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by

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Drawing Crime and Justice
in Latin American Crime Comics and Graphic Novels
1970-2015

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by

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Dedication

To
CHARLOTTE SOMETIMES,
for teaching me how to teach
and
for teaching me what it means to
raise a strong feminist daughter
and
for your love of reading

To
OVELIA DE LA AURORA INLAKECH,
for teaching me what
unconditional love is
and
for all your abrazos
and
meows

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1970-2015

by

Samuel Scott Cannon, Ph.D.

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SUPERVISOR: Jossianna Arroyo-Martínez

Abstract: This project investigates contemporary Latin American crime comics in order to interrogate how these popular culture texts represent concepts of crime and justice. This study looks to crime comics that fall into the detective or private investigator genre between 1970 and 2015 from Mexico and Chile, precisely because they confront crime directly. In particular, the Mexican comic character El Pantera, created by Daniel Muñoz, and Ramón Díaz Eterovic's detective Heredia from Chile are the primary focuses of this investigation. These two characters have formed a part of their respective cultural imaginaries over the last four decades and as such they serve as reference points for how concepts of crime and justice have evolved in Mexico and Chile. The investigation of these comic narratives brings to light that economic and political policies related to neoliberalism are seen as sources of crime and violence. This investigation proposes that Mexican and Chilean comics reveal that neoliberalism is criminal through the lens of popular criminology and

that these comic texts are means of processing neoliberal violence and disappearance in the realm of popular culture.

This research proposes new approaches to the study of Latin America comics by putting Mexican and Chilean crime comics into dialogue with comic theories by Scott McCloud, Thierry Groensteen, and Nick Souanis, as well as Latin American comic research by Bruce Campbell, Ana Merino, Anne Rubenstein, Harold Hinds and Charles Tatum. In addition, these comic texts are investigated through critical theories by Giorgio Agamben, Michel De Certeau, Pierre Nora, Slavoj Žižek, and Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott. This research represents a unique approach to Latin American comics that take the contextual realities of contemporary neoliberal practices into consideration, and offers new comic theories such as the multibraid network, new gutter spaces, and the idea of “Ashes in the Gutter” to bring McCloud’s writings in touch with Mexican and Chilean realities. In addition, this dissertation provides one of the only histories of the Chilean comic industry written in English.

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INTRODUCTION:
**How to Survive Neoliberalism: A Comic Guide to the Symptoms of
Latin America's Uneven Modernity**

*Nothing changed, except the point of view
– which changed everything.*
-Nick Sousanis

*Es en esa perspectiva de largo plazo
que la historia del capital se muestra no solo
como la historia del progreso y la modernización,
del desarrollismo y la industrialización,
sino como la historia del cadáver
y de la muerte.*
-Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott

*Hay que entender los cómics
como forma cultural de la modernidad,
capaz de negociar o crear espacios
de diálogo, tensión y resistencia
entre diferentes sectores sociales
y culturales, dentro de lo subalterno
y lo hegemónico.*
-Ana Merino

Latin American comics confront crime, but not just petty street crimes, or fictional super villains. Latin American comics negotiate narratives about crime at the level of the disappeared individual as well as large-scale crimes against humanity – things much more heinous than super villains do – or in other words, the realities of contemporary Latin America. It is the intention of this project to weave together comic images and narratives from Mexico and Chile in order to establish a broader vision of how popular culture imaginaries develop ideas about the sources of crime and violence in Latin American (post)modernity. I agree with Ana Merino's assertion that comics from the Spanish-speaking world emerge from the uneven development of modernity (11), and I propose,

through the readings and analysis in this project, that comics not only negotiate and reveal the tensions of modernization but that they also speak directly about neoliberalism's role in these processes. The articulation of modernity and neoliberalism is pointed out by Anne Rubenstein in her book *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation* when she says, "what people at the time called modernity, but what could be equally well be described as industrial capitalism - can be seen at work in the battles over education that were still occupying public attention in years that comic books first appeared on Mexican newsstands" (15). While Rubenstein's work looks into the early years of Mexico's comic industry and how modernity clashed with traditionalism in politics and comics, I find that neoliberalism, as an exacerbated form of capitalism, continues to be a source of conflict and tension in not only Mexican comics, but Chilean comics as well. Rafael Barajas' 1996 graphic novel *Cómo Sobrevivir al Neoliberalismo Sin Dejar de Ser Mexicano* [*How to Survive Neoliberalism While Staying Mexican*] depicts the violence and impact of neoliberalism in nine panels: "Los síntomas del neoliberalismo son: 1. Política antisindical. 2. Desempleo. 3. Fin de las políticas de bienestar social. 4. Cierre de instituciones de seguridad social. 5. Baja del salario real 6. Sacrificio de las mayorías. 7. Enriquecimiento de una minoría. 8. Pérdida de soberanía. 9. Falta de perspectivas" ["The symptoms of neoliberalism are: 1. Anti-union policies. 2. Unemployment. 3. The end of social welfare policies. 4. The closure of social security programs. 5. Reduction of the minimum wage. 6. Sacrifice of the majority. 7. Prosperity of a minority. 8. Loss of sovereignty. 9. Lack of perspective"] (30). Barajas illustrates



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Figure 1. Rafael Barajas' (El Fisgón) depiction of the symptoms of neoliberalism.

these economic and political moves as literal acts of violence against Mexican bodies. The repeated silhouette in this sequence of panels reproduces and multiples the bodies and acts of violence visually across the page. Each panel could represent a moment in a series of attacks against a single body or as individual moments of different bodies being attacked with various levels of violence. The four panels showing the silhouette with dagger(s) in its back and an axe in its head can be read as moment-to-moment transitions which show a succession of events moving forward in time - this signaling how political and economic policies continually, overtime increasingly bring violence upon individual bodies. Scott McCloud also points out that aspect-to-aspect transitions bypass time and set a wandering

eye on different aspects of a place, idea, or mood (72) - this alternative reading of these same four panels can reveal that violence is occurring at multiple levels of intensity across neoliberalism as a spatial system, an epistemology, and a world-vision.

Through my analysis of the graphic narratives studied in this dissertation I have recognized that an aspect-to-aspect reading of Mexican and Chilean crime comics reveals how neoliberalism attempts to dominate and control space, ideology, and mood across both of these nation's popular imaginaries and physical realities. Throughout this project I approach Mexican and Chilean crime comics through the lens of popular criminology, or "the criminological imaginings that lie at the intersection of academic criminology and popular culture" (Phillips and Strobl 6). I situate my research along the methodological lines of Nickie Phillips and Staci Strobl's book *Comic Book Crime: Truth, Justice, and the American Way*, in which they look at North American cultural ideas about crime and justice as developed in the realm of comic books. They explain that much can be learned about a society through their comic books by "interrogating the ways in which cultural meanings about crime and justice are negotiated and contested within them. In this context, comic books offer expressions of contemporary life that tap into our hopes, fears, personal insecurities, and uncertainties about the future" (2). In an attempt to understand the fears, insecurities, and uncertainties of a culture I believe that looking to pop culture representations of violence can be significantly revelatory. Through this approach to culture, through the lens of popular culture's depictions of crime, it becomes possible to explore "the ways in which meanings about crime and justice are negotiated and contested in comic books and the way these imaginings form part of a broader cultural context in

which readers absorb, reproduce, and resist notions of justice" (2). An important aspect of how these crime comics function as cultural texts about crime and justice is that they directly or indirectly contemplate the role of neoliberalism as part of the contemporary reality of violence. As seen in Rafael Barajas' panels above or in the pages of the Chilean graphic novel *El Viudo: La Cueva del Manco* where the hero notes how neoliberalism is unsettling the masses just before the massive 1957 "Battle of Santiago" erupted, these popular culture texts are not afraid to identify this source of civil unrest and how it relates specifically to physical violence. This project brings together graphic narratives from Mexico and Chile in order to create an aspect-to-aspect vision of the polysemy of violence as instigated by and a consequence of neoliberalism from the 1970s through 2015.

I. Why Mexico and Chile? Unflattening Neoliberalism from the Pages of Crime Comics

The final symptom of neoliberalism in Rafael Barajas' comic was a lack of perspective, and it is precisely this ailment that makes approaching the concept of neoliberalism from multiple perspectives so important. Neoliberalism manifests in multiple forms across time and space and can be difficult to identify at times, as it is embraced by both conservative and liberal political institutions. In this project, I identify neoliberalism at the nexus of descriptions given by David Harvey and Naomi Klein. Harvey explains that neoliberalism works under "the assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade" and that the freedom of a neoliberal state embodies "the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations, and

financial capital" (7). This can be inversely stated by saying that neoliberal economics and politics place the good of capital over that of the human individual. While Harvey describes the general ideology of neoliberalism, Naomi Klein details how its implementation has been carried out over the last several decades in her book *The Shock Doctrine*. She points out that neoliberal reforms have been strategically and systematically forced upon societies from Argentina, Mexico, and Chile, to Iraq and Yugoslavia. These strategic changes to economic and political systems occurred best under "the atmosphere of large-scale crisis" and that this "provided the necessary pretext to overrule the expressed wishes of voters and to hand the country over to economic 'technocrats'" (12). Klein clarifies that "this was now the preferred method of advancing corporate goals: using moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering" (9). These moments of collective crisis or trauma function differently from place to place and in order to obtain a clear picture of this reality it becomes necessary to approach neoliberalism from multiple perspectives in time, space, and culture. This is why the intersection of Mexican and Chilean crime comics can articulate a unique vision of how neoliberal violence is experienced, subverted, negotiated, and resisted in the popular imaginary.

Nick Sousanis' philosophical treatise in comic form explains that perspective is supremely important, and that his theory of *unflattening* should be defined as "a simultaneous engagement of multiple vantage points from which to engender new ways of seeing" (32). In his chapter titled "The Importance of Seeing Double and Then Some" he illustrates how the minute distance between our own two eyes allows us to view reality from two distinct perspectives and that "it is this displacement - parallax - which enables

us to perceive depth" (31). Thus our perception of the world is formed by a "constant negotiation between two distinct sources" (31). Sousanis describes how using two distinct points of reference has reshaped our vision of the world and universe, from how Eratosthenes in Alexandria came to discern that the Earth is curved to how Copernicus used perspective to determine that the Sun is the center of our solar system. While these discoveries revolutionized our understanding of reality, Sousanis signals that "nothing changed, except the point of view - which changed everything" (33). The power of this unflattened approach, from multiple perspectives, is depicted by Sousanis on a single page of comic text that is difficult to reproduce as a linear quote, but coupled with an image of the page this quotation should be clear:

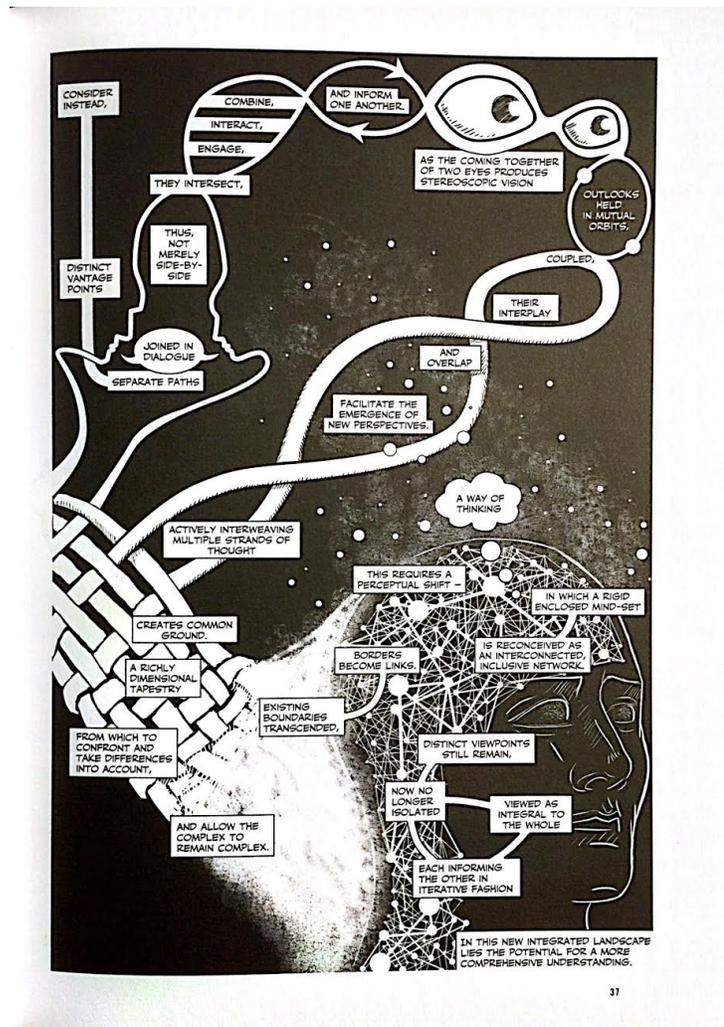


Figure 2. Creating dialogue between multiple vantage points from Nick Sousanis' "Unflattening"

Distinct vantage points, separate paths, joined in dialogue. Thus, not merely side-by-side, they intersect, engage, interact, combine, and inform one another. As the coming together of two eyes produces stereoscopic vision, outlooks held in mutual orbits, coupled, their interplay and overlap facilitate the emergence of new perspectives. Actively interweaving multiple strands of thought creates common ground. A richly dimensional tapestry from which to confront and take differences into account, and

allow the complex to remain complex. Existing boundaries transcended, borders become links. This becomes a perceptual shift - a way of thinking - in which a rigid enclosed mind-set is reconnected as an interconnected, inclusive network. Distinct viewpoints still remain, no longer isolated, viewed as integral to the whole, each informing the other in iterative fashion. In this new integrated landscape lies the potential for a more comprehensive understanding. (37)

In an attempt to unflatten the realities of neoliberalism across Latin America, this project looks to understand this by taking the vantage points of Mexican and Chilean crime comics as distinct loci from which to create a stereoscopic and dimensional, unflat, vision of violence and crime.

Neoliberalism exerts itself differently in Mexico and Chile, but Mexico City and Santiago de Chile both exist as developments of these violent economic and political ideologies. This way, I suggest a reading from multiple perspectives that looks to their crime comics as a mode of popular criminology that allows an aspect-to-aspect approach between the comic texts studied here that can unflatten neoliberalism's attempts to control space, ideas, and atmosphere. The unique differences between the Mexican and Chilean experiences of neoliberalism make them valuable vantage points from which to view and analyze this phenomenon. In this way, nothing changes about their local realities, except for the perspective, and that changes everything. Their distant borders become links, their multiple comic panels become aspect-to-aspect transitions that articulate the shape of neoliberalism as a reality, its curvature, axis, or center, perhaps. In my project these links

are extremely important, I look to Thierry Groensteen's theory of comic *braiding* to weave together comic texts from Mexico and Chile. In Groensteen's theory of General Arthrology, or the study of articulations across the entire length of a comic text, he proposes that every panel in a comic "exists, potentially if not actually, in relation with each of the others" and that it is possible to organize these relationships as a network rather than a sequence (146). Groensteen also calls this network both a series and a braid. He explains, "A *series* is a succession of continuous or discontinuous images linked by a system of iconic, plastic or semantic correspondences" (146). In this way, it is possible to link and braid individual comic panels that do not exist in a linear sequence nor appear near each other in the topography of a comic text. This hyper-topical reading means that the links created by braiding "concern panels (or pluri-panel sequences) distant by several pages, and that cannot be viewed simultaneously" (148). I explore the possibility of expanding upon Groensteen's theory, inspired by Sousanis' multi-perspective theory of unflattening, by creating a braided series of comic panels across multiple comic texts, nations, and temporalities. In doing this, I find a constellation of violent and criminal imaginings that echo and resonate with Rafael Barajas' description of the symptoms of neoliberalism across Mexican and Chilean crime comics.

II. Comics and the City: Detecting Modernity in the Age of Neoliberalism

Born from the technological advances of modernization, the newspaper was the primary space for the creation and dissemination of the comic. These early pieces of sequential art dealt specifically with the place of the popular classes within their urban

environment. Thus the comic emerges as an early expression of modernity that looked directly at the lives of city dwellers. The centrality of the comic as a medium is that it is inextricably associated with both projects of modernization and the representation of the popular classes that emerged in consequence of these projects. The popularity of the newspaper comic strip saw the comics reproduced in stand-alone books. Soon the comic book became the preferred medium for consuming sequential art. The North American comic industry had its boom between 1938-1950, but the medium suffered greatly as a result of censorship. The medium saw a significant development in sophistication during the 1980s, and 1986 is considered to be the year that changed comics forever. The Pulitzer Prize awarded to Art Spiegelman for his 1986 graphic novel *Maus* shows the scope of the medium and how comic texts continue to deal with the consequences of modernity such as WWII and its aftermath. Over the last three decades the graphic novel has become an increasingly important form of sequential art that has reimagined both the comic book and the novel.

While the importance of the comic in North America is clear, the place of sequential art in Latin America has been problematic due to the fact that in many cases the comics being published in newspapers were translations of North American products and they have been criticized as being little more than another form of colonialism. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart made a strong argument against the colonialist ideas that appeared in Walt Disney comics in their *Para Leer al Pato Donald* (1972). Although North America's imports filled many of the newspapers and comic books there has been a steady production of comics that represent a significant Latin American body of work and, most recently,

graphic novels. In many cases comics were heavily monitored and censored which caused them to function principally as satirical and subversive texts. This limited the development of the medium until the 1980s, with the most substantial advances in sophistication happening over the last three decades. The sophistication of the medium in Latin America can be exemplified by the case of the Brazilian artists Fábio Moon and Gabriel Bá winning the Eisner Award for “Best Limited Series or Story Arc” in 2011, and the Chilean artists Gabriel Rodríguez and Nelson Daniel being awarded the Eisner for “Best Limited Series” in 2015, among other awards from the North American comic industry.

This project analyzes detective fiction through the medium of the comic and graphic novel between 1970-2015 in order to question how the medium articulates concepts about criminality and justice in Latin America. I believe comics and graphic novels are forms of media that reimagine the role and importance of detective fiction across Latin America in contemporary literary production. I focus on Latin American detective narratives in the era of neoliberalism. My dissertation argues that the writings of Daniel Muñoz (Mexico 1938) and Ramón Díaz Eterovic (Chile 1956) use detective fiction in ways that contrast with the North American and European detective genres to establish ideas of criminality and justice that are uniquely local while displaying their national and transnational implications. This is done by following the multiple adaptations of two fictional private investigators: Gervasio "El Pantera" Robles and the Detective Heredia. I show that Latin American detective narratives and the visual noir aesthetic through which they are presented generate concepts of criminal subjectivities and juridical power of enforcement that contest hegemonic concepts of who can be perceived as criminal, who

can administer justice, and how these ideas function on national and transnational levels. The detective characters created by these authors have been present in the popular production of their respective countries (and beyond) for over forty years, and their appearance in comics and graphic novels dialogues with their manifestations in literature and television. I propose that a close reading of these graphic texts and the noir style they employ reveals how these detective narratives are tied to particular city spaces and national programs of neoliberalism. Referencing the symbolic importance of these city spaces and the depictions of crime that are related to them serves as commentary on the Mexican and Chilean projects of uneven modernization and neoliberalism as carried out in Mexico City and Santiago de Chile. While each country considered in this dissertation has seen a similar production and adaptation of post-1979 private detective characters, that provide a view of how this genre is developing and transforming across Latin America, it is also important to see that these countries each represent unique manifestations of neoliberal practices that contextualize these characters within an increasingly hegemonic and globalized situation. In the case of Patnera in Mexico, the corrupt state of politics and police work see him dehumanized and converted into a *homo sacer* by the State itself. For Heredia, in Chile, this reveals itself through processes of gentrification and the disappearance of traditional urban spaces and their links to memory and history. The appearance of these private detectives and the analysis of their textual and visual production show that concepts of criminality and justice are being re-elaborated to confront contemporary concerns about the consequences of neoliberal capitalism and its impact on national projects of modernization. The theoretical writings of Giorgio Agamben, Pierre Nora, Michel de

Certeau, and Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott are used here to critically approach these concerns. While this dissertation focuses on literary, comic, and filmic texts it confirms the idea that these cultural products interact with economics and politics at national and international levels and can provide insight into how these economic and political processes are being imagined across Latin America, and how their violent implications are being incorporated into the reality of artistic comic production.

This project investigates how the effects of modernization, and its ambiguously incomplete nature, have seen specific developments or exacerbations in the urban centers under the influences of neoliberalism. I focus my inquiries on Mexico City and Santiago de Chile as Latin American urban centers that demonstrate the effects of modernization and neoliberalism and serve as spaces of action for the detective narratives studied in this project. The Mexican Distrito Federal became the site of massive worker migration after the institutionalization and corruption of the Mexican Revolution, as land reforms were never implemented. Due to this large-scale migration, Mexico City expanded to become one of the world's largest megalopolises. While police and political corruption became institutionalized, it is in the post-NAFTA era that cartel and military violence have permanently changed the face of not only the Distrito Federal but of the entire country, specifically during Felipe Calderón's presidency (2006-2012). The re-configuration of urban space in Chile appears as a direct consequence of Augusto Pinochet's U.S.-backed military coup in 1973 and subsequent dictatorship (1974-1990). Along with the coup came sweeping economic reforms designed by the neoliberal economist Milton Friedman that saw the urban landscape of Santiago de Chile not only transformed by military force but

also by waves of gentrification. These bellicose and economic changes have resulted in significant increases in both population and violent crime in these capitol cities. These projects have culminated in the accumulation of violence in specific sectors around the city, the criminalization of poverty, and a rampant increase in public and private security forces that act against these populations with little-to-no legal repercussions.

By detective fiction I refer principally to the hard-boiled sub-genre that was made popular by writers such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammet and that are directly referenced in the Latin American texts I am studying. This genre is often identified as “neo-detective fiction” (*neopolicial*) or as the *novela negra* throughout Latin America. In many of these texts the protagonist is a non-official agent (private investigator) that often works parallel to the police. In this study the term “noir aesthetic” refers to the North American cinematic style that was developed in the post-WWII era under the influences of German Expressionism and post-war paranoia and its subsequent variations and transformations. These films were identified by the French film critic Nino Frank as “film noir.” The noir style typically employed low-key lighting to create multiple or elongated shadows and large dark spaces within the frame among its other prominent features. The analysis of the comic and graphic novel adaptations of detective fiction and noir aesthetics establishes a dialogue about how these forms of media articulate new convergences and connections when studied as cultural products that reimagine one another.

III. A Popular Criminology of Comics

The predominant approach to the variety of texts studied in this project is taken starting from Nicole Rafter's concept of "popular criminology" as presented in her book *Criminology Goes to the Movies: Crime Theory and Popular Culture*. Rafter's work focuses on the intersection of academic criminology and popular culture. As mentioned above, this approach was taken to the medium of comics by Nickie Phillips and Staci Strobl in their book *Comic Book Crime: Truth, Justice, and the American Way*. Their principal concern has been "exploring how the portrayal of crime and justice in comic books contributes to concepts of when, where, and against whom violence is appropriate" (6). While Phillips and Strobl question the role of super heroes in the creation of North American popular criminology, I consider detective narratives as the focus of my study, as they are closely associated with concepts of legality and processes of justice. I approach this question using detective fiction in its various adaptations, seeing that the detective characters investigated have had a significant impact in the media (literature, comics, television) and cultural imaginations of Mexico and Chile. Following the approaches of Rafter, Phillips, and Strobl I question how these Latin American detective narratives conceptualize criminal subjectivities as well as how they develop solutions that negotiate and contest legal concepts of justice. The impact that these detective characters have had over the past forty years not only reflects how concepts of criminality and justice are represented but also signals that they contribute to popular ideologies about these topics.

In order to approach the sequential art texts, I look to Ana Merino's book *El Cómic Hispánico* as an initial point of departure for discussing the place of comics in Latin American cultural production. Merino's conclusions about the connections between

projects of modernization and the production of comics allow this project to extend her ideas by questioning the place of comics and graphic novels in the era of neoliberalism. The work of Thierry Groensteen in *The System of Comics* and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* are the basis for the close readings of the comic texts. The process of performing a close reading of a piece of sequential art is still a new and debated field and these authors provide tools for reading how comics use the page, the panel, and signs within panels to create meaning, as well as emphasizing the importance of the reader in creating meaning between frames. Groensteen offers the tools of General and Restrained Arthrology (the study of articulations) as ways of discovering how sequential art can generate meaning across the length of a text or at the level of the individual frame. McCloud's most significant contribution has been his focus on the "gutter" (the seemingly empty space between panels) of the comic frame and the active participation of the reader that occurs there. These approaches that are specifically tailored to comics provide important methods of extracting new insights from the medium.

The analysis of the meanings produced by the use of noir aesthetics in these works will be facilitated by the work of Jennifer Fay and Justus Nieland in their book *Film Noir: Hard-Boiled Modernity and the Cultures of Globalization*. Their study makes evident the links between localized narratives, noir aesthetics, and transnational conflicts in the post-WWII era and beyond. Their framework permits this project to question how these narratives and aesthetics function on local, national, and transnational levels in the era of neoliberalism in Latin America, in general, and in Mexico City and Santiago de Chile, specifically.

IV. Contributions

This dissertation represents one of few projects that offers an in-depth analysis of comics as a unique field of study and specialization by a scholar working on Latin American literatures and cultures. This dissertation represents an effort to expand the borders of Latin American literary and cultural studies and to bring it into contact with the larger field of comic scholarship that is principally produced by departments of English or Communications. This project opens new dialogues between popular mediums and concepts of articulation and adaptation. It also uses comics and graphic novels as means of re-writing (re-drawing) criminality and justice, and to present new visions of the urban environments of Mexico City and Santiago de Chile.

This project represents the first academic approach to the works of the Mexican writer Daniel Muñoz. Muñoz's career as a comic script writer, novelist, and creator of the TV adaption of his character "El Pantera" has spanned over forty years and yet his proposals about how to curb urban violence in Mexico City have not been addressed primarily because they appeared in the form of elusive *historietas*. In Chile the work of the prolific writer Ramón Díaz Eterovic has received its due attention but the recent collaboration between Eterovic and a group eight of Chile's most prominent comic artists, led by Carlos Reyes, has not been studied along side Eterovic's body of work. This project also provides new theoretical approaches to Thierry Groensteen's concept of *braiding* by proposing a *multibraid* that links individual comic panels across multiple comic texts from divergent temporalities and national contexts. In light of this new theoretical approach, I

also suggest a reading of Scott McCloud's concept of "Blood in the Gutter" from a Latin American perspective that connects these comic theories to the violent neoliberal realities of forced disappearances across Mexico, Chile, and beyond – and finding that for Latin America, we face "Ashes in the Gutter", borrowing this concept from Jacques Derrida and Sergio Villalobo-Ruminott's work that is explored in chapter one of this project. Along with this reconsideration of the gutter as a theoretical space, I propose the formation and interrogation of *new gutters* that are created by the formation of a multi-textual *multibraid*. These new gutter spaces are the articulations generated by putting Mexican and Chilean crime comics into a *multibraid* that produces new juxtapositions that did not previously exist.

This dissertation project contributes to the understanding of criminal subjectivities, concepts of justice, and the study of Latin American literature in general by approaching a specific sub-genre of what is generally termed "la novela neopolicial." The contributions that this project undertakes are those of analyzing the role of detective protagonists that are non-official agents of justice and the significance of their actions for/against the state as means of establishing how these texts conceptualize criminality and justice in contemporary Latin American detective fiction. My project delves into the study of detective fiction by extending its scope to include not only television but also comics as fields that provide new stylistic and aesthetic possibilities. The analysis of Pantera and Heredia confronts questions of adaptation, not only of narrative style but also of visual aesthetics that appear in the mediums of television and comics. While there has been ample work done in the fields of both detective fiction and television, this project works

extensively with how this genre is interpreted in the medium of the comic and graphic novel. The medium of sequential art serves as a link between the purely textual literature and the particularly visual medium of television. This approach to comics is particularly relevant when working with popular literature and media from the 1980s forward, as it is a cultural product that must be addressed.

V. Chapters: Theories, Panthers, Detectives, and Histories

The four chapters of this dissertation approach the reality of crime comics in Mexico and Chile starting with my theoretical proposals in chapter one. These ideas link Mexican and Chilean crime comics with the violent era of forced disappearances, and interrogates how these texts negotiate this violence in comic art. The following two chapters offer close readings of Mexican and Chilean detective crime comics in order to investigate the local realities of neoliberalism as developed in *El Pantera* and *Heredia Detective*. The final chapter of this project looks to provide a brief history of crime comics in Mexico and Chile. I pay particular attention to the history of Chilean comics as it is an area that has not been developed in English language research or at the academic level. I believe that these multiple perspectives, in broad terms, on Latin American crime comics show that popular culture texts indeed contemplate, inform, and reproduce an imaginary that identifies neoliberal political and economic practices as sites of violence and crime.

VI. Chapter One-

Ashes in the Gutter of Latin America's Crime Comics: Tactics for Walking the Multibraid's New Gutters in Mexican and Chilean Neoliberal Comicscapes

This first chapter develops my theoretical framework as a two-fold approach to Mexican and Chilean crime comics. The writings of Thierry Groensteen, Scott McCloud, Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott, and Michel de Certeau form the basis of this framework. As explained briefly above, I push at the limits of Groensteen's theory of *braiding* in order to propose what I call a *multibraided network*. The creation of this multibraided network, puts panels into communion that were previously unrelated, and these new juxtapositions open up what I suggest are *new gutters* that did not exist before. I believe that it is in these new gutter spaces that interrogation into the consequence of neoliberalism as explored in Mexican and Chilean crime comics should be made. The analysis of this multibraided network reveals that these comics and graphic novels, that deal specifically with crime, produce repetitions and echoes that link them to neoliberalism as an inciting cause of violence. In this network of comic references to neoliberalism, I find the possibility of creating this multibraid that explores how comics and popular culture negotiate these economic and political realities in Mexico and Chile, and that this would eventually lead to a larger project expanding into a multibraided network across Latin America. I divide my approach to this multibraided series along two strands or visual themes in comics. The first, focuses on comic panels that show images of city maps being used to strategize plans to dominate urban space for the implementation of neoliberal practices. I call this the map-level strand and refer to Michel De Certeau's theories of strategies and tactics to explore how these panels reflect upon neoliberal habits in the cityscape and comicscape. The

second strand in this multibraid is the street-level strand that finds a series of panels that show tactics for facing, resisting, and simply surviving the violent realities of neoliberalism. This chapter's conclusions discuss how the texts that form the multibraid between Mexico and Chile reveal the impact of neoliberalism by opening up new gutter spaces, and finding tactics for walking them, that allow new perspectives from which to question and negotiate the economic and political realities of neoliberalism.

VII. Chapter Two-

The Life and Un-Death of Gervasio Robles and the Creation of the Bandit/Hero El Pantera as Homo Sacer in Neoliberal Noir Mexico City

This chapter reflects upon the various versions and adaptations of Daniel Muñoz's character El Pantera. This chapter pays specific attention to the adaptations Pantera has seen over the years from the realm of comics, to literature, and finally to television. This analysis looks to discover how Pantera's more than four decades as part of Mexico's cultural imaginary informs, resists, and reproduces ideas about crime and justice. This chapter explores the violence of the neoliberal city and its effects upon marginalized bodies. This vision of Mexico City is read as establishing a field of signification for Pantera that locates him as both a hero and bandit, a threat to State sanctioned social order. This allows me to develop proposals about the precarious bio- and necro-politics of the bandit/hero in the age of neoliberalism. I rely on Giorgio Agamben's theory of the *homo sacer*, or sacred man, who cannot be killed nor sacrificed and exists outside the bounds of sovereign law. I argue that Pantera's story can be read as a popular culture imagining of how the Mexican state

makes *homines sacri* of its citizens and the possibilities for negotiating this identity to survive and challenge the neoliberal state.

VIII. Chapter Three-

Places of Memory in Neoliberal Santiago de Chile: Taking Ghosts Out for a Stroll and Mourning the Disappeared City

The Chilean graphic novel *Heredia Detective* is the central focus of this chapter. My analysis suggests that a reading of this graphic novel led by Groensteen's theory of braiding emphasizes places of memory across the urban landscape of Santiago de Chile. I study the protagonist's meandering through downtown Santiago as an effort to recover memories of the city's violent past that neoliberal processes of gentrification attempt to hide. I look closely at the sites of national history and identity that are depicted in Gonzalo Martínez's illustrations of Santiago in this graphic novel. This reading sheds light on the types of disappearances brought about by neoliberalism upon memory and the city itself. This chapter employs the theories of Pierre Nora on places of memory, Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott's concept of Cindrology, and Groensteen's concept of braiding to link together the multiple sites and memories represented in this graphic novel.

IX. Chapter Four-

The Case of Crime Comics: A Brief History of the Mexican and Chilean Comic Industries

This brief chapter serves as a summary of the general history of comic production in Mexico and Chile, as well as an overview of the place of crime comics within each of these national industries. This chapter departs from each country's Golden Age of comics: Mexico 1930-1950 and Chile 1962-1975. While Mexico's local comic production fluctuated due to paper prices, censorship, and other political concerns, Chile's markets were impacted by more overt events such as the nationalization of the comic industry's largest publisher and the military coup that saw this same publisher, now under the control of the military government, shutdown the comic industry for years. An emphasis is placed on exploring the history of the Chilean comic industry in this chapter. This is due to the fact that Mexico's comic industry has been the focus of multiple in-depth works, while the history of Chile's comic industry has not been thoroughly studied in North American academic texts. I hope that this contribution to the field brings information and insight that can be used to broaden the spectrum of investigations carried out around Chile's comic history and industry.

X. Pop Culture's Criminology of Neoliberalism

My research into Latin American comics, specifically the fields of Mexico and Chilean production, questions how narratives that deal with crime and justice portray popular culture's imaginary about what is considered a crime, who can be considered a criminal, and how justice can be achieved. I propose that these narratives reveal that in pop culture, justice must be found outside the legal limits of the State, because the crimes are perpetuated by the State itself against its own citizens with impunity. This is not only my

idea; it is supported by the comics themselves. These texts absorb, reproduce, and resist dominant discourses on crime and justice as implemented by neoliberal policies. They participate in this popular culture cycle, and my interrogations look particularly at who carries out criminal acts and in turn who seeks out justice for these crimes. In this sense it is important to realize that pop culture texts can “provide a script or narrative which suggests when violence is appropriate, against whom, for what reasons and with what effects, together with images of those against whom violence is permitted and prohibited” (Young 3-4). This project proposes that the crime comic narratives explored here reveal that in the age of neoliberalism violence is constantly permitted by the State against its own citizens, they face these dehumanizing effects as they are converted into *homines sacri*, left to wander urban landscapes completely transformed by gentrification, or left as Ashes in the Gutter, a complete absence through neoliberalism’s horrifying *modus operandi*: disappearance. Comic’s historical connection to the city permits them a unique vantage point from which to explore the development of modernization as it passes through the hegemonic symptoms of globalized neoliberalism, and for this reason I turn to them as a source for understanding popular culture’s criminology of neoliberalism.

