

Postrepresentational Cultural Memory for Children in Chile. From *La composición* to “Bear Story”

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Abstract

This article analyses texts intended for child audiences —picturebooks, a poetry book, and a film— that deal with the Chilean dictatorship (1973-1990). The memorialization practices within children’s media appear to be modeled on the difficulties of finding a national consensus regarding the events that transpired during the dictatorship and the appropriate ways of rendering them for children. Lydia Kokkola’s work on the Holocaust as a *motif* shows that gaps of information are left to be picked up by the adult reading alongside the child. Children’s literature that refers to state violence is described as elusive or circumventive. This article approaches these texts as complex materialities, suspending the paradigm of representation and interpretation. Inspired by Ullrich Gumbrecht’s call for a post-hermeneutic literary theory and by new materialistic approaches to the humanities and education, it is argued that these texts are more profitably read and experienced as artworks that escape pedagogic domestication. Accordingly, this article examines these selected texts as pieces that may smuggle meanings and intensities into educational settings if their complexity is not reduced by mediation practices.

Memory; picturebooks; new materialism; Augusto Pinochet; affect theory; Chilean dictatorship

We live in times of buoyant cultural memory, using this term to refer to that shared construction of a past that we collectively make through our cultural and aesthetic practices. Memory was formerly regarded as more of a psychological term, but today we are more aware that the exercise of individual memory depends on the recollections of those of a society at large, that the individual practice of remembering is modeled by the possibilities opened up by a given community at a determinate moment (Assmann, 1995, p. 125). In this context, the publication of children’s books that refer to traumatic national pasts has become something of a moral imperative. The subject matter is no longer considered too upsetting but rather appropriate and even necessary for children (Kidd, 2005, p. 120).

Cultural memory studies —a transdisciplinary field of research in the humanities and social sciences— revolves around the question of how the past is constructed and reenacted for the needs of the present. Exploring how traumatic (national) pasts are narrated for children —the future of our present— sheds light on

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the problematics of collective remembrance and the difficulty of reaching social consensus. As Valerie Krips (2004, p. 31) states, paraphrasing Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, children's books are these *lieux* or sites in which the collective memory of a group becomes crystallized. As several authors note, children's books circulate —are written, published, and read— in a highly ideological field that is characterized by an adult fear of disturbing children's innocence (Stephens, 1992, p. 3). This fear becomes particularly prevalent when thinking about how violent events of the past should be rendered for them, as the notion that children are likely to be disturbed by certain stories is still widespread (Giussani, 2014).

As a result, traumatic events in a nation's history tend to be dealt with in an elusive way (Muñoz-Chereau, p. 2). It has become popular to quote Theodor Adorno (1983, p. 34) on the question of how it is possible to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz without being "barbaric." As Lydia Kokkola's research on narratives of the Holocaust in children's literature shows (2002, p. 226), in most texts aimed at young readers, information is either suppressed or expressed in terms distinguishable only by an adult reading alongside a child; hence, the responsibility for contextualizing anything contentious is left to the adult reader. Research on children's books dealing with cultural memory —regarding the Holocaust, dictatorships, and war— points to the tension between publishers, requiring works that will be informative-resources for the classroom —that is, works that have a clear pedagogic aim—and authors, who aspire to produce works that are regarded as being of high aesthetic quality (Martín-Rogero, 2008, p. 50; Ramos, 2010, p. 34; Kokkola, 2013, pp. 168-169).

This article discusses material in a variety of forms: two picturebooks (*La composición* and *Un diamante en el fondo de la tierra*), a book of poetry (*Niños*), and a short film (*Bear Story*), all of which refer, more or less explicitly, to human rights violations during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile (1973-1990). Antonio Skármeta's *La composición* (2000) serves as an introduction to the three later pieces, produced between 2013 and 2015. These texts could be considered to take an elusive approach since their delicate subject matter —killings, torture, forced displacements, and other forms of state violence— are dealt with indirectly, using metaphor and allegory. However, rather than see these texts simply in literary terms, I shall explore them more widely as post-representational, transdisciplinary artworks in which meaning is not bound to the discursive sphere but also has a materiality surplus to language that is manifested in the form of "intensities." I take this last term from affect theory. Brian Massumi (1995, p. 86) refers to it as an individual's physical reaction to a stimulus when the body is "filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonance". The notion of "intensities," together with associated terms like forces, flows, and desires, is used in order to depose language from what Maggie MacLure (2013, p. 660) calls its "god-like centrality." In affect theory, such intensities, feelings, and emotions are not seen to express a person's interior state, but, rather, a relational, collective force whose borders mark both inside and the outside (Ahmed, 2004, p. 6; Gregg and Seigworth,

2010, p. 5). In this article, I propose to trace how the difficulties at stake —the rendering of state violence— can actually help in opening up spaces for an approach that escapes the domestication of the pedagogic.

