacto segundo para mostrar al público del país o de la nación o de la patria, cómo el tiempo se ha comportado con nuestros cuerpos” (117). However, the day of the commemoration, upon which the two women will finally have the chance to give their testimonies with their bodies, finds the pair with thirteen other dying women in a common room of the hospital, recently operated on and openly suffering through their recuperation. The

daughter observes the spectacle of the commemorative ceremonies: “Hablan y hablan y hablan lo mismo, lo mismo, lo mismo, lo mismo. Lo adivinamos porque conocemos sus protocolos y hasta podríamos augurar las formas, los matices, los velos y las ambigüedades gráficas, las pausas documentales y la profusión de elementos técnicos que sintetizarán el encuentro” (163) and later she states clearly: “Los archivos del país o de la patria, de toda la nación no estaban preparados para nombrarnos” (179). The repetition of the same message signals the propagandistic rhetoric of a regime that wishes to promote a single truth, a solitary mode of speaking and to silence dissenting voices, bodies, and opinions, and to not name certain peoples: in other words, it seeks the consecration of an “official” archive, and the elimination of any competing views.

Eltit’s return to the body throughout her career can be seen as the productive construction of an alternate historical archive, one that is not rigidly dependent on the semiotics of language, or on a set formula for giving testimony, but that seeks to place information in the space between the text and the reader, or the body and the observer, thereby subverting the need to place materials within the physical archive. Re-locating the place of information discovery to the transmission between one body and another works to open up the historical narrative to a wider creating audience, placing archival power as something inherent to the body, to every body, dependent only on the decisions (free or forced) that one takes in regards to how their body becomes used by the system.

The archival function inherent to the body requires cultivation and defense against the corrosive state system, lest it take over and eliminate such corporal memorial power.⁸ A prime example of this in *Impuesto a la carne* is the fate of the daughter’s cousin, whose father is a surgeon and routinely operates on his own daughter. The cousin’s lack of ability to resist via the subtle survival strategies employed by the mother-daughter pair scripts her fate as that of a mignon “fan”, and, eventually, as death. Similarly, at the end of the text, the mother and

⁸ The parallels between this scene and the scene of torture are, in this reader’s opinion, not incidental.

daughter are placed in a common room with thirteen other women, all of who have lost all emotion and motivation. The daughter describes them as:

Enfermas que ante la desconfianza que ahora les inspira su cuerpo, esperan algo de la medicina. Son mujeres cuando no ingenuas, obsesivas, entregadas a los medicamentos, adictas a sus cuerpos, envenenadas de ellas mismas. Son víctimas de sucesivos espejismos de sanación, como si sus órganos pudieran burlar de las inexactitudes de la medicina. (152)

Here, Eltit plays with the line between life and death, between control over self and complete loss of power to the system. The organs retain control to mock the system, but the women, having lost access to their own bodily knowledge due to their increasing faith in the manipulative, controlling, and memory-brokering medical system, “van a morir porque no pudieron o no supieron resistir” (157). The same way that the daughter’s cousin fell victim to her father’s constant surgical “fixes,” these women too are destined to die, and with them go their biological fluids, tissues, and organs, along with any capacity to relay memories and past truths. Thus, although every body has the power to function as an archive, that power must be seized by the individual, called upon to do the difficult “labors of memory” (Jelin) and to create the space for their blood and organs to speak even where languages may falter.

Conclusion: Abject Corporalities, Everyday Resistance

Within the trajectory of Latin American literature, Diamela Eltit is an author in a league of her own. She has established herself as a prolific novelist, essayist, artist and activist whose work repeatedly engages critically with controversial and politically salient issues. Eltit’s art and its use of the body as a site of memory inscription offers an alternative to the positivist historical framework that has long governed the generation of historical archives. The manifestation of violence on the body alludes to the corporal as a written page upon which is engrained the testimony of past wrong-doing. In re-coding the

body as an archive, Eltit gestures towards a subversive understanding of all tortured bodies as testimonials, even if they are not recognized as such by the state. In Eltit's early performance art she used her own body as a site of historical inscription, having, "cut and burned herself and then turned up at a brothel where she read part of her novel [Lumpérica]" (Richards "Margins" 209). This performativity remains in play with the corporal throughout Eltit's career. With her latest novel, Diamela Eltit retains the centrality of the body that has long marked her work. The mother and daughter whose bodily suffering fills the pages of *Impuesto a la carne* are the latest manifestations of Eltit's belief in the truth-telling capacity of corporal materials. Their belief that:

ambas somos organodependientes y conseguimos que la biología sea el instrumento verídico y apto para establecer el centro en el que radica el umbral de la historia. Los cuerpos, los nuestros, portan los signos más confiables para establecer el primer archivo del desastre (127),

signals the changed poetics of the new norm for the body in New Chilean Fiction marked by the period of the dictatorship. Furthermore, their affirmation that:

Permaneceremos acostados testimoniando las muertes masivas de las mujeres. De no sé cuántas mujeres. Será así porque mi mamá y yo somos anarquistas y tenemos la obligación histórica de redactar las memorias de la angustia y del desvalor. Unas memorias que serán escritas a lo largo de los próximos doscientos años con el esmero de los antiguos calígrafos que dejaron su sangre en la letra (155),

calls on the reader to also be an *archivera anarquista*, celebrating every body that resists oppression and calling on each to offer its own corporal textuality as history. The evasive, messy, and baroque nature of Eltit's writing exposes the wounds that officially sanctioned testimony wants to tie up in a neat box, label, and put on the shelf of the past to be left behind, made normal and moved on from. In their obstinate refusal to forget (or disappear) the body, Diamela Eltit's texts posit an alternate means for inscribing knowledges and reject the desire for the creation of a univocal historical "truth," transgressively working to subvert the reliance on an "official" history or archive.

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