CHAPTER ONE:
**Ashes in the Gutter of Latin America's Crime Comics: Tactics for
Walking the Multibraid's New Gutters in Mexican and Chilean
Neoliberal Comicscapes**

*I would prefer ashes as the better paradigm for what I call the trace
– something that erases itself totally, radically, while presenting itself.*
-Jacques Derrida

That-which-is-not-represented-but-which-the-reader-cannot-help-but-to-infer.
-Thierry Groensteen

To kill a man between panels is to condemn him to a thousand deaths.
-Scott McCloud

*Permitásenos insistir en esto: la excepcionalidad inaugurada
por las dictaduras del Cono Sur y llevada al extremo con el llamado
etnocidio centroamericano, encuentra en la excepción Mexicana [...] uno de sus capítulos más relevantes. Más allá de las diferencias, todas ellas atendibles, en la puesta en escena de las operaciones prácticas de violencia y desaparición, lo que las conecta es su excepcionalidad no excepcional, es decir, su radicalización del excepcionalismo propio del proyecto de acumulación capitalista y su permanente suspensión soberana de la soberanía.*
-Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott

In this chapter I propose a two-fold approach to Mexican and Chilean crime comics. First, in the field of comics theory I endeavor to expand the possibilities of Thierry Groensteen's theory of General Arthrology by pushing the bounds of his concept of *braiding* or *tressage* beyond the borders of a single comic text. In order to do this, I suggest that the processes of identifying a braided network or series be carried out across multiple texts that share recollections or echoes and "form a constellation to the degree that the reading detects and decrypts their complementarity and interdependence" (*The System of Comics* 147). Currently, I put forward the term *multibraid* for this type of intertextual

braided reading of comics beyond their individual borders or covers. Following the creation of this multibraid, I see it necessary to take into consideration the presence of *new gutters* that appear as each panel of the multibraid is brought into communion with the other parts of this braided network. The new juxtapositions created by drawing out these panels or series of panels from their original texts and placing them into a multibraided network allows us the possibility to carry out new processes of closure between panels and series that weren't possible before weaving this new multibraid. It is precisely in the spaces of the new gutter, created by the multibraid, that I find the second part of my approach to Mexican and Chilean crime comics. The unifying constellation of this exemplary multibraid is the appearance and repetition of the neoliberal practices of violence and disappearance in Mexican and Chilean crime comics. I argue that by weaving the reflections that contemporary Mexican and Chilean crime comics make about neoliberalism and violence in Latin America it is possible to show that political and economic neoliberalism is the source of crime, violence, and disappearances, and that this is expressed through the narratives appearing in the popular culture imaginary as expressed through the medium of comics.

In order to do this, I look to Mexican and Chilean comics and graphic novels that have been produced since 1970 and that deal specifically with narratives about violence and crime. These texts approach crime and violence from multiple perspectives: satire, horror, memoir, surrealism, and history among others. As I researched comics and graphic novels that deal specifically with crime I began to find repetitions and echoes in these narratives that link them to neoliberalism as an inciting cause. In the graphic novel *Heredia*

Detective I recognized practices of gentrification, in *Los Penitentes* I found direct references to violence done in the name of democracy and that tied to capital, and in *El Viudo* the protagonist specifically calls out neoliberalism by name as the source of Chile's bloody pre-dictatorship historical violence. In this constellation of neoliberal references, I saw the possibility of creating a multibraided network that could explore how comics and popular culture negotiate the reality of neoliberalism in Mexico and Chile, and this as a start for a larger project that could expand the multibraid across Latin America.

Neoliberalism is multifaceted and expresses itself differently across markets, but there are general ideas that direct its implementation globally. One of these core ideas is “the assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade” and that these freedoms must “reflect the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations, and financial capital” (Harvey 7). Neoliberalism places these interests above any other value and thus policy and practice “set up those military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets” (2). The role of force in implementing neoliberalism is a central concern of my project. To interrogate neoliberalism in the Latin American context, I look to Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott's text “Las edades del cadáver: dictadura, guerra, desaparición (Postulados para una geología general)”. He explains that the silent symbol of Latin America's current age is the cadaver and that

el cadáver parece contener el secreto de la mercancía, haciendo evidente que la condición brutal de la llamada acumulación primitiva no está en un

pasado remote y ya superado, un tiempo abstracto y especulativo, sino plenamente vigente en nuestra actualidad. Es en esa perspectiva de largo plazo que la historia del capital se muestra no solo como la historia del progreso y la modernización, del desarrollismo y la industrialización, sino como la historia del cadáver y de la muerte”

[“the cadaver appears to contain the secret of merchandise, making it evident that the brutal condition of so-called primitive accumulation is not in some remote past and already overcome, some abstract and speculative time, but that it is fully in force in our actuality. It is through this long term perspective that the history of capital reveals itself not only as the history of progress and modernization, of developmentalism and industrialization, but rather as the history of the cadaver and of death”]. (6)

It is this history of the cadaver and of death that emerges from the reading of contemporary Mexican and Chilean crime comics. In this chapter I specifically consider the violent practice of disappearance as it has operated under neoliberalism, as the disappearance of disappearance itself in Villalobos-Ruminott’s words, and the ways that this practice is negotiated in crime comics and can relate to the gutter as a place of interrogation and study. One important conclusion about neoliberalism’s violent practices that should be made clear is that this violence is not accidental. Slavoj Žižek points this out in his book *Violence* when he explains that these violent acts represent “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (2). As the Mexican comic

artist Rafael Barajas, also known as El Fisgón, puts it “El rasgo esencial del neoliberalismo es la crueldad” [“The essential characteristic of neoliberalism is cruelty”] (29).

The works selected to form this proposed multibraid depict both historical and fictional accounts of crime and violence, and in order to analyze them I follow the approach suggested in *Comic Book Crime: Truth, Justice, and the American Way*. The authors state, “Rather than interrogate whether the books accurately reflect the ‘reality’ of crime and justice in America, we suggest that the myths contained in these stories [...] reverberate throughout the subculture and ultimately shape a larger cultural discourse” (Phillips and Strobl 19). This approach accepts that all of the comic narratives produced can influence the larger culture’s ideas of what or who can be considered a threat to society and who can be a hero (19). I argue that in the case of Mexican and Chilean crime comics that neoliberalism can be identified as one of these threats to society and the braided network discussed in this chapter explores how these comics negotiate, resist, subvert, and survive the realities of neoliberalism in the age of the cadaver.

The exploration of the multibraid presented in this chapter begins with a series of brief descriptions of the comics and graphic novels included in it, and is followed by an introduction to Thierry Groensteen’s theories of Restrained and General Arthrology of comics. I then link Groensteen’s General Arthrology with Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott’s proposals of a General Geology of disappearances throughout Latin America. The confluence of these two theories opens the possibility to perform what Groensteen calls “crazed readings” and it is this point that I present, in detail, the panels and series that form the multibraid that makes up the body of this chapter. I focus on what I call two particular

“strands” within this multibraid: the map-level strand and the street-level strand. These two series or networks that take panels from the contemporary crime comics that depict representations of city maps used for strategic purposes (the map-level strand) and panels that show actions taken by characters in the streets of the city (the street-level strand) as forms of resistance against the plans made at the map-level. My discussion of these two strands is informed by Michel De Certeau’s work *The Practice of Everyday Life* in which he explains that a map-level knowledge of a city can employ strategic calculations and manipulations of power in order to delimit and dominate that space, and that tactics can be used at the street-level to defy the strategies of this foreign power over space (35-36). I connect this map-level strategic domination of space with the practices of neoliberalism as shown in the comic texts discussed in this multibraid. The map-level strand questions capital’s strategic use of the city, neoliberal rituals of fear, and surreal visions of disaster capitalism. The street-level strand proposes the tactics of walking the gutter, survival, satire and revolution, local knowledge, vigilantism, and memory. I conclude this chapter by discussing how these texts reveal the impact of neoliberalism by weaving and braiding the realities of Mexico City and Santiago de Chile into a single multibraided network that allows space in the new gutter for questioning and negotiating neoliberalism and tactics for opposing it. This conclusion includes proposals about how crime comics should be studied in the context of Latin America where disappearance as a practice of neoliberalism makes investigation and detection nearly impossible – and I suggest that we read these texts as works that have “Ashes in the Gutter” because Latin American crime comics cannot function under Scott McCloud’s idea of Blood in the Gutter.

I. Describing the Network of Braided Texts

In this chapter I propose an expansion to the theoretical possibilities of Thierry Groensteen's General Arthrology, specifically his concept of *braiding*. I take into account recurring and echoing visual and narrative concepts from multiple comic texts and braid them into a new network that functions beyond the multiframe and narratives in which they originally exist in order to create new readings and juxtapositions that I identify as *new gutters* that necessarily emerge as part of this braided series. These new gutter spaces permit the imagining of new narratives and new interpretations of both fictional and historical events, and they allow for the identification of common linkages between each text. As most of the comics I include here treat history, violence, and memory, these new gutters generate the space where readers can come to conclusions about the meanings of these historical events in the realm of popular culture as communicated by these comics. The multibraid I am proposing transcends Groensteen's theory since it goes beyond the limits of a single multiframe, but I consider that in these texts there are resonances and echoes that bring these panels and stories into a braid, that justify reading them as panels in communion – as a unique series – across multiframe, borders, space, and time. As Groensteen explains “comics is not only an art of fragments, of scattering, of distribution; it is also an art of conjunction, of repetition, of linking together” (*The System of Comics* 22).

Since I will be discussing a variety of Mexican and Chilean texts as part of this multibraid, and because I am looking at specific panels from these texts I find it important

to give a brief summary of each as a means of orientation before beginning the exploration of this braided network.

Los Penitentes (Mexico 1974)

Written and illustrated by Francisco Ochoa González, *Los Penitentes* is a political satire comic published weekly by Editores Mexicanos Asociados. Ochoa González worked as an assistant to Gabriel Vargas on the famous comic *Familia Burrón* before he went on to create his own series *Los Penitentes*. Ochoa González was awarded a Tlacuilo de Oro in 1984 and the National Journalism Award (Premio Nacional de Periodismo) in 1987. His series *Los Penitentes* uses conversations between its recurring characters to introduce critiques of Mexico's history and politics. Laughable characters such as Super Indio, who is often misunderstood, are employed in the comic's satires in order to couch political critiques in the voice of a supposedly uneducated character. In most issues about mid-way through the comic a character begins to narrate a section of the text that leaves behind the recurring characters and takes up images from a variety of sources to explain the comic's historical and political critiques. The majority of the comics in this series then conclude with a section titled "El Diablo Cojuelo." Each of these three sections satirize some aspect of Mexican culture, history, or politics; for example, some of the topics explored include: the presence of the CIA in Mexico, the political erasure of the events of 1968, Mexican politicians putting their lovers on government payroll, and UFO conspiracy theories among many others.

El Pantera (Mexico 1980)

Daniel Muñoz is the comic script writer that created the character of El Pantera. His hero first appeared on the pages of the comic *Super Mini* in 1971. By 1980 his character had gained enough popularity that he was given his own comic series titled *El Pantera*. The series, published by Editorial Vid, had a fifteen year run. In the mid 1990s many of his adventures were re-released under the title *Lo Mejor de El Pantera*. Muñoz eventually published two novels about his character in 1994 and 1997, and Televisa produced a television adaptation of the comic in 2007 that ran for three seasons.

Pantera, as a character, is an indigenous man who was raised on the streets of Mexico City after he was abandoned by his father. Pantera, whose real name is Gervasio Robles, took to the pachuco hustling life of the 1970s *danzón* scene where he fell in love with a prostitute named Rosaura. Their romance led to Rosaura's eventual death at the hands of her mistress, the fearsome crime boss La Bella Diana, and Pantera's imprisonment by corrupt police. Pantera's vendetta against Diana and his innocence are discovered by the military general Porfirio Ayala, and the general decides to pit Pantera against their mutual enemy Diana. Pantera is given his freedom on the condition that he work as a secret agent for the general to uncover police corruption and find evidence against Diana. Pantera's relationship with the general leads him into many adventures in the comic even after they defeat their common enemy.

El Pantera is a comic text that openly criticizes the corruption of the Mexican state and proposes military intervention as a solution to this corruption. There are multiple levels of identity politics at play as Pantera is an indigenous man and his racial subjectivity is

used in various way as a tool in his fight against state sponsored crime. As a character Pantera provides unique insight into the last four decades of Mexico's cultural imaginary surrounding police corruption, violence, crime, and justice.

El Canto del Delirio (Chile 2008)

Juan Vásquez's surrealist book is a compilation of comics in times of dictatorship according to the description on its cover. This collection was created during Augusto Pinochet's regime but many pages were either incomplete or lost. The final section of *El Canto del Delirio* was illustrated in the post-dictatorship era in order to provide a complete vision of the repercussions of the military government. Vásquez's comic includes many references to television and popular culture during the dictatorship that were used to distract the public from the violence being carried out against the citizens. The artist does not shy away from illustrating tortured and mutilated bodies. The words to the Chilean national anthem "Puro, Chile, es tu cielo azulado" run along the top of most pages creating ironic juxtaposition with the grisly and violent illustrations.

El Canto del Delirio provides a unique vision of the dictatorship through a medium that many Chilean comic artists have described as being in a state of "apagón" ["blackout"] during the time. Juan Vásquez's illustrations conjure both the reality of violence and the surreal atmosphere of fear and oppression. This book is one of the few comics that directly illustrates the physical violence done during the military regime.

Mortis: Eterno Retorno (Chile 2011)

This graphic novel written by Miguel Angel Ferrada, with contributions from the writers Carlos Reyes, and Jorge Baradit, and illustrated by Ítalo Ahumada, Claudio Romo, Martín Cáceres, and Danny Jiménez, is based on the classic 1940s Chilean radio program and comic series *El Siniestro Dr. Mortis* by Juan Marino. This new version of Mortis was published in 2011 by Arcano IV as part of a resurgence of comic publication in Chile since 2007. Since the publication of this graphic novel, Ferrada has directed the publication of two sequel volumes titled *In Absentia Mortis* (2012) and *In Nomine Mortis* (2013). These sequels were created through collaboration between multiple authors and artists including: Felipe Benavides, Brain Wallis, Pedro Pablo Hermosilla, Vicente Plaza, Daniel Mejías, Alfredo Rodríguez, Javier Bahamonde, Mauricio Ahumada, José Huichamán, Francisco Inostroza, Juan Vázquez, Amancay Nahuelpán, Sebastián Castro, Juan Nitrox Márquez, Jaime Castro, Olivier Balez, Angel Bernier, Rodrigo Elgueta, Pablo Santander, Abel Alizondo, Kobal, Claudio Muñoz, as well as the Eisner Award winning artist Gabriel Rodríguez, and the best-selling author Francisco Ortega.

Mortis: Eterno Retorno tells the story of a secret society known as the Cofradía that is attempting to unleash and resurrect evil incarnate, Mortis. Before the events shown in the graphic novel *Mortis*' essence had been contained in a special dome constructed on the Punto Nemo, or a small island at the farthest point from any coastline in the Pacific Ocean. This is done as a way of keeping Mortis away from humanity. The graphic novel tells how the Cofradía carries out a series of ritualistic acts in order to incarnate evil itself – this includes multiple ritual murders done across the city of Santiago de Chile.

Ferrada's graphic novel is a contemporary contemplation of the presence of evil in our world and society. The supernatural fight between those who wish to have death reign over the planet and those who attempt to harness and restrain death and suffering speaks allegorically to struggles fought across the globe. In particular, I read *Mortis: Eterno Retorno* as a narrative that explores the fear of evil's return in a culture that suffered under the violent burden of dictatorship from 1973-1990 and is still facing the haunting repercussions of that experience.

Heredia Detective (Chile 2011)

This graphic narrative is based on the literary detective created by Ramón Díaz Eterovic in the mid 1980s. The detective Heredia has been the protagonist of more than fifteen novels, multiple short stories, a television series, and in 2011 he appeared for the first time in medium of comics. The adaptation of Heredia to comics came about as two separate groups of comic writers and artists began projects to bring their favorite detective into the world of sequential art. As the world of comic creating is rather small in Santiago de Chile these two groups soon became aware of their independent projects and came together to work collectively. *Heredia Detective* is a collaborative graphic narrative with contributions from more than twenty writers and artists. Ramón Díaz Eterovic participated in the process and wrote in the introduction to the graphic novel that he had often imagined his character portrayed through the medium of comics. The creators that collaborated on this project are: Carlos Reyes, Cristián Petit-Laurent, Gonzalo Martínez, Abel Alizondo, Demetrio Babul, Rodrigo Elgueta, Ítalo Ahumada, Félix Vega, Diego Jourdan, Christiano,

Daniel Bernal, Alan Robinson, Carlos Gatica, Gabriel Garvo, Claudio Muñoz, Claudio Romo, Don Liebre, Joze, Nelson Castillo, Nelson Dániel, Huicha, Jorge Quien, Vicho, Nicolás Pérez de Arce, and Tite Calvo. Since the publication of this graphic novel the original Heredia novels and each new titled in the series have been re-published with cover art drawn by Gonzalo Martínez; this decision on part of Eterovic and the publisher Lom Ediciones both canonizes the graphic novel and shows the (retroactive) impact comics can have on other forms of media. This is especially apparent in Heredia's case since the character had previously been adapted into a television series, but that version of the detective was not capable of fixing within the cultural imaginary or the mythology of Eterovic's protagonist while Martínez's version is now the official face of the famous detective.

The graphic novel itself tells multiple stories embedded within a narrative that meanders through downtown Santiago de Chile. Heredia meets with his friend El Escriba [The Scribe], who is Eterovic's fictional avatar, outside their favorite local haunt, the City Bar Restaurant. The problem is the bar has been permanently closed and they find themselves walking the streets of the city and remembering past cases as they mourn the loss of Santiago's traditional communities and neighborhoods. Their walk through contemporary Santiago is illustrated by Gonzalo Martínez, but each time the two friends stop to reminisce the ensuing memory is illustrated by another artist as an embedded narrative within the story illustrated by Martínez. This method of structuring the graphic novel reveals the changes in the city, its atmosphere, and in the characters themselves. After their recollections of series killings, drug smugglers, adulteries, and strippers

murdered at military parties Heredia confesses to his friend that he hopes that one day he can live in a world where his job is no longer necessary, but the final page of the story shows the detective telling his friend about his most recent case investigating more serial murders.

Heredia Detective can be read as a text that contemplates the realities of Santiago in the face of rapid gentrification and neoliberal expansion. I read the disappearance of the City Bar Restaurant as a sort of crime against the city and its inhabitants that are all too familiar with disappearances brought about by forcing neoliberalism onto a population. The juxtaposition of past and present in the graphic novel also allows it to be analyzed as an approach to memory and history in places where violence has occurred and what can be done in those spaces to stop the historical and political erasure of past violences and oppressions. The collaborative nature of this graphic novel provides a polyvisual and polyvocal perspective on crime, memory, and the city of Santiago de Chile.

Historias Clandestinas (Chile 2014)

This graphic memoir was written and illustrated by the sibling duo Ariel and Sol Rojas Lizana. The book describes itself as part of a larger story of people resisting powers that try to manipulate the public and rob them of justice, truth, or liberty. The Rojas Lizana siblings grew up during the Pinochet dictatorship and their family and friends were members of the underground revolutionary resistance group MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria) [Left Revolutionary Movement]. Their graphic memoir depicts

the sacrifices, labor, study, and daily struggle necessary to protect themselves and the larger resistance movement during the years of the military regime.

Historias Clandestinas offers a glimpse into the life of the leftist resistance during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. It also approaches the era from the point of view of children and focuses on family life as political life. Ariel and Sol Rojas Lizana's personal stories use simplistic visuals to depict the oppressive reality of their youth.

El Viudo: La Cueca del Manco (Chile 2014)

Gonzalo Oyanedel explores Chile's 1950s past through the adventures of his masked vigilante El Viudo. Illustrations by the team of Rodrigo Campos, Juan Nitrox Márquez, and Cristian Docolomansky create a nostalgically noir vision of Santiago de Chile, and Oyanedel's witty dialogue reproduces the snap of the hard-boiled detective genre. This graphic novel questions the political and economic realities that led to public riots and military repression in Chile's history. El Viudo acts according to his own vigilante model of justice that sometimes aligns with the government and other times is at odds with it. One of his main concerns is that Chileans are turning against their fellow Chileans and are being manipulated by North American financial interests. The historical index at the end of the book details the political references made by the characters, the slang they use, the cigarettes preferred by El Viudo, and even descriptions of the masked vigilante's car and motorcycle.

El Viudo: La Cueca del Manco is one of the only crime comics that does not address the dictatorship but rather chooses to explore the violent past and political history prior to

it. I argue that El Viudo is a hero that fights to maintain the violence of 1950s Chile from being overshadowed by the military regime and that these narratives help to develop a deeper understanding of the roots of political violence and oppression in the country.

Each of the texts described above appears as a part of the multibraid that intertwines these narratives in order to draw out specific panels and series of panels that find resonances across the national, physical, and temporal boundaries of each individual text or narrative. To bring these crime comics into the multibraided network I propose it is necessary to provide a clear idea of Thierry Groensteen's theories of Arthrology.

II. Theories of Arthrology: Restrained Arthrology, General Arthrology, and Braided Networks

The French comics theorist, Thierry Groensteen proposes in his book *The System of Comics* that it is possible to read sequential art out of sequence when there are shared or common characteristics between panels or series that can be found at great distances from each other within a text. Groensteen calls this method of reading "braiding." These connections or braids are trans-linear and "frequently concern panels (or pluri-panel sequences) distant by several pages, and that cannot be viewed simultaneously" (148). With this idea in mind I propose the imagining of a braided and trans-linear intertwining of contemporary Mexican and Chilean crime comics and narratives with connections that are not immediately seen unless we begin to view and read employing alternative methods. Here I will outline a braid that I have found in contemporary crime comics and graphic

novels from Mexico and Chile that can bring their narratives and cultural fluxes into a braided network in order to create new places of study, analysis, and understanding.

Thierry Groensteen is one of the most innovative authors of comics theory and was a leading figure for the academic legitimization of sequential art. In the 1980s he worked on multiple projects that took comics as a serious art form, he edited *Schtroumpf - Les Cahiers de la bande dessinée* and worked on the organizing of the Colloque de Cérisy in 1987 that focused on comics narration and modernity. In English translation, Groensteen has published *The System of Comics* (2007) and in 2013 his follow-up book *Comics and Narration* was released. Groensteen's theory of Arthrology, as explained in *The System of Comics*, informs my work throughout this chapter.

Arthrology

Groensteen's project of describing the "complex of units, parameters, and functions" of comics developed the concept that he termed Arthrology which comes from the Greek *arthron* and means the study of articulations (*The System of Comics* 21). Accordingly, Groensteen's Arthrology functions through a Spatio-topia, which is a term "created by gathering, while maintaining distinct, the concept of space (*espace*) and that of place (*lieu*)" (21). In *The System of Comics* the author considers the spatio-topical relationships between the individual units that comprise a comic text, these range from the word balloon, the frame and panel, to the strip and page. Groensteen divides his analysis into two categories of Arthrology, namely Restrained and General Arthrology.

Restrained Arthrology: The Sequence

The articulations of comics narration that tend to determine the linear sequence of panels is what Groensteen labeled Restrained Arthrology. These articulations are "the elementary relations, of the linear type" and are "governed by the operation of breaking down (*decoupage*), they put in place the sequential syntagms, which are most often subordinated to the narrative ends" (22). The spatio-topia that Restrained Arthrology is concerned with is the contents of the individual panel, the gutter between panels, the thresholds of narrativity, the strip, the breakdown, and the page - or in other words the *mise-en-page* and the interactions or articulations between each of these individual parts of the page.

General Arthrology: The Network

Beyond the *mise-en-page* articulations of Restrained Arthrology, Groensteen finds the possibility of "other relations, translinear and distant" that become decipherable by reading a text at length and making connections at the level of the multiframe, or the level of the text as a whole. The multiframe is a term that Groensteen identifies as "the sum of the frames that compose a given comic" and that "Its borders are those of the entire work" (31). This General Arthrology identifies articulations in comics at "a more elaborate level of integration between the narrative flux [...] and the spatio-topical operation" of the entirety of the text (22). General Arthrology functions between panels, sequences, and pages that are found at great distances from one another within the body of a comics text but yet have thematic, narrative, or visual connections that *braid* them together into their

own translinear sequence that can exist beyond the Restrained Arthrology of the text or multiframe. Groensteen's concept of the braid or braiding (*tressage*) consists of the idea that every panel in a comic exists potentially in relation to every other panel within the multiframe. This is a type of organization that does not have to follow the order of the comic strip or sequence of images but rather it functions more like a network of panels. The correspondences handled by braiding usually concern panels or groups of panels that are separated by several pages and that cannot be viewed at the same time (148). General Arthrology is concerned with the *gridding* of the comic text as a whole, the concept of braiding, the creation of place within the text, and the establishment of networks throughout the multiframe. Gridding refers to the division of "the available space into a number of units or compartments" (144).

My approach to contemporary Mexican and Chilean crime comic production takes Groensteen's theory of General Arthrology as its starting point and continues from there in order to propose a braid of visual and thematic connections across Latin American comic production in both temporal and spatial terms. In the description of Groensteen's Spatio-Topical system of comics he identifies the importance of the site of each individual unit of a comic text. Each panel within a comic has spatial coordinates that define its site, and the site of the panel determines "its place in the reading protocol" (34). According to the sequence of these sites the reader should be able to deduce the pathway that organizes the narrative of the text. These sequential sites serve to direct the gaze as it moves across the page and structures the various informational units of the comic. These sites do not only determine the position of information on the page and within the multiframe as a whole but

"they are also determined by a partition of time" (35). The site of each panel represents a unique moment in the movement of a narrative and within the larger process of reading. Groensteen clarifies that it these spatial and temporal parameters are conferred upon them by Restrained Arthrology - it determines the panel's form, area, and site (35). But within the theory of General Arthrology there exists a method for escaping the restraints of site and temporal partitioning that Restrained Arthrology demands.

III. A General Arthrology of the Gutter / A General Geology of Absence and Disappearance in Latin America

In my opinion, the first step into this realm that can exceed the determinations of Restrained Arthrology is the gutter. The gutter is the space that exists between panels. While Groensteen states that "the gutter in and of itself [...] does not merit fetishization" (112), I see the gutter as a space that binds and unites a text and that it is a space (or lack thereof) that exists arguably across all comic texts as a unifying feature of the medium. Scott McCloud signaled the importance of this space earlier on in *Understanding Comics*. Although Groensteen seems to dismiss the gutter he did provide several thoughts that clash somewhat with McCloud's view that it is a space or an absence that is necessary to the functioning of the medium of sequential art. In his explanation of the gutter's function he says that it designates "that-which-is-not-represented-but-which-the-reader-cannot-help-to-infer" (112). For McCloud this is the space where the reader acts and collaborates (66-69) and for Groensteen it is where the absence infers a forced virtual panel (*The System of Comics* 112-113). This symbolic site of absence, in this clashing point between McCloud

and Groensteen, is where I insert my project and proposal, but rather than maintain that absence in the realm of Restrained Arthrology I will explore that absence when included in reading processes carried out through Groensteen's idea of General Arthrology and braiding.

The gutter as a space of absence becomes the opposite of the panel and brings to mind the silence of that which is no longer present. Groensteen states that "the gutter [...] cancels the already read panel" thus converting it into something ephemeral that only leaves a mark in the absence (113). In chapter three of this dissertation I approach Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott's theory of *Cendrología* [Cindrology] and disappearances across Latin America, and I would like to bring his Hamletian interrogation of the skull, as he calls it, into conversation with my reading of these guttural absences in Latin American sequential art. Throughout this project I analyze graphic narratives that deal specifically with crime, violence, and disappearances - absences. In this chapter I look across the current spectrum of crime comics in Mexico and Chile and this idea of absence in the gutter and "la desaparición de la misma desaparición" ["the disappearance of disappearance itself"] across time and space in Latin America will braid, intertwine and bind by readings (Villalobos-Ruminott 3).

In his article "Las edades del cadáver: dictadura, guerra, desaparición (Postulados para una geología general)" Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott suggests a theoretically geological approach to the secret of violence across Latin America with its continuities and discontinuities (2). The processes of colonization, nation building, and their transformation into neoliberal states have produced massive deaths as well as the, now common practice,

of disappearing of the (presumably) dead. Since far too often we are faced with a complete absence of the remains of those destroyed by neoliberalism's practices, Villalobos-Ruminott proposes a study of disappearances through what he calls *Cendrología* [Cindrology] and he explains it in these terms: "no es una ciencia de la muerte sino una sutil interrogación de las cenizas en cuanto huellas últimas que sin devolvemos a la (metafísica de la) presencia, nos indican todavía que alguna vez hubo algo, una vida, sobre la que operó la misma desaparición" ["it is not a science of death but rather a subtle interrogation of ashes as the last remains that, without returning us to the (metaphysics of) presence, tell us still that at one time there was something, a life, upon which disappearance itself was carried out"] (3). He combines this approach to the violent absence of remains with his General Geology that "intenta trazar el mapa general del territorio para identificar las dinámicas de suelo y de sedimentación propias de la economía de la violencia, pues es esta economía de la violencia la que funda los procesos de acumulación contemporáneos" ["attempts to trace the general map of the territory in order to identify the dynamics of the soil and sediments belonging to the economy of violence, since it is this economy of violence that establishes contemporary processes of accumulation"] (4). This General Geology connects dictatorial violence, femicide, narco-violence, civil wars, pacifications, forced migrations, and even the supposed returns to democracy as tremors created by expansive seismic waves brought about by neoliberalism's dismantling of the nation-state and its sovereignty (7-8). This can be evidenced in new sovereignty's obsession with security; I discuss Mexico's efforts to protect capital through the Carlos Slim and Rudy Giuliani zero-tolerance policing plans during Felipe Calderón's presidency in chapter two.

Villalobos-Ruminott's first proposal can be summarized by saying that the state of exception initiated during Latin America's dictatorial strata (keeping with the geological metaphor) laid the foundations for neoliberalism's radicalization and permanent implementation of the state of exception that is the "*suspensión soberana de la soberanía*" ["*sovereign suspension of sovereignty*"] in favor of capitalist accumulation (10). The second proposal of the General Geology of Latin America is to consider the dynamics of the strata that characterize contemporary practices of power. The current function of power, according to his reading, is that of permanent and repetitive war. He points out that the state goes about this in apparently contradictory ways: "intensificando las políticas securitarias y policiales destinadas al control social, interno e internacional, por un lado; y haciéndose parte de los mismos procesos de acumulación para-legal (narcotráfico, corporativización de servicios, fomento de deuda, guerra como emprendimiento privado, etc.), por otro lado" ["intensifying security politics and policies destined for social control, internal and external, on the one hand; and making itself part of the para-legal processes of accumulation (drug trafficking, privatization of public services, promoting debt, war as a private undertaking, etc.), on the other"] (13). These bipolar methods make the state itself "canalla o criminal" ["despicable o criminal"] (13). Third, Villalobos-Ruminott proposes that there must be a seismic shift in the soil of memory. This means that we cannot limit our interrogation of violence by political transitions and other operations that whitewash and delimit the past as something already completed (16). It follows that this interrogation cannot be part of the operations of supposed restitution that ask us to forget the past, to "close the wound," while leaving the disappeared absent and unburied (21). Finally, he

makes clear that the cadaver, and its absence, are the silent signs of our era, the sign "que nos permita volver a pensar las relaciones entre soberanía y acumulación, precisamente en el contexto actual en el que, vía procesos neo-extractivos, desertificamos el mundo y agotamos sus recursos fósiles. El cadáver fosilizado de antaño demanda la producción sacrificial de más cadáveres, infinitamente, perpetuando así la historia natural de la destrucción" ["that permits us to again consider the relations between sovereignty and accumulation, precisely in the current context when, through neo-extractive processes, we are making the world a desert and exhausting its fossil resources. The fossilized cadaver of the past demands the sacrificial production of more cadavers, infinitely, perpetuating thus the natural history of destruction"] (22). This General Geology of violence crosses the borders, temporalities, and cultures of Latin America in order to interrogate the production and accumulation of capital and cadavers where we can find the complicity between sovereignty, violence, and cruelty (26). What I find uniquely important in this General Geology is Villalobos-Ruminott's suggestion that it offers new connections across Latin America that find meaning outside the limits of national identity and history. He explains these connections in the following way:

Desde el punto de vista de una historia natural de la destrucción, la relación que podemos establecer entre los crímenes y la violencia inherente a los procesos dictatoriales del Cono Sur latinoamericano de los años 1970, y la serie de crímenes 'recientes' en México, es de contigüidad geológica, como si aquello que los aproximase fuera una dinámica de suelos o placas que acusan recibo, con una breve anacronía, de lo que impacta en cada una de

ellas respectivamente. En tal caso, dichos crímenes nada tienen que ver con una cuestión nacional, ni menos con un cierto carácter nacional, pues expresan la misma cancelación del proyecto nacional haciendo que el nombre propio (Chile, Guatemala, México, etc.), signifique algo que apunta ya no al corazón de una historia comunitaria excepcional, sino hacia el desbordamiento permanente de sus fronteras"

[“From the point of view of a natural history of destruction, the relationship that we can establish between the crimes and violence inherent in the dictatorial processes of Latin America’s Southern Cone in the 1970s, and the series of ‘recent’ crimes in Mexico, is one of geological contiguity, as if that which brought them together were a soil dynamic or tectonic plates that show, with a brief anachronism, the impact they each have respectively. In this case, said crimes have nothing to do with a national question, or even less with a national character, in reality they express the cancellation of the national project itself making the name (Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, etc.) mean something that no longer points to the heart of an exceptional community history, but rather it points to the permanent overflowing of its own borders”]. (7)

It is precisely this overflowing of crime and the nullification of the nation that interests me here. These geological connections of violence open up the possibility of new readings and new methods of resistance. I wish to couple this General Geology of destruction and violence with Groensteen's theory of General Arthrology in order to establish new ways of

reading and understanding, and to find how culturally we can fill in those silences, how to voice the absences created by the tremors of violence that run along the hemisphere, how to commune with the ghost panels in the gutters left open by violent erasure.