So far, the handful of children's books on Pinochet's dictatorship has been reviewed and analysed in relation to how they deal with the tension "between telling as well as protecting the audience from what is told" (Muñoz-Chereau, 2017, p. 12) and how they represent the past (Troncoso Araya, 2015). These approaches have dealt with the role of fiction in informing children without questioning why fiction should bear that responsibility. In this article, I explore how these artworks may operate by "deterritorializing," a term coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to indicate a blurring of borders, a decontextualization of something provocative (1987, p. 9). Further research on reader-response and aesthetic-emotional encounters with these works could help map out affective flows between readers, the pieces, and what Karen Barad calls "the entanglements of 'spacetime-matterings'" (2011, p. 125); that is, the complexities of time and space in which encounters occur. We can speculate about the affective flows and intensities these texts may provoke in readers and viewers attending to their discursive and material complexities. The emphasis, therefore, is not on how the past is represented or how memory is negotiated, but rather on what spaces these pieces open to intensities and affects. What we may call an arts-mediated approach —that is, a mediation with audiences, not based on the idea of interpreting, but rather of experiencing the disruptive power of art in contemporary arts curating practices— may open up other spaces which could encourage cultural remembrance and reflection on the possibilities of encounters with books (Fontdevila, 2018).

In the analysed material, we find gaps of information that appear to intentionally prompt adults to fill in context and information. The qualities of gaps have been amply theorized by scholars of children's literature, especially in relation to picturebooks. Clémentine Beauvais (2015, p. 1), for example, uses the delightful image of a jigsaw puzzle that has visual and verbal pieces waiting for an active reader to put them together. In the case of books about traumatic pasts, gaps appear to be left not only for the reader to fill in, but also for an adult mediator who can decide how much of the horror should be rendered. Personally, I think that these gaps should be regarded as spaces or silences that can overflow the boundaries of the work and would therefore benefit from not being reduced by traditional practices of interpretation.

Overall, this article is an exploratory work, inspired by Ulrich Gumbrecht's (2004, p. 2) call for the humanities to move beyond hermeneutics by discarding the perennial quest for meaning and interpretation. Gumbrecht argues that artistic productions impact on our bodies and senses and can be connected to the new materialist and affect approaches in which matter is not understood as being passive, but as having agency (Coole and Frost, 2010, p. 7). Both discourse and matter are seen as flows and intensities that are mutually implicated and co-productive (Barad, 2003, pp. 821-822). In this post-hermeneutic, new materialistic

approach, the affective dimensions and complexities of a text cannot be reduced to decodable meanings. Gumbrecht (2012) calls for reading what he terms the *Stimmung*, or the mood and atmosphere of a work that produces effects on the reader's body. Accordingly, this article takes an attentive look into materialities such as rhythm, colour and the tactile (or evocations of tactility) in order to show how context permeates a text and vice versa (especially with regard to how authors create their work and explain its significance). Finally, it examines what MacLure (2013, p. 659) terms "the materiality of language itself —its material force and its entanglements in bodies and matter." Such perspectives guide my approach to the analysis of the entanglements of cultural memory as a collective practice, the material makings of an artwork, and the tensions between adults and children in the ways in which these pieces position their ideal readers/viewers.

Before examining the texts themselves, however, this article will give some background about the Chilean dictatorship, its politics of memory and the scarcity of children's media referring to it.

Coming to terms with the Chilean dictatorship

Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship is the most emblematic Latin American military dictatorship of the past century, imposed on the only country that had democratically-elected a socialist president, Salvador Allende, in 1970 (Del Alcàzar, 2014). Pinochet took over Chile in 1973 through a *coup de état* backed by the CIA. The regime was characterized by the systematic suppression of political parties and the persecution of dissidents: over 3,000 people were killed or disappeared, 30,000 were tortured, and 200,000 forced into exile. Pinochet's dictatorship shaped much of modern Chile's implementation of radical neoliberal economic reforms, which were in sharp contrast to Allende's leftist policies, Pinochet being advised by a team of free-market economists trained in US universities (González, 2015). This regime was backed by the military, and held power for 17 years, after which time power was peacefully transferred to an elected president. Despite the return to democracy, Pinochet maintained his position as commander-in-chief of the Chilean Army and later became a senator, having stipulated this lifelong privilege for ex-presidents in his self-penned constitution.

In 1998, Pinochet travelled to the UK for a medical intervention and was there arrested by Scotland Yard. This was the first time a former head of government had been arrested on the principle of universal jurisdiction, initiating a judicial, political, and public relations battle. Pinochet was finally released in 2000 and returned to Chile on the condition that he would be put on trial there, but he died in 2006 while criminal charges were still pending. The decade after Chile returned to democracy is often described as a period of transition ("La Transición"), a time when the political parties made a pact with the military to maintain the *status quo*. This gave impunity to repressors, restricted the participation of citizens in government, and allowed for the establishment of a neoliberal economic system.

Slowly, however, the citizenry has sought restitution for their oppression, using not only the legal and political systems but also what Elizabeth Jelin describes as the “vehicles of memory” (2002, p. 37): books, museums, theatrical works, films, photographs and others artistic forms of expression that shape the collective memory of the past. Research on the representation of dictatorship in films —possibly the most visible medium in which this collective remembrance has been articulated— shows that both documentaries and fiction films have been shifting in the last decades from rather realistic or naturalistic portrayals of the violence to more allegoric depictions (Estévez, 2010; Traverso, 2010). Antonella Estévez, for instance, describes the latest approaches as revolving around a “cinematographic melancholy,” drawing extensively on metaphor. Through such figurative representation there is an attempt to explore the dilemma that Adorno articulated; namely, the difficulty of expressing grief in a sociopolitical context framed by discourses of modernity and progress, where trauma and the need for justice have not been properly addressed.

Though such subject matter is difficult for any artistic works to deal with, children’s books have been particularly silent on the issues involved (González, 2014)]. While part of the reason for this reticence might arise from a desire to “protect” children from trauma and the representation of violence, there was also the fact that people were themselves confused about the political implications of what happened. A lack of consensus over past events was particularly problematic given that children’s literature, in its pedagogical role, depends on straightforward narratives. Even terms like “dictatorship” were controversial, such that the right wing government of Sebastián Piñera attempted to replace it with-“military regime” (Strauss, 2015, p. 269). However, this initiative met with huge resistance, such that now both terms are used in history textbooks for secondary and high school students.

Having discussed the socio-political context that led to the eventual production of the texts discussed herein, let me move on to look more closely at the works themselves.

Narrating for children

Shortly before the commemoration of the coup’s 40th anniversary in 2013 —a moment recognized as the end of impunity for criminals— a group of people connected with children’s literature a group of people connected with children’s literature brought people’s attention to the fact that very few publications dealt with this recent history (M. J. González, 2014). As a result, new texts began to be published, probably encouraged by the anniversary itself, which inaugurated a new climate of remembrance. The works discussed here emanate from this period, being released between 2013 and 2015: *Niños* by María José Ferrada and illustrated by Jorge Quién (2013), *Un diamante en el fondo de la tierra* by Jairo Buitrago and Daniel Blanco (2014), and the animated short film *Bear Story* (2015) by the Chilean studio Punk Robot. All these texts have

received important critical attention, not only within Chile, but also from wider international children's literature communities. *Un diamante en el fondo de la tierra* was included amongst the White Ravens Honour List elaborated by the Internationale Jugend Bibliothek and received the Colibrí Medal in Chile (by Chilean section of IBBY). *Niños* was published by a small publisher but received two important awards in Chile —the Premio Academia and the Premio Municipal de Literatura of Santiago— and has had some international circulation, since the author, María José Ferrada, is a praised children's poet who often attends book fairs and other literary events. *Bear Story*, probably the most well known of these works, was awarded an Oscar for the Best Animated Short Film in 2016 —the film was later adapted into a picturebook published that same year. As can be seen, all these texts have been critically acclaimed and circulate internationally.

[indent] Before focusing on these three texts, however, it is important to discuss the only children's work prior to this that dealt with the Chilean dictatorship. This is *La composición*, by Chilean author Antonio Skármeta, published as a picturebook in 2000, more than a decade before the topic gained recognition amongst children's book authors. It is internationally known and recommended as a text that deals with Latin American dictatorships and, although the country, year, and other details are not mentioned in the narration or the paratext, the book is most often associated with the Chilean dictatorship and read as such in different countries (Yokota, 2014, p. 68; Llorens García and Terol Bertoeu, 2015) This picturebook has garnered numerous prizes and special mentions, such as being included in the White Ravens Honour list in 2001 and the Unesco Prize for Children's and Young People's Literature in the Service of Tolerance in 2003. Aside from all the plaudits it has accrued, this work is also important for the material sensibility of its telling, making it central to the concerns of this article.