Villalobos-Ruminott's *General Geology* places us in contact with the secret of the cadaver in the era of disappearance, the secret of the silence and erasure produced by capital, security, and the state in both legal and extra-legal ways, and I find that part of the "infinita sofisticación de su procesamiento post-mortem" ["infinite sophistication of post-mortem processing"] can be found in the popular imaginary as expressed through crime comics in Latin America (2). I propose that these comic texts are means of processing neoliberal violence and disappearance in the realm of popular culture. While *General Geology* provides a means of finding violence's seismic connections between Mexico and Chile in the neoliberal era, I find it important to encounter a parallel method of linkage in the realm of comics theory. In this way it becomes possible to negotiate economic, political, and popular artistic expression across borders and temporalities while respecting the uniqueness of sequential art as a medium in Latin America. As seen above, Thierry Groensteen provided two theories of Arthrology in his book *The System of Comics*, and my initial approach began by examining some aspects of Restrained Arthrology that led us to the gutter, the ghost panel, and the disappearances that happen there. In Groensteen's theory of General Arthrology he proposes a method of finding braids throughout a comics text that can function beyond the sequential and temporal limitations that are usually placed upon reading. This is his theory of braiding or *tressage*. Just as Villalobos-Ruminott has seen fit to create and imagine a *General Geology*, a type of non-traditional reading, so

Thierry Groensteen suggests the possibility of "crazed reading" (147) - I find that contemporary Latin America's interactions with neoliberalism demand that we use these types of crazed readings because they are the only type that fit the madness of our current context, and in Groensteen's words we can find "the possibility of translinear relations and plurivectoral courses" (147). This crazed reading opens a means to deciphering the General Geology and Arthrology of Latin America in ways that "los estudios de área y la misma arquitectura categorial y disciplinaria de la Universidad moderna, se muestra insuficiente" ["area studies and the categorical and discipline structure of the modern University, show themselves as insufficient"] (Villalobos-Ruminott 10).

In the medium of comics Groensteen explains that braiding is frequently concerned with panels or sequences of panels that are distant by several pages, and that cannot be viewed at the same time (148). He says these connections are established "in absentia" (148) and this absence or disappearance in my project has become the sign of our era in Latin America (and most probably beyond). Braiding in comics functions through multiple localities and temporalities. It creates synchronic links upon the surface of the page and diachronically it "recognizes in each new term of a series a recollection or an echo of an anterior term" (147). In a comics text braiding could identify panels that visually or textually echo one another in certain ways, braiding "detects and decrypts their complementarity and interdependence. It is the very efficiency of braiding that incites this crazed reading" (147). The panels included in a braid can exist at long distances from one another in the topography of a multiframe and/or they can be temporally distant within the diagenetic narrative of the text, and yet the panels in this series are "enriched with

resonances that have an effect of transcending the functionality of the site that it occupies" (148). This type of crazed reading allows us to find connections that circumvent the sequential and topographical structure of sequential art, this is a type of dwelling in the gutter or in the ghost panel where the reader's imagination is empowered to find linkages and meanings that go beyond the restrictions of the narrative. I am aware that Groensteen most likely would not approve of this approach. (I would suggest here that this General Arthrology compliments the General Geology in that they both find meaning in absentia and in the ghost spaces; Villalobos-Ruminott would say they create "una analítica de las transiciones y cruces entre el fósil, el vestigio, el cadáver y la huella, donde el pozo, la mina, la represa son arquitecturas familiares al cenotafio y al campo santo" ["an analysis of the transitions and intersections between the fossil, the vestige, the cadaver and the trace, where the bottomless pit, the mine, the reservoir are architectures related to the cenotaph and the graveyard"] [20]). Braiding disconnects comic panels from their spatio-topical sites within the text but it is this new series of connections and echoes that confers upon them the quality of *place* (*The System of Comics* 148). Groensteen asks, "What is a place other than a habituated space that we can cross, visit, invest in, a space where relations are made and unmade?" (148). It is precisely the processes of braiding that create new *places* wherein we can invest and cross-over (morbid pun intended) and subsequently explore relations that could seem at a distance physically or temporally, such as Mexico City and Santiago de Chile, for example. Through General Arthrology and Geology we can open a place where we can explore alternate histories and imaginaries and even alternate realities of crime and justice as seen in the productions of popular culture. In the rest of this chapter I

propose a braid that weaves its way through the popular imaginaries of Mexican and Chilean crime comics and across time and space to open a new *place* for analysis and crazed readings.

Both Groensteen and Villalobos-Ruminott open places that allow us to question disappearance and absence. For Groensteen the gutter cancels previous narrative and images and functions as silence and a type of forced virtual panel (113). In the case of Cindrology we are taken into the realm of neoliberal capitalist accumulation that Villalobos-Ruminott calls the "nomos planetario" ["planetary nomos"] and into which he conglomerates and unifies a "aparato jurídico-financiero-militar" ["juridical-financial-military apparatus"] that leaves nothing in its wake - it disappears life and then uses its power to disappear the processes of disappearance (12); a multifaceted machine that creates absence. So here we look into that space, the absence of the gutter, the absence of the Planetary Nomos. In this ghostly space - the space where we can only find absence and erasure, the space where we can only say, "hay ahí ceniza" ["there are ashes"] (4) - I look to Scott McCloud's foundational work on the gutter for insight on what imagination and comics can teach us about absence and agency. These absences often leave us wanting, and even demanding, answers. Historically, these answers have taken far too long and often they reveal unimaginable impunity and indifference for human life when we delve into the ghost panels of Latin America's history. My case here is to look to popular culture and imaginaries in an attempt to understand how these absences can be explained, explored, negotiated, and resisted - my contribution is that crime comics take up the absences created historically and then imagine methods of justice and resolution in the spaces that history

and logic cannot make sense of or that they cannot even reveal due to the judicial-financial-military processes of disappearing that neoliberalism has accumulated across Latin America's geographies, temporalities, and peoples. In the following sections, I look to contemporary crime comic production in Mexico and Chile to draw out these imaginaries that I believe work to fill in the ghost panels and the absences created over the last several decades (which were informed by centuries of colonization and violence) by the "polisemia de la destrucción" ["polysemy of destruction"] (Villalobos-Ruminott 4). I also propose that the graphic narratives produced in Latin America over the last several decades can bring us tactics to use in our practices of decolonization and resistance, that reading and walking - our practices of everyday life - can be tactics, in De Certeau's use of the term, to re-imagine crime, violence, and absence in sequential art.

While Groensteen tends to dismiss the gutter and see it as a tool in the hands of the comic creator, Scott McCloud identified it as the "host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics" (66). McCloud emphasizes the participation of the reader in the process of creating meaning in comics. In his analysis of the processes of closure he points out that closure in comics is not necessarily continuous and is inherently voluntary in nature (68). McCloud employs the now classic example of two consecutive panels, the first

I MAY HAVE DRAWN AN *AXE* BEING *RAISED* IN THIS EXAMPLE, BUT I'M NOT THE ONE WHO LET IT *DROP* OR DECIDED HOW *HARD* THE BLOW, OR *WHO* SCREAMED, OR *WHY*.



THAT, DEAR READER, WAS YOUR *SPECIAL CRIME*, EACH OF YOU COMMITTING IT IN YOUR OWN *STYLE*.

Figure 3. Scott McCloud's classic illustration of the process of closure in comics.

showing a man with an axe ready to swing at another man while he says "now you die!". The following panel shows a skyline with the exclamation "eeyaa!" written across the horizon. Here McCloud shows that, "Every act committed to paper by the comics artist is aided and abetted by a silent accomplice. An equal partner in crime known as the reader. I may have drawn an axe being raised in this example, but I'm not the one who let it drop or decided how hard the blow, or who screamed, or why. That, dear reader, was your special crime, each of you committing it in your own style" (68). The gutter as the realm of action and agency for the reader is important because in the short absence of forced narrative and plot we can find a place for negotiating and imagining. Just as we have seen Villalobos-Ruminott open place to interrogate the ash of absence so here we find agency to imagine outside the demands of news, official discourse, and over-determined narrative. It is fitting that McCloud concludes this section of his discussion of closure by saying, "To kill a man

between panels is to condemn him to a thousand deaths" (69), and this is precisely the issue we face in the era of disappearance. While Groensteen gives credence to the writer or the creator of the narrative to place a forced virtual in the gutter between panels, I prefer the power and agency inspired by McCloud's reading, and I hope that the interrogation of the cultural repercussions of killing men, women, and children between panels, as it were, we can find ways to break out of the forced virtual narratives of capital and politics that surround us.

I find that Groensteen's dismissal of the gutter in his work on *Restrained Arthrology* seems to omit his own ideas about braiding and *General Arthrology* that allow for readings that can exceed the demands of the author/creator. In his book *Comics and Narration*, Groensteen states that in a series (which is different from a sequence in that the panels are not found in immediate succession), "the images are 'linked by a system of iconic, visual or semantic correspondences' that do not pertain directly to causality and are not under the sway of the logic of the action or the tyranny of the plot" (34). Now that we can create or identify a braided series that can function outside the narrative, I would like to ask if these panels are not still unified by the gutter that binds them, since the gutter unifies the entire multiframe? If we identify a new series outside of the tyranny of plot (or of the creator I would say), then it becomes possible to also open up new gutter spaces that allow new imaginings and participations by the reader. In this process we can locate new absences and produce new possible actions to occur between panels. In this new gutter of the braided series we face and must interrogate absence and erasure again, and in new and creative ways.

IV. A Crazy Reading, A Braided Series: Intertwining Mexico City and Santiago de Chile

With a place opened up for the analysis of translinear and plurivectoral braids that can carry us across the temporalities and borders of Latin America, I propose a series of panels and crazy readings that draw us into these graphic places where we can question the imaginaries surrounding crime and justice. In this chapter I suggest a visual braid that links localities with crime and in the following chapters I delve specifically into the cases of *El Pantera* and *Heredia Detective*, that are of particular interest and that share a number of similarities in terms of production, adaptation, and content.

In this braided series I include panels from the comic texts *Lo Mejor de El Pantera*, *Mortis: Eterno Retorno*, *El Canto del Delirio*, *Historias Clandestinas*, *Los Penitentes*, *El Viudo: La Cueca del Manco*, and *Heredia Detective* as articulations in this network that crosses national borders, temporal limitations, and various multiframe to weave a braid based on the representations of physical spaces and crime, as consequences of neoliberalism, that appear in these panels.

The structure of comics is very apt for the analysis of spaces, especially city spaces. In the book *Comics and the City* Jörn Ahren and Arno Meteling explain the structuring vision of comics “implements a topographical reading of the cityscape, which is led by the point of view in frames, panels and sequences. The urban landscape is similarly structured by panel-like blocks and grids” (7). The panels and the gutters between them appear to reproduce the topographical vision of a city map, as if viewing it from above, like Batman,

and each panel reveals what happens in those streets. It is this perspective of the city, seen from above, that I take to begin my analysis of these visual connections across panels, gutters, comics, borders, nations, and time.

V. The Map-Level Strand

As a means of exploring and deciphering the street/gutters of the cities illustrated in the comics of the braided series I present here I look to the work of Michel De Certeau in his book *The Practices of Everyday Life*. In particular, I reference his ideas of spatial practices and his theory of walking the city. I believe that this theory provides important approaches to reading cityscapes and in turn, comicscapes. De Certeau's spatial practices can be read as ways of walking the multiframe and the street/gutters of comics. The concepts of strategies and tactics, as developed by De Certeau, help to form the braid that I explore in this chapter and offer insights for living in neoliberal (post)modernity and open new perspectives through which to read comic texts in terms of strategic and tactical spatialities that can be approached as comicscapes. De Certeau's book explores the possibility of a city using strategic calculations of power in order to delimit that territory as its own (35-36). De Certeau states that this delimitation of place for strategic manipulations of power and domination is "the typical attitude of modern science, politics, and military strategy" (36). It is from this strategic panoptic position that I introduce the first strand of my visual braid. The panels that initiate this braid deal visually with city maps used for strategic purposes.

VI. Strategic Uses of the City in Favor of Capital

Walter Osorio, his henchmen, and Pantera (who has been mistaken for Carlo Franti, an Italian-American hitman or "amurabador") stand over a map of Mexico City and review the details of Osorio's plan to assassinate Don Leopoldo Ortega Torri, the



Figure 4. Walter Osorio planning the assassination of the president of Macondo during his visit to Mexico City.

president of the South American Republic of Macondo, as he makes an official visit to the Mexican capital. Osorio's finger hovers over the map that seems to house comic panels that will appear later in the comic where Pantera and Osorio will have a karate duel atop the Monument to the Revolution. I read this comic map as a way of housing future panels within the blocks and streets - as if it were possible to zoom into the map where the Monument to the Revolution would be and find the comic panels depicting Pantera's performance of the "proyección haria-goshi" that results in Osorio's flying karate kick launching him over the edge of the monument to his death.



Figure 5. Walter Osorio launching himself to his death from atop the Monument to the Revolution in Mexico City.

This initial approach to the visual braid of maps across Latin American crime comics shows this panoptic visual of the city used as a tool in strategic planning. De Certeau explains that this type of strategic military and political planning functions on three levels in its processes of domination and delimitation of *place*. The three effects of this delimiting strategy are: the triumph of place over time, panoptic practices, and the power of knowledge (36).

In the case of this issue of *Lo Mejor de El Pantera*, titled "Vámonos muriendo ora que están enterrando gratis" ["Let's Get to Dying Since They're Burying for Free"], the

attempt to gain control of Mexico City through this panoptic approach would lead to the death of the ex-guerrilla communist president of Macondo at the hands of a North American hitman - all this organized by the extremely wealthy, citizen of Macondo, Walter Osorio. This type of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary plus North American interference narrative is not unfamiliar historically. While the map seen in the panels of *Lo Mejor de El Pantera* may show Mexico City, the visual braid I propose will show that this panoptic attempt at control occurs across Latin American comics and these panoptic views will weave and link us across time and place in their pursuit of dominance over place, time, and knowledge.

VII. Neoliberal Rituals of Fear and Psychogeography

In Santiago de Chile a mysterious cult, called simply "La Cofradía", begins to carry out a series of macabre occult rituals in order to bring Mortis, "una especie de organismo inmaterial" ["a species of immaterial organism"] (*Mortis: Eterno Retorno* 19), into the realm of the living. A series of pins perforating a map of Santiago de Chile mark the locations of these ritual murders



Figure 6. Father Libby's map of ritual murders performed across Santiago de Chile.

across the city. Each pin marks a quadrant of the city that will later appear in a panel of the graphic novel. Father Libby, a Catholic Priest, explains that "Están creando un espacio ritual. Psicogeografía" ["They are creating a ritual space. Psychogeography"] (101). This ritual use of the city's psychogeography is intended to revive and incarnate Evil and Death itself, *Mortis*. Another panel of the city map shows the *Cofradía*'s plan as Father Libby exclaims, "Esto es grande. Están canalizando la entidad *Mortis* en nuestro plano" ["This is big. They are channeling the entity *Mortis* on our plane"] (102). In a similar way neoliberalism uses a crazed and violent psychogeography to create the appropriate atmosphere for its growth and incarnation. In *Mortis: Eterno Retorno* there is a fear that the great Evil and Death of the past may return to dominate the present. The ritual spaces where Evil is to be reborn in Santiago are ordinary, quotidian places such as a public pool or a construction site. The city map here shows us that Evil, or the past, reappears in the spaces we occupy on a daily basis; the memory of Evil can be read on a city map.

VIII. Violence from Above: Disaster Capitalism and Security

Juan Vásquez's *El Canto del Delirio* is a violently illustrated surrealist vision of Pinochet's military coup and regime. A full page panel shows Santiago de Chile from above with the Río Mapocho running at a diagonal from the top right of the panel to the bottom left while naked bodies tied in barded-wire rain down upon the city from the sky (12). This image resonates with the Evil that is feared to return in *Mortis*, and contrasts with *El Pantera*'s panels showing Walter Osorio falling from the Monument to the Revolution. Again this panoptic view is used to express a domination over place and even over memory and time as seen in *Mortis*' concern with the ritual return of Evil and Death to the city. *El Canto del Delirio* establishes a visual link between the September 11, 1973 Pinochet coup d'etat and the terrorist attacks in New York City on September 11, 2001



Figure 7. Juan Vásquez's surreal vision of bodies raining over Santiago de Chile.

with a two-page spread of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center as they are moments away from being struck. This link shows the ways that Evil and Death spread and grow across time and place, bodies falling from the sky - thus creating the atmosphere that fosters the growth of the security state and surveillance that go hand-in-hand with neoliberal practices of protecting capital over individuals and freedoms. Naomi Klein analyzed this neoliberal tendency around the globe in her book *The Shock Doctrine* where she called "these orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities, 'disaster capitalism'" (6). Klein goes on to explain that this ritualistic use of catastrophe to create the atmosphere necessary to expand neoliberalism originated precisely in the aftermath of Pinochet's coup in Chile (8). She states that it was "the most extreme capitalist makeover ever attempted anywhere" (8). This method of disaster capitalism became "the preferred method of advancing corporate goals: using moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering" (9). In this way the surrealist vision of bodies falling over Santiago de Chile and the images of mutilated bodies hanging over everyday spaces in *Mortis* put on display how fear and violence can be read as metaphors for the engineering of places for the implementation and return of oppressive evils.

IX. The Strategic Domination of Barad-Dûr: The New York World Trade Center, The Torre Latinoamericana, and The Costanera Center

The destruction of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers (illustrated in Juan Vásquez's *El Canto del Delirio*), in this crazed reading across panels, borders, and time,

can function as a symbolic attack on the exemplary site of panoptic dominance that Michel De Certeau used in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. This dominance over place is called an "erotics of knowledge" by De Certeau, there is a certain pleasure in this knowledge of the whole, in this dominance of time and place (92). The World Trade Center is now a fiction and a memory but in the context of this visual braid it may be substituted by Mexico City's Torre Latinoamericana or Santiago de Chile's Costanera Center. The Torre Latinoamericana (or Latin American Tower), completed in 1956, was the most innovative and tallest skyscraper in Mexico City until 1984. It is considered a historical landmark and withstood the massive earthquakes of 1957 (7.9 magnitude) and 1985 (8.1 magnitude) due to its architecture and engineering. The tower is seen by some to be a symbol of safety and stability in Mexico. The Mexican businessman Carlos Slim (who was ranked the richest person in the world between 2010 and 2013) purchased seven floors of the tower in 2002. Slim is also partially responsible for bringing North American security and policing policies to Mexico which rely on computerized analysis and surveillance which directly relate back to De Certeau's theories of strategic dominance over urban spaces. Chile's Gran Torre Santiago, the most identifiable portion of the Costanera Center, was completed after several stalls in construction in 2012, and is now the tallest building in Latin America. Due to insufficient planning most of the building has remained unoccupied because the proper legal permissions and permits were not obtained from the government. This conflict between symbolic progress, capitalism, and politics is embodied by the fact that the tallest building in Latin America remains mostly unused and darkened as it looms over Santiago in the night sky. On a visit to Santiago in 2015 I heard the Chilean author Francisco Ortega

refer to the Costanera Center as "Mordor." This allusion may seem flippant at first but I believe that the connection is relevant. Mordor is the geographical domain of the Dark Lord Sauron in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The dominant architectural feature of the region is Barad-dûr, the tower of Mordor (often the tower and geographical region are conflated and the tower is simply identified as Mordor itself). This tower houses the Eye of Sauron which constantly surveyed Middle-Earth in order to see that the Dark Lord's will was being obeyed and that no threats approached his domain. The tower of Barad-dûr and the Eye of Sauron are identified with the will and mind of Sauron himself – thus architecture and surveillance are metaphorically linked to the will of evil. This panoptic gaze structured the landscape of Middle-Earth according to its threat of violent power and also sought out any who dared threaten it. This very insistence on power and surveillance created the possibility of subversion and resistance that the very weakest, the most underestimated enemies of the Dark Lord, used to overthrow him. The connection of Barad-dûr with the Gran Torre Santiago signals how these symbols of power dominate landscapes in attempts to control and transform them according to their own will and vision of space. From the gleaming two towers of Mexico City and Santiago de Chile I propose new uses and tactics for reading urban spaces in sequential art across the Latin American map that these panoptical towers establish and maintain. Like the position of De Certeau in the WTC or the Torre Latinoamericana or the Costanera Center, the creators and readers of graphic narratives often view comic texts from a panoptical view and from that vantage lose sight of their possible street-level uses. In the following sections of this chapter I propose a street-level tactic for subverting traditional analysis of sequential art as well as

the traditional structuring of transnational dissertation projects that are forced to conform to certain rationales for the links and connections they find between nations, times, or histories. Not only this, but I will continue to follow the visual braid from the map-level to the street-level in order to see how resistance, justice, and crime are imagined as tactics for evading, escaping, surviving, and fighting the dominant systems of the security state and neoliberalism.

X. Why All These Maps?

As I discuss in detail in my chapters on Pantera in Mexico City and the Detective Heredia in Santiago de Chile, there are multiple neoliberal practices occurring across Latin America that delimit and dominate urban landscapes in the name of progress and security. Gentrification and swelling ground rent costs in Santiago are causing the city itself to disappear like another victim of neoliberal violence, while in Mexico the national push for security and control have produced horrors such as Ayotzinapa and the open assassination of journalists. These processes of domination can be pin pointed on the city maps and as proposed by Rudy Giuliani in 2002 they can then be used to create procedures to increase security and protect capital investments in these areas. The panoptic vision of dominion is used by the technocrat/politicians to imagine regimes to impose upon those that dwell in the streets. All these maps then represent in the medium of comics a visual braid across Latin America that shows the efforts to dominate these places, control the population, and impose political and economic practices - this vision can be linked to Villalobos-Ruminott's General Geology as a method for mapping disappearances and violence, and in some cases

can serve to show psychogeographical practices of fear that create an atmosphere to foster this domination. Yet, De Certeau points out that these strategic mapping practices of control that work at the technocratic and statistical level "can tell us virtually nothing about the currents in this sea theoretically governed by the institutional frameworks that it in fact gradually erodes and displaces" (34). It is this virtual nothing that the map-level domination of place knows about the street-level that I will explore next in this visual braid through Latin American graphic narratives.

XI. The Street-Level Strand

As this evil (as seen in the Eye of Sauron, in Mortis, or the rich political saboteur Walter Osorio) cyclically returns to delimit place and dominate knowledge and time with its strategic practices, there remain possibilities to escape and subvert these map-level efforts at control. Here I would return to the idea of absence, the comic gutter, and disappearance; because De Certeau explains that "a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" and that "the space of a tactic is the space of the other" (37). While the map-level efforts dominate place, the tactics of resistance work from *absence*. The panoptic, the Tower Latinoamericana/Costanera/Barad-bûr, becomes blind to the use of space precisely because it is a "law of foreign power" placed over a lived space (37). It is here in the streets of the city, that the map can only see as the gutter - a blank space where nothing precise is happening, that popular imagination and action can subvert the organizing gaze of the map. As we follow the visual braid across books, national borders, time, and place we necessarily create new gutters that connect these

panels, or new streets, that have never been mapped and that can work outside the demands or tyranny of the plot (*Comics and Narration* 34). De Certeau describes this space as the "cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse" (37). As seen earlier, Groensteen's obsession with the creator's intended use of the gutter is similar to the surveillance of the proprietary powers that these articulations of our crazed reading between texts undoes. This tactical reading of braided comic panels functions against the forced virtual panels and "juxtaposes diverse elements in order suddenly to produce a flash shedding a different light on the language of a place" (De Certeau 37-38), and as seen in Groensteen the braided series constitutes a new place to explore and in which we can invest (*The System of Comics* 148). As we leave behind the map-level reading of this visual braid we will zoom-in to see the street-level tactics used to make "lucky hits in the framework of a system" (De Certeau 38).

XII. Tactics for Walking the (New) Gutter

One of the great tactics for making the city impossible to administer is the act of walking the streets (De Certeau 95). The city map can be used to track with a line the movement of an individual throughout the city but it has no way of telling *why* they moved this way or that or *what* they were doing along the path. De Certeau says, "Surveys of routes miss what was: the act itself of passing by. The operation of walking, wandering, or 'window shopping,' that is, the activity of passers-by, is transformed into points that draw a totalizing and reversible line on the map. They allow us to grasp only a relic set in the

nowhen of a surface of projection" (97). The panoptic practice that attempts to control the plot of street-level movements and actions can only create a line that tells little of what actually happens in the process of walking the city. I would argue that as we look at the gutters of the multiframe of a comic and trace the narrative through the supposedly forced virtual acts of closure that occur between panels that we are also looking only over the relic of a surface of projection that can tell us little of the act of reading and closure; how readers connect a panel from this text with a page from another and move back and forth between them. As we travel the gutter across comic texts to create new series, braids, we walk paths that the panoptic view of a text misses, we make connections, we window shop in a way, across panels. Our crazed reading works in the absence that opens up in the panoptic, structured, and strategic reading practices forced on us by the plot. This proposed tactic of walking the gutter is similar to what De Certeau says of Charlie Chaplan's cane, he "multiplies the possibilities of his cane: he does other things with the same thing and he goes beyond the limits that the determinants of the object set on its utilization" (98). In this way we are choosing to use only certain features of the constructed order of the multiframe of the comic texts. De Certeau explains that by this practice of walking certain ways one can choose to only go here or not there, or one can choose to increase the possibilities of a place by creating shortcuts or detours, or one may make their own prohibitions about their path and forbid oneself from taking routes that are considered obligatory (98). Thus as looking down over a map is much like looking down upon the page of a comic we can choose to read otherwise, to travel the gutter in paths of resistance, and in ways that the map never intended but that it ultimately left open by its own organization of the

breakdown of the multiframe, and that is demanded by the very nature of the medium of sequential art as it functions through the gutter. Our new tactics for walking the gutter can affirm, suspect, try out, transgress, respect, etc. the trajectories laid out on the projected surface of the comic page, the hyperframe, or the multiframe. The panels in this portion of the visual braid all deal with street-level tactics that have us doing other things with the same thing in order to move in places that the panoptic map-level of control cannot detect.

XIII. Survival as Tactical Resistance

In Ariel y Sol Rojas Lizana's graphic memoir, titled *Historias Clandestinas*, a panel housing a black and white cross-hatched drawing of the Chilean Presidential Palace, La Moneda, shows the building from above, split in half, spewing smoke and fire. This panel reveals the results of some of the most violent planning, delimiting, and dominating of place that has occurred in Latin America. But another panel in this text



Figure 8. "Historias Clandestinas" showing where resistance can take place during times of oppression.

takes us from the map-level of violent domination to the street-level where individuals take action to resist this violence in the gutters of the city. A full-page panel shows a magnifying glass hovering over a map-level representation of a Santiaguino neighborhood with the enlarged portion revealing the home of clandestine resistance fighters hidden amongst the policed and controlled map of the city.

The mysterious room pointed out in the panel refers to the space that was used by the leadership of MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria) [Left Revolutionary Movement]. The graphic memoir tells of the arrival of Ernesto and Vero, a couple of militant leftists, that were supposed to stay with the family for a week but ended up living there for ten years. Ernesto was the head of MIR after the death of Miguel Henríquez and

stayed in hiding throughout the military regime. *Historias Clandestinas* recounts events of resistance from the perspective of children growing up in a revolutionary safe house during Pinochet's military dictatorship. The magnified, street-level look, at the daily activities of resistance in this graphic memoir lays out the tactics used to undo the map-level plans of domination. In a section of the book titled "Quehaceres Diarios" ["Daily Chores"], the authors show how the MIR leader Ernesto would write messages, then they would be typed up on a machine, illustrated by the children, copied on a hand-operated mimeograph, and finally how the youngest children, without registered fingerprints, would put together the pages, place the revolutionary newsletters in envelopes and address them. This daily chore produced "El Rebelde" ["The Rebel"], which was "la voz oficial del MIR y se enviaba a gente importante, agencias de prensa, estaciones de televisión..." ["the official voice of MIR and was sent to important people, press agencies, television stations..."] (Rojas Lizana). Some of the children's other daily chores consisted of studying political texts, reading about engineering, apprenticing as an electrician, attending boring meetings, and digging multiple underground hideouts in their yard.

This descent to the street-level of our visual braid takes us to a full page panel in *Historias Clandestinas* that shows three human figures painting graffiti on a wall with the accompanying text: "Era importante escribir en las murallas para mantener viva la idea de que teníamos un resistencia organizada. A veces íbamos a pintar en la mitad de la noche. Una vez, nos persiguió la policía" ["It was important to write on the walls to keep alive the idea that we had an organized resistance. Sometimes we went out to paint in the middle of night. Once, we were chased by the police"] (Rojas Lizana). This tactical "art of the weak,"

as De Certeau puts it, was used to resist and attack the map-level domination over the city of Santiago de Chile during the military regime. The work of communicating via the walls of the city was never foreseen in the map-level plans made by the dictatorship, this tactic is exercised from the places of absence where the strategies of delimitation and domination have their blind spots. The authors of *Historias Clandestinas* explain, "No tenemos TV. Ni radio. Ni rostros. Solo tenemos muros" ["We don't have TV. Nor radio. Nor faces. We only have walls"] (Rojas Lizana). While they were excluded from systems and strategies of power they used the

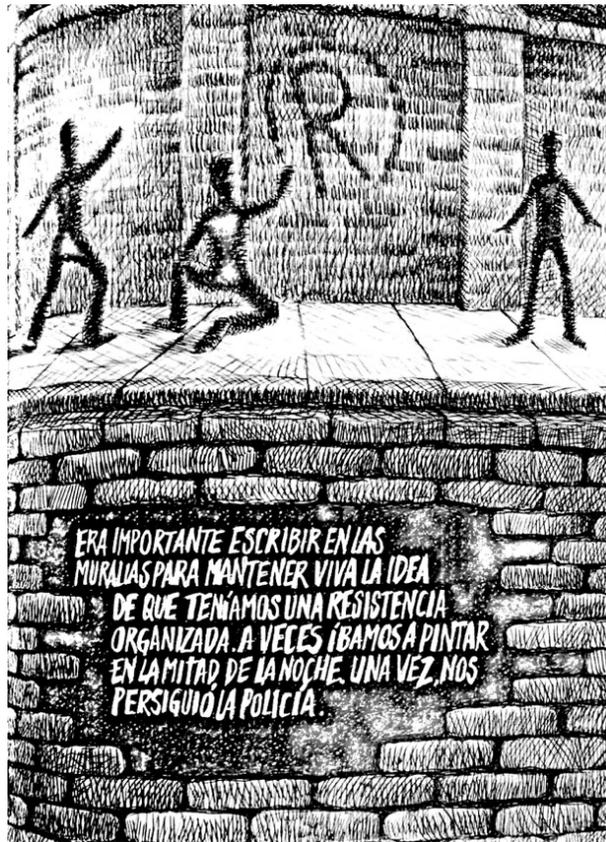


Figure 9. Street-level tactics of resistance in Ariel and Sol Rojas Lizana's work.

tactics of the street to find a voice during the dictatorship that lasted from 1973-1990. De Certeau calls graffiti "calligraphies that howl without raising their voice" (102). The production of these calligraphies of resistance is one panel along the visual braid that we follow now at the street-level through Latin American crime comics. De Certeau, in his chapter titled "Walking in the City", explains that the city is a totalizing landmark for "socioeconomic and political strategies" but that while these strategies are in play and attempt to dominate and organize urban space from the panoptic map-level that "urban life increasingly permits the re-emergence of the element that the urbanistic project excluded" and that "the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power" (95). The actions taken by the children in *Historias Clandestinas* reveal the street-level contradictory movements that function beyond the organizing reach of map-level strategies. Along this tactical strand of the visual braid we find other panels that reveal the street-level actions that work outside the realms of hegemonic power in their exploration of resistance and justice.

XIV. Satire as a Tactic and the Proposal of Revolution

Issue number forty-four of the Mexican comic *Los Penitentes* was published in December of 1974. The homeless neighborhood super hero, Super Indio, is called upon to protect his friends who have been unable to pay rent for the last forty months. Super Indio's friends plead saying, "¿No es usted el famoso Super Indio? ¿El defensor de los pobres y víctimas de la justicia?" ["Aren't you the famous Super Indio? The defender of the poor and of the victims of justice?"] (*Los Penitentes* #44 5). As the rent collector bangs on the

door the desperate man exclaims "Es el capital que viene a pisotear al obrero" ["It's capital that has come to stomp the laborer"] (6). This conversation between Super Indio and his friends positions their interactions within the larger narrative of capitalist strategies of control, and this comment is not the only one made in this *historieta* that emphasizes the reality of the working class being dominated by capitalism. After Super Indio accidentally saves the day, he shouts a series of apparently misplaced insults through the door: "Ese Pinochet es ojo de chánchara. Pinochet es puro puro y al amanecer bachicha..." (10). Super Indio's friends ask themselves, "¿Por qué insulta a Pinochet?" ["Why is he insulting Pinochet?"] and a small child answers, "Porque está lejos" ["Because he's far away"] (10). The following panel marks a transition from the Super Indio narrative into a sort of history lesson/political critique. This is an important feature of *Los Penitentes* and occurs in almost every issue.

The next panel shows a gorilla sitting on a pedestal emblazoned with a swastika while the gorilla holds a photo of Pinochet over his face. An accompanying narration reads, "Por qué insultamos a Pinochet? ¿Por los crímenes que ha cometido? No, jóvenes. A Pinochet le cargamos la viga porque está muy lejos, el desgraciado" ["Why do we insult Pinochet? For the crimes he has committed? No, my young friends. We give him a hard time because he's very far away, the poor guy"] (11). The Pinochet gorilla adds, "Si me tuvieran cerca, no digo si no hasta me echaban porras" ["If you had me closer, I bet you would be cheering me on"] (11). The political critique continues with a man wearing



Figure 10. "Los Penitentes" questions how crimes can be committed in the name of democracy.

a cap and gown explaining that they accuse Pinochet of usurping political power and committing crimes in the name of democracy (11). This has been the strategic plan that attempts to organize, delimit, and control urban space throughout this braided series - because for neoliberalism democracy and free markets are one in the same. *Los Penitentes* then poses the question, "¿Pues que no en todas partes se cometen los mismos crímenes con cargo al mismo nombre?" ["Well, aren't these same crimes committed everywhere in the same name?"] (11). Of course they are referring to crimes committed in the name of

democracy, but what is unique here is that they are speaking of large scale violent crimes that reshape societies and economies. On the following page a red panel with an intimidating image of Augusto Pinochet wearing his iconic dark glasses explains, "En otras palabras, Pinochet es un gorila muy grueso. Es directamente responsable de la muerte de veinte mil chilenos" ["In other words, Pinochet is one thick gorilla. He is directly responsible for the death of some twenty-thousand Chileans"] (12).