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The story is focalized through Pedro, a child growing up in a country in which, suddenly, soldiers are seen on the streets. Pedro's parents get together with some friends to listen to a radio programme that has a very weak signal. We, as adults, assume that it is the only station that broadcasts in opposition to the regime. Pedro himself is passionate about football and craves to own a proper ball. We see him playing football games with his neighbours. But one day the game is stopped when they see the father of one of the team members dragged out of his grocery store by military officers. No explanations are offered and none of the witnesses demand any. The children stop playing and go home, except for Pedro, who awaits his father at the bus stop. Pedro does not ask him why their neighbour was detained, but he does ask whether the military might also detain his father. He is assured that this will not happen because the boy brings him good luck. This is as far as the father acknowledges his political position as an opponent to dictatorship.

On the following days, a soldier comes to the school and asks the children to write a composition about

what their parents do in the evening. Pedro has never spoken about politics with his parents, or, indeed, with anyone. But he understands that listening to that radio programme could be interpreted as seditious, so writes that his parents play chess instead, thus ensuring a happy ending, both for Pedro's family and for the story; that is, if we ignore the fate of the man who was detained, about whom we hear no more. Pedro's "coming of age" is complete: he too is now an opponent of the dictatorship and understands the importance of keeping certain things secret. The German edition, illustrated by Jacky Gleich, is even more emphatic in creating this happy ending, showing the father and son setting out together to find a chess set (Skármeta and Gleich, 2003, p. 61).

When *La composición* was published in 2000, the picturebook genre was still a novelty in Spanish-speaking countries. However, the story had first appeared 30 years earlier, in 1970, as a short story entitled "Tema de clase," without pictures. Later, the publishing house —Ekaré, run by Chilean exiles in Venezuela— commissioned two Chilean artists to illustrate the story, but they did not complete the job and the Spanish artist, Alfonso Ruano, eventually produced some realistic illustrations—ones that, using the terminology of social semiotics, had "high modality" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 158-163); that is, they were seen to have a visual verisimilitude. Ruano's illustrations gave the story a tone that differs from two other editions of the book, one from Argentina and one from Germany, where different illustrators had been commissioned. Interestingly, in the illustrations of María Delia Lozupone and the aforementioned Gleich, the military is much more threatening. For example, whereas Ruano depicts a man simply leaving his house, escorted by soldiers, these other illustrators show him being dragged out by force, just as the written text describes it. More generally, these foreign versions use low- and high-angle shots to show, on the one hand, the power asymmetry between the children and the adults, and, on the other, that between the ordinary people and the soldiers.

It is interesting to see, in the original edition of *La composición*, how Alfonso Ruano's illustrations distill material evocations. Gleich and Lozupone's illustrations function by condemning the military, whereas Ruano's more neutrally evoke the people living under state violence and control. We are presented, for instance, with an illustration of a massive brickwall, perhaps suggesting the impossibility of escape, while an anonymous child is shown waiting for a bus. On this intimidating wall we may discern that the word "resistencia" (resistance) has been graffitied then painted over; and several pages later the same message is discernible again (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. On this intimidating wall from *La Composición* we may discern that the word "resistencia" (resistance) has been graffitied and painted over.

Rather than focus on the threatening figures of the soldiers, Ruano prefers to show how the oppressiveness of dictatorship translates into the quotidian. Such a method of representation does not work through the hermeneutic process of decoding meanings; rather, the

framing of certain objects and textures triggers a material evocation. For instance, in representing the scene in which the children are asked to write about what their parents do in the evenings, the illustration shows a desk with a biro, a pencil, an eraser and the corner of a notebook (Fig. 2). The student has bitten the pencil and the eraser has a small hole in the middle. Pedro, we realise, must have been boring through it with the pencil, as tiny particles of the eraser are visible on the desk. The classroom wall also has some marks, which might have been made by pencils or other implements wielded by bored or anxious children. There is also a hole that could have been created in the same way, or it might indicate the trace of a bullet.

Niall Nance-Carroll (2014, p. 275) highlights how *La composición* troubles the child-centered, aetionormative discourse of children's literature, by narrating how a child that takes political action without receiving advice from adults; for his actions are not grounded in any determinate political

Figure 2. The student has bitten the pencil, and the eraser has a small hole in the middle.



ideology. As he points out, Pedro is a relatively average child, not at all exceptional or heroic. *La composición* thereby suggests that children are more politically aware than we, as adults, suppose. It is interesting that Pedro's political awareness does not derive from the discursive sphere, for no one has explained to him what dictatorship is about. Rather, it is something he "gets" from observing the way people move and the things they

fear. This knowledge is also derived from the way the story is situated within the material practices of everyday life, such that the reader is not positioned as a moral spectator, witnessing what Luc Boltanski calls "distant suffering" (1999). Unfortunately, as Boltanski also notes, the latter is a recurrent strategy in trauma narratives

La composición may be considered a rather "old" form of picturebook since the verbal and the visual are not quite in "synergy," to use Lawrence Sipe's term (1998, p. 98). Today, and especially in

Latin America, picturebooks are regularly described as books in which images have "equal" weight to the written text, and in which the visual complements the verbal in the creation of meaning (Hanán Díaz, 2007). This conceptualization of the picturebook has become the template, with critics expounding on the various categories of relationship that are permissible between the verbal and the visual (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001, pp. 23-24). Such models are learnt by teachers, librarians, and other mediators of children's literature, who



then teach students the benefits of being able to “decode” pictures, a practice that treats illustrations like puzzles, to be interpreted as part of an overall semiotic system (O'Neil, 2011). This understanding, in turn, shapes mediation practices, making a book less likely to be treated as an aesthetic artifact. And, beyond that, restricts its potential to deterritorialize, to be a vehicle for pursuing what Deleuze and Guattari term “lines of flight” (1987, p. 205).

Contemporary renderings

The other three texts discussed in this article have been published in the last decade and seem much more aware of the crossover potential of appealing to both child and adult audiences—and, as such, provide places of aesthetic and playful experimentation (Beckett, 2008). All three were produced at a time when the division between genres and disciplines had become less rigid. Thus the three works described below borrow practices, techniques, and conceptualizations from a broad range of contemporary arts practices. When compared to these later texts, *La composición* appears to have a rather “traditional” approach to its subject, not only in its telling—it has a linear plot and consistent focalization—but also in its realistic depiction of a Latin American neighborhood.

In *Niños*, *Un diamante en el fondo de la tierra* and *Bear Story* we can see a common approach to the trauma of the past through a range of material evocations that help to elicit a particular mood. Objects, layouts, rhythms, silences, textures, and gaps are key elements in these evocations. Kokkola (2002, p. 214) noted something along these lines in her research on children’s literature and the Holocaust, explaining that, “rather than examining how these books represent the Shoah through the medium of words, I shall be arguing that a certain absence of words—the silence itself— can sometimes work as a kind of tactful communication.”

We may look at these three works within the framework of a contemporary sensibility that is frequently articulated in the visual arts. A key distinction between modern and contemporary art has been the shift from aesthetic beauty to an appreciation of the underlying concept of a work. The end result then becomes less important than the process by which the artist arrived there. For contemporary arts, the material conditions involved in the production of a work are to be acknowledged—explicitly or implicitly—and this acknowledgment brings to the fore complexities that are not simply aesthetic, but also sensual, intellectual, and institutional, because art is no longer confined to the visual or to the arguably obsolete concept of beauty. In contemporary arts, experience is not bound to the representation itself but to all that is beyond what we “see” (Furió, 2002). The three works mentioned above would seem to be approached more productively as cultural and artistic objects framed within this contemporary, postrepresentational sensibility.

Niños (2013) comprises 34 illustrated poems, each of which has the name of a child whose feelings,

desires, and actions are described by the speaker. For example, the first one reads as follows:

Alicia

De todos los regalos que le han dado este cumpleaños,
Prefiere los globos
Con los que han adornado la casa para la fiesta.

Porque si vuelan, si abre la ventana y los echa a volar,
Será como hacerle un regalo al viento.

Porque el viento también debe tener un día de cumpleaños.
Aunque no lo sepamos, debe tener. (unpaginated)

Alicia

Of all the birthday presents she's received
Her favorites are the ballons
That decorate the house for the party.

Because if they fly, if she opens the window and lets them soar,
It will be like giving the wind a present.

Because the wind must have a birthday, too.
Even if we don't know when it is, it must have one¹.

All the poems refer to events that relate to the experience of childhood: wonderings about the sound of the sea, the blossoming of spring, or learning how to speak. Only at the very end of this book, a two-page epilogue resignifies the previous texts by listing the full name and age of each child at the last time he or she was seen. Of course, they are all children who disappeared during the Chilean dictatorship, having been either executed or kidnapped. We know, then, that Alicia, the girl who gives her name to the first poem, was Alicia

¹ All translations are mine, with exception to this poem, by American literary translator Megan McDowell.

Marcela Aguilar Carvajal and that she was last seen when she was six years old.

The author—even if this is something we learn by reading reviews and interviews— had to search through the archives in order to compile this list of disappeared children (Ruiz, 2014). Pablo, one of those originally listed, was later identified by the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (the Argentine Human Rights organization of grandmothers who search and find children who were kidnapped during the Argentine dictatorship) a few weeks before the publication of the book. At the time of writing, the Abuelas in Argentina have identified 127 children that were kidnapped and illegally adopted; in Chile, there is no such organization, but it is plausible to speculate that some of these children will now be adults living under other identities. Propitiously, when Pablo was identified, his poem was placed at the very end of the book and the entire work was dedicated to him: “esperamos que las estrellas brillen siempre para él. Y le dedicamos este libro” [We hope the stars always shine for him. And we dedicate this book to him].