Below this, on the same page, a well dressed man plays a violin as the text above his head reads, "¿Cuántos murieron en Tlatelolco?" ["How many died at Tlatelolco?"] and the violin player's response is simply, "Yo no sabo. A mí no me meta en sus chismes, que tengo familia" ["I don't know. Don't get me involved in your rumors, I have a family"] (12). This well dressed violinist echoes the position of those whom capital affords the luxury of ignoring politics. The questioning voice of the comic returns to pose a follow-up question: "Cuántos murieron el 10 de junio? ¿Cuántos campesinos han sido asesinados y sepultados clandestinamente?" ["How many died on the 10th of June? How many workers have been murdered and secretly buried?"] (12). This final question returns us to the place of absence and disappearance that connects the multiple panels and narratives of this braid. Violent disappearances have become the *modus operandi* of capitalism and democracy across Latin America - this Mexican comic that comments on the Chilean dictatorship explains that what is happening in Mexico and Chile is one single phenomenon. After the final question posed above, the *historieta* responds that all of this has been done to support democracy (12). *Los Penitentes* critiques Mexicans, Chileans, and the citizens of all the "dictaduras disfrazadas de democracias en América Latina" ["dictatorships disguised as democracies

in Latin America"] (17) for being able to identify the problems of other countries without addressing their own, local leaders and governments. In a double-edged comment the comic proclaims, "Con respecto a los chilenos exiliados, son ustedes bienvenidos, están en su casa. Total, nomás le echamos más agua a los frijoles" [With respect to the exiled Chileans, you are welcome here, you are at home. In the end, the only difference is that we put more water in our beans"] (17). This remark is a scathing criticism of the current Mexican political climate as it implies that the same atrocities being committed in Chile are happening in Mexico as well. In this way *Los Penitentes* points out the strategic plans of capital and democracy across Latin America, all those dictatorships disguised as democracies, and the comic goes so far as to state that "el Tío Sam tiene muchos alumnos en los gobiernos de los países de América Latina" ["Uncle Sam has many students in the governments of Latin American countries"] (17). At this point the comic turns from identifying and criticizing the influence of North American capital and democracy throughout Latin America and it begins to propose tactics to stop its advancement. There are panels that show street protesters marching with signs, workers with lighted torches burning crops, and finally a revolutionary carrying a rifle on his way to Chile. But a subsequent panel shows the revolutionary with his back turned stating, "Lo que ustedes sugieren es de películas" ["What you are suggesting is something out of the movies"] (22). The comic responds to this excuse by briefly recounting the history of Fidel Casto and Che Guevara's 1959 Cuban revolution as proof that there are tactics for resisting the powerful panoptic strategic forces of capital.

XV. Tactics of Local Knowledge of the Cityscape and Subjectivity

In the first issue of *Lo Mejor de El Pantera* the disappearance of a smalltime criminal leads Pantera into taking on the role of a paid chauffeur in order to infiltrate the criminal network of Antonio Laudi, a North American gangster from Chicago. Here absence and disappearance once again pull this comic narrative into the world of transnational crime in the era of neoliberalism. Soon Pantera discovers that Laudi and his gang are involved in an international counterfeiting and money laundering scheme. Pantera's past working as a taxi driver and his physical appearance allow him to become part of the gang and discover the counterfeit printing plates and find out that a huge man-eating plant is responsible for the disappearance of the missing gangster, nicknamed El Untado, and many others. The relationship between nature and disappearance here is unfortunately familiar in the Mexican imaginary as mass unmarked graves have served as man-eating disposals of bodies that are intended to remain vanished. Pantera's tactics for inserting himself into the international criminal network rely on his knowledge of Mexico City's streets and his indigenous appearance. When Laudi first meets Pantera he inquires if he knows the city well, and Pantera replies that he was a "ruletero" or cab driver. Pantera's ability to navigate the street-level reality of Mexico City as a means of avoiding police detection provide him the skills necessary to gain access to the criminal underworld. This along with Laudi's assumption that because Pantera is indigenous that he isn't very intelligent allow the protagonist to unravel the carefully strategized transnational counterfeiting operation. When Laudi first meets Pantera he thinks to himself, "Es un indio, un campesino" ["He's an indian, a peasant"] (*Lo mejor de El Patnera* #1 30).



Figure 11. Pantera's racial identity being scrutinized by the North America gangster, Antonio Laudi.

Later, when Pantera is forced to take on Laudi's gang they begin to hurl racial slurs at him because of his indigenous features. One henchman prepares to shoot Pantera with an uzi as he shouts "¡Indio apestoso, te enseñaré a..." ["Stinking indian, I'll teach you..."] (*Lo mejor de El Pantera* #1 92). Pantera then tosses several gangsters into the mouth of the man-eating plant and captures Laudi. Pantera's use of street-level cityscape knowledge and his indigenous identity that allows him to be perceived as one that exists outside of the control of urban and state hegemonic control are employed as tactics against the transnational strategies used by North American gangsters. Questions relating to Pantera's racial and subaltern status are explored in detail in chapter two as part of my close reading of Pantera's role as a Mexican anti-hero.

XVI. Vigilante Tactics as Neoliberalism Turns Citizen Against Citizen

The masked vigilante, El Viudo [The Widower], provides another panel of descent from the map-level of this visual braid to the street-level. A single-panel, two-page spread illustrated by Rodrigo Campos and Juan Nitrox Márquez with rich inking by Cristian Docolomansky depicts El Viudo crouched on a rooftop overlooking the 1957 public transportation riots that came to be called "La batalla de Santiago" ["The Battle of Santiago"]. El Viudo watches as his fellow Chileans take the streets in a tactic of resistance against the oppressive neoliberal economic reforms put in place by Carlos Ibáñez del Campo's administration (1952-1958)



Figure 12. El Viudo observes the Battle of Santiago before descending into the crowd to stop Chileans from turning on their fellow Chileans.

under the guidance of the North American Klein-Saks Mission of economists. The Battle of Santiago resulted in the decree of an *estado de sitio* or a state of exception for the

implementation of martial law during which at least sixteen people were killed and some five-thousand more injured. As Villalobos-Ruminott suggests in his *General Geology*, the implementation of neoliberalism in Latin America was quickly followed by the state of exception that has now become the norm as neoliberalism's policies have become a permanent fixture of Latin America's economic reality (8-9). The economic struggles that brought about the Battle of Santiago illustrate how strategic implementation of neoliberal policies eventually turn citizens and governments against each other and in an even darker turn they pit citizen against citizen. From the rooftop El Viudo descends into the masses rioting in the streets during the Battle of Santiago, and at the street-level he is able to see the violence introduced by the austerity reforms of the Klein-Saks delegation playing out as Chilean turns against Chilean. El Viudo stops his fellow citizens from killing each other in an attempt to show that the true enemy is not the police or the bus drivers but that the map-level economic strategists from North America are the sources of this current turmoil. The violence brought about by neoliberalism's placement of private property and profits over the individual or collective good is multiform and in this particular case it is manifested as violence between individuals that El Viudo must stop because those individuals are being manipulated by the map-level strategies of the state and transnational capital. El Viudo is acutely aware of this reality. In another street-level



Figure 13. El Viudo stops citizens from killing a police officer during the Battle of Santiago.

panel, he admires Santiago's architecture and states "Crece el descontento frente al neoliberalismo" ["The frustration with neoliberalism grows"], but right away he references the violent cost of resistance and adds "no podemos costearlas a punta de masacres ni torres de sangre" ["we can't afford them at the cost of massacres and towers of blood"] (Oyanedel 17). Here El Viudo refers to the 1938 Matanza del Seguro Obrero when young members of the Movimiento Nacional-Socialista de Chile protested against president Arturo Alessandri Palma (1932-1938). The protest was seen as means of inciting a coup and fifty-nine of the sixty-three protesters were massacred. El Viudo explores and emphasizes the violence incited by neoliberalism and the violence necessary to resist it. Although this vision of perpetual violence is disheartening it also points out that in popular culture imaginary it is necessary, at times, to use violence and sacrifice as tools to fight the strategic

oppressor. Gonzalo Oyanedel's *El Viudo* shows the violent reality on the streets of Santiago as a direct result of neoliberal practices with his investigations leading him into the upper echelons of Santiago's society to find those involved in the strategies of domination and delimitation in the city. El Viudo is a hands-on character that functions in the very midst of the street-level realities of neoliberalism's strategic planning. His tactics are rough and violent themselves but they find the moments of advantage and strike to cripple the elites' plans whenever possible.

XVII. Tactics for Walking Memory and the City

El Viudo functions as a sort of spiritual predecessor to the Detective Heredia whose activity in Santiago, Chile begins in the 1980s. While El Viudo interacts directly with violence, Heredia walks the streets in a graphic novel that takes place around 2011 and is concerned with memories of violence. The book *Heredia Detective* explores absences on the street-level by investigating bodies that aren't there and by looking for parts of the city that are vanishing through the neoliberal real estate and economic processes of gentrification. A detailed analysis of these processes is included in chapter three of this project. Heredia, as a character, has lived through the harsh implementation



Figure 14. Heredia prepares himself to say good-bye to the City Bar Restaurant.

of neoliberalism and seen its results. As he stands on the street he thinks to himself, “Después de los lamentos contra la modernidad que arrasa con los barrios tradicionales de Santiago no nos queda otra cosa que ir a despedirnos” [“After lamenting against modernity erasing Santiago’s traditional neighborhoods, the only thing we have left is to say good-bye”] (*Heredia Detective* 9). Heredia is forced to behold the product of latent capitalism. His walk around the city is propelled by the disappearance of a place and as he wanders the city with his friend The Scribe they confront the places where something once was. Heredia makes several stops on his walk to recall investigations of past crimes. He is taking his ghosts out for a stroll as The Scribe puts it (10) and in this way he interrogates all that remains, the ashes, the absences, the gutter spaces of the city. As Heredia uses memory as

a tactic against the multiple forms of disappearance neoliberalism has enacted on the city and its inhabitants he literally situates his memory between panels, in the gutter. Each time Heredia conjures up a memory the recollection happens at a page turn in the comic text. As the page is turned it is accompanied by the physical process of vanishing the present form of the city as illustrated by the comic artist Gonzalo Martínez and on the other side of the page turn, and the gutter, a new panel appears containing the memory illustrated by another artist. Once the memory draws to a close then another page turn brings us back to the present and to the city as illustrated by Martínez. The entire multiframe of *Heredia Detective* is an exploration of absence and memory, an interrogation of the gutter space, since the majority of the comic takes place in the realm of memory that is meant to contradict the pristine and clean vision of Santiago's neoliberal present. In Gonzalo Martínez's illustrations of Santiago the city is shown in sharp, clean, almost perfect detail. Martínez is an architect by training and his renderings of the city serve to make the cityscape extremely recognizable, to the point that this comic can only be about Santiago. At the same time, his clean lines and sparsely populated streets insinuate a vision of the city that is safe - the type of vision of the city that neoliberalism's security obsessed zero-tolerance policing would be proud to tout as the result of their work. The contrast that the page turn transitions create between Martínez's clean depiction of the city and the other artists' dark and violent renderings of its past illustrate is that no matter how clean or safe neoliberalism can appear to make a place there is always a history of violence that betrays the fiction of the cityscape. This tactic of memory as a form of resistance against the supposed city level results of neoliberalism is alluded to by Bjorn Quiring when he wrote:

"the city as mnemonic device has a somewhat sinister side: it commemorates that its urban law and order was established by acts beyond the law, namely violent seizures of power and acts of domination" (200). Heredia's memory resists the erasure of neoliberalism's cleansing of the city in the name of security. His memory dwells in the absences created by neoliberal urban law. The protagonist's movements about Santiago can be traced on the map-level but they cannot be deciphered or made legible from the panoptic view. Only at the street-level, within the panels of the comic text, can the movements, driven by absence and memory, be made understandable as tactics against neoliberalism's disappearances.

XVIII. Braided Cities: Intertwining Mexico City and Santiago de Chile

In general terms the visual braid I have proposed is organized by comics that all represent urban spaces and stories of crime – in its multiform manifestations. More specifically they are Latin American urban spaces in the age of neoliberalism, and concretely the braid consists of comic images from Mexico City and Santiago de Chile. These two cities seemingly have little in common, but as seen through their artistic production it is possible to see that they both manifest interrogations, critiques, and negotiations of neoliberal economic and political realities. These cities are two of the most representative places of neoliberalism's effects in Latin America although those effects have been played out with drastically different political, economic, and social consequences. While their historical realities differ and the expressions of neoliberalism may have come under the strikingly different guises of dictatorship and narco violence, it is clear that the resultant violences and practices of disappearance, the feature of this era in

Latin America, are undeniably present. Of course, this horrifying practice has happened in other places across Latin America and beyond, therefore I must admit the limitations of my current research parameters and say that the investigation of the multiplicity of expressions of neoliberal violence and its explorations in sequential art is a lifetime pursuit. I plan to expand the scope of this research in the future and collaborate with others whose work weaves its way into these braided networks.

As I have pulled these panels out of the texts in which they are embedded to interrogate them beyond the tyranny of their plots, temporalities, and spatialities I have hoped to find new juxtapositions. By bringing these panels together, notwithstanding their existence in separate books, I have found that they are all exploring the consequences of crime and violence under neoliberalism. The distance between these texts seems reduced when these panels are braided together through the unifying lens of crime and violence, through the absences and disappearances they investigate. This braid is subversive to the strategic delimitation and dominations of neoliberalism because "Insofar as comic books primarily consist of narratives of violence, crime, and justice, reading them is itself a transgression" (Phillips and Strobl 7). This means a questioning and interrogation of the practices of neoliberalism through the creativity of popular culture.

XIX. The Multibraid and the New Gutter

It has also been my purpose here to show, on a theoretical level, that by expanding Groensteen's concept of General Arthrology and braiding beyond the bounds of a single multiframe that we are able to generate a type of *multibraid* that finds its resonances and

echoes outside the tyranny of the plot of any one single multiframe. In turn this new multibraided series necessitates the creation of new gutter spaces that permit us to interact with these panels and series in new ways through previously unavailable acts of closure. De Certeau's *Practices of Everyday Life* reveals that it is possible to walk these new gutters in a multitude of ways, methods of walking and reading that were never intended by the planners (in this case the comic artists), and that this spatial practice can undo readable surfaces and creates a "mobile city" within the planned dominant version of itself, a palimpsest (110). The comic text as city map can then be walked and fragmented, made mobile, and be layered upon itself or upon other sites to create unexpected, crazed readings. We can walk from Santiago to Mexico City, from 1973 to 2015, from history to memory, from life to death in these new gutters. I argue that both De Certeau and Villalobos-Ruminott could see this as "the internal alternations of the place (the relations among its strata) or the pedestrian unfolding of the stories accumulated in a place (moving about the city and travelling)" (De Certeau 110). This is the efficacy of a comic multibraid that exceeds the limits of a single multiframe and the power of comics as a medium to unfold the city as a space. As Ahren and Meteling say, "From a historical point of view and against the backdrop of the modern age, comics are inseparably tied to the notion of the 'city'" (4). This inseparability of the medium of sequential art from the city lends them to be read as maps, but it does not limit their readings to the panoptic gaze. As shown in this chapter it is possible to descend into the new gutter spaces and walk the city, the comic page, in new paths that allow us to understand these spaces as locals with street-level tactics that affirm,

suspect, try out, and transgress the multiframe, hyperframe, and panel and allow us to interrogate the absences in the new gutters.

XX. Ashes in the Gutter

The gutter is an identifiable absence, “the symbolic site of this absence”, and Groensteen recognizes it is as silence, but he admits “this silence often speaks volumes” (*The System of Comics* 113). For McCloud the gutter is where the magic of comics happens and as quoted earlier, he says that to kill a man between panels, or in the gutter, is to condemn him to a thousand deaths (69). It is this silent multiplicity of deaths and absences that now needs to be addressed in the context of Latin American comic production. McCloud’s chapter on closure and the gutter is titled “Blood in the Gutter” but this title is impossible to apply to Latin America – as disappearance has become the model of the contemporary era (and I would argue that it has been the model since the colonial period when complete racial and cultural disappearances were practiced as genocide). In the Latin American context there is nothing in the gutter, utter absence, or as Villalobos-Ruminott would put it “hay ahí ceniza” (3). For the study of Latin American comics that contend with issues of history, politics, violence, or memory (among many other subjects) I believe it more appropriate to say there are ASHES IN THE GUTTER. Contemporary comic production, as it is tied to the city, and as this is historically and politically tied to colonization, modernization, and neoliberalism necessarily constitutes a dialogue with the practices of disappearance in Latin America. Whether these comic texts be political satire from 1970s Mexico about the ramblings of Super Indio or graphic novels about the

resurrection of a fictional evil named Mortis they all resonate with the realities of disappearances and violence, their gutters are filled with the ashes of the missing – those condemned to die a thousand deaths over and over again. I propose that the Hamletian interrogation of the skull happen in the gutter. And as I have suggested here we must create new gutters to walk and question and investigate where we can remember and resist the disappearances of individuals, neighborhoods, ways of life, and memory. As disappearance is the modus operandi of neoliberalism in our age, I am certain that as we expand and continue to weave braided series that explore its presence across Latin America we will find texts to intertwine with the readings I have barely begun here. It is my argument and contribution that in the Latin American context we cannot talk about blood in the gutter, rather we are forced to seek out the ashes in the gutter, the disappearance of even the event of violence - the gutter for Latin American comics is the true place of interrogation. These absences must be allowed to speak their volumes.

XXI. Cityscapes and Comicscapes: Walking the Mean Streets Neither Tarnished Nor Afraid

These are not simply stories that show cities - these stories help to create and re-imagine these cities. These graphic narratives, in the words of De Certeau, form part of the metaphorical city that "slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city" (93). The stories of crime and justice exist in the imaginary of their native cities and help to create mythic versions where crimes can be solved and justice can be obtained. He explains that myths are discourses relative "to the place/nowhere (or origin) of concrete existence" but

that they can subvert that concrete reality with “an allusive and fragmentary story whose gaps mesh with the social practices it symbolizes” (102). These stories slip in and out of the reality of their cities as fragments that challenge the reality where these myths develop.

What I have come to find from interrogating these comic texts is that neoliberalism in its multiple expressions is seen through this medium as a producer of violence and an enemy to citizens of the popular classes. In this sense popular criminology is telling us that the who can be considered a criminal question can also be asked: what is criminal? When we consider the idea of justice in these comic scenarios it becomes clear that justice is fleeting, barely obtainable, and that it must constantly be sought out again - for the next crime against us. Justice is carried out by individuals who are willing to investigate, who are unafraid to follow the clues that lead them back to individuals, police, politicians, practices, businesses, and ideologies that pit individuals against the value of property, productivity, security, and the supposed benefits of capitalism. Justice, sadly, happens on a small scale, case by case, and is brought about not by the state but by those who work outside the law. This in turn informs us that the law as it stands functions for the benefit and protection of capital and not of the citizens since they are the victims of the state, victims of capital that has transformed democracies into permanent states of exception. In some of the examples shown in this chapter, justice can only be found in survival or in memory. While this may sound discouraging it is also clear that we can use these narratives in order to study stories about finding justice, we can walk new gutters and new streets that we imagine by analyzing these voices through their art. Justice may be mythic, but as myth it can still perturb the realities of the cityscape. The tactics found in these comic texts are

popular culture expressions of resisting through investigation, study, walking, surviving, laughing, drawing, remembering, and fighting when necessary. Let us never overlook a popular text, let us be willing to walk the gutters, let us be unafraid to investigate, let us identify the criminals for who they are, for the systems they support and protect, and let us employ tactics of resistance. Reframing the famous words of Raymond Chandler, I hope we can walk the new gutters neither tarnished nor afraid, let us search for the hidden truths that can reveal the criminals for who they are and give voice to popular culture:

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. He is the hero; he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor—by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world.

He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him.

The story is this man's adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. If there were enough like him, the world would be a very safe place to live in, without becoming too dull to be worth living in. ("The Simple Art of Murder")

Finally, let us hope that as we take our part in walking the new gutters, of investigating, of challenging, and of surviving that we keep the hope that one day these

wanderings, investigations, and acts of survival will no longer be necessary. As the detective Heredia confesses at the close of his meandering through the city of Santiago, “Te voy a contar un secreto: nunca pierdo la esperanza de vivir en un mundo en que mi oficio sea un arte pasado de moda” [“I’m going to tell you a secret: I never lose hope of living in a world where my job is a lost art”] (*Heredia Detective*).

CHAPTER TWO:
**The Life and Un-Death of Gervasio Robles and the Creation of the
Bandit/Hero El Pantera as Homo Sacer in Neoliberal Noir Mexico City**

*¿ESTO PUDO SUCEDER EN
CUALQUIER PARTE DEL MUNDO?*

-Daniel Muñoz

*Deberás luchar contra hampones, policías
y detectives. Serás un hombre que no existe.*

-Daniel Muñoz

*When its borders begin to be blurred,
the bare life that dwelt there frees itself
in the city and becomes both subject
and object of the conflicts of the political order,
the one place for both the organization
of State power and emancipation from it.*

-Giorgio Agamben

In this chapter I analyze the various versions and adaptations of Daniel Muñoz and Alberto Maldonado's Mexican comic book character El Pantera. The approaches I take here are informed by the theory of cultural criminology as explored by Nickie D. Phillips and Staci Strobl in their book *Comic Book Crime: Truth, Justice, and the American Way*, in which they argue that "comic books [...] are replete with themes of crime and justice" and that it is possible to analyze comics as a means of exploration into "the ways in which meanings about crime and justice are negotiated and contested in comic books and the way these imaginings form part of a broader cultural context in which readers absorb, reproduce, and resist notions of justice" (2). In the case of *El Pantera* it is both interesting and important to note that this character has been present in the Mexican cultural imaginary since the early 1970s when he first appeared in the historieta *Super Mini #40* and that most recently Pantera prowled through Mexico City in Televisa's live action television

adaptation from 2007 to 2009. The idea of Pantera hasn't disappeared since his appearance on the small screen, as of 2015 it was reported that Warren Ellis, Universal Cable Productions, and Televisa USA were discussing the possibility of creating a North American television adaptation of the character (Hipes). Thus Pantera's importance as a pop culture crime fighter and reference should not be overlooked. The character has existed for over four decades as a figure in the cultural imaginary that absorbs, reproduces, and negotiates the multiple meanings of crime and justice in Mexico and in particular Mexico City's Distrito Federal.

Throughout this chapter I analyze the three different adaptations of *El Pantera*: the original historieta version (1980-1995), the two novels written by Daniel Muñoz in 1994 and 1997, and the television adaptation by Televisa in 2007. The ways in which the mediums of comics, the novel, and television transform El Pantera and Mexico City will be sites of exploration in this chapter. Since there are three different versions of the character that I discuss in this chapter, it may, at times appear that certain statements are contradictory. For example, Pantera's origin story is inconsistent between the comics, novels, and television series. For this reason, I will specify which version of the Pantera narrative I am referencing throughout this chapter by identifying the source of the narrative when contextually necessary. As the analysis of this chapter moves between three distinct mediums I will be approaching each of them as they transform and reimagine the original aesthetic elements of the comic version of *El Pantera*. The movements of my analysis look to discover how Pantera's more than four decades of existence informs, resists, and reproduces cultural ideas about crime and justice in Mexico. Phillips and Strobl explain

that comics, and media in general, have power “to reflect and shape what type of person is considered a threat to the social order and what type of person may be considered heroic” (19) and in this chapter I propose that in the case of Mexico over the last four decades a hero must necessarily be a threat to the social order. I believe that the multiple narratives of *El Pantera* will make this proposal abundantly clear.

This chapter approaches the current state of police militarization and zero tolerance policing in Mexico in order to establish a context for how this analysis is situated within a larger discussion of state sanctioned violence in Mexico and around the globe as the ideas of “security” and “sovereignty” become more and more overtly violent and dehumanizing. Following this contextualizing section I provide a general introduction to the creators of *El Pantera*: Daniel Muñoz the creator, script writer, and novelist; Alberto Maldonado the illustrator of the comic series; as well as Juan Alba and Guillermo Peimbert, two other artists who worked on the comic version of *El Pantera*. From there I move into an analysis of the three different adaptations of Pantera and the implications these transformations have on the character’s subjectivity in terms of race, class, and subalternity. These facets of Pantera’s identity are in turn contextualized within the space of Mexico City and the aesthetic practices that the comic and television adaptations employ to represent the city. I explore these representations of Mexico City through the lens of noir aesthetics and the poetics of Classical Mexican Cinema styles as detailed by Charles Ramírez Berg. These visions of Mexico City as a signifying space for El Pantera locate him as both a hero and a bandit, a threat to state sanctioned social order, and I develop a discussion about the bio- and necro-politics of the precarious nexus of the bandit/hero. Finally, I identify the locus

of Pantera's role in Mexico's cultural imaginary as that of the *homo sacer* as described by Giorgio Agamben, but I propose that the realm of bare life and the *homo sacer* can be a site of resistance in Pantera's Mexico City – that as he is stripped of his citizenship and humanity and that he is also placed in a space outside the power of the state where he can undermine its corrupt power and authority.

In order to complete this analysis, I refer to Giorgio Agamben's text *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* and to clarify these references I would like to establish the usage of the terms *bare life* and *homo sacer* as they will appear throughout this chapter. Bare life exists as natural human life becomes politicized, and life's very inclusion into the political system must reduce that natural life to bare life or political life. This means it becomes a life that can be acted upon by the sovereign power with death. According to Agamben, Roman law originally constituted life only as the counterpoint to the law's power to threaten death over the citizen (87). Political life then necessitates that each citizen exist with "an unconditional capacity to be killed" (85) and that "*life exposed to death (bare life or sacred life) is the originary political element*" (88). A contradictory feature to this establishment of bare life is the possibility of what Agamben calls the *homo sacer*. The *homo sacer*, or sacred man, resides within a contradiction or a state of exception. This exception consists of the individual who can be killed by anyone without them being identified as a homicide or being punished by the sovereign power for this action, yet at the same time this individual is identified as one who should not be killed. In this way that individual is placed outside the realm of law. Agamben explains "The contradiction is even more pronounced when one considers that the person whom anyone could kill with

impunity was nevertheless not to be put to death according to ritual practices” (72) and that the specificity of the homo sacer is “*the unpunishability of his killing and the ban on his sacrifice*” (73). This places him outside both human and divine law. Throughout this chapter I analyze the narratives of *El Pantera* as popular culture imaginings of how the Mexican state creates a homo sacer in Pantera as well as how he maneuvers and negotiates the identity of the homo sacer to subvert and harshly challenge the state.

I. Militarization and Zero-Tolerance Policing in Neoliberal Mexico City

In 2002 Mexico City's Secretaria de Seguridad Publica del Distrito Federal invested over \$4 million dollars in having the Giuliani Group LLC investigate and diagnose the capital's notorious crime problems (Weiner 2003). The *Giuliani Report on Mexico City* provided 146 recommendations on criminal policy as well as an elaborate geo-referencial delinquency tracking computer program called Compstat (Lagunas 2008). The implementation of these recommendations, which included James Wilson and George Kelling's broken-windows theory, brought zero tolerance policing into full force in Mexico City and this meant reconsidering "the whole management of public urban spaces on the basis of the celebrated broken-window theory, thereby removing every sign of urban decay from some core spaces, such as the subway, the inner city and some upper middle-class residential areas" (Campesi 459). But this re-structuring of Mexico City police work and urban space are not the only sectors of society that have been affected by increases to what neoliberalism terms "security." Since the 1980s when the Mexican president Miguel de la Madrid recognized drug trafficking as a national security threat each subsequent

administration has increased the presence of military policing of civilians. Gustavo Fondevila and Miguel Quintana-Navarrete provide a concise review of the increase of military personnel involved in the so-called War on Drugs: "in the 1960s, some 300 active military members were assigned to crop eradication; by the late 1970s, the number had risen to 5000; by 1987, crop eradication involved 25,000 military personnel (Serrano and Toro, 2002: 160-161). According to Solís (2009: 75), in 2009, a total of 45,000 army personnel participated in Calderón's monthly *operativos*" (521). These processes of urban control and the efforts by the military in the War on Drugs have functioned parallel to one another to create "a complete militarization of urban spaces" and the implementation of "the repressive management of social marginality known as *zero-tolerance policing*" (Campesi 457). The militarization of urban spaces and zero-tolerance policing contribute to the impunity with which state forces act upon Mexico's citizens, these reforms expanded military and police power over civilians to the extent that in many cases "the very survival of these people now depends in full on the discretion of police officials" (460). This statement is reminiscent of Foucault's declaration in *The History of Sexuality* about the politicization of life: "modern man is an animal whose politics call his existence as a living being into question" (143). The politicization of security and urban space in Mexico City, and across the nation in general, has been negotiated in terms of neoliberal investments and the protection of capital that would be exemplified through such events as the visit of Rudolph Giuliani to Mexico at the behest of Carlos Slim, who offered to pay Giuliani's \$4.3 million consulting fee. These attempts of increasing "security" simultaneously have brought about the zero-tolerance policing conditions that blur the boundaries between

security and death. When the security and protection of capital meets the bare life of the Mexican citizen that is seen as undeserving of life, with the police as the judge, jury, and executioner, then Agamben's description of the modern state's mixing of politics and death can be seen in full play:

If there is a line in every modern state marking the point at which the decision on life becomes a decision on death, and biopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics, this line no longer appears today as a stable border dividing two clearly distinct zones. This line is now in motion and gradually moving into areas other than that of political life, areas in which the sovereign is entering into an even more intimate symbiosis not only with the jurist but also with the doctor, the scientist, the expert, and the priest. (122)

And in the case of Mexico we might add "the telecommunications mogul" and "the North American mayor" to Agamben's list of actors that are becoming incorporated into the widening bio- and necro-political realm as capital pushes these boundaries ever farther. These conditions create a realm of bare life, or of a camp, according to Agamben in which the marginalized citizens of Mexico City are excluded from the protections of political life and citizenship where they exist as exceptions, as *homines sacri*. In this chapter I propose a reading of the pop culture text *El Pantera* as a means of understanding this precarious situation, as a cultural text that imagines how the Mexican state uses the condition of bare life against its citizens and the seeming inevitability of military intervention as a means of societal control in the Mexican popular imaginary.

While dealing with the bio-political implications of *El Pantera*'s narrative there are also multiple layers of adaptation and aesthetics that influence my analysis of Pantera as a pop culture reference to Mexico's criminal imaginary. The processes of adaptation and the aesthetics deployed in these various versions of *El Pantera* will form and inform my approach as to how this cultural product critiques, subverts, and even supports Mexico's recent history of crime, drug-trafficking, and police and political corruption.

II. Pantera's Creators and Publication

Daniel Muñoz Martínez was a prolific, yet not widely known, comic script writer. His most noted works are *Kendor, el hombre del Tíbet* and *El Pantera*. He was born July 21, 1938 in Mexico City's Colonia Obrera and began his career in 1966 writing for *Sucesos para todos*. Muñoz wrote for a substantial list of publications including: *Diario de la tarde*, *Excélsior*, and *El Heraldo de México*. In 1967 he began his work with Editorial Argumentos under the direction of Yolanda Vargas Dulché, who was known as "La Reina de las Historietas" ["The Queen of Comics"]. Muñoz continued to work with Editorial Argumentos for over thirty years during which time he collaborated on the production of titles such as *Mini Leyendas*, *Mini Policiaca*, *Mini Terror*, *Mini Aventuras*, and *Muertes Trágicas* among others (*Lo mejor de El Pantera* #1 97). His character El Pantera first appeared in *Super Mini* #40 in 1971 and was originally illustrated by Juan Alba. By 1980 El Pantera had become popular enough to fill his own comic book with covers by Guillermo Peimbert and stories illustrated by Alberto Maldonado (*Lo mejor de El Pantera* #3). *El Pantera* ran for some fifteen years and in the nineties Muñoz published two novels

based on Pantera's origin story and his adventures in the world of wrestling. In 2001 Editorial Vid began to republish Muñoz's Pantera comics under the title *Lo mejor de El Pantera* with a run of some 150 issues. In recognition of his work Muñoz received an honorary diploma from the Círculo de Tlacuilos in 1983 and a year later was awarded a Tlacuilo for best comic book script writer (*Lo mejor de El Pantera* #3 97).

Grupo Editorial Vid, previously Editorial Argumentos (EDAR), published *El Pantera* as part of its line of national Mexican comics. Editorial Argumentos, the precursor to Grupo Editorial Vid, was founded by Guillermo de la Parra and Yolanda Vargas Dulché in 1955 and by 1976 they "captured about 23 percent of the market with sixteen titles" (Hinds and Tatum 8). Vid held distribution licenses from both Marvel and DC Comics during the 1990s and was able to produce hugely popular national titles such as *Lagrimas, risas y amor*, as well. Eventually Vid went on to obtain licenses for many Japanese manga titles before finally losing the licenses for Marvel in 2005 and DC Comics in 2011 and closing its distribution centers that same year. Although Grupo Editorial Vid is no more it is still remembered as one of Mexico's largest and culturally most important comic publishers. In 1995 Vid, under the direction of Manelick de la Parra, organized one of the largest comic conventions in the nation. This event was titled El MECyF which stood for "modelismo estético, ciencia ficción y fantasía" and was held in Mexico City's World Trade Center from 1996 to 1998. This event brought special guests such as Dennis O'Neil, Dan Jurgens, Jon Bogdanove, and Todd McFarlane to interact with and influence both fans and comic creators in Mexico (Martínez).

III. Three Panteras: Adaptations and Transformations Through Historieta, Novel, and Television

Here I analyze three different versions of the character El Pantera. Since his original appearance in comic form Pantera has been adapted into two novels and a television series. I will address each of these versions briefly here and provide close readings of these adaptations later in the chapter. As noted previously, El Pantera originally appeared in the publication *Super Mini* in 1971. Daniel Muñoz created the character and during this period El Pantera was illustrated by Juan Alba. From this early version Pantera's distinguishing visual characteristics were established: dark hair with an iconic white streak, dark skin with indigenous features, and green eyes. By 1980 Pantera was given his own weekly comic series by Editorial Vid and the artist Alberto Maldonado took over as illustrator. While Maldonado illustrated the stories of each issue, the artist Guillermo Peimbert produced the cover art for the comic during its fifteen years of publication. Thus the most recognizable and iconic images of El Pantera should be attributed to the Peimbert & Maldonado team. Maldonado maintained much of Juan Alba's original character design but increased his musculature and height, and created a consistent facial structure that emphasizes Pantera's indigenous traits. In the weekly comic series Pantera is identified as a ranchero that visits Mexico City to fight crime. He often works for the General Porfirio Alaya who requests that Pantera infiltrate criminal organizations in the city. In other issues of the comic Pantera becomes involved in various adventures to help his friends or in the pursuit of women. The majority of these stories are self-contained within one issue of the comic and do not maintain an overarching narrative. The comic version of Pantera has been the iteration of

the character that has had the most impact culturally, and this is primarily due to the more than fifteen-year length of its publication run. The Alberto Maldonado and Guillermo Peimbert vision of Pantera is considered the purest version of the character amongst commenters on Pantera fan pages and blogs.