Niños is a complex endeavour. On the one hand, it is a collection of poems that describe rather irrelevant actions performed by children in their observation and intervention in the world. Children are shown trying to solve the mysteries of life and posing questions. This is the bright side of the book, which needs to be contrasted with the darker side that remembrance implies, and remembrance is better understood within the framework of contemporary arts practices. The term “practice,” in fact, is very common in contemporary arts—with their emphasis on the processual rather than on object-making; moreover, the term also moves us towards a posthumanist framework in which meaning is always relational and, as such, unstable (Bourriaud, 2002). So, the author of *Niños*, María José Ferrada, has delved into the archives in order to come up with this list of names. She traces, names and inscribes. The list of names that is given in the epilogue, therefore, becomes more than a paratext: it is another poem, even if it is one addressed to a rather different, ideal reader.

The work with archives has been one of the main techniques used by contemporary arts today. Following Jacques Derrida[’s] *Mal d’archive* (1995), curator Okwui Enwezor (2008) presented the trailblazing “Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art,” showing how artists could use archival material to rethink identity, memory and loss. In a world inundated by information and images, what matters is to bring these crucial dimensions to light, to frame them. The list of names elaborated by María José Ferrada and included as a last “poem” presents an aesthetic approach to documents in which the authorial and the authentic interplay to bring to the fore the horror and the loss. In this list, then, the dictatorship is not “represented” so much as “presented” by a certain display of documentation about missed children.

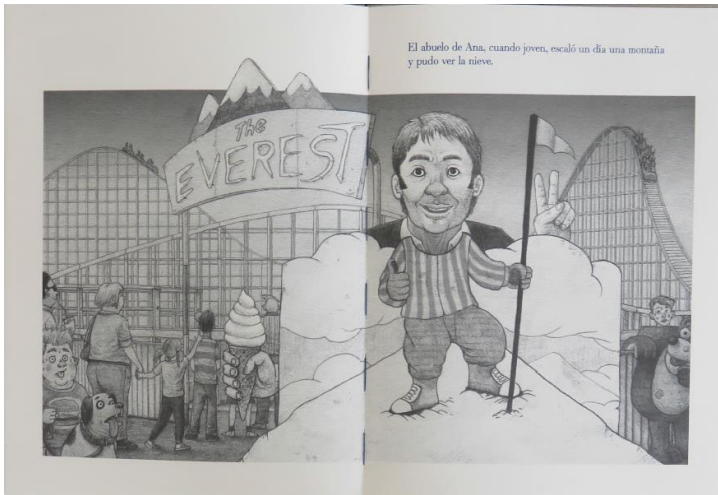
Niños may be criticized for delivering a message not meant to be decoded by children, but I prefer to approach it from a different perspective by asking, instead, what happens in that gap between the poems and

the list of disappeared children. How do we feel when reading the list? What physical reactions do we have? The text opens up a web of complexity that is not only discursive, but material too: it brings to the fore the fact that we are bodies that read; that reading does not occur in the mind only.

Before moving on to *Un diamante en el fondo de la tierra*, let me mention an earlier picturebook written by this Colombian author, Jairo Buitrago: *Camino a casa* (2008). In this work, Buitrago deals with state violence by portraying the difficult daily life of a child who, on the last page, appears to be the daughter of a man who disappeared in 1985. The narration relates how this girl finds protection in the figure of a lion that accompanies her in her difficult daily journey from school to a marginalized neighbourhood. The only reference to state violence occurs in the corner of the last double spread, where a newspaper headline announces, “Familias de desaparecidos en 1985” [Families of the disappeared in 1985] (unpaginated). Very interestingly, this book —with that single reference to the political context— has been used to convey the nature of dictatorship and national trauma to children in different Latin American countries (Blanc, 2017). His later picturebook, *Un diamante en el fondo de la tierra*, published in Chile 11 years later with illustrations by the Chilean artist, Daniel Blanco, is more explicit, referring to the 1973 *coup* in Santiago de Chile. The climate of remembrance may allow more direct treatment, even if words like torture, dictatorship, and *detenidos desaparecidos* (the term for people who are still missing) are avoided. This 11-year interval also helped to shape an aesthetic approach in which a complexity of issues is brought to the fore.