Near the end of the weekly comic's publication by Editorial Vid, Daniel Muñoz published a novel exploring Pantera's backstory. The 1994 novel was aptly titled *El Pantera* and developed the history of Gervasio Robles before he began his comic book adventures. Without Alberto Maldonado to illustrate the streets of Mexico City, Daniel Muñoz shines as a pulp novelist in his ability to describe the urban settings, cabarets, and brothels of the 1970s Distrito Federal. Muñoz clarifies Pantera's indigenous heritage: "Mi verdadero nombre es Gervasio Robles Villa. Nací bastardo, hijo de un norteco, un regiomontano, pues, y de una india oaxaqueña. Por eso soy un indio de ojos verdes: heredé los de mi padre" ["My real name is Gervasio Robles Villa. I was born a bastard, son of a northern from Monterrey and an Indian from Oaxaca. That's why I'm an Indian with green eyes: I inherited them from my father." (*El Pantera* 26)]. At the beginning of the novel Pantera confronts his possible death and as his life flashes before his eyes Muñoz explains how Gervasio Robles Villa came to be known as El Pantera. The novelistic version of Pantera explores the character's connection with Mexico City, the police, organized crime, and how he came to be an urban hero prior to the adventures shown in the comic series of the 1980s. The narration of the novel is told through Pantera's point of view and thus he becomes a more robust individual with ideas about the role of Keynesian economics in Mexico, the preservation of Mexico's cultural heritage, and the part the Mexican military

should play in dealing with organized crime. Muñoz's 1994 novel culminates in Pantera defeating the Mexico City crime boss Bella Diana with the assistance of General Alaya and the Mexican military. In the novels Muñoz proposes a solution to police corruption, drug trafficking, and prostitution which I will discuss in more detail in this chapter. After the publication of *El Pantera* in 1994 Daniel Muñoz wrote another Pantera novel in 1997 that explored machismo, lucha libre, and the dangers of feminism to Mexican society titled *El Pantera, en: el misterio de la Amenaza Negra*. This second novel is a type of *comedia de enredos* that tells the story of Pantera's investigation into the disappearance of a singer who ran away from his nagging wife and took on the disguise of a famous luchador. While this novel presents ample material for critical analysis I will not be discussing this text as its connections to the comic and television version of El Pantera are extremely limited. I think it is sufficient for this introduction to the character to say that this novel does not significantly develop Pantera as a character but rather, in my opinion, was Daniel Muñoz's exploration into writing a comedic story that involved the world of wrestling.

In 2007 Televisa brought Daniel Muñoz's Pantera to television. The series, produced by Rodolfo de Anda and Alexis Alaya, ran a total of forty-one episodes over three seasons. The series reimaged *El Pantera* in a contemporary Mexico City and paid homage to the character's comic book origins with animated scene transitions, unique lighting techniques, and stylized editing, which will be analyzed in detail later in this chapter. The first season of the television series loosely follows the origin story of Gervasio Robles Villa as told in the 1994 novel, but by the end of the season the writers had moved the story in a completely original direction and seasons two and three represent storylines

that deal more with current events in Mexico (international drug trafficking, cartel wars, and DEA agents) than with the type of adventures Pantera had in the comics or novels. One of the most significant changes brought to the character was the image of Pantera himself. The enduring Maldonado and Peimbert image from the comics and even the covers of the novels was revamped causing longtime fans to reject the Televisa version of the iconic hero. Televisa cast the Puerto Rican actor Luis Roberto Guzmán, best known for his work on Mexican telenovelas, as El Pantera. The changes to the temporal setting of the series as well as the casting of a non-indigenous person in the role of Pantera caused significant changes to be made to the entire narrative of the first season and to many of the characters in the series. The impact of these changes will be discussed in this chapter as well.

In 2015 the English author Warren Ellis and Universal Cable Productions in collaboration with Televisa USA announced that they will produce a US adaptation of *El Pantera* (Hipes). While few details are currently known about the North American version it has been reported that the action will be moved from Mexico City to a fictional US/Mexico bordertown where a recently appointed chief of police will help a friend fake his own death in order to become El Pantera and to rid their town of crime. This version of Pantera will surely play a part in my future research and writing as the shifts in language, location, and race will inevitably bring about new circumstances that will be fruitful for analysis. The multiple versions of Pantera that these adaptations have produced bring about questions in relation to the identity and subjectivity of the protagonist as he has changed from a comic book illustration into the Puerto Rican actor Luis Roberto Guzmán.

IV. Pantera's Adventures in Racial Adaptation

El Pantera is frequently identified as an "indio" or "campesino" by other characters, especially those that occupy positions of economic or social power over him. The comics present readers with a hero that is neither mestizo nor indigenous but rather a hero labelled "indio" which carries with it a certain level of cultural disdain and prejudice. Thus Gervasio Robles, the hero of the comic, can be considered a subaltern character. Pantera's story begins when he is falsely imprisoned by corrupt police. While in prison he was instructed by an "asiático que le enseñó Artes Marciales" ["Asian that taught him martial arts"] (*Lo mejor de El Pantera* #3), and after using his new found Wu-Shu skills to defend himself from multiple assassins General Alaya takes notice of Pantera's abilities and innocence and offers him a deal: the general will get him out of prison "bajo la condición de que iba a combatir el crimen de una forma extra oficial" ["with the condition that he was going to fight crime in an extra-legal form"] (*Lo mejor de El Pantera* #3) Although this sounds like a generous proposal by the state it is clear that if Pantera does not accept it he will be returned to prison where he will eventually be killed by his enemies. Finally, "Gervasio aceptó, ya que no tenía opción" ["Gervasio accepted, since he didn't have any other option"] (Ibid). The position of Pantera as an indigenous protagonist turns into a cultural dichotomy: on the one hand racial discrimination against Pantera can be seen in his being blamed for a homicide he did not commit. The colonial thought that the "indians" are savages is reflected in this scenario. On the other hand, General Alaya seeks out the help of El Pantera to fight against police corruption that they are unable to control through official means. Yet the indigenous hero is still denied the honor of protecting the nation's

capital city since the state's representatives did not give him a choice in the matter; "ya que no tenía opción." The relationship between the "indian" and the state thus becomes either service or death. Although *El Pantera* may subvert hegemonic expectations by presenting an indigenous hero this very presentation comes at the cost of his liberty and life; Pantera's social position in the text can then be found at the nexus of indianism and indigenism.

On May 14th, 2007 Televisa premiered "Regreso a casa", the first episode of its television adaptation of *El Pantera*. The TV adaptation, directed by Alejandro Gamboa, followed the plot of the of its comic precursor but with a few serious alterations. The most immediate and notable change was in the appearance of the show's titular hero, El Pantera. Instead of casting an indigenous actor the role was given to the Puerto Rican actor Luis Roberto Guzmán, who's casting represented a whitewashing of Pantera's appearance and by extension of his social contextualization. Pantera's whitening changes the dynamic of his interactions with his environment and the other characters, and likewise it erases the possibility of using the original plot of the comic to present an indigenous hero to a national and international public. As Robert Stam's discussion of the foundational performances of the first African-American actors in Hollywood points out, "Performance itself intimated liberatory possibilities" (274). This same concept applies to Televisa's decision to eliminate the indigenous identity of it's version of *El Pantera*. By erasing the performance of an indigenous actor in the role of Gervasio Robles it made putting an indigenous identity in a position of visibility impossible, and thereby eliminating the potential to break stereotypes and create a "resistant performance" against Mexican television's hegemonic standards

(274). Although the main character's identity was whitewashed, the presence of indigenous identity was manifested in a new character developed for Televisa's adaptation: El Indio.

El Pantera, both the comics and television series, can function as national allegories for Mexico, and in particular for the Distrito Federal. This being the case it appears that Televisa attempted to maintain some sort of indigenous themes running in its TV adaptation. In the comic version the protagonist learned martial arts from an Asian man (named "El Chino") while in prison, but in the television adaptation a character carrying another vague racial epithet instructs Pantera in the ways of martial arts, El Indio. The transferal of indigenous identity from the main character to his mentor maintains the appearance of concern for indigenous representation but it, in reality, denies the program the power to resolve or even develop it at all. At the end of the first episode, El Indio appears in General Alaya's office and it is revealed that the two of them are working together to prepare Pantera for some unknown event before "el quinto sol" ["the fifth sun"] is extinguished. This vague reference to Mexico's indigenous traditions seems to start a storyline with an indigenous theme in the show, and yet, by the fifth episode this plot vanishes from the series.

Another character that was invented for the television series is El Mandril. A cursory glance at the characters reveals that El Mandril was given Pantera's physical appearance from the comics. The actor Gerardo Taracena plays the role of El Mandril, and his part in Mel Gibson's 2006 film *Apocalypto* is not insignificant. Taracena's acting trajectory brings the image of an Aztec warrior and then transforms it into that of a Chilango drug trafficker in *El Pantera*. El Mandril seems to be an aesthetic representation

and filmic homage to Pantera's physical qualities as they originally appeared in the comic. Between El Indio and El Mandril the original image of Pantera is transferred to the television series, but in this translation of indigenous characteristics the image of an indigenous hero is reduced to a mystic stereotype (in El Indio) and a delinquent profile (in El Mandril). This manipulation of indigenous representation transforms the comic's original hero into a sort of decorative figure at the cost of his actual identity.

V. Subaltern Identities and Mexico City as Pantera's Field of Signification

Pantera's indigenous identity is more than a decoration in the original comic series. The protagonist's physical characteristics are central to the structure of many of the comic's narratives and they become intertwined with Mexico City as a contextualizing force. The interplay between Pantera's race, social class, and the city situate him as a subaltern figure. Here I do not want to leave Pantera's description as subaltern as a vague statement but prefer to use Homi Bhabha's definition which includes space for subversion and resistance. He states that subaltern persons or groups are "oppressed, minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group: subaltern social groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power" (210). Pantera can be considered as a subaltern character in at least two ways: first, he is not considered to be part of the dominant white/mestizo culture of Mexico City. He is racially identified by others as "indigenous," and, secondly, he is labeled as a criminal, a felon, an ex-con. This constitutes Pantera as both a subaltern subject as well as a sort of anti-hero whose adventures are directly linked to the Mexican *Distrito Federal* and contemporary inner-

city crime. Precisely the type of crime the fictional General Alaya and the very real Rudy Giuliani have both been hired to fight against in Mexico City.

Pantera's story begins when he is falsely imprisoned by corrupt police, but in a twist of fate Mexico City's chief of police, General Alaya, helps him escape from prison in exchange for Pantera's promise to work as an unofficial agent of the state to monitor internal corruption and to infiltrate criminal networks. Due to his subaltern racial status, and because Gervasio is perceived as a criminal, he is particularly suited to these types of activities. How his race is perceived by other characters in the comic series is central to the plot and to how Pantera functions culturally. These facets of his identity provide him access to drug cartels, prostitution rings, and counterfeiting operations, among other criminal spaces in Mexico City.

The narrative of *El Pantera* is contextualized by the urban space of Mexico City – an environment where both the extremes of wealth and poverty can be seen and crimes range from white-collar fraud and corruption to petty theft and loitering on the streets. The urban space of Mexico City inscribes upon Pantera certain expectations because of his ethnic and social identity. The city itself becomes instrumental to Pantera's activities and success. The city's contextualizing power can be seen in many comics, and in particular in popular North American superhero comics. For examples, Gotham City, and all its crime, creates Batman's origin – the city itself generates the need and space for the Dark Knight. In the Marvel universe New York City is the source of villains and heroes, who both use the advances of modernity to become super powered. Jason Bainbridge points out interesting connections between comic book heroes and the cities they inhabit in the

following way: “Marvel’s superheroes are [...] products of the city but they are ‘super’ in that they can transcend those limitations (of gridlock, crime, and other urban constraints) that the city places on the rest of us” (168) and that they are “the very definition of the Silver Age superhero, ordinary people – like Peter Parker, Matt Murdock, or Bruce Banner – affected by ‘modernity’” (166). Yet, in the case of *El Pantera*, things don’t run parallel to this North American description. He does not have any super powers and yet he is a product of the city and affected by modernity just like the famous, North American, heroes mentioned above. The unique characteristics that Mexico City bestows upon Gervasio Robles are that he can maneuver the city and its criminal organizations in ways that others cannot. In a sense his subalternity is his power (as contradictory as that may sound). Without the city and its culture as context Pantera’s actions, his subalternity, his banditry, and heroism would be incomprehensible. We can see Pantera’s body and how it is reacted to by others in the city as symbolic of Mexico’s uneven modernization that makes indigenous populations and individuals incongruent with the national present.

The creation of this subaltern antihero in *El Pantera* is aided by the fact that readers can both textually and visually interact with the character and his environment through the medium of the comic. In the first issue of *Lo mejor de El Pantera* the protagonist is assigned to work as a driver for a rich foreign business mogul that the chief of police suspects of producing counterfeit money. When General Alaya decides to send Pantera to work with the counterfeiters as an undercover agent the comic shows an aerial view of downtown Mexico City, locating this crime and action within the context of contemporary Mexican urbanity and within a represented real space that would be recognizable to local readers of

the *historieta*. This creates a link between the action of the comic and the everyday lived experiences of the readers. Traditionally, in Mexican comic publishing practices, editors that worked with the genre of detective or crime comics had strict guidelines in place to avoid censorship and criticism. One important editor of detective comics made “certain that stories do not deal with Mexican politics, and that the fundamental message, ‘crime does not pay,’ is incorporated” and it was also suggested that “stories should take place outside Mexico” (Hinds and Tatum 189). Both Daniel Muñoz and Alberto Maldonado ignored these guidelines and placed the action of *El Pantera* at the very heart of Mexico City, and they often included political, economic, and social references in their narratives and illustrations. With the city as his context Pantera was able to infiltrate the counterfeiting operation thanks to his subaltern appearance. When Pantera meets his new boss, Antonio Luadi, the rich criminal thinks to himself “Es un indio, un campesino. No se ve muy inteligente. Más bien diría que tiene cara de cretino” [“He’s an Indian, a peasant. He doesn’t look very intelligent. I’d say he has face of cretin”] (*Lo mejor de El Patnera #1 30*). The translation



Figure 15. Pantera's enemies use racial slurs against him, and uzis.

doesn't do this passage justice, the words *indio* and *campesino* can be racially and intellectually derogatory and insulting terms in Mexican Spanish that insinuate that Pantera must be too ignorant, because of his race, to catch on to the criminal activities that will be going on behind the scenes while he works as a chauffeur. Antonio Luadi's prejudice is his weakness against Pantera. Even once Pantera has discovered the location of the counterfeiting operation and informed General Alaya, the villains continue to belittle him by calling him "indio apestoso" ["a stinking Indian"] (92).

In another issued, titled "Servidumbre del vicio", Pantera is called upon to locate and stop a group of drug traffickers, and once again his subaltern characteristics change the course of events. When Pantera enters the office of the French opium distributor he is stereotyped as a *pistolero* or gunman with a face that gives this fact away. On the way out Pantera is recognized by one of his enemy's henchmen and he informs his boss that he knows Pantera from prison. The protagonist's phenotype and his criminal history have

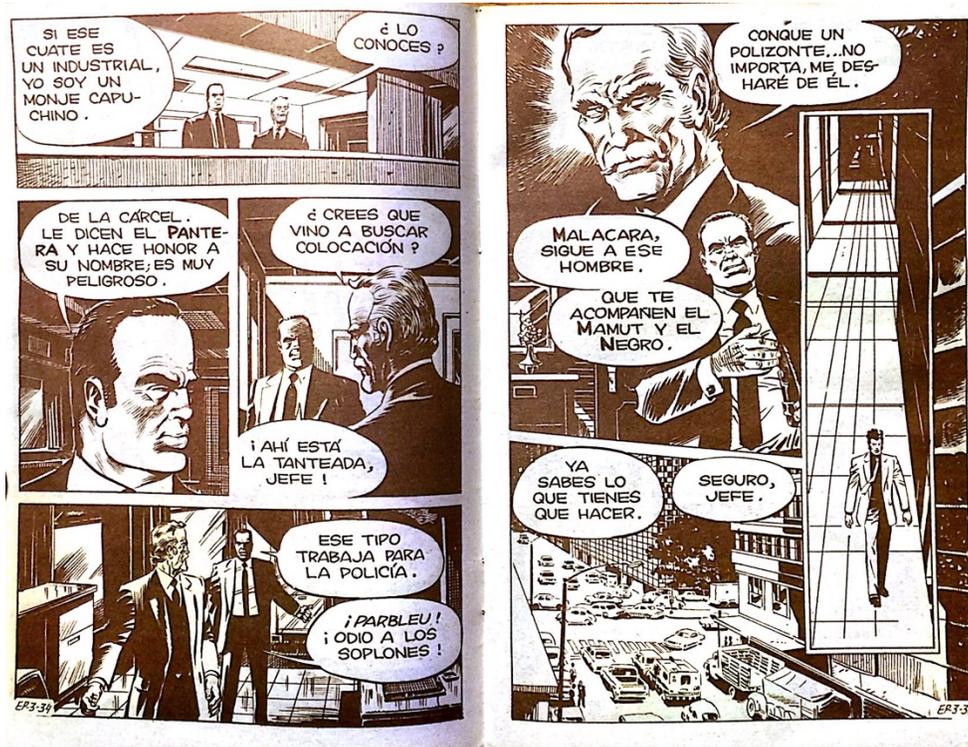


Figure 16. Pantera's identity as a felon is revealed.

given him away and three thugs follow him with the intention of eliminating him so that he cannot cause any problems for their drug trafficking in the future. After Pantera makes one of the henchmen stab himself with his own knife, breaks another's trachea in two, and tortures the third, he finds out where the traffickers are stockpiling their heroine and leads the police to the hideout. In each of Pantera's adventures his physical appearance and his criminal history (although he was falsely accused) come into play in the urban landscape of Mexico City. What is so unique about this is that the medium of the comic makes all these features immediately visible. The combination of sequential art and written text provides an abundance of information. The contextualization of *El Pantera* within Mexico City makes the conflicts and storylines of the *historieta* readable as critiques and commentaries on the preoccupations and concerns of both the creators of the comic series

as well as the readers. Likewise, the artistic style of Alberto Maldonado's illustrations depicts Mexico City through a dark and noir aesthetic "which [creates] a world that is never stable or safe, that is always threatening to change drastically and unexpectedly" (Place and Peterson 68). The representation of Mexico's capital city as a noir urban space full of criminals and violence reveals much about the way Muñoz and Maldonado, and their readers, perceived the city in the early 1980s – a space of false progress, a wasteland of unrealized (post)modern dreams where the future is anxiously imagined but exposed as impossible to achieve by the decadent, black-and-white present of the noir aesthetic (Dimendberg 3).

Pantera moves and works within Mexico City as a subaltern subject and a bandit/hero capable of catching the criminal (and corrupt officials) that the local police are incapable of apprehending. Gervasio Robles is not a super hero; if anything he is an anti-hero who would be considered by the large majority of the population to have no place in the city. He is constantly identified as an *indio* or *campesino* which express the idea that he belongs in a rural setting far from the "civilized" city. In addition, Pantera is considered a criminal that should be in prison (or dead), and does not deserve to walk the streets of Mexico City freely, but these two subaltern aspects of his character are what allow him to be heroic, to subvert the city, to fool the criminals and police alike. The city itself becomes instrumental to Pantera's character because it makes his identity both subaltern and heroic. Julio Ramos explained, "It is necessary to think of the space of the city, rather, as the field of signification itself [...]. From this perspective, the city would not only be a passive 'context' of signification, but rather the crystallization of the distribution of the very limits,

articulations, courses and aporias that constitute the field determined by signification” (156). In the case of Daniel Muñoz’s comic series *El Pantera*, Mexico City is the field of signification that gives meaning to the protagonist, his identity, his actions, and his status as both subaltern and hero. Just like there would be no Batman without Gotham City so there could be no Pantera without Mexico City. Each action he takes is determined by the city and interacts with the urban space. Comics are particularly suited to show in a concrete way these interactions between individuals and the spaces they inhabit.

Daniel Muñoz and Alberto Maldonado’s *El Pantera* series shows the unique ways that comics can deploy, textually and visually, the relationships between urban spaces, subaltern subjects, and (anti)heroes. Because comics combine sequential art and text they provide a powerful medium for the study of how cities are visually represented, how their inhabitants are perceived within the signifying field of the city, and how a hero can be created within those urban spaces. Pantera is no traditional hero, [as analyzed previously in this chapter], since his power comes precisely from his subaltern status, but as Homi Bhabha wrote, “subaltern social groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power” (210). While Pantera was seen as less by the other characters in the comic, that position allowed him a sort of subversive power over those in authority – the point that this brings to light is that if Pantera is to fight those who have power over him, the comic is revealing that in Mexico City those in power are the drug traffickers, the money counterfeiters, the pimps, and the corrupt police and politicians. Daniel Muñoz and Alberto Maldonado found a clever way to point out contemporary problems in Mexico City and provide a hero for the city that functioned within that context

or signifying field. In the following section I analyze how the city as a field of signification is represented aesthetically and the implications its depiction can have in regards to an understanding of the narrative of Pantera's mission to save the Distrito Federal.

VI. The Noir and Classical Mexican Cinematic Aesthetics of Pantera's Mexico City

Sitting in his digital, city-wide pan-opticon, the General Porfirio Alaya looks over fourteen black and white screens displaying surveillance footage of the Distrito Federal's national monuments: El Ángel de la Reforma, La Diana Cazadora, El Palacio de Bellas Artes, and El Gran Zócalo. General Alaya keeps watch over his city through these flickering screens. Captain Ramos escorts in the recently escaped convict El Pantera. General Alaya explains to Pantera that it was HE who helped him escape from prison, and that he would allow him to remain free only if he assists the General with putting his

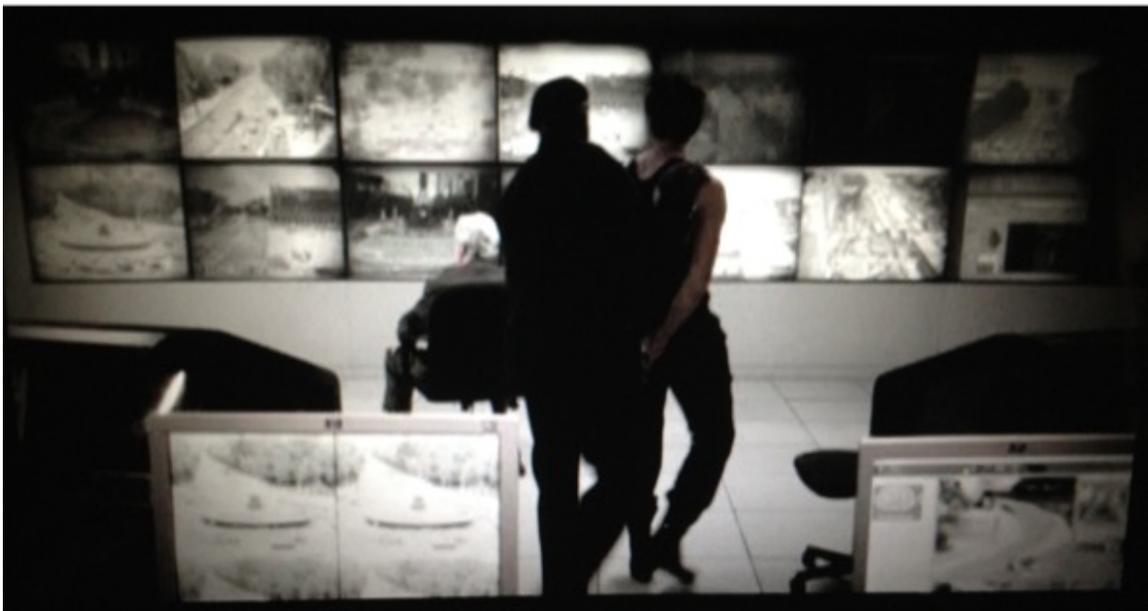


Figure 17. Pantera is forced into working for the state to fight police and political corruption. Here he observes General Alaya's surveillance hub.

house in order - as he gestures to the surveillance footage of the city. Pantera accepts General Alaya's conditions and quickly adds "pero yo no soy policía" ["but I'm no cop"]. This scene, at the end of the first episode of Televisa's 2007 adaptation of Daniel Muñoz's comic, succinctly reveals the many intersections of national memory, state power, and criminality that are at play in *El Pantera*. The interactions of El Pantera with the monumental urban cityscapes of Mexico City create an opening for the analysis of how a criminalized unofficial agent of the state can function as a local hero that both conforms to and subverts official state power within the context of Mexico's Distrito Federal. In this section an analysis of the noir aesthetics of *El Pantera* and the function of a national hero in juxtaposition to the monumental sites of national memory depicted in the TV series will develop a critique of the ambiguous nature of state power, heroism, and banditry.

From the title sequence of the program, *El Pantera* references the black and white, smooth-line pulp aesthetic of its comic predecessor. Not only did Televisa creatively adapt the visual style of the comic to the TV screen but they also took care to locate the action of the series in the urban space of Mexico City. Muñoz and the illustrator Alberto Maldonado included detailed drawings of iconic locations from Mexico City in their comic, and Televisa reproduced this feature of the *historieta*. The noir aesthetic that is used in both versions of *El Pantera* creates a unique vision of Mexico City that communicates at the same time a sense of longing and nostalgia for a past that promised a European, progressive future (as seen in the Eurocentric architecture of the Mexican capital) and the acknowledgement that this past project was never achieved, as revealed by the present.

The first step in analyzing this unachieved national program is to consider how *El Pantera* depicts the Distrito Federal's urban space and national monuments through the unique aesthetic of film noir. Following an analysis of the noir reading of these scenes and spaces I will suggest an approach that looks at Classical Mexican Cinema's influence of these same scenes and aesthetics in order to read them from a traditionally Mexican cinematic perspective. At least three specific aspects of the noir aesthetic that are notable in *El Pantera* are the stark "low-key" lighting, the anti-traditional use of wide-angle lenses to create a greater depth of field, and the arrangement of unsettling mise-en-scène. Janey Place and Lowell Peterson explain that, "Nearly every attempt to define *film noir* has agreed that visual style is the consistent thread that unites the very diverse films that together comprise this phenomenon" (65). The low-key lighting effect is created by manipulating the traditional three light system that normally consists of a key light as the primary source of lighting, a fill light which is used to eliminate shadows created by the key light, and finally a back light. In film noir the fill light is almost completely eliminated to generate opposition between light and dark which "[hides] faces, rooms, urban landscapes - and, by extension, motivations and true character - in shadow and darkness which carry connotations of the mysterious and the unknown" (66). Not only does the manipulation of the lighting change the way characters appear upon the urban landscapes, but also the use of a larger depth of field with wide-angle camera lenses has "the effect of drawing the viewer into the picture, of including him in the world of the film and thus rendering emotional or dramatic events more immediate" (67). In the case of *El Pantera*, Mexico City becomes an urban space full of iconic national monuments that take on an unsettling

and mysterious urgency. Their nationalist and historical messages are obscured and ideas of national unity and identity are ominously called into question with portions of these monuments being hidden from view by off-center, unsettling *mise-en-scènes* - insinuating the incompleteness of the revolutionary national project.

The effect that this noir aesthetic has upon the cityscape, and its sites of Mexican national heritage in particular, can be seen in the episode titled "Prestamistas" in which a corrupt police officer extorts protection money from individuals and businesses in Pantera's barrio, La Colonia Obrera. In an attempt to get more money out of Lola (Pantera's friend and eventual love interest), the corrupt officer kidnaps her, and Pantera orchestrates an elaborate rescue and arrest after a laughable chase scene between Pantera on a bicycle and the kidnapper in a car. The representatives of official state power, General Alaya and a blockade of police cars with sirens flashing, pose majestically in front of the Palacio de Bellas Artes in a night-for-night shot that creates the feeling that "small areas of light seem on the verge of being completely overwhelmed by the darkness that now threatens them from all side" (67). The French-inspired neoclassical building is a site of national identity that houses murals by Diego Rivera and Siquieros, but under the



Figure 18. Captain Ramos and General Alaya pose in front of the Palacio de Bellas Artes.

influence of the noir aesthetic and as the location of an overly exaggerated display of state power the Palacio de Bellas Artes represents a failed past national project that is now darkened by the harsh reality of an overgrown, post-modern megalopolis where state power is only a show and real power is wielded outside of the state by unofficial actors, such as El Pantera. With the darkened Palacio de Bellas Artes as the monumental backdrop, Pantera violently beats the corrupt police officer as the Chief of Police and an array of other officers look on as the only real form of justice is served - the unimpeded and blatant violence of a criminal exercised against the corrupt representative of state power. This completely staged encounter between the unofficial agent of the state (El Pantera), the corrupt police officer, and General Alaya points to one of the tropes of the film noir genre: the actions that take place in the noir atmosphere happen in "a world in which power

relations [can] still be traced with relative ease" (Dimendberg 4). Pantera thus becomes the only agent with power to change the dark and decaying urban space of Mexico City while General Alaya is powerless to even arrest the corrupt officer that was just so spectacularly apprehended due to a lack of evidence. The national system of justice completely fails, but Pantera provides extra-official vengeance in order to give it the appearance of functionality, and in noir stories appearances are often deceiving. The low-angle of the camera, reminiscent of Emilio Fernández and Gabriel Figueroa's iconic style, portrays the state as heroic and as part of a national heritage as it is staged in front of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, yet this image of power is pure artifice, the true hero of Mexico City is the unofficial agent of the state, El Pantera.

While reading this particular scene in terms of noir aesthetics opens it to interpretation as a vision of the lamentable state of Mexico's impotent and corrupt system of justice, I would like to propose another reading that approaches the aesthetics of this scene in *El Pantera* from a uniquely Mexican perspective. I believe it is clear that the aesthetic vision of Televisa's adaption of *El Pantera* relied upon noir stylizing that was reflected in the comic's pulp illustrations, but those characteristics that can be identified as particularly noir can be found in Mexican cinema and even have a uniquely Mexican vision and history associated with them as well. The acclaimed Mexican filmmaker Emilio Fernández (1904-1986) developed a cinematic vision of Mexico that has impacted the nation's cinema ever since. It is important to note that Fernández alone should not be credited for the creation of this style of Mexican cinema. As Charles Ramírez Berg points out in his book *The Classical Mexican Cinema*, Fernández's most esteemed films should

be considered "the product of an efficient, closely knit filmmaking group - the Fernández film unit - rather than crediting them solely to Fernández, as is the usual practice, or, occasionally, to the team of Fernández and Figueroa" (94). The Fernández Unit as described by Ramírez Berg consisted of the director Emilio Fernández, the editor Gloria Schoemann (1910-2006), the unit's screenwriter Mauricio Magdaleno (1906-1986), and the internationally recognized cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa (1907-1997). In his detailed analysis of the poetics of the Fernández Unit, Ramírez Berg draws a parallel between the visual styles of noir filmmakers and the Fernández Unit's aesthetics: "In the U.S., numerous films noir used darkness and shadow to portray a treacherous worldview. Around the same time as the Fernández Unit was producing its best work, several Hollywood filmmakers, including John Ford, Orson Welles, William Wyler, and Anthony Mann, were making extensive use of the extreme foregrounding of characters, low-key lighting, and low camera angles" (105-106). But Ramírez Berg goes on to emphasize that "no Mexican or Hollywood filmmaker combined *all* of the formal elements listed here, or used them as insistently and consistently as the Fernández unit did during its extraordinary seven-year run" (106). According to Ramírez Berg the list of the Fernández Unit elements is as follows: native motifs as national icons, foregrounding, low-angle shots, Figueroa's skies, dual perspectives, expressionistic lighting, diagonal compositions, song and dance, and stealing from Hollywood in order to express *lo mexicano*. While many of these characteristics are shared with the aesthetics of film noir they can also be read in a particularly Mexican way which adds an additional layer of meaning to the shots from *El Pantera* described above.

As noted earlier the low-key lighting in *El Pantera*, especially as it overshadows the Palacio de Bellas Artes in darkness, can be interpreted in a traditionally noir manner as a critique of modernity and its unfulfilled promises, and yet in the case of Mexican cinema this lighting can be seen through its relationship to the Fernández unit's visual approach to tragic narratives. Emilio Fernández had a tendency for the tragic and Figueroa "conveyed those unhappy tales with darker-than-usual [...] lighting" (117-118). This clue from classical Mexican cinema can signal that the darkness in *El Pantera's* visuals of Mexico City is to indicate that this TV series is a tragic tale thus doubling down on the idea that Mexico City is almost certainly unable to be redeemed by Pantera or General Alaya's endeavors. Tragic cinematic structures tend to deal with consequences of actions established at the outset of the plot, and in the case of *El Pantera* the tragic event that establishes the long denouement of the series can be seen when General Alaya is first introduced as he sits viewing the surveillance footage of Mexico City and explains to Pantera that Mexico City is uninhabitable. Despite their efforts there is no redemption, there is no putting the house back in order, because the tragic fate of the city was put into motion long before Pantera's appearance on the streets of the capital or in Mexico's cultural imaginary.

The director, Alejandro Gamboa, arranged the shots outside of the Palacio de Bellas Artes in *El Pantera* as apparent references to the classical Mexican cinema of the Fernández Unit (and conveniently at the same time the generic conventions of film noir). Besides the low-key lighting in this scene the use of low angle shots stands out visually. In *El Pantera*, General Alaya and his array of police are presented from a low angle with the

darkened Palacio de Bellas Artes behind them. In classical Mexican cinema this type of shot "gave their Mexican characters power and dominance in the frame and was consistent with the aims of their artistic nationalism, namely to proclaim the importance of Mexico and the dignity of its people" (Ramírez Berg 109). Combined with the tragic interpretation of the low-key lighting, this low angle shot of General Alaya creates a vision of tragic nationalism and places the truly powerless General in a position that can only claim the appearance of power. I hold that while *El Pantera* seems to attempt to pay homage to the aesthetics of the Fernández Unit with this low-key lighting and low angle mise-en-scène it inadvertently turns this homage into an ironic critique of Mexican political and police corruption by placing General Alaya before a symbol of national heritage and history in a position of power all while in the narrative of the episode he is unable to even apprehend the criminal and prosecute him because they have no evidence. This visual of power is then shown to be hollow, creating the idea that Mexico's history of power is aesthetic and artifice; the locus of power lies outside of the mise-en-scène of authority in the hands of the bandit Pantera.

This vision of Pantera as both criminal and state actor establishes him as part of the long line of Mexican bandits who have been both enemies of the state and its own heroes - the revolutionary heroes of 1910 (particularly Villa and Zapata) were intermittently considered bandits and heroes by the state in their processes of becoming national heroes. Juan Pablo Dabove explains "bandits were able to place their significant means of violence at the disposal of the central government, as was the case of the Plateados de Salomé Plasencia, who sided and fought with the Liberal Party during the Mexican wars of reform.

It was also the case of the bandit who became part of the rural police in porfirian Mexico..." (27). This trajectory of heroism and banditry from the history of Mexican nation building to the restoration of the Distrito Federal in *El Pantera* parallels the aesthetic of film noir in that it "[invokes] the past while anxiously imagining the future, [it reveals] multiple spatialities, no less than multiple temporalities" (Dimendberg 3). Pantera's actions appear as echoes of Mexico's national history as well as the hope for the capital city's future. The protagonist's actions are carried out in the urban center as opposed to the rural north or south, but this form of state co-opted banditry reverberates across Mexican national space and time.

VII. The Mexican Makings of a Bandit and a Hero

During Pantera and General Alaya's first meeting, the representative of state power confesses that his mission is that Mexico City "vuela a ser habitable" ["becomes habitable again"]. The noir aesthetic and the realization that *El Pantera* is another link in the genealogy of national banditry/heroes lays bare the simulacra and spectacle of the past as represented by the darkened national monuments that appear throughout the series as context to Pantera's actions. This retro vision of the present shows the husks of past national projects as the unsuccessful aspirations of a staged and stylized past that creates a sense of nostalgia but at the same time uneasiness. It is the nonsynchronous image of decayed (Eurocentric) dreams of modernity that becomes visible only from the noir vision of the present. Pantera emerges as a hero in this noir version of Mexico City and as Carlos Monsiváis explains, heroes "son la gran escenografía de las naciones, y no se le niegan a

entidad alguna, por reducida que sea. Ni las regiones ni los pueblos medianos y pequeños se abstienen de sus representantes hazañosos, motivos de orgullo de las colectividades..." ["are the grand scenery of the nations, and they will not be denied to any entity whatsoever, as small as it may be. Neither the regions nor the medium-sized or small towns abstain from having their heroic representatives, a collective source of pride..."] (85). The bandit Pantera is then the hero of the Colonia Obrera, a local hero that acts under the auspices of the state, but both as its victim and its savior. Pantera was first arrested and wrongfully imprisoned because corrupt police framed him. He spent five years in prison, until he was allowed to escape by General Alaya who employed him as an unofficial agent of the state with the threat of re-incarceration if he did not do as he was told (although General Alaya is aware of Pantera's innocence). Thus the state exercises its power only to deny it. Pantera confirms the power of the state in the sense that he meets out justice that it is unable to serve due to its condition of decay and corruption, but likewise he subverts its power by denying the state any true control since the criminals he brings to the police cannot be prosecuted legally - thus he perpetuates the disfunctionality of the state apparatus. Monsiváis explains how this image of a bandit/hero can influence society: "el heroísmo ayuda a estructurar las conciencias nacionales, encauza la lectura de la Historia y, en los distintos niveles sociales, suscita simultáneamente el sentimiento de orgullo y la conciencia de fragilidad. <<Somos potentes: tenemos héroes; somos frágiles: casi todos nuestros héroes son mártires>>" ["heroism helps to structure the national conscious, it directs the reading of History and, at different social levels, it simultaneously provokes pride and a consciousness of fragility. <<We are powerful: we have heroes; we are fragile: almost all

of our heroes are martyrs>>”] (83). This urban noir heroism creates the consciousness that the state is flawed, but that there are heroes (who are often bandits at the same time) that support the simulacra of the nation, that stand and act out national power before the backdrop of national monuments and memory, and at the same time reveal the very fiction and spectacle of state power. The bandit/hero is the complete realization of what is implied by the noir aesthetic of the series - the national project of progress has failed and only the appearance of state power exists in the form of a state empowered by the repetitive cycle of bandit/heroes.

Pantera embodies the very ambiguous nature of Mexico's current state of being: an innocent man criminalized by the state, then employed and threatened by the same state to work against the state itself. This unique situation shows the subtle intertwining of national memory (as seen in the noir representation of national monuments), state power (deployed against itself), and criminality (both on the part of Pantera and the corrupt state) in order to critique the fabrications of state power as a fragile and ambiguous entity that is negotiated through legitimized forms of criminality and staged acts of national power.

Historical discourses of national power related to Mexican sovereignty were studied by Gustavo Fondevila and Miguel Quintana-Navarrete in their article titled "War Hypotheses: Drug Trafficking, Sovereignty and the Armed Forces in Mexico." Their research analyzed public speeches given by Mexican presidents during the eighteen-year period from 1994-2012 and concluded that throughout the Zedillo, Fox, and Calderón presidencies the national discourse about sovereignty developed into "concepts more attuned to the new globalisation paradigm" (529) with Calderón's disastrous approach

being "a definition of sovereignty based on the life of the society and the state" (530) or in other words it is based on bio-politics and security. Slavoj Žižek states that "'bio-politics' designates the regulation of the security and welfare of human lives as its primary goal" and explains "bio-politics is ultimately a politics of fear; it focuses on defense from potential victimization or harassment" (40). Although in both the narrative of *El Pantera* and Mexican reality there is a focus on protecting life this act of protection comes at the contradictory cost of placing an ever increasing number of lives into the situation of bare life, consigning them to the role of *homo sacer*. Žižek explains this process and its contradictions thus:

Post-political bio-politics also has two aspects which cannot but appear to belong to two opposite ideological spaces: that of the reduction of humans to 'bare life,' to Homo Sacer, that so-called sacred being who is the object of expert caretaking knowledge, but is excluded, like prisoners at Guantanamo or Holocaust victims, from all rights; and that of respect for the vulnerable Other brought to an extreme through an attitude of narcissistic subjectivity which experiences the self as vulnerable, constantly exposed to a multitude of potential 'harassments.' Can there be a more emphatic contrast than the one between respect for the Other's vulnerability and the reduction of the Other to mere 'bare life' regulated by administrative knowledge? But what if these two stances none the less spring from a single root? What if they are two aspects of one and the same underlying attitude? [...] What these two poles share is precisely the underlying refusal of any

higher causes, the notion that the ultimate goal of our lives is life itself. This is why there is no contradiction between respect for the vulnerable Other and the readiness to justify torture, the extreme expression of treating individuals as *Homini sacer*. (42)

This contradictory political practice has been put into effect through the implementation of Rudy Giuliani's \$4 million dollar zero-tolerance policing strategies. There is a level of staged spectacle in the Mexican production of bare life. The spectacle of the War on Drugs has seen president Calderón give some 2,742 speeches on the topic (Fondevila and Quintana-Navarrete 522) and it has focused on the spectacle of the broken windows theory. This spectacularization of life and security appears in *El Pantera* in the staged scenes of police and military force (which are ultimately ineffectual) and through Pantera's literal cleaning and repairing of buildings in the Colonia Obrera.

The elaborately staged scenes in *El Pantera* allude to the real life discourses and actions of Mexico's armed forces and underline the precarious borders between the actions and their actual effectiveness. In the narrative of Televisa's *El Pantera* the protagonist discovers that he is not simply facing off against local drug dealers in the Colonia Obrera but that he is involved in taking down an international drug-trafficking syndicate with la Reina de los Narcos at its center. Thus for Pantera the great crisis is more than making Mexico City habitable again, it is making the entire country habitable. The vision of the 2007 series falls in line with Fondevila and Quintana-Navarrete's findings that "militarisation was at its peak during Calderón's administration because he saw sovereignty everywhere and conceptualised drug trafficking as capable of undermining all its facets"

(529). The narrative difference is that in *El Pantera* the government cannot be trusted to protect sovereignty and this function must be taken up by the individual that dwells in the liminal space of the bandit/hero.

For the creator of Pantera, Daniel Muñoz, there was a role for the military to play in the salvation of Mexico City. For Muñoz, as far back as 1994, military intervention was the solution to the problems of police corruption and organized crime in the Distrito Federal. Televisa shied away from this proposal in their adaptation of *El Pantera*, maybe because it was precisely too close to the violent reality of Calderón's War on Drugs. Pantera's novelistic adaption suggested that after Pantera used his racial and cultural capital to infiltrate Mexico City's ring of organized crime that military force would have to be deployed to violently eliminate the crime bosses and corrupt police and politicians alike. In the novel this happens with General Alaya ordering a massive military attack on Diana's brothel with everyone still inside. The cultural imaginary, as elaborated by Muñoz in his novel, recommends the violent action of the Mexican military as the solution to drug trafficking, prostitution, and police and political corruption. This imaginary is echoed in Calderón's actual mobilization of military force. Sadly, Pantera's dangerous proposal didn't transfer from its popular culture roots to reality. Calderón's militarization saw a massive increase in civilian casualties and a drastic upswing in cartel and government violence. Pantera's fictional solution of military intervention would, in reality, put a large number of Mexican citizens into the realm of bare life; it would see the public share Pantera's status of *homo sacer*.

VIII. Pantera's Genesis as Homo Sacer

Pantera's origin story was revealed in a novel published in 1994 by Daniel Muñoz decades after the character's first appearance in the *historietas*. The adventures shown in the comic series would often have Pantera being picked up by Capitán Ramos and taken to General Alaya's office where he would be given an assignment, but the nature of the relationship between Ramos, Alaya, and Gervasio Robles was not always clear. The 1994 novel explains how Pantera became engaged in the process of liberating Mexico City under the direction of General Alaya. I propose a reading of this genesis narrative that renders it a popular culture imagining of the precarious situation of bare life as developed by Giorgio Agamben. The comic and novel stories thus read as imaginaries in which a hero can be found in the realm of bare life, which so many individuals inhabit, and yet at the same time it shows that the struggle is never-ending. Even as the story of *El Pantera* attempts to find hope and subversive power in this realm of existence it becomes clear that his heroism is still subjugated by the state. As noted earlier, Pantera's relationship with Mexico City is definitive of his identity and role as an urban actor. Throughout the novel Pantera is constantly questioning the city's future, wondering who will protect its historic landmarks, and how it can be redeemed. This is a central internal conflict for Pantera as an individual, and it is from these concerns that his own subjectivity springs. Although he is often directed by General Alaya, Pantera finds his own reasons for joining the cause that permit him a source of agency and autonomy that come from his connection to the Distrito Federal. Agamben explains that "the bare life that dwelt there frees itself in the city and becomes both subject and object of the conflicts of political order, the one place for both the

organization of State power and emancipation from it" (9). Mexico City is the site where Gervasio Robles becomes violently forced into the realm of bare life, forced into clandestinely serving the nation with his life as collateral, and it is also the site where he finds the emancipation from state power precisely because it has placed him outside of its own control.

Pantera was a pachuco hustler who worked, among other things, as a bread maker, a chauffer, a mechanic, a carpenter, and a construction worker. As Pantera recounts his work history he comments, "En nuestra clase debemos saber un poco de todo hasta que nos convirtamos en 'maestros de todo y oficiales de nada'" (Muñoz 27). Pantera makes it clear that he comes from a working class, proletariat, background. At eighteen Pantera gets his first *tacuche* (zoot suit) and starts his life as a pachuco in Mexico City's famous dancehalls. Pantera describes his *tacuche* in detail as, "Algo bien caifán: un saco largo, color ladrillo y unos pantalones tipo trabuco, color tabaco, corbata multicolor de mírame a fuerzas y zapatos de dos colores, con tacón cubano, sin olvidar desde luego, el tando con su pluma de arco iris" ["It was something real cool: a long jacket, brick colored, and wide-leg pants, tobacco colored, a look-at-me-or-else multicolored tie, two-tone shoes with a Cuban heel, and not to be forgotten, a fedora with a rainbow feather"] (27-28). The famous Salón Colonia was the first dancehall Pantera frequented where he learned danzón, swing, bugui-bugui, mambo, cha cha cha, and rocanrol (28). Alejandro Madrid and Robin Moore explain in their book *Danzon: Circum-Caribbean Dialogues in Music and Dance* that Salón Colonia was one of the legendary dancehalls that opened in Mexico City during the 1920s, along with the famous Salón México (107). Like Pantera, Salón Colonia remained a part

of Mexico City culture into the 2000s. Both the character and the spaces he inhabited have seen decades of change come across the capital city. Unfortunately, just a few years before *El Pantera* was to see its television adaptation, Salón Colonia closed its doors in 2003, only a year after its eightieth anniversary. After years of declining interest in danzón and the promotion of free-to-the-public danzón lessons and events by the government "the legendary Salón Colonia and Salón Ribera had to close their doors, while ventures like Salón Atzín and the newly recreated Salón México lasted only a short time" (173). Pantera's prowling of the dancehall scene situates him within Mexico City's working class identity, Madrid and Moore point out that "The working classes' passionate embrace of [danzón] in the 1930s led directly to the flourishing salon industry of later decades" (154). Pantera's genesis story originates in Mexico City's working class dancehall scene in the mid 70s, locating him along a specific cultural trajectory - the Distrito Federal's urban underbelly. Pantera spends his nights in various dancehalls and eventually meets Rosaura at another famous salon, el Smyrna. This encounter will drastically change the rest of Pantera's story. "Rosaura era del oficio. Se desempeñaba como una de las pupilas en el club de la Llave de Oro con Brillantes, que pertenecía a La Bella Diana, la leona más famosa de la ciudad" ["Rosaura was a working girl. She got along as one of the pupils are the Golden Key club, that belonged to La Bella Diana, the most infamous lioness in the city"] is how Pantera introduces her and his future arch nemesis, La Bella Diana (Muñoz 31).

Eventually Pantera and Rosaura fall in love and Rosaura vows to leave behind her life as a prostitute, but she hatches a secret plan to steal a diamond ring from La Bella Diana as "una pequeña indemnización por desempleo" ["a small compensation for her

unemployment”] (32). While Pantera is unaware of Rosaura's plan, the couple begin an idyllic life in the Colonia Obrera; Pantera later reminisces, "Íbamos a bailar, a comer a la calle, al cine. En toda mi vida nunca he sido tan feliz como en aquella época" ["we went out dancing, out to eat, to the movies. In my whole life I have never been as happy as I was back then"] (33). But the consequences of Rosaura's plan arrive at their doorstep in the form of Diana and two henchmen. Rosaura is able to stop the trio from murdering Pantera by pulling a pistol on them which allows the couple to escape to the airport and purchase tickets to Ciudad Juárez with a plan to "perdernos en las tierras del Tío Sam" ["get lost in Uncle Sam's land"] (37). Pantera and Rosaura aren't able to get on the plane before they are arrested by Mexican special agents that work for La Bella Diana. Pantera is beaten and taken to a judge and accused of the theft of Diana's diamond ring. He is rapidly sentenced to four years in prison; "Pena que purgaría en el Palacio Negro de Lecumberri" ["a sentence he would pay out in the Black Palace of Lecumberri"] (38). Rosaura, on the other hand, is forced back into a life of prostitution to pay off her debt to Diana. Pantera comments on these illegal arrangements made by Diana and offers a criticism of the corrupt state of Mexican law when he says, "Si ustedes argüyen que eso no está contemplado dentro de la ley, puedo decirles que son unos ingenuos. Usualmente las leyes las dictan los poderosos y los ricos, que están exentos de obedecerlas. La ley se hizo para los fregados, como su servidor" ["If you are going to argue that this isn't legal, I can tell you that you are fools. Usually laws are dictated by the powerful and the rich, and they are exempt from obeying them. Laws were made for the screwed, like yours truly"] (38). Pantera's imprisonment

marks the beginning of his transformation into a *homo sacer* - everyone wants him dead but no one can kill him.

Muñoz's novel opens with several fictitious newspaper articles that develop a narrative of the criminal and corrupt situation in Mexico City during the mid 1970s. The author is keenly aware of the unique situation being played out in his capital city. Before the opening page of the novel, but after the official title page, a single question, in all uppercase letters, is posed by Daniel Muñoz to the reader: "¿ESTO PUDO SUCEDER EN CUALQUIER PARTE DEL MUNDO?" ["COULD THIS HAPPENED IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD?"] (7). With this question in mind Muñoz starts with an article from the "Los intocables" column titled "Cortesanias" supposedly published in the newspaper *El Universal* on May 8, 1978. This article presents the novel's antagonist, Bella Diana, as the "famosa cortesana y hoy 'madama' influyente" ["famous courtesan and nowadays influential 'madam'"] and then proceeds to enumerate her crimes against Mexican society: "la corrupción de muchachas, tal vez menores de edad; el tráfico de estupefacientes, el vicio en sus formas más infames y especialmente la decadencia del sistema, que obliga a las autoridades municipales, policiacas y delegacionales, a proteger y asistir al 'Club privado', que es visitado por la crema de la administración pública y la nata de la política" ["the corruption of young women, possible underage; drug trafficking, vice in its most infamous forms and especially the decadence of the system, that forces the city authorities and the police to protect and help this 'private club', that is visited by the cream of the public administration and politicians"] (10). The article goes on to explain that Bella Diana had taken complete control of the capital's police forces and that the only solution to this

corruption was for the new chief of police to employ "un recurso desesperado" ["a desperate resource"] (12). The newspaper explains, General Alaya "arrancó del apando donde se pudría un enemigo de Diana... y lo arrojó en su contra. Este presidiario no tenía nada que perder en aquel juego... más que su propia vida. Ansioso de venganza, se lanzó contra la influyente 'Madama' y realizó el trabajo que los DIPOS, PREVENTIVOS y JUDICIALES se negaban a efectuar, desmoronando a golpes de audacia, el que parecía incommovible imperio de LA BELLA DIANA" ["yanked from the cell where he rotted an enemy of Diana... and he threw him against her. This prisoner had nothing to lose in the game... nothing but his own life. Anxious for revenge, he launched himself against the influential 'Madam' and did the work that the police refused to do, breaking apart with audacious strikes, La Bella Diana's supposedly unshakeable empire"] (12). This recognition that Pantera was thrown into this legal and political struggle by state actors as a subject that had nothing to lose but his own life highlights the role of the nation in the conversion of Pantera into a homo sacer. Gervasio Robles is placed outside the functioning of law administered by the state and only then is enabled to do what Mexico City's finest were unable to accomplish. It appears that in a completely corrupt system, that dehumanizes its citizens, Pantera as homo sacer is able to maneuver a form of justice that also functions outside of law - the realm of the bandit thus intersects with the realm of bare life that the state forced upon Gervasio Robles.

In Pantera's origin story there are a multitude of factors that contribute to seeing him striped of his humanity and left in the realm of bare life; this process, as I interpret it here, is more extreme and overt than the political workings that usually see citizens reduced

to *homines sacri*. Agamben explains that “the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original [...] nucleus of sovereign power” and that it can even be considered “*the original activity of sovereign power*” (6). While these processes can be part of the essential and supposedly normal functioning of government, I find that the narrative presented in *El Pantera* imagines the extent of the brutality that a government can achieve, and in particular it puts on display the intersecting imaginaries of Mexico’s participation in the production of *homines sacri* and bare life. As a form of cultural production it shows that no citizen (even a previously anonymous *pachuco* from the Colonia Obrera) is safe from the abuses of state power no matter how well intentioned they may be. As the violent verbs used in the quote above show, the state can *arrancar* [yank] and *arrojar* [throw] a citizen from their place and re-contextualize them as an object outside of their own legal rights - stripping them of their citizenship and the right to their own life. Pantera identifies himself as the bastard son of a *norteño* and “una india oaxaqueña” who learned to hustle on the streets of the Colonia Obrera in Mexico City and thus is located among the marginalized identities that already struggle to maintain their rights and are within those groups most targeted by the impunity of the police and state (Amnesty International 2007). Beyond his indigenous and working-class situation Pantera loses his freedom when he is imprisoned for the theft of La Bella Diana's diamond ring, but his situation worsens when the state decides to carry out the *ley de fuga* on Pantera. This action will see Pantera symbolically and legally lose his life.

While in prison Pantera begins studying Wu Shu under the direction of his cellmate Kwai Lan. His mastery of the Chan Chuan fighting style was proven when he exacted

deadly revenge against three other inmates after they nearly killed Pantera and violated Rosaura during a conjugal visit. These violent events made their way into the tabloid headlines in Mexico City, and eventually reached Capitán Ramos and General Alaya: "TRES PELIGROSOS ASESINOS MUERTOS CON KARATE EN LECUMBERRI" ["THREE DANGEROUS ASSASSINS MURDERED WITH KARATE IN LECUMBERRI"] (Muñoz 92). Once Ramos and Alaya discover that this dangerous inmate was wrongfully imprisoned by Bella Diana and her corrupt police they decide they can use Pantera to take down Bella Diana's crime ring. Capitán Ramos describes their plan in the following way: "para acabar con una fortaleza, se necesita un cañón o una bazuca; este Pantera será nuestra bazuca. En algún lado leí que los agricultores usan una especie de insectos para que devoren los insectos dañinos que empalagan las plantas. Pantera hará las funciones de nuestro insecto devorador de plagas" ["To destroy a fortress you need a cannon or a bazooka; this Pantera will be our bazooka. Somewhere I read that farmers use one species of insect to devour the insects that plague their plants. Pantera will be our plague devouring insect"] (95). This description clearly dehumanizes Gervasio Robles and demonstrates the state's disregard for his life beyond their use for it. In order to bring Pantera into their plan the military experts decide that he can no longer exist, he must die. When Capitán Ramos brings Pantera into General Alaya's office to reveal to him their plan and proposition they tell him, "Serás un hombre que no existe" ["You will be a man that does not exist"] (100). This is when General Alaya explains that Pantera will officially be dead after they apply the *ley de fugas* on him during a prisoner transfer from Lecumberri to the Islas Mariás. Although this was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter I find it

relevant here to point out that this interaction is reminiscent of Foucault's description of politics when he said, "modern man is an animal whose politics call his existence as a living being into question" (143). In this case that modern man is a panther. The political corruption that shapes Mexican reality literally costs Pantera his legal existence as a living being and pushes him outside of the law and into the realm of the homo sacer, the realm of the living dead. Pantera explains in his own words how the ley de fuga functions in Mexico,

La Ley Fuga se ha aplicado en México a reos de alta peligrosidad. Es un sustituto del paredón, dado que la pena de muerte está abolida en nuestro país. [...]. La ejecución se realiza, con algunas variantes, de la siguiente manera: cuando la cuerda es conducida a su destino, al hombre señalado como víctima se le hace creer que van a darle una oportunidad de evadirse, por parte de algún soldado de los que custodian el convoy. Cuando el iluso brinca del tren y echa a correr, es acribillado a mansalva por la espalda, sin piedad de ninguna clase. No se tiene noticias de algún tipo que haya logrado salvarse de una Ley Fuga. (103-104)

[The Law of Flight has been carried out in Mexico on extremely dangerous criminals. It's a substitute for the firing squad, since the death penalty has been abolished in our country. (...). The execution is done, with some variations, in the following way: when the prisoners are on their way, the man appointed as the victim is made to believe that he will be given a chance to escape by some soldier who is guarding the convoy. When the naïve criminal jumps from the train and starts running he is mercilessly shot in

the back, without any pity whatsoever. There has never been news of anyone surviving a Law of Flight”]

This method of illegally carrying out a death sentence was used by General Porfirio Alaya's namesake, Porfirio Díaz during his military regime (1876-1911) when his opponents would be allowed to escape from imprisonment so that they could be killed for taking advantage of the apparent slip in security.

When Pantera is allowed to escape the train to the Islas Marías he swims down river as bullets shoot past him in search of his back, and he is finally recovered by Capitán Ramos who informs him, “En estos momentos te acaban de hallar muerto a la orilla del río Lajas” [“Just a moment ago they found you dead on the shore of the Lajas River”] (108). For an instant Pantera begins to fear for his life in response to the captain’s confusing statement. Capitán Ramos then explains part of his plan for making Pantera a homo sacer and placing him outside of the law; he says, “Hace tres días un pobre vagabundo, sin oficio ni beneficio ni parientes que reclamaran su cuerpo, se ahogó en Xochimilco. Tomamos prestado su cuerpo de la morgue, le pintamos un mechón blanco en la frente, para que diera el gatazo de que eres tú, y esta noche lo abandoné junto al río” [“Three days ago a poor vagabond, without a job or family that would come looking for his body, drowned in Xochimilco. We borrowed his body from the morgue, we dyed a white stripe in his hair, so that he would look like you, and tonight I left his body next to the river”] (108-109). Here it can be seen clearly that the state’s goal of making Mexico City habitable again, making it a place safe for life, can come at the cost of using those marginalized citizens that inhabit the realm of bare life to achieve this goal. The fact that the body of one homo sacer can be use in place

of another, and in order to reproduce the condition of bare life, emphasizes how the state's bio-political protection of life is the flipside of its own necro-politics. Here the state, via Capitán Ramos, uses death to achieve its purposes, in protecting certain lives it must annihilate others. When faced with the reality that he is now a dead man, Pantera asks, "¿Cuánto tiempo estaré muerto?" ["How long will I be dead?"] and Ramos replies, "Para siempre, Pantera" ["Forever, Pantera"] (109). Thus the protagonist is irrevocably set outside the law, made untouchable, and left by his own nation to haunt the liminal realm of bare life.

Yet for Pantera it is his existence in this lawless realm, intersected by his racial and social identity, that allow him to maneuver the corrupt lawlessness of Mexico City. Pantera's unique set of circumstances place him at a nexus that unravels certain cultural ideas about how criminality and justice can function in Mexico City. I find that the type of anti-hero that Daniel Muñoz and Alberto Maldonado create in *El Pantera* reflects a cultural imaginary that can only find a possible hero in someone who is decidedly outside of the functioning of the Mexican state. At the same time Pantera exists in the realm of bare life where many citizens dwell, placed there by the state, and in Pantera there is an identity that is truly a popular identity that is capable of challenging a dehumanizing system from a point that he holds in common with the majority of his fellow citizens. He expresses this sentiment when he first sets out on his mission to take down the corrupt Mexican police force saying, "después de esto puedo morir en paz con el mundo, sin que me deba nada. ¡Mi sueño dorado fue siempre madriar a los DIPOS hasta que mi corazón descansara!" ["after this I can die at peace with the world, without it owing me anything. My golden

dream was always to fuck up the cops to my heart's content"] (114). In the investigation "The Weakness of Public Security Forces in Mexico City" Elena Azaola collected testimonies from Mexico City police officers about their own self-image. The following testimonial from a citizen-turned-officer corroborates Pantera's feelings: "Just hearing the word 'police' would leave a bad taste in my mouth... I thought that all these people did was rob or extort people who had the misfortune of falling into their hands. Six years on the other side has not changed my view of the police much, there is no end of justifications, some very valid, others less so, but what is certain is that the police does not work as it should" (165). It is this very vision of the police that Pantera's identity and exclusion from the law allow him to attack, to dismantle, what his fellow citizens and even the officers themselves think of their security forces. Pantera's adventures in the comics, novels, and television series inform and reproduce a popular imaginary of who is considered to be a criminal and who can carry out justice in Mexico City. This narrative proposes that only an individual that functions outside of the law, who's identity is other, and who is presumed guilty although innocent can actually affect justice in the face of a corrupt state. Thus we see the homo sacer intersecting with the bandit in the realm of death and lawlessness where the state is faced with the product of its own (bio-) (necro-) politics; it has fashioned its own demise in the form of the homo sacer Pantera. In this way, even if Pantera fights to give the state power over Mexico City, to make it habitable again, he undermines the actual power of the state and places the power to make the realm of bare life habitable again into the hands of the outsiders, the bandits, the lawless, the ones the nation considers dead. In the end the state, embodied visually by General Alaya and Capitán Ramos, have no power

to save the city – a historically recurring theme in Mexico’s history and imaginary: bandits saving the nation.

IX. Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that Daniel Muñoz and Alberto Maldonado’s character El Pantera follows a uniquely Mexican trajectory of the bandit/hero and that his transformation into such can be read as a model of how the Mexican state employs the creation of homo sacer to achieve its political and economic ends. The contradictory nature of the homo sacer inevitably undermines the state’s power in the story of El Pantera as he is able to negotiate Mexico City, his identity, and his place outside the nation’s laws in order to perform acts of violence, crime, and justice that show how popular culture can imagine alternatives to the corrupt state’s methods of identifying and punishing criminals and reaching legal justice. Pantera’s place in Mexico City is necessary to understanding this process. Giorgio Agamben explained that the city is the place where state power is exerted but also the space where it can be subverted. Agamben wrote, “the bare life that dwelt there frees itself in the city and becomes both subject and object of the conflicts of the political order, the one place for both the organization of State power and emancipation from it” (9). I hope that through the investigation of this chapter it can be seen that the more than forty-year trajectory that Pantera has followed through Mexican popular imaginary finds tactics for being both a subject and object of state power and in that precarious zone that Pantera was capable of becoming emancipated from the state through its own corrupt uses of power. At the same time, Daniel Muñoz used the pages of his 1994 Pantera novel

to imagine a solution to Mexico City's corrupt politics and policing, and this included the deployment of military force within the Distrito Federal. As explored in at the beginning of this chapter, the militarization of urban spaces in Mexico has increased in an attempt to make the city habitable again and to protect capital – in a word to create “security.” Daniel Muñoz's 1994 imaginings have a terrifying echo in the real events of Felipe Calderon's War on Drugs that began in 2006. The narratives presented in Daniel Muñoz's work are contradictory in ways since the protagonist can be read as an individual that becomes capable of escaping state power and, although is supposedly working for the state, subverting that power. While in the same text Muñoz proposes that an increase of state presence through the military would somehow NOT be misused by the state. I think here it is possible to find the fault in Muñoz's vision – that the Mexican state would be capable of deploying military force in Mexico City against its own citizens without it devolving into another form of state-sanctioned impunity. As a cultural product that imagined the military intervention of the Mexican state over a decade before Calderon's War on Drugs it becomes a teleological lens through which we can understand pop culture's relationship to political thought and how even the cultural imaginary at times cannot fathom the horrors of the reality it proposes. Although Muñoz suggested a horrifying premonition of Mexico's War on Drugs, it is interesting that Pantera as a character can leave the narrative unassociated with the state and its violence precisely because he was placed outside the state's power, he was legally killed by the state, and thus can exist completely outside its influence and retain his place as a hero... and bandit.

This chapter's analysis also revolved around Pantera's identity as it transformed across the mediums of comics, literature, and television. Pantera's racial and societal identity informed his negotiations of state power and criminal organizations (they could be one in the same). His indigenous and (apparent) criminal subjectivities were contextualized within the space of Mexico City as a field of signification which brought the city into focus as another character in Pantera's adventures. The inclusion of Mexico City as a significant source of meaning necessitated that the role of the urban space as well as how it was portrayed be part of this chapter's analysis. I approached the representations of Mexico City in the comics and the television adaptation by unpacking the noir aesthetics used to depict the Distrito Federal. Through this it became possible to see that the vision of Mexico City developed in *El Pantera* was one that had a fraught relationship with modernity and with showing national imagery unless it was shadowed by the darkness that tends to flood *El Pantera*'s mise-en-scene. The analysis of the scene from the episode "Las Prestamistas" found Pantera as the only actor capable of performing any type of justice but that this was only achievable through extra-legal means which reinforced Pantera's place as both a bandit and a hero. This consideration of the protagonist carried that analysis into an exploration of the bio- and necro-politics of Pantera's liminal role of bandit/hero, and finally that role brought me to analyze his genesis narrative and how it can be read as a model of how the Mexican state created a homo sacer of Gervasio Robles (aka Pantera). As noted at the beginning of this conclusion, the identification of Pantera as a homo sacer, as an individual that dwells outside of the rule of law, is what allows him to function as a heroic character in the context of Mexico City.

The ideas explored in this chapter are a starting point for future projects that I will pursue. In the realm of the study of Mexican sequential art, I hope to connect this work with other comics that explore concepts of criminality and justice. I plan to expand my analysis to the full body of works by Daniel Muñoz as he worked on a variety of titles with EDAR and VID editorials, in order to come to a more complete understanding of his political imaginings. Beyond the work of Daniel Muñoz, I plan to take my close reading of crime narratives to the work of Paco Ignacio Taïbo II and the graphic adaptations of his work (such as the text and comic versions of *Cuatro manos*), as well as his recently published work illustrated by BEF (Bernardo Fernández). I believe that *El Pantera* and its multiple adaptations and over forty-year trajectory place it at a unique point in cultural production that can lead my work in a variety of directions (into the early 1970s comic market, Mexico neo-noir cinema, crime fiction adaptations such as *Ensayo de un Crimen*, or the *novela negra* and the *neopolicial*).

CHAPTER 3:
**Places of Memory in Neoliberal Santiago de Chile: Taking Ghosts Out
for a Stroll and Mourning the Disappeared City**

*Me llamo Heredia y vivo en una ciudad furiosa,
una ciudad injusta donde cada transeúnte es una bomba
de tiempo a punto de estallar en tu cara a la menor provocación.
Pero es mi ciudad y la amo. Ese día Santiago lucía abandonado y
tranquilo.*

-Ramón Díaz Eterovic

*Memory is by nature multiple and yet specific;
collective, plural, and yet individual.*

-Pierre Nora

*No hay memoria sino memorias sociales en disputa,
y el proceso de oficialización habría comenzado,
tempranamente, con la producción estatal de una narrativa
destinada a exorcizar los fantasmas del pasado y su amenaza
melancólica.*

-Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott

The detective Heredia first appeared in 1987, when General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship was in full force, to offer a counter discourse about crime and justice. In Heredia's first novel, *La ciudad está triste*, he traces what appears to be the case of a runaway college girl and reveals the violent practices of the dictatorship against university students. Heredia has consistently recalled memories that challenge official discourse and power – memories that resist the erasing measures of history. Heredia's 2011 adaptation to the medium of the graphic novel continues the character's tradition of recovering memory from the forgetfulness of official history and discourse. The detective's investigations and discoveries attempt to restore memory even when the crime's victims cannot be brought back. In Chile the enduring presence of the violently disappeared is a constant link between the past and the present. Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott questions how we are to talk about

violence when the evidence (the body) of such violence has been disappeared. He proposes cendrología (cindrology) that works not as “una ciencia de la muerte sino una sutil interrogación de las cenizas en cuanto huellas últimas que sin devolvernos a la [...] presencia, nos indican todavía que alguna vez hubo algo, una vida, sobre la que operó la misma desaparición” [“a science of death but a subtle interrogation of the ashes as final traces that do not return us to the presence, they indicate to us that at sometime something was, a life, upon which disappearance itself operated”]. So too does the graphic novel *Heredia Detective* try to locate a trace of those who are gone, the places of their memories. The places of memory that Heredia encounters in Santiago de Chile show how collective memory can recover what official history may attempt to cover or forget. This graphic novel that mirrors in its pages the structure of the topography of Santiago proposes a counter reading of history that is laced with memory that reacts to the urban spaces of the city and subtly tries to interrogate the traces of the crimes and violence that have only left memory in their wake. This chapter analyzes how memory is inscribed upon city spaces, how these locations are rendered in the medium of the graphic novel, and that by encountering these violent *lieux de mémoire* their inhabitants come in contact with condensed forms of history and memory throughout Santiago. What Bjorn Quiring writes about the representation of urban spaces in Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell’s *From Hell* (2006) is equally true of Heredia’s interactions with the city of Santiago in the graphic novel: “Insofar as urban space relies on these representations, it is neither quite real nor entirely fictitious; it is a montage of both, which counts on the city-dweller qua spectator /

reader to synthesize mythical past, concrete present, and uncertain future into a meaningful whole” (200).

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the graphic novel *Heredia Detective* represents criminality and justice across the urban landscape of contemporary Santiago de Chile. I hold that criminal behavior in this text is approached through memory and can respond to the concern that although Chile, and Santiago in particular, has had a relatively stable police force and legal system (at least prior to the 2011 student protests), there exists a greater perception of fear of crime than in the past (Dammert 47). This concept of criminality also operates on an urban scale; by this I mean that the changing landscape of Santiago is presented as a type of crime that attempts to hide the violent nature of the city. I show this in my analysis of the representations of iconic urban spaces and monuments in the graphic novel and how the juxtaposition of these images with particular panels, pages, and narratives suggests a connection between physical changes in Santiago's cityscape, national monuments, memory, and crime.