Un diamante en el fondo de la tierra begins when a schoolteacher asks the children to reach out to their grandparents and bring their stories into the classroom. The exercise, therefore, is to gather individual memories and connect them with a collective experience. The protagonist’s grandfather is a rather sad man who is presented as someone who “no sabe nada de la abuela, ni de su país” [does not know anything about grandmother or her country] (unpaginated). The child then tells us his story, built from fragments of what family members have told him and from what he has perceived from the ways in which they relate to what they tell. His grandmother was detained and disappeared. His grandfather was detained too, and still has marks on his wrists that bear witness. The narration alternates this story with brief portrayals of the grandparents of the other classmates. On the last page, the boy tells us his grandfather had said that marrying grandmother was like digging up a diamond from the depths of the earth.

In the first pages, we are confronted with the figure of a high-ranking soldier standing to attention, the written text informing us that “El abuelo de Tania se tomó una foto cuando le dieron una medalla” [Tania’s grandfather had his picture taken when he received a medal] (unpaginated). The image shows him in standing straight up in a dark room with sunglasses on. In the following double-spread we see the protagonist’s grandfather in his past life: “Mi abuelo Manuel pintaba murales, se manchaba la ropa, y la abuela se la lavaba” [my grandfather Manuel painted murals, his clothes got stained and grandmother washed them]. The image shows the man painting an iconic mural of the Chilean socialist revolution (the copyright page acknowledges that it cites the work of the collective Brigada Ramona Parra, a faction of the Communist Party that developed a celebrated revolutionary mural art form; see Fig 3). The grandfather is shown taking off his t-shirt,



surrounded by brushes and paint buckets. These two double-spreads set the emotional tone of the book. We are led to feel that medals are not always good and that it is better to keep a distance from certain authority figures. Figure 3 The protagonist’s grandfather paints an iconic mural of the Chilean revolution.

authority figures.

In *Un diamante en el fondo de la tierra* the visual undercuts the meanings set by the verbal. The

artificiality of representation is persistently shown. Thus we read that, “El abuelo de Ana, cuando joven, escaló un día una montaña y pudo ver la nieve” [Ana’s grandfather, when he was young, climbed a mountain one day and could see the snow]. However, the illustration shows a man at an amusement park in front of the cardboard scenery of a rollercoaster called *Everest* (Fig. 4). In that same picture, a boy is dressed as a bear and has removed the costume’s head. He is sweating, for the day is hot. The contradiction between the verbal and the visual, together with those ironic details, reveals how memories are fictions of a past constructed for a present that has no real access to experience.



It is not only in the interplay of the verbal and the visual that the book produces these meanings, but also in its more subtle material qualities, such as its layout, binding, its use of texture and colour. Putting these together, we react to the fact that the book has a blue written text and black-and-white, pencil illustrations. The book is also spineless, being bound with blue thread. These features might lead us to experience the book as having the feel of a handmade notebook that has been put together by an individual having only a pencil

Figure 4. In *Un diamante en el fondo de la tierra* the visual undercuts the verbal and shows that memory is created for the needs of the present.

and a blue typewriter ribbon to hand. In other words, it gives the appearance of being a very personal story that has not been officially published by the “gatekeepers” of children’s

literature. It is more like what the Russians term “samizdat.”

Finally, let me discuss *Bear Story*, which is probably the most widely-known narrative about dictatorship for children today. This shortfilm won the Oscar for the best animated short in 2016 and was later adapted into a picturebook, published in 2016 under the title *Historia de un oso* (Herrera & Osorio, 2016). It tells the story a bear who is captured by a circus, then manages to escape but, sadly, he never finds his family again. The story could be interpreted as being about animal abuse, but, for a Chilean audience, its allegorical implications are clear, especially as the film’s director, Gabriel Osorio, has stated that the film concerns the exile of his grandfather. This said, there is no explicit reference to the Chilean dictatorship, which may also be a deliberate omission in order to ensure the work’s broader circulation.

The bear is portrayed in solitude. He spends his days assembling a tin marionette theatre which tells the story of his capture, but gives it a happy ending by being reunited with his family. Stories are thus shown to have the power to provide closure following traumatic events. Moreover, it is demonstrated that they achieve this by creating a sense of distance. So, through the Bear’s personal theatrical production we see the animal tamers capturing the bear, each carrying a club, known in Chile as a “luma”, which is metonymic of the repression experienced by the people there (Fig. 5).