I. Illustrated Santiago

I believe that *Heredia Detective* represents the most significant interpretation of the city of Santiago de Chile in the medium of sequential art. It is significant that this graphic novel is based on Ramón Díaz Eterovic's novels that so often have Santiago as their protagonist. Díaz Eterovic's first novel, aptly titled *La ciudad está triste* (1987), opens with the detective Heredia comparing himself to the city of Santiago:

Pensaba en la tristeza de la ciudad cuando golpearon la puerta. En las luces que esa tarde de invierno veía encenderse paulatinamente a través de la ventana y en las calles donde acostumbro a caminar sin otra compañía que mi sombra y un cigarrillo que enciendo entre las manos, reconociendo que, como la ciudad, estoy solo... (1)

[I was thinking about the sadness of the city when they knocked at the door. About the lights that in that winter evening I saw slowly turn on through the window and about the streets where I tended to walk without any other company than my shadow and a lit cigarette lit in my hands, realizing that, like the city, I am alone...]

This relationship between the city and Heredia continues throughout the detective's literary existence, but it also extends into his appearance in sequential art.

The connection between sequential art and the city has existed since the early stages of their development. In the introduction to their book *Comics and the City: Urban Space in Print, Picture and Sequence*, Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling note that "From an historical point of view and against the backdrop of the modern age, comics are inseparably tied to the notion of the 'city'" (4). Comics, in their current form, first appeared in New York City newspapers where they took over entire pages and eventually required their own books to fulfill readers' demands. New York City was illustrated and filled with these comic characters while other fictional comic cities were created, Metropolis and Gotham being two of the most famous. As the medium of sequential art has spread it has taken on the challenge of rendering fictional and actual cities across its panels and pages. In order to

analyze the graphic novel *Heredia Detective*, it is necessary to analyze Santiago. Just as the earliest New York comic strips depicted the urban landscape and inhabitants of the rapidly growing metropolis, so too the writers and artists that collaborated on the creation of the graphic novel *Heredia detective* fill their pages and panels with the places, people (or lack thereof), histories, and memories of their own city, Santiago. Ahrens and Meteling point out, "The city functioned as an important plot element, even an atmospheric, and symbolic protagonist, and suddenly became the focus of attention in many genres" (5). In this sense Santiago as a place gives meaning to the stories told in *HerediaDdetective*, and only by questioning the role of this symbolic protagonist, that is the constant companion to Heredia, can the cultural meanings of the crimes and methods of justice deployed in its pages be deciphered fully.

A walk around the historic center of Santiago structures the narrative of the graphic novel *Heredia Detective*. This unplanned meandering through the city was caused by the permanent closing of the City Bar Restaurant that left Heredia with no place to drink and converse with his friend El Escriba. As they wander the center of Santiago the artists illustrating the graphic novel carefully render specific locations, thus connecting their destinationless stroll, the memories inspired by the sites they visit, the stories told in the graphic novel, and the national history behind these locations. The Correo Central building, the National Library, the Santiago Metropolitan Cathedral, the Monument to American Liberty, the Santiago Central Market, and the Santo Domingo Church are some of the sites that the two visit on their passage through the city.

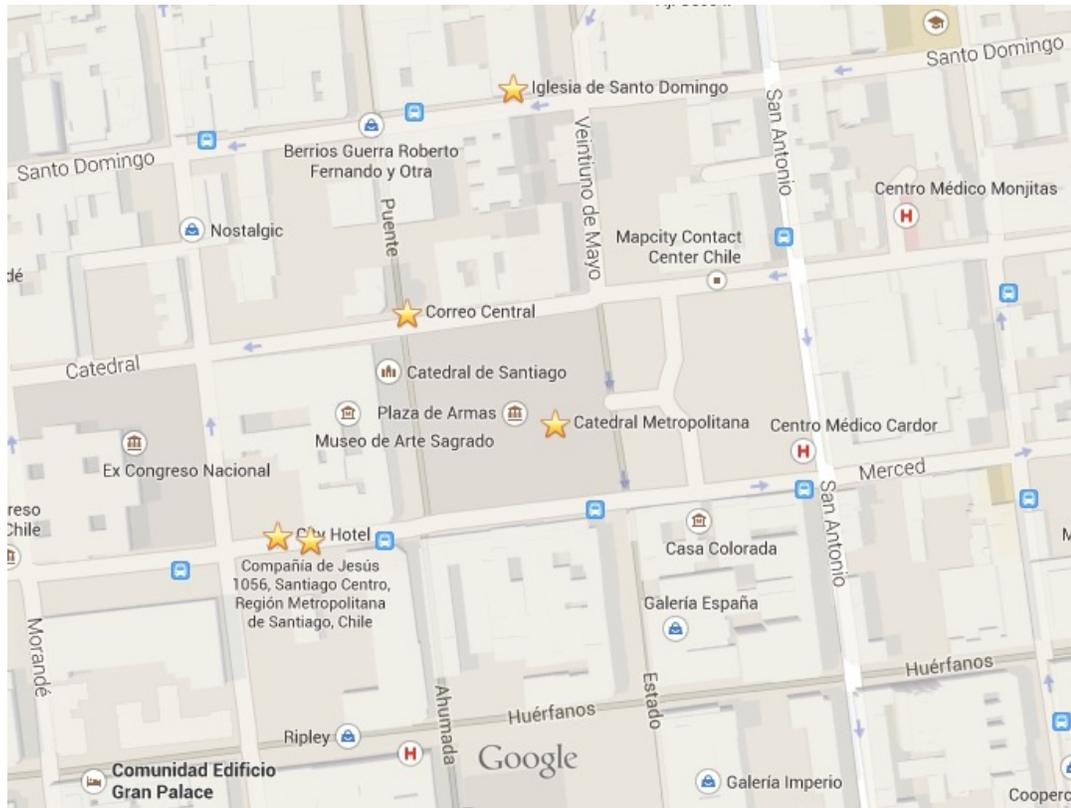


Figure 19. Downtown Santiago where Heredia and El Escriba wander and recall memories of past crimes.

Each of these locations is tied to the memory of the investigation of a specific crime for Heredia and El Escriba that seems to blur the boundaries between national history and the individual's experience of crime and violence in Santiago. Since the pair's walk around the city is initiated by the closure of the City Bar Restaurant it is important to note that they take its closing as another indication that someone is dedicated to "arrancar el corazón a nuestra ciudad" ["tearing the heart out of our city"] (Díaz Eterovic et al 10). According to Díaz Eterovic's comic avatar, El Escriba, the loss of the City Bar Restaurant is "Otro trozo de la historia de Santiago que nos arrebatan" ["Another piece of Santiago's history that they snatch away from us"] (10).

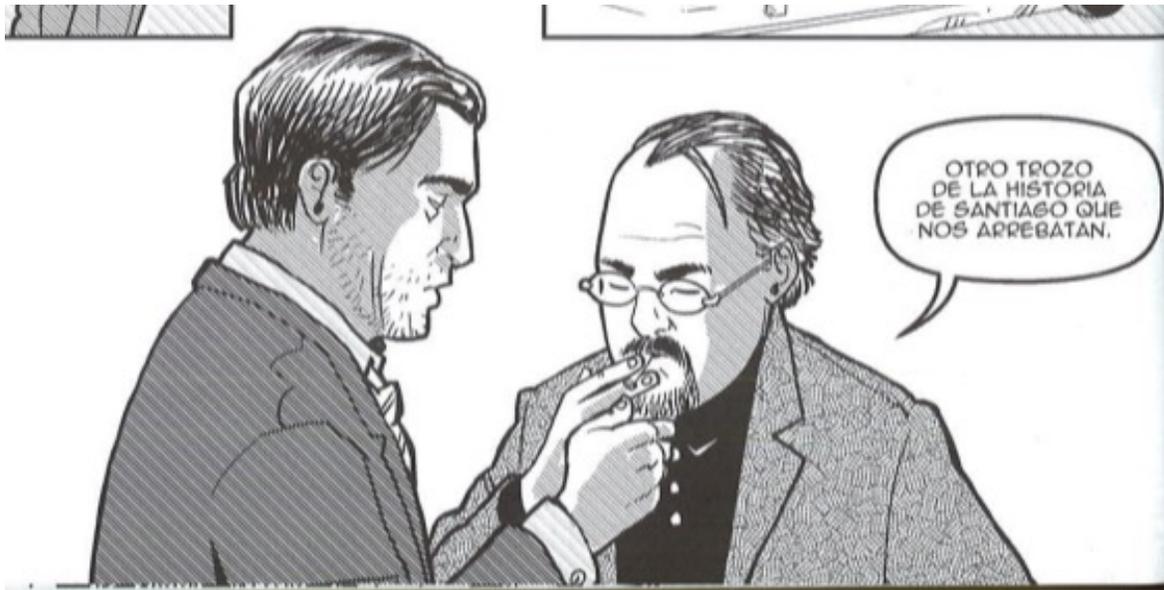


Figure 20. Heredia and El Escriba lament the disappearance of another traditional site in their neighborhood.

These comments don't appear to refer to the official history of the city as the national buildings and monuments are shown intact throughout the graphic novel, rather this stolen history can point to the rapidly changing face of the city brought about by neoliberal reforms initiated by the military regime (1973-1990) as well as to more recent methods of gentrification that attempt to recreate Santiago by raising large scale housing and business buildings in historical sectors of the city.

II. Historical Santiago

These changes to Santiago's urban landscape privilege certain histories and versions of the city, they erase entire neighborhoods and the spatial memory that accompanies them. *Heredia Detective* proposes certain historical buildings and monuments as markers of history and memory, and the structure of the graphic novel juxtaposes these historic sites with local memories. Before offering a close reading of the ways that the artists and writers

of *Heredia Detective* articulate the intersections of history and memory it is necessary to briefly review some of the history these locations bring to the panels of the graphic novel. The locations depicted in the graphic novel represent centuries of national projects that have attempted to present Chile's capital city through Eurocentric architecture and monuments, yet the way these locations are interacted with in everyday life often contradicts their intended use. De Certeau described this as a migrational or metaphysical city slipping "into the clear text of the planned and readable city" (93). An important example would be the Monument to American Liberty that is located in the Plaza de Armas outside of the Santiago Metropolitan Cathedral. This monument was designed by the Italian sculptor Francisco Orsolino and was the first



Figure 21. The Monument to American Liberty designed by Orsolino.

national monument erected in Chile after achieving independence from Spain and seeing the last of the Spanish troop surrender in 1826. The monument was inaugurated in 1836 and marks the “Kilómetro Cero” from which point kilometers are marked across the country. The monument depicts in the Roman classical style the goddess Minerva giving liberty to an indigenous woman representing America. Relief sculpture around the base of the monument displays important figures in the history of Chile’s independence: La salida de la Escudra Libertadora (1820), La Entrada del Ejército Libertador a Lima (1821), La Batalla de Ayacucho (1824), and a portrait of Simón Bolívar (Voionmaa Tanner 90).

This monument thus creates a particular historical narrative that situates the center of the nation, the kilometer zero, around the idea that Chile’s right to liberty is inherited from Europe and that the nation’s history descends from Greece/Rome, through Europe at the hands of the Italian sculptor Orosolino, and is commissioned by the creole leaders of the fledgling nation. Although this monument sits near the pre-Colombian Cápac Ñan rout of the Inca, now known as the Paseo Ahumada, the role of the indigenous population in the national imaginary is sculpted as the mostly nude América timidly receiving liberty from Minerva. The Paseo Ahumada came to have the most expensive property values of any Latin American thoroughfare after Santiago’s mayor Patricio Mekis Spikin renovated the paseo in the 1970s after Augusto Pinochet’s coup d’état. Mekis employed the architects Carlos Aliaga and Alvaro Guridi to renovate the Paseo Ahumada in order to bring pedestrian foot traffic back to that area since it had begun to move to the Avenida Providencia and took businesses along with it. Aliaga and Guridi modeled the new

pedestrian area of Ahumada after successful versions they had observed in Madrid, Munich, and Buenos Aires (Farías 2012).

Since this renovation the Paseo Ahumada has seen several other restorations that seem to fluctuate between protecting the Paseo against ambulatory vendors and unwanted loiterers and attempts to attract a desirable public to the Paseo all over again. In an article published in *El Mercurio* in 2006, the impresario Herman Chadwick suggested the idea of eliminating the Paseo Ahumada “para mejorar el centro de Santiago” [“to improve the center of Santiago”] (Droguett). This proposed closure of the Paseo was necessary in his opinion because the businessmen and bankers were leaving the area and most importantly Corpbanca and BancoCrédito banks were planning to leave the area as well. The changes taking place along the Paseo were synonymous on a local level with national shifts towards neoliberal economic policies that followed North American and European models implemented by Reagan and Thatcher.

III. Neoliberal Santiago

These new neoliberal policies made Santiago de Chile a city with a rapidly changing face that left only memories in its wake. Heredia’s relationship with Santiago goes back to the mid-1980s when Ramón Díaz Eterovic published *La ciudad está triste*. Heredia first appeared in Santiago during the era of radical social and economic change. The 80s in Chile saw the dismantling of the state’s Keynesian economic model after the military coup that brought Augusto Pinochet to power, and the implementation of US sponsored neoliberal programs coming south from Milton Friedman’s Chicago School.

This period was initiated by the violence of the September 11, 1973 coup during which the democratically elected president Salvador Allende lost his life, and was followed by decades of violent impunity against Chile's citizens. Alessandro Fornazzari explains the transition thus,

The Chilean neoliberal transition is commonly periodized into two distinct stages. The first – and most ideologically radical phase – began in 1975 and collapsed with the economic crisis of 1982. This first stage was marked by the appointment of Chicago School-trained economists to many of the key state economic posts (Sergio de Castro's appointment as the minister of the economy was this stage's apex). It was during this period that Milton Friedman's ideas were most faithfully put into practice by his Chilean students and followers. These policies included: liberalizing the price system and market, opening the country up to foreign trade, and generally reducing government involvement in the economy. The second phase inaugurated a more pragmatic form of neoliberalism. This emerged after the economic debt crisis of the early 1980s, which sank the short-lived 'Chilean Miracle' and threatened the future of the Chilean neoliberal economic model. (5-6)

These changes across Santiago were not limited only to the Paseo Ahumada. As Ernesto López-Morales points out in his article "Gentrification by Ground Rent Dispossession: The Shadow Cast by Large-Scale Urban Renewal in Santiago de Chile" once Pinochet's military regime began to implement neoliberal reforms in the 70s and 80s

Santiago's central area began to see rapid deindustrialization which in turn moved the more politicized populations away from the center,

These factors, among others, contributed to a mismatch between residential and industrial functions, declining populations, social deprivation, and several decades of further peri-central decline. However, from then on, most of this space survived and crystallized into a very dense structure composed of small residential plots (usually fragmented in lots of 160 m² or so), narrow streets, few green areas and insufficient amenities. (332)

Later in the early 90s urban renewal developers began “using [the] newly created Urban Renewal Subsidy (URS) to repopulate the whole inner-city area in Santiago” (333). According to López-Morales a process of ground rent dispossession saw the gentrification of significant areas of Santiago. This process functioned by seeing the devaluation of first-cycle construction as ground rent increased due to urban development in the surrounding areas. As homeowners and landlords saw the devaluation of their homes and buildings they tended to de-invest in these properties, this caused a decline in capitalized ground rent and in turn lowered the value of surrounding properties in the neighborhood. With these devalued homes and buildings dropping in price real-estate agents tended to

accelerate building devaluation, exploiting racist (or classist) outlooks of decadence among homeowners (in North American cases, provoking fear among white owners about an influx of new black or Latino residents, just to get hold of their properties at lower prices and resell them at higher prices

precisely to black and Latino newcomers). Blow-out is the outward spreading of slums from the inner city in order to amplify the rent gap. (339)

Once the real-estate establishment sees the accelerated devaluation of these areas financial institutions then label these areas as unfit for investments meaning that residents cannot obtain funds with which to improve their properties and increase their value. The final stage of this process of gentrification is the abandonment of these properties, and after this they are bought up at extremely low prices, the original buildings demolished, and large-scale housing or business buildings erected in their place which allows the new owners to make massive profits from a property for which they paid very little (339).

These are the types of radical changes that initiate the protagonist's movement through the city. While the buildings erected by the processes of gentrification do not appear outwardly to resemble the monuments and historic buildings established in Santiago's past they form a type of urban lineage that demonstrates how the city is structured by entities with either national or economic hegemonic power over the area. In the case of the Monument to American Liberty there is a visual narrative of Eurocentric ideology built into the city, at its very center and at its earliest moment. The Paseo Ahumada appears as an area of popular gathering and movement that must be constantly managed by city officials in order for it conform to the vision that the mayor or economic elites have of it. Finally, even housing and who can live in the city is manipulated through elaborate economic and real estate processes that have recreated entire neighborhoods and erased local populations. This legacy is what Heredia and El Escriba are confronted with at the beginning of the graphic novel *Heredia Detective* as they stand on the street

Compañía de Jesús just a few blocks from the Plaza de Armas in front of the now closed City Bar Restaurant where El Escriba proclaims “Otro trozo de la historia de Santiago que nos arrebatan” [“Another piece of Santiago's history that they snatch away from us”] (Díaz Eterovic et al. 10).



Figure 22. The façade of the permanently closed City Bar Restaurant.

IV. Heredia's Santiago

This is the Santiago that Heredia faces at the opening of the graphic novel. Not only was Chile faced with significant economic changes, it also faced exponential growth in crime. According to Lucía Dammert “the period between 1973 and 2006, reported rates of property crimes tripled, and crimes against individuals increased by 100 percent” (49). What is significant about these numbers is that they only represent crimes that were reported during this period, and clearly crimes committed by the state were not included in

these figures. Heredia's place in Santiago in 1987 was that of the private detective who dared investigate crimes even when the police themselves or other government officials were involved. Heredia, and many of the Latin American protagonists of the neopolicial genre, does not necessarily succeed at detective work because he is exceptionally talented like his early European literary predecessors, but rather Heredia persists even when what he discovers could cost him his life or tear at the hegemonic structures that maintain the status quo of the nation. In *La ciudad está triste*, Heredia investigates the disappearance of a young university student named Beatriz who became involved with a radical political group, and she "Empezó a hablar de cosas como democracia, justicia, derechos humanos, y se metió en asuntos no muy bien vistos en este tiempo. Onda roja, usted entiende" ["Started to talk about things like democracy, justice, human rights, and she got into things that aren't well looked upon right now. The red wave, you know."] (30). By the end of the novel Heredia has discovered that Beatriz was disappeared by city officials and although Heredia sees his own type of justice done he confesses,

Ya no hay misterio que descubrir. En verdad, nunca existió ningún misterio. Todo no es más que un crimen, un sucio, asqueroso y maldito crimen. Las pistas que revelan al culpable en la última página son para las novelas; en la realidad los asesinos ostentan sus culpas con luces de neón. Se conocen sus nombres y apellidos, pero nadie hace nada por juzgarlos. (67)

[Now there isn't any mystery to solve. Really, there never was a mystery. It's nothing more than a crime, a filthy, disgusting, goddamned crime. The clues that reveal the culprit on the last page are for the novels; in real life

the murderers flaunt their guilt like a neon sign. Their names are known, but no one does anything to see them judged.]

The significance and the irony of Heredia's statement is that he is speaking through a novel and while the citizens of Santiago do indeed know the names of those perpetrating violence against them they are unable to find justice for themselves, yet Heredia in the pages of this novel was able to point to the police and politicians in Santiago as being those guilty murderers. Through Heredia and the fiction of *La ciudad está triste* it was possible to say what the citizens already knew to be all too real – the government was the source of these crimes and there was little-to-nothing they could do about it. While this was the sad truth Heredia provided a form of imaginary or popular justice against the impunity of the military regime.

V. Heredia's Popular Criminology

Just as Ramón Díaz Eterovic's novels are linked to Chile's history of crime, Nickie Phillips and Staci Strobl, authors of *Comic Book Crime*, emphasize that comic books in particular “offer expressions of contemporary life that tap into our hopes, fears, personal insecurities, and uncertainties about the future” (2). The purpose of their book is to “explore the ways in which meanings about crime and justice are negotiated and contested in comic books and the way these imaginings form part of a broader cultural context in which readers absorb, reproduce, and resist notions of justice” (2). Comics, in general, are able to do this not only through the narratives they communicate but also through the visual cues they provide, suggesting interesting links between the appearances of criminals and heroes,

crime scenes, and methods of executing justice. Phillips and Strobl's approach to comics as cultural products that circulate about crime and justice follows what Nicole Rafter coined as "popular criminology" and exists at the intersection of academic criminology and popular culture (6). This way of reading the graphic novel *Heredia Detective* opens it to a reading that can discover how the Chilean popular imaginary may determine what actions or crimes truly represent a threat to the social order as well as who exercises justice and who commits crime in the streets of Santiago. Phillips and Strobl make clear that whether or not these graphic fictions accurately show the reality of crime and justice, "that the myths contained in these stories [...] reverberate through the subculture and ultimately shape a larger cultural discourse" (19). Díaz Eterovic's writings have won recognition around the globe and his texts can offer readers an insight into Chile's, and in particular Santiago's, vision of crime and justice. The reading of the Heredia novels and graphic novel offer narratives that reveal the true culprits behind Santiago's violent past and at the same time they suggest methods of obtaining justice – these methods are almost always extra-legal. The expressions of contemporary life that appear in the graphic novel *Heredia Detective* connect the present and the future with memories of Chile's past that are haunted by disappearances, serial murders, lies and betrayal, and even promises of economic stability that saw Santiago permanently changed. My analysis of the graphic novel *Heredia Detective* is carried out with the concept of popular criminology in mind in an attempt to show how this collaborative text draws connections between urban change and renewal, memory, and crime.

The detective Heredia has been the protagonist of some sixteen novels and numerous short stories by Ramón Díaz Eterovic. Heredia as a character has seen Chile's, and more significantly Santiago's, many transitions and yet he remains a relevant cultural product. As the detective Heredia has traversed Chile's imaginary over the years he has passed between novels, short stories, and the television, and in 2011 he was brought to the world of sequential art. Ramón Díaz Eterovic explains, "Desde que publiqué la novela *La ciudad está triste* [...] imaginé a Heredia convertido en un personaje de historieta, dibujado en blanco y negro" ["Since the publication of *The City Is Sad* [...] I imagined Heredia becoming a comic book character, drawn in black and white"] (Díaz Eterovic et al. 5). Heredia's adaptation to the pages of the graphic novel *Heredia Detective* began a few years earlier with a conversation between the comic scriptwriter Carlos Reyes and the artist Gonzalo Martínez where the first drafts of Heredia's illustrated form came about. The number of writers and artists that collaborated in the making of the graphic novel is proof of Heredia's importance in Chile's pop culture imaginary. The graphic novel shows Santiago's detective illustrated by more than twenty different artists in widely differing styles. It is interesting to note that Ramón Díaz Eterovic embraces the multiplicity of the artists' versions of his detective, "A partir de este libro, Heredia adquiere nuevos rostros. Invito a conocerlos y a disfrutarlos. Son parte de la vida de Heredia y de sus andanzas por el barrio Mapocho y sus alrededores" ["From this book on, Heredia acquires new faces. I invite you to come to know them and to enjoy them. They are part of Heredia's life and a part of his adventures in the Mapocho district and its surrounding areas"] (Díaz Eterovic et al. 6). The multiple faces of Heredia demonstrate how Díaz Eterovic's novels have

impacted the imagination of Santiago's artists, but their re-imagining of the detective Heredia has seen one particular version selected by LOM Ediciones to be the new face of the detective. Gonzalo Martínez's rendering of Heredia now appears on the new editions of Díaz Eterovic's novels. The graphic novel's ability to capture the spirit of Heredia on its pages has in turn produced a new and official version of the detective that has been retro-fitted to Díaz Eterovic's original novels. *La ciudad está triste* now appears with Martínez's version of Heredia on the cover walking the streets of the Mapocho district, and Díaz Eterovic's more recent novels, like *La música de la soledad* (2014), present Heredia through Martínez's art.



Figure 23. Cover art for the re-edition of "La ciudad está triste" art by Gonzalo Martínez.

The detective Heredia has been a fixture of popular imagination in Chile over the last three decades but Díaz Eterovic's work has also been recognized around the world with

literary prizes and the translation of his novels into multiple languages. As early as 1987 Díaz Eterovic was recognized for his work with the Anna Seghers award from the German Art Academy, he would go on to win the Premio del Consejo Nacional del Libro y la Lectura in 1995, the Premio Municipal de Literatura de Santiago in 1996, Premio Las Dos Orillas 2000 del Salón del Libro Iberoamericano at the international crime fiction event Semana Negra de Gijón, the Premio Altazor de Narrativa in 2009, and the award for Mejor Obra Literaria 2009, among others. He has also been a finalist for the Casa las Américas literature prize from Cuba and for the Dashiell Hammett Award from the International Association of Crime Writers. He is a politically committed author and has explained the politics of his works with the following:

La novela policial que escribo está estrechamente ligada a los crímenes políticos que han asolado a Chile y a Latinoamérica. Un crimen que abandona el cuarto cerrado o las motivaciones individuales, y se relaciona al poder del Estado, a los negociados políticos y económicos, a la falta de credibilidad en la justicia, a la búsqueda de verdad. La novela policial ha sido para mí una perspectiva para hablar de temas sensibles en la sociedad chilena, como los detenidos desaparecidos, el narcotráfico, la carencia de una democracia real, las traiciones. Mis novelas las siento como una crónica de la historia chilena de los últimos 20 o 25 años. (“Ramón Díaz Eterovic presentará las nuevas luchas del Detective Heredia en Primera Feria Subantártica del Libro” 2014)

[The type of crime novel I write is closely linked to the political crimes that have devastated Chile and Latin America. A type of crime that leaves behind the lock room or individual motivations, it is related to the power of the State, to political and economic negotiations, to inability to believe in justice, to the search for truth. The crime novel for me has been a perspective that allows me to talk about topics that are sensitive in Chilean society, such as disappeared detainees, drug trafficking, the lack of real democracy, betrayals. I feel that my novels are like a chronicle of Chile's history over the last twenty or twenty-five years]

The detective Heredia, over the last three decades, has been a consistent voice in Chile's cultural imaginary, pointing out the injustices perpetuated against Santiago's citizens. Ramón Díaz Eterovic has been able to create a fictional character that has won national and international recognition for his persistence in questioning and investigation crimes that are relevant on a national level, and being able to bring readers in contact with larger political and economic processes that affect them. In reality, all too often these crimes against humanity, committed by the State, are not punished, but Díaz Eterovic's narratives create the possibility of imagining justice for these offenses.

Heredia Detective is a collaborative text written and illustrated by Ramón Díaz Eterovic, Carlos Reyes, Cristian Petit-Laurent, Gonzalo Martínez, Abel Elizondo, Demetrio Babul, Rodrigo Elgueta, Ítalo Ahumada, and Félix Vega. The text is organized into short stories each written and illustrated by different creators. Most of the stories are based on a collection of short fiction by Ramón Díaz Eterovic titled *Muchos gatos para un*

solo crimen. The graphic novel includes an additional narrative that joins these stories together. This unifying narrative is an important focal point of my analysis as it is unique to the comic adaptation of the text and because it creates a new context for each of the shorter stories embedded within it. This segment of the book was written by Carlos Reyes and illustrated by Gonzalo Martínez. Here I pay particular attention to the contributions of Gonzalo Martínez to this text.

Gonzalo Martínez was initially trained as an architect, which is easy to understand as soon as one begins to interact with his art. Martínez is often identified by his contemporaries, such as Carlos Reyes and Moisés Hasson, as being responsible for the resurrection of the comic medium in Chile and for the current boom in comic and graphic novel production throughout the country ("La memoria de la (des) conocida historieta chilena" 2014). Martínez's graphic adaptation of Alberto Fuguet's *Road Story* simultaneously established the Chilean graphic novel in both popular and academic realms.

The narrative of *Heredia Detective* is focused on the city of Santiago as its protagonist. This is often said of the hard-boiled genre in crime fiction but this idea becomes even clearer in the medium of the graphic novel. At a visual level, images of buildings and monuments dominate Martínez's page layouts. Often the panels showing Santiago's cityscape expand behind or overlap other panels and fill the gutter spaces. This tactic puts the city behind, over, or between the actions of the text. Martínez shows Heredia and his friend El Escriba dwarfed by the surrounding urban spaces with their word balloons

descending vertically as a way of bringing the eye back to the characters hidden by these images of the city. Martínez's use of panels, as well as

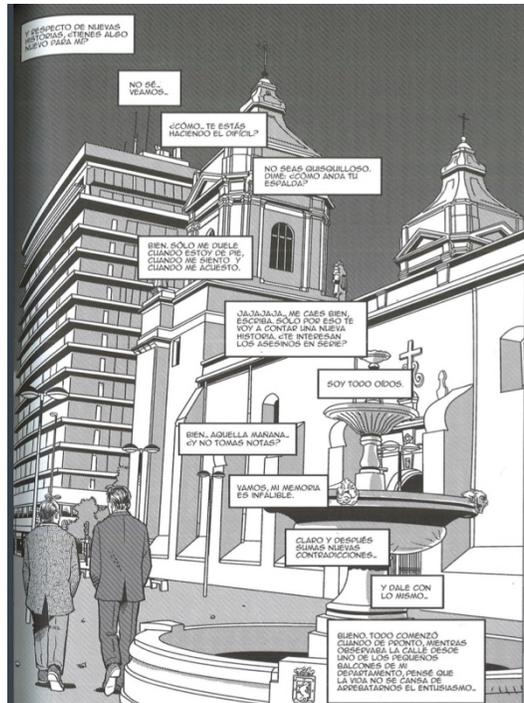


Figure 24. An example of Martínez's page layouts that are dominated by the cityscape of Santiago.

the spaces between them, is one of the ways that the artist creates such a vivid portrayal of Santiago. The comic theorist Scott McCloud described the importance of the spaces between panels, called gutters, when he explained the process of closure in comics in his book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1994). McCloud explains that sequential art is

a medium where the audience is a willing participant and conscious collaborator and closure is the agent of change, time and motion. See that space between the panels? That's what comics aficionados have named 'the gutter.' And despite its unceremonious title, the gutter plays host to much

of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics! Here in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea. [...]. Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality. (66-67)

In the case of Martínez's construction of Santiago in sequential art there are more than simply two juxtaposed images leaving a gutter in which the mind may imagine the rest of the city. Martínez uses multiple methods of closure and unconventional page and panel layouts to present the city and the detective Heredia that uniquely build the city of Santiago through the overlapping panels and between the gutters of *Heredia Detective*. On the first three pages of the graphic novel Martínez employs both action-to-action transitions and aspect-to-aspect representations of Santiago and Heredia to create page layouts that embed the action of the narrative within a robust vision of the city. There are sequences of panels on both of these pages where the order of reading the panels is somewhat unimportant since more than narrate the order in which actions take place they bypass "time for the most part and [set] a wandering eye on different aspects of a place, idea or mood" (McCloud 72). These aspect-to-aspect panels are used by Martínez to recreate the atmosphere of Santiago. This aspect-to-aspect and overlapping representation of Santiago makes the city a multifaceted space that is not simply a backdrop but rather



Figure 25. Martínez's page breakdown places images of the city behind and over other panels - filling the gutters with images of Santiago.

makes it a focal point, a protagonist, in many of the panels and pages of the graphic novel. On these first three pages alone the illustrations of the city often dominate the characters within the panel or close-up images of Heredia or El Escriba are framed by renderings of Santiago's iconic, and now closed, City Bar Restaurant on the street Compañía de Jesús. While Martínez crowds his page layouts with buildings they do not feel cluttered. The panels showcasing Santiago's urban landscape almost always extend behind the other panels on the page and eliminate the gutter. This tactic embeds the actions of the characters within the cityscape – what happens between the panels is Santiago, life in Chile's capital city. McCloud uses a two-panel example to show how readers participate in the creation of the narrative in sequential art. He says,

Every act committed to paper by the comics artist is aided and abetted by a silent accomplice. An equal partner in crime known as the reader. I may have drawn an axe being raised in this example, but I'm not the one who let it drop or decided how hard the blow, or who screamed, or why. That, dear reader, was your special crime, each of you committing it in your own style. All of you participated in the murder. All of you held the axe and chose your spot. To kill a man between panels is to condemn him to a thousand deaths.

(68-69)

I MAY HAVE DRAWN AN *AXE* BEING *RAISED* IN THIS EXAMPLE, BUT I'M NOT THE ONE WHO LET IT *DROP* OR DECIDED HOW *HARD* THE BLOW, OR *WHO* SCREAMED, OR *WHY*.



THAT, DEAR READER, WAS YOUR *SPECIAL CRIME*, EACH OF YOU COMMITTING IT IN YOUR OWN *STYLE*.

Figure 26. McCloud's explanation of what happens in the gutter. In the case of Martínez's art, the city of Santiago happens in the gutter.

If we read the gutter space as the reader's moment of agency within the comic text then it is interesting to think that in *Heredia Detective* Martínez often chooses to fill in those spaces. This could be read as a way of locating the reader's agency within the imaginary

of Santiago since it is the city's landscape that occupies the gutter spaces. In some way this can limit the participation of the reader to the realm of Heredia's city, but this only emphasizes the point that Santiago itself is a vital and active part of this text. Martínez's handling of the cityscape and the panel and page layouts in *Heredia Detective* sets the mood for the rest of the graphic novel and firmly locates the events within a temporal and spatial plane of Santiago.

The city itself is the first victim to be shown in *Heredia Detective*. This foundational crime against the city serves as the impetus that sets the rest of the narrative into motion. Heredia and El Escriba are shown meeting outside the City Bar Restaurant where they would traditionally meet for Heredia to tell El Escriba the details of his cases so they could be turned into novels. When the characters find the bar permanently closed they begin to wander the streets of Santiago, recalling crimes and acts of violence that have taken place along their path through the city. In *Heredia Detective* crime and violence are not shown, they are remembered. Yet the act of remembering functions only in relation to physical location. These remembered crimes and violences are not arbitrary but are intimate and strictly related to their environment. Heredia and El Escriba's act of walking the city stirs memories of past crimes that become a haunting force in the text, and each of the stops they make along their way marks a place of memory. The concepts of haunting (hauntology: the things that return) and places of memory (lieux de mémoire) provide insightful methods for questioning not only the narrative structure of *Heredia Detective* but also for analyzing the visual and sequential aspects of the graphic novel.

VI. Haunting Santiago's Places of Memory

Pierre Nora offers an important approach to deciphering how these historic national sites can be haunted by other memories and meanings. Pierre Nora calls these types of locations *lieux de mémoire* or places of memory. These concepts are explored in extensive detail in Nora's text *Realms of Memory*. I will be referencing his text "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*" for concise explanations and descriptions of the functioning of these places of memory. History and memory are at odds, history destroys memory, usurps it; "History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it" (Nora 9). While, on the other hand, "memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual" (9), and has the power to alter the significance of historic places with nationally prescribed meanings. Nora explains that "history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things" (9) and that memory has barely survived our current historical age because it has often been abandoned for the ease that history offers (12). The resistance of memory to hegemonic, top-down historical meanings is at the core of *Heredia Detective* but may not be immediately obvious without reading the text primarily as sequential art and paying specific attention to how this medium functions. The graphic novel uses juxtaposition, page turns, visual braiding, and a variety of illustrators to resist the national hegemonic meanings ascribed to specific buildings and monuments in the city of Santiago.