It is *Bear Story*’s use of distancing techniques that make it especially valued by teachers, who prefer to deal with the memory of the past in a more figurative manner (García-González). But *Bear Story* is particularly effective in the way that this distancing, at the discursive level, is combined with the presentation of an intimate and textured world. We could analyze this by drawing on the categories of visual modalities sketched by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006, pp. 158-163), as mentioned earlier, where what they term a “higher modality,” or more realistic representation, is achieved through the use of various techniques, such as colour saturation, colour differentiation, colour modulation, contextualization,

Figure 5. The tamers of the *Bear Story* carry club, a metonymic reference to the repression that occurred during the Chilean dictatorship.

representation, depth, illumination, and brightness. But *Bear Story* is not so straightforward, deploying an interesting mix of high and low modality. Thus the house and urban landscape are depicted with a verisimilitude that is quite different from that used by mainstream animation studios like Pixar, Dreamworks, and Disney. This evocation of tactility, combined with the materiality of the soundtrack —with analog-sounding background noise—conveys us to a specific time and space, a *spacetime mattering*, as Karen Barad calls it (2014, p. 168). *Bear Story* shows a neighborhood that has not been transformed by “progress,” an urban landscape that appears to resist the new organization of lives under a neoliberal regime. Things are not new but, rather, are used and worn out: walls are grafitted, streets are cobbled. *Bear Story’s* can also be read as the story of a man —who happens to be a bear—who manufactures stories as a way of resisting a world in which the telling of stories are not valued. The depiction of the bear’s life and environment is saturated with feelings of intimacy. For example, the depiction of the house includes a quick view of unmade beds that still display traces of the body shape of the bear. All of this detail gives the work a sense of authenticity and



intimacy as we witness the Bear’s personal



craftsmanship. As others have noted, the visibility of manual work in animation films is frequently associated

with a longing not only for that which is true and genuine, but also for things lost and, therefore, with nostalgia and yearning (Tomkowiak, 2018). Moreover, the sense of intimacy suggests not only trustworthiness but also a personal connection, in that only one person at a time may experience it. Lastly, as Figure 6 shows, the observation window is at a child’s height. In contrast to the detailed portrait of the bear’s present life, his past abuse is distanced. This distancing is achieved on different levels. First, by the use of anthropomorphized animals performing in a circus, functioning as a metaphor for the torture he experienced. Second, the scene showing the bear’s capture has the lowest modality of any in the entire film. The capture is rendered through images of Shadow Theatre, such that we see only the bear’s silhouette, where he is hidden within an apartment building with other animals, being beaten over the head and carried away by the police. The scene even includes some humour with the figure of a giraffe taking up three vertical window frames. The picturebook adaptation depicts his capture in a similar way, using silhouettes with no verbal text. Clearly, this

is a trauma that is, as Adorno might put it, beyond words. The discursive is seen to have no place here.

Figure 6. The observation window is leveled at a child's height in *Bear Story*.

Conclusion

Most narratives dealing with the state violence of the Chilean dictatorship are modeled on the sort of material complexity outlined in this article, where events are handled in elliptical, suggestive ways and the losses themselves are mourned. Semioticians would focus more on what these texts connote, using such words as dictatorship, torture, *detenidos desaparecidos* [missing people], and executions being replaced by more metonymic indicators, such as the allusions to “*marcas en sus muñecas*” [marks on his wrists] (Buitrago and Blanco, unpaginated). Images remain powerful in the more open way they convey nuances of meaning, but, as I have argued, in these texts their interplay is more complex, not simply responding to the words but to the rhythm of the whole text: the turn of the page, the sequencing of the illustrations, their layout, textures, the binding and so on. Elizabeth Grosz argues that what distinguishes the arts from other forms of cultural production are the ways in which artistic production merges with, intensifies, and eternalizes or monumentalizes sensation[s] (Grosz, 2008, p. 4). These works elicit sensations that deterritorialize discourses about memory politics by escaping the traditional paradigm of representation. Hence none of these texts deal explicitly with matters of justice; they avoid the established discursive way of ordering events, which requires that the past be revisited in order that new generations will avoid its repetition. These texts avoid that more pedagogical approach where adults appear to patrol children's texts, carefully guiding not only what the latter see but also shaping their responses.

Some, of course, might argue that the texts discussed in this article are timid and elusive in their manner of narrating the horrors of the Chilean dictatorship; but, as I have argued, they have simply adopted a different approach, one that works in more subtle ways and deals with the less rational, non-discursive, material complexity of things: what, in affect theory are called intensities. Unfortunately, these dimensions are regularly neglected in school contexts. Acknowledging this alternative way of reading would make the classroom, and other spaces, into a more democratic forum, one where the adult need not feel the need to dominate by contextualizing material and filling in all the narrative gaps. While reader-response criticism has long celebrated the multiplicity of answers that come from group reading experiences and, in more recent approaches, has paid more heed to performative and visual responses to texts (Styles & Nobel, 2009; Arizpe & McAdam, 2011), I would contend that this could be taken further by exploring the material dimensions of memory that this article has discussed: the non-verbal and non-discursive, the intensities and emotions that

these texts may elicit. It is then possible that the gaps in these works —if we continue using that established term— may then not need to be picked up by adults, but, rather, could be filled with silence: a silence that is not the lack of something but a mark of its presence.

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