As Paul Skenazy indicates in his book, the hard-boiled mode of crime fiction is a genre of hauntings (114). The traditional hard-boiled texts by Chandler and Hammett tell stories of crimes that are made complex due to their connections to the past that are often

purposefully hidden to protect rich and powerful individuals or institutions (Scaggs 66). An important feature of hard-boiled fiction is the recovery of this past information that haunts the present. This type of mystery and crime can be thought of in the terms Derrida employed when speaking of hauntings; the things that return. In the case of *Heredia Detective* there are sites of haunting throughout the center of Santiago. As Heredia and El Escriba wander the city there are stories from the past that return, and also importantly, other stories that do not. These locations are not arbitrary. The relationships between the sites illustrated in the graphic novel and the memories they conjure in the protagonists call into question the mnemonic power of national monuments and buildings that enshrine state-sanctioned discourses on history.

Gonzalo Martínez's training in architecture and his artistic skill allow him to recreate, in fine detail, the buildings of Santiago's Plaza de Armas and the monuments that occupy the city center. Since these sites and monuments have significant historical meanings they are some of the city's most recognizable icons. Each building or monument that Martínez illustrates carries its own official history and meaning as determined by the state and these sites should elicit particular memories in the citizens that encounter them, but the text shows that these sites are possessed and haunted by alternative pasts and futures that will not leave the present be. This is the realm of hauntology; Warren Montag explains that this is the

Task of interrogating the spirit, that which is neither living nor dead. The linear time of birth, life and death, of the beginning and the end [...], which later allows us to speak of what persists beyond the end, beyond death, of

what was never alive enough to die, never present enough to become absent. What exist between presence and absence that prevents the non-present from simply disappearing? Using different language, we might put the question another way: how does what is absent produce effects? ‘What is the effectivity or the presence of a specter, that is of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum?’ (71)

This type of haunting is why Heredia is unable to interact with the city without the past crossing over into his experience of the city in the present. It functions along the same lines as Villalobos-Ruminott’s investigation of the disappeared bodies, his cindrology, which recognizes that the present is dependent upon the past especially when it leaves no physical trace. What he calls “la desaparición de la misma desaparición” [“the disappearance of disappearance itself”] (3).

The path that Heredia and El Escriba take through Santiago leads them to the Plaza de Armas. The artist Gonzalo Martínez carefully reproduces the Correo Central building, the Monument to American Liberty, and the Santiago Metropolitan Cathedral among other iconic locations. Their walking of the city is reminiscent of the *crónica* but in the case of *Heredia Detective* they become visual crónicas of memory, crónicas of hauntings. It is important to note that these memories of violence are not specters of the military dictatorship, they are more recent. They are fresh, and like memory will change with the next crime or violent act that occurs near them. These specters are representations of contemporary forms of violence that may often be overshadowed by the monumental violence of Chile's past: the military coup of September 11, 1973, the surveillance of

civilians, torture, death, and disappearances. Heredia, as a fictional character, has served to critique criminal practices since his inception. Heredia has sought out justice through extra-legal means where legal justice was unattainable. Just as Heredia is a fixture in the popular imaginary so too are the concepts of popular justice that his narratives propose. As Jock Young points out in his text “Constructing the Paradigm of Violence: Mass Media, Violence, and Youth” pop culture products “provide a script or narrative which suggests when violence is appropriate, against whom, for what reasons and with what effects, together with images of those against whom violence is permitted and prohibited” (3). Heredia then becomes a representation of alternative conceptualizations of justice, popular forms of justice, that can contest national discourses on crime and violence and who is guilty of perpetuating it against the citizens of Santiago. Heredia's role as a conceptual tool for embodying ideas of popular justice contributes significantly to why he has remained relevant over the last thirty years despite the drastic social and political changes that have occurred in Chile. Heredia is the private eye that questions these changes, these transitions, and seeks to find justice when it appears impossible to achieve. Although Heredia traditionally solves crimes using hard-boiled, pig-headed methods, it is significant that in the graphic novel the instigating crime is one that cannot be solved by his usual methods. The forces that are changing the face of Santiago are larger and more diffused, and the graphic novel proposes that the only means of resolving this crime is memory.

Heredia Detective employs the unique medium of sequential art to depict the violent past that continues to be present in Santiago's places of memory. In light of surpassing the fortieth anniversary of the coup d'état that initiated Pinochet's dictatorship

it is important to revisit places of memory to find new historical and symbolic meanings in the unavoidable remnants of the past that continue to linger in the present. Fredric Jameson points out that it is precisely in “our current present, the wealthy, sunny, gleaming world of the postmodern and the end of history, of the new world system of late capitalism” that we are unexpectedly betrayed by the past (39). This is precisely what *Heredia Detective* does by exploring the repercussions of the Military Regime's neoliberal economic policies upon Santiago's cityscape. There is an attempt to reveal the specters of the past that dwell in the seemingly distant present. While the graphic novel avoids most depictions of physical violence it carefully develops a critique of the changing face of the city, the loss of traditional barrios (specifically the Barrio Mapocho) and sites of socialization (such as the City Bar Restaurant), and the destructive role of gentrification. As urban renewal and gentrification eradicate the working class inhabitants from the city center it makes way for history to replace the living memory of those who previously lived in these areas. Díaz Eterovic, Reyes, Martínez and the other creators of *Heredia Detective* juxtapose the developing metropolitan vision of Santiago with the memories of violence that haunt its streets as a form of preserving the local knowledge of a Santiago that is rapidly disappearing. A version of Santiago that does not only exist in the streets, landmarks, and buildings of the city but a Santiago that exists through the inhabitants of the city and their memories and their lived use of those streets, landmarks, and buildings.

As the two wander the city they are confronted with violent memories from the past. Their inevitable encounter with memories of crime and violence that rupture the façade of the neoliberal Santiago reveal that these urban spaces are haunted by memories

that the whitewashing of official history cannot erase. The medium of sequential art provides a unique artistic approach to the articulations of crime, urban space, and memory. As Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling point out: “The structuring gaze of comics implements a topographical reading of the cityscape, which is led by the point of view in frames, panels and sequences. The urban landscape is similarly structured by panel-like blocks and grids” (7). The city of Santiago, then, is mapped in the topographic reading of the comic panels and shown in detail within the individual panels of the graphic novel. The focus of *Heredia Detective* on iconic urban spaces in Chile’s capital helps to create a mythology of the ordinary (in the sense of Roland Barthes’ study of how the message of a thing can become myth) where the present form of the city confronts memory through an ordinary stroll about the urban center (Barthes 109). In the graphic novel a collaborative team of comic artists, each with their own style and emphasis, create a multifaceted vision of how violence haunts Santiago’s urban spaces.

In the diegetic world of the graphic novel *Heredia* and El Escriba find themselves meeting outside the City Bar Restaurant that has been permanently closed. Since “la modernidad que arrasa con los barrios tradicionales de Santiago” [“the modernity that lays waste to the traditional neighborhoods of Santiago”] has robbed them of their classic meeting spot they begin to wander the streets of the city (Díaz Eterovic et al. 9). On the very first page of the graphic novel it can be seen that the city and its urban landscape will be the grand contextualizing influence over the text. The panels that show the action of the story are embedded within a larger image of the building where *Heredia* lives. This visual indicator, which differs from the traditional comic page layout, continues throughout the

graphic novel and establishes the city of Santiago as the structuring feature of the lives of the characters. Heredia and El Escriba begin their nostalgic walk through the city by referencing two forms of violence that have visited the urban center. El Escriba asks Heredia if he is “sacando a pasear los fantasmas” [“taking your ghosts out for a stroll”] (10) a reference to the victims of violence that the detective has investigated – and then El Escriba references a form of economic and political violence that has changed the face of the city: “Es como si alguien estuviese empeñado en arrancar el corazón a nuestra ciudad.” [“It’s as if someone were determined to tear the heart out of our city”] (10). The extreme economic reforms implemented during the dictatorship under the direction of the University of Chicago’s School of Economics encouraged waves of gentrification in the city that re-structured its urban landscape. One facet of these changes was due to “the law against land speculation [being] removed by the military dictatorship, and regulations to control these practices have been left extremely soft by the more recent democratic governments” (Lopez-Morales 337). These speculative real-estate practices have contrastingly left vast areas of the city unused and dilapidated or seen large-scale buildings erected, radically changing the face of neighborhoods and the values of the properties surrounding these new edifices. This double form of nostalgia places Heredia and El Escriba in contact with memories of the city that its new form often erases through these speculative tactics.

VII. The Correo Central and Serial Murder

While Heredia and El Escriba pass in front of the Correo Central building the detective announces, “Cada vez que recorro estas calles recuerdo sus historias. Cerca de aquí mataron a una mujer a la salida de un cine porno.” [“Everytime I walk these streets I remember their histories. Near here a woman was murdered leaving a porn theater”] (Díaz Eterovic et al. 11). This memory of violence appears in stark contrast to

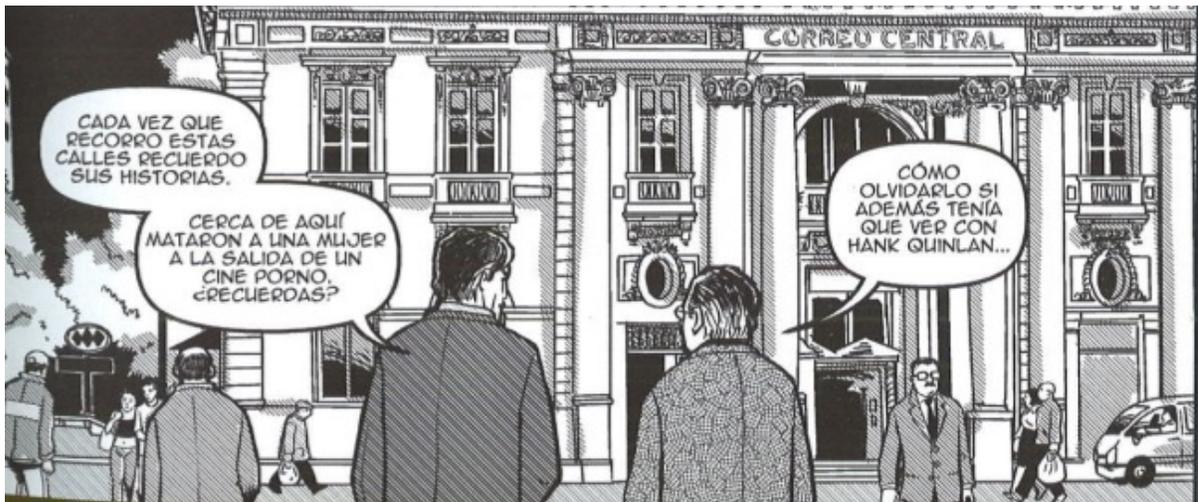


Figure 27. Herediad and El Escriba stand before the Correo Central building and think about serial killings that happened nearby.

the elegant Correo Central building and creates a discourse that calls into question the history that this urban space is supposed to elicit. This building was built in 1882 by Ricardo Brown on the foundations of the burnt down Palacio de los Gobernantes that was the office of the president of the republic until the 1840s. The Correo Central houses a museum and shares the Plaza de Armas with the national cathedral and national museum. This structure that houses officialized versions of national history can be read as one of many of the state’s apparatuses for controlling the realms of memory. The memory that arises in Heredia’s mind, titled in the graphic novel “Vi morir a Hank Quinlan” [“I Saw Hank Quilan Die”], can be perceived as a specter that contests official history. Since the

museum is a space that excludes memory in order to establish history, Heredia's memory of a series of murders that the police were unable to solve undermines the state's monopoly over justice and history at once. As the graphic novel flashes back, now at the hands of the comic artist Abel Elizondo, to show Heredia's memory of the grisly serial killings that took place outside the Normandie Theater, the dominance of official history, represented by El Correo Central, fades into the dark streets of the next chapter. The transition from Gonzalo Martínez's version of the streets of Santiago to Abel Elizondo's interpretation is a page turn and is a drastic change from one artist's style to another. As the first flashback/memory shown in the graphic novel Elizondo's section of the text shows Santiago framed in darkness. In this segment of the book the page borders and gutters are completely black, a complete reversal of Martínez's white gutters or his gutters filled in with illustrations of the city. In this memory Elizondo employs high-contrast black and white to create a truly noir mood allowing the black sections of the panels to bleed out of their borderless frames into the black gutters between them. If Martínez's sections of *Heredia Detective* places Santiago between the gutters and at the center of the story, then Elizondo's section hides all the actions taking place in the gutters completely in the dark, creating an ominous environment of dread. Even Heredia's thoughts are encased in black squares on the black pages, outlined with only a thin border of white. The expressionism of Elizondo's opening page is striking. The page is divided in half vertically with white areas dominating the first panel showing the detective walking down a relatively realistic rendering of the street Tarapacá just outside the

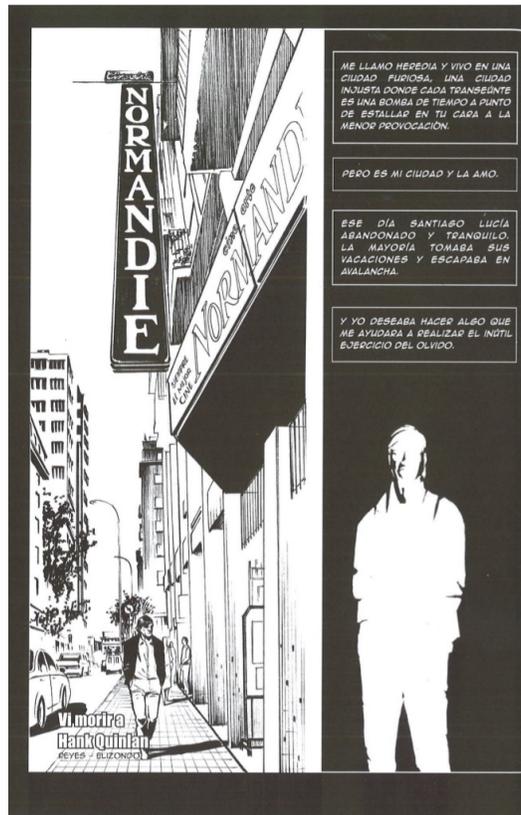


Figure 28. Abel Elizondo's illustration of Heredia's violent recollection of the past transitions into a noir vision of Santiago.

CineArte Normandie. The juxtaposed panel is black with only Heredia's silhouette in white, above him are his thought: "Me llamo Heredia y vivo en una ciudad furiosa, una ciudad injusta donde cada transeúnte es una bomba de tiempo a punto de estallar en tu cara a la menor provocación. Pero es mi ciudad y la amo" ["My name is Heredia and I live in a furious city, an unjust city where every passerby is a time bomb ready to explode in your face at the least provocation. But it's my city and I love it."] (Díaz Eterovic et al. 12). The articulation between Martínez's page showing the Correo Central building that evoked the memory and the dark intensity of Elizondo's opening to that memory is striking and signals the contradictions between Santiago's present as shown in Martínez's style and its violent

past depicted by Elizondo. It is possible to read Elizondo's version of this memory as part of the psyche of the city, a sort of expressionistic trauma connected to the present of the Correo Central building and thus Santiago's history as a whole. Since the Correo Central initially housed the presidential office it is associated with the establishment of Santiago as a respectable city with architecture of universal taste, the establishment of the nation. As signaled by Bjorn Quiring, "the city as mnemonic device has a somewhat sinister side: It commemorates that its urban law and order was established by acts beyond the law, namely violent seizures of power and acts of domination" (200). This applies equally to Ricardo Brown's Correo Central building as a mnemonic device of national history and power. In order to establish and maintain the state's power over these historic national sites there is a plentitude of violent memories tied to them, and Heredia's memory is only one added to the many. The graphic novel's use of page-turns and even page color transitions draws attention to the intersection of memory and history, and shows that the history supposedly associated with the Correo Central can be subverted by local memories that overpower the historic significance of the site.

VIII. The Monument to American Liberty, Lies, and Fantasy

As the detective and El Escriba continue their perambulation around the Plaza de Armas they find themselves standing before The Monument to American Liberty while "admiring" a woman as she walks by. The monument was the first to be set up in the plaza after independence and was sculpted by Francisco Orsolino, an Italian. The sculpture depicts the goddess Minerva giving América, represented by a mostly nude indigenous

woman, liberty. This narrative of Eurocentric culture that pretends to bestow some form of authority on the new nation commemorates historic moments around its base, but once again the memories of Heredia and El Escriba disrupt the official power of the urban space that conjures them. Heredia recalls the memory titled “Por amor a la Srta. Blandish” [“For the Love of Ms. Blandish”]. While the Monument attempts to present a history that establishes order and hierarchy, Heredia’s memory



Figure 29. Heredia and El Escriba watch a beautiful woman with the Monument to American Liberty behind them.

is one that tells of lies and betrayal and serves as a point of juxtaposition to the Orsolino’s monument. The Monument to American Liberty stands as the marker of kilometro cero for Chile, the contrasting memory that the graphic novel proposes is that of a betrayal, deception, and hidden truths.

Once again a page-turn reveals the transition between the smooth, dark lines and architectural renderings of Gonzalo Martínez and the soft and hazy pencil work of Rodrigo Elgueta, the artist illustrating the story of Srta. Blandish. In contrast to the statuesque woman illustrated by Martínez, Elgueta's renderings are gently shaded and almost dream-like. Since the beauty of the Srta. Blandish is the focal point of this memory it makes sense that Elgueta would illustrate this segment. In this case Heredia is hired by the Señora de Arizmendi to investigate her husband and discover if he is having an affair. Heredia admits that he prefers not to take adultery cases "porque no calzan con el molde de detective novelesco" ["because they don't fit the mold of a literary detective"] (Díaz Eterovic et al. 50). Nevertheless, Heredia takes the case and easily discovers Mr. Arizmendi's indiscretions, but when Heredia confronts the woman that has stolen Mr. Arizmendi's heart he too falls for her. Although Heredia has photographic evidence of the affair he chooses not to tell Señora de Arizmendi the truth when the time comes. Instead Heredia tells her that "su marido es tan inocente como una blanca paloma" ["your husband is as innocent as a white dove"] and destroys the evidence (57). Heredia explains why he decided to keep the truth to himself when his talking cat Simenon asks him about the stupid look on his face and guesses that it has something to do with a woman. Heredia replies, "Te equivocas, no es una mujer, es una diosa que debo traicionar" ["You're wrong, it's not a woman, it's a goddess that I have to betray"] (56). This reference to betraying a goddess can be linked back to the Monument to American Liberty that inspired the memory of the Srta. Blandish in the first place. In this case it seems that the monument, with Minerva atop, betrays a hidden truth. Chile's first, foundational monument can be read as a version of truth that

masks a more painful history. The fact that the graphic novel *Heredia Detective* structured the connection between this particular memory and the Monument to American Liberty shows how articulations between images in comics and narratives can generate discourses that do not fully appear in the images or texts alone. The final panels of the story show Heredia reclining in his chair and the face of the Srta. Blandish appearing in his memory – a type of fantasy that betrays the reality of the truth he had so recently discovered. So too the Monument to American Liberty stands in a central location in the Plaza de Armas as a sort of fantasy that deflects the past. When Heredia says that he must betray a goddess, it is possible to consider this as not a betrayal of Minerva but of América instead. The nature of both the monument and Heredia’s memory as forms of revealing and again hiding truth is reflected throughout Elgueta’s segment of the graphic novel. The memory opens with a frameless panel but as the story moves forward the edges of the panels become increasingly more jagged and dark. These jagged panel borders contrast with the soft penciling of Elgueta’s illustrations and convey a sense of instability as they become more and more prominent as the story moves along, but at the final panels of the segment the borders are once again relatively stable. This coincides with Heredia’s decision to maintain the status quo by not revealing the truth about the Srta. Blandish, which allows him to continue to fantasize about her as shown in the last panel. As the truth is discovered in this segment the boundaries around the story become unstable and only when the status quo is restored do those borders begin to return to order.

The juxtapositions of national buildings and monuments and the history they represent with the memories that these same spaces bring to Heredia’s mind articulate how

popular memory can contradict official ideas of nation as laid out in the urban landscape. Ramón Díaz Eterovic, the creator of the detective Heredia, indicated that he wanted to show “un Chile a media luz que no siempre aparece en los titulares de la prensa ni en las imagines de la televisión.” [“a dimly-lit Chile that doesn’t always appear in the headlines of the news or in the images on TV”] (Díaz Eterovic et al. 6). The graphic novel *Heredia Detective* proposes a metamorphosis of these national spaces vis-à-vis the memories they inspire in the protagonist. The importance of this is that any individual can be capable of suggesting alternate memories for these spaces. Carlos Reyes, one of the contributors to the graphic novel wrote, “Cada vez que Heredia entra en acción hay un discurso sobre lo chileno, sobre un gran y enorme crimen social que se repite una y otra vez que permite el devenir de la soledad cotidiana, el prejuicio social y la certeza de una injusticia inmanente” [“Every time that Heredia goes into action there is a discourse about being Chilean, about a great and enormous social crime that is repeated over and over that allows the development of quotidian isolation, social prejudice and the certainty of imminent injustice”] (Díaz Eterovic et al. 124). The actions that Heredia undertakes in this graphic novel are through memories that contest in certain ways what it may mean to be “Chilean.”

IX. Braiding the Loose Ends

The two examples analyzed previously reveal how the articulations between sites of historical national significance (the Correo Central building or the Monument to American Liberty) and the memories associated with them can serve as affective insights into how Santiago’s urban spaces are lived and used by the city dweller in spite of the site’s

intended mnemonic function. These examples represent a reading of the graphic novel in terms of a linear panel-to-panel and page-to-page analysis that Thierry Groensteen called Restrained Arthrology. *Heredia Detective* can also be analyzed by means of General Arthrology:

The other relations, translinear or distant, emerge from general arthrology [...]. They represent a more elaborate level of integration between the narrative flux (which can also be called the narrative energy or, again, to adopt an expression from Hubert Damisch, the ‘story shuttle’ [*navette du récit*]) and the spatio-topical operation, in which the essential component, as Henri Van Lier has named it, is the “multiframe” (*multicadre*).
(Groensteen 22)

This multiframe (strip, page, double page or book length system of panels) reading permits non-contiguous pages and panels to be read together although they appear at great distance from one another within the text (30). These translinear readings are instances of braiding (tressage) that “frequently concern panels (or pluri-panel sequences) distant by several pages, and that cannot be viewed simultaneously” (148). The structure of *Heredia Detective* carefully braids together representations of national historical sites, narratives of memory, page-turns, and transitions between illustrators to focus narrative energy on a series of sites throughout the graphic novel. These braided sites in the text focus on representations of the Correo Central building, the Monument to American Liberty, the Mercado Central de Santiago, and the Iglesia de Santo Domingo. All these locations are clustered around the Plaza de Armas – the heart of the city of Santiago de Chile. Each of

these locations are illustrated by Gonzalo Martínez which tightens the visual braid that holds these images together throughout the text. Martínez's vision of Santiago is architectural, clean, and almost completely devoid of inhabitants. The detective Heredia and El Escriba appear in the panels on these pages but they are almost always dominated by the architecture in some way. Other than these two characters Martínez does not occupy the city with many additional humans, and when he does they are drawn in such a way that their sense of movement or life is limited, they are statuesque. These empty illustrations of Santiago bring to memory the processes of gentrification that have removed the traditional working-class populations from the city center and to the periphery. Heredia's walk through the city becomes a lament over the absence of the popular classes, a lament for the disappearances of the sites of *convivencia* like the City Bar Restaurant. Matríguez's Santiago has been emptied out, it has become a ghost city, haunted by the memories that fill the pages of the graphic novel.

Here it is interesting to consider that according to Groensteen sites of braiding can become

enriched with resonances that have an effect of transcending the functionality of the site that it occupies, to confer the quality of *place*. What is a place other than a habituated space that we can cross, visit, invest in, a space where relations are made and unmade? If all the terms of a sequence, and consequently all the units of the network, constitute sites, it is the attachment, moreover, of these units to one or more remarkable series, that defines them as places. (Groensteen 148)

Then Gonzalo Martínez's illustrations of these locations become places, playing on their reality as physical places in Santiago and their existence as braided site/places in the work of sequential art makes it possible to understand how they are haunted and invested with memories. While Martínez's renderings are almost devoid of inhabitants, they are nevertheless inhabited by the inevitability of memory.

Within the text of the graphic novel these places do not simply represent disembodied segments of Santiago because the process of the gridding and breakdown of a work of sequential art is not exclusionary, it functions through the concept of circumscription: "The frame of a comics panel does not remove anything; it is contented to circumscribe" (Groensteen 40). Groensteen explains that the "elasticity" of the medium allows the artist to be "essentially preoccupied by what he wants to put in his image (that is, in his frame), not by what he must exclude" (41). If this is the case then Gonzalo Martínez's renderings circumscribe the entirety of Santiago within the graphic novel. The historic and temporal braiding that occurs at these places can then be read as the entire landscape of Santiago being intertwined with memories that constantly contradict the pristine, architectural, and uninhabited vision of the city that Martínez provides, the fictional neoliberal city. Although the places are empty, only walked by fictional characters – after all Díaz Eterovic did not even embody himself in these narratives but chose the avatar of El Escriba to take his place – they are full of memory. Gonzalo Martínez's final two-page spread shows Heredia and El Escriba contemplating the possibility of a future in which they are no longer necessary. Heredia confesses saying, "Te voy a contar un secreto: nunca pierdo la esperanza de vivir en un mundo en que mi oficio sea un arte pasado de

moda” [“I going to tell you a secret: I never lose hope of living in a world where my job is no longer necessary”] (Díaz Eterovic et al 78). Immediately afterwards, on Gonzalo Martínez’s final page of illustrations, the two walk past the Iglesia de Santo Domingo where Heredia begins to tell El Escriba about his most recent case investigating a serial killer. This moment and place link the past, present, and future to these inevitable memories of violence.

The braided places created by Gonzalo Martínez serve as a space for the “interrogación ‘hamletiana’ de la calavera para que ésta nos entregue el secreto de la violencia” [“‘Hamletian’ interrogation of the skull so that it will give us the secret of violence”] as Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott poetically described the processes of discovering the meanings of violence from the past that is contiguous with our present. *Heredia Detective* uses sequential art to circumscribe an almost completely uninhabited Santiago de Chile that functions as a place (in Groensteen’s significant usage of the term that implies its links with other sites in spatio-temporal configuration throughout the multiframe of the entire graphic novel) where the haunting specters of memory can penetrate into the present and re-imagine the use and significance of these spaces. The present does not have to be understood according to the national discourses inscribed upon the landscape of the city, its buildings, and monuments. As the city of Santiago will inevitably continue to transform itself, thus erasing neighborhoods and histories, the emptiness of the sanitized city seen in Gonzalo Martínez’s illustrations will haunt it. Historic buildings and monuments dominating the landscape, attempting to provide memory and a discourse about what it means to be in Santiago de Chile or what it means to be “Chilean” while at the turn of a

page its dark violent streets are prepared to contradict them and take us looking for the traces of the city's disappeared past along with its inhabitants.

Returning to the concept presented by Phillips and Strobl it is possible to understand *Heredia Detective*'s vision of Santiago as both a response to the realities of life in Chile's capital and a proposal about how to interact with its violent atmosphere and history. Graphic novels echo and resonate with popular perceptions of urban life. My reading of *Heredia Detective* suggests memory as a means of resistance against multiple forms of disappearances that haunt even the sites of the city that are infused with the most historic significance. Heredia has a long history of investigating the disappeared – the graphic adaptation avoids showing acts of violence, it depicts only the memories of the investigations. This is the process of questioning the absence of the body; it is the city devoid of inhabitants in Gonzalo Martínez's illustrations. For Heredia there is a double disappearance taking place in Santiago, it is not just the victims that have disappeared but on the level of the cityscape there are entire sectors of the city and its population disappearing. In the case of the disappearance of the city Heredia doesn't carry out an investigation, the findings would be all too obvious, and would leave him with no corrupt official to take out or illegal club to burn to the ground as with some of his investigations. There seems to be no means to achieving justice, even extra-legally. It is only the memories that Heredia and El Escriba retain that can occupy the absence left by the disappearance of the city – they are the ashes in Villalobos-Ruminott's cendrologia. The only reminder left that there was once something there.

CHAPTER FOUR:
**The Case of Crime Comics: A Brief History of the Mexican and Chilean
Comic Industries**

*No cualquier investigación era plausible
en un país donde la policía no era honesta ni efectiva.*
-Pablo Piccato

*Necesitamos historieta que haga sentido
a las distintas necesidades del Chile de hoy,
que atiendan a la necesidad de entretenerse,
pero también a la memoria, a los afectos,
a la sátira política, a la construcción de nuevos héroes,
al entendimiento personal, a la lucha por
construir una sociedad más justa, a pensar
el Chile del futuro, a soñar; es la única forma
de que las editoriales y los autores podamos
seguir creando por mucho tiempo.*
-María José Barros

*Los cómics en los países del mundo hispánico
también surgen con la modernización,
pero tiene diferentes características,
y su forma de enunciar la modernidad
se hace, por una parte, desde un espacio
autóctono en conflicto con los productos
de importación norteamericanos, y por otra,
desde una modernidad incompleta llena de
vértices, donde el fenómeno social que representan
no es sólo parte de la emergente industria del
entretenimiento de masas sino que, en algunos casos,
es capaz de ser un artefacto que cuestiona
el espacio ideológico al que pertenece.*
-Ana Merino

This short chapter is intended to serve as an introduction to the general history of comic production in Mexico and Chile, as well as a brief overview of the place of crime comics within these two national industries. While access to many of these texts is difficult to achieve, the work of dedicated fans, investigators, and scholars has made this endeavor

somewhat easier to carry out. As noted in the previous chapters, comics are inherently tied to the city, to urban spaces and stories, and thus, almost inevitably, to crime. As comics emerged in these spaces of modernization they appeared in close proximity to news articles about political scandals, corruption, murder, and crime in general. As the comic industry developed and comics moved from newspapers to magazines, pamphlets, and eventually *historietas*, comic books, and later graphic novels these stories about crime took on new directions. One of these was the genre of detective or crime fiction. In this short history I look specifically at comics with narratives that center around the investigation and detection of crime. Many of the Mexican and Chilean comics relied upon the European model of Conan Doyle and later on the James Bond model to some extent. With the appearance of the *hard-boiled* model of crime fiction, established most notably by Raymond Chandler in his text *The Simple Art of Murder*, and its adaptation into the film noir genre, a few of the comics produced in Mexico and Chile took to telling gritty local stories that called into question their national realities in the age of globalization. This turn appeared in unique ways in Latin American crime fiction as the development of the *novela negra*. All of these types of crime and detective narratives can be found to a lesser or greater degree across Mexican and Chilean comic production. While crime and violence and other forms of legal, political, and social transgression appear in a variety of comics across Mexico and Chile's comic industries, I find that incorporating these other forms of crime and violence into this history would make the undertaking almost infinite.

In order to follow the appearance and trajectory of crime comics in Mexico and Chile I begin my summary of their industries at their respective Golden Ages: Mexico

1930-1950 and Chile 1962-1975. In the case of Mexico there has been a much greater interest in studying the nation's comic industry and for this reason my summary and analysis of it are much more concise. This provides me the space to develop one of the first histories of the Chilean comic industry and Chilean crime comics in English. I devote a larger portion of this chapter to Chilean comic history due to the lack of resources available on this topic, while I defer to the exceptional and in-depth work of established researchers on the historical details of Mexico's massive comic industry.

I. Mexico

The history of Mexico's comic industry has been well studied by authors such as Ana Merino, Harold Hinds and Charles Tatum, Bruce Campbell, and Anne Rubenstein, and for this reason my current project will not attempt to reproduce the well researched history of the entire comic industry. As each of the authors mentioned above point out, Mexico's comic industry is unique and tied closely to its revolutionary history and themes of *mexicanidad* [Mexicanness]. Ana Merino emphasizes this when she explains that José Guadalupe Posada's engravings and "El mundo del taller anuncia los temas populares que aparecerán en la futura historieta mexicana" ["the world of the printing workshop announced the popular themes that will appear in the future Mexican comic"] (210). By the mid 1920s Mexico City newspapers began publishing comic strips in their Sunday editions after the arrival of the rotographic news press (Rubenstein 17). The post-revolutionary emergence of comics situated them in a unique cultural space, comics became part of the revolutionary literacy programs carried out between the 1920s and

1940s, and reading comics could be considered "a revolutionary, patriotic, or modern act" (15). By the 1940s it was estimated that Mexicans purchased nearly half a million comic books a day, and that *Pepín*, one of the most popular and important comic publications, printed somewhere around 300,000 copies a day, eight times a week, Sunday ran two editions (18). The Mexican comic book industry consolidated around weekly, and later daily, comics published by large newspaper companies, with some of the nation's most important and lasting series being: *Paquín* (1934), *Paquito* (1935), *Pepín* (1936), and *Chamaco* (1936) (Hinds and Tatum 3). The appearance of these comics marked the opening of what is considered to be Mexico's Golden Age of *historietas*, with its closure in the 1950s (3). Although the quality and quantity of comic production declined after the Golden Age, it is important to note that one of Mexico's most significant comic producers appeared in this so-called Silver Age: Yolanda Vargas Dulché and Guillermo de la Parra's Editorial Argumentos (also known as EDAR before its name was eventually changed to Grupo Editorial Vid). Vargas Dulché's contributions to Mexican popular culture cannot be overstated, she is known as the "Reina de la historieta" ["Queen of Comics"] and her creation and writing for *Lágrimas, Risas y Amor* would be the basis for multiple telenovelas that continue to influence Mexican popular culture, among her many other contributions. Eventually Editorial Vid and Televisa reached an agreement in which Televisa took over the publication and distribution of Vid's licenses.

Many of Mexico's crime comics appeared as storylines published in *Pepín* and *Chamaco* during the Golden Age. The Catálogo de Historietas de la Hemeroteca Nacional maintained by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México lists more than sixty crime

comics that appeared in *Pepín*, *Chamaco*, and *Cartones* during the years of Golden Age production. UNAM's database most frequently identifies these crime comics with markers such as: *policíaca*, *detective*, *crimen*, *misterio*, *gángster*, *cárcel*, *madre soltera*, *ricos*, *mujeres fatales*, *cabaret*, *barrio*, and *amores trágicos* (pepines.unam.mx). The tag that often accompanies these others is *héroe anglosajón* [Anglo-Saxon hero], this alludes to the fact that the majority of these crime comics center around detectives or amateur sleuths that follow the Sherlock Holmes model with narratives that do not take place in Mexico. One of the longest running crime comics was *Antón Custer*, written and drawn by the well-know artist Sealtiel Alatríste. This detective and his sidekick Chet Sanders had appeared in other storylines published in *Chamaco*, most notably *Detectives y Bandidos* in 1944. His character Antón Custer is described as "El cerebro moderno y bien equilibrado, en lucha contra el crimen" ["The modern and well-balanced brain, in the fight against crime"] (pepines.unam.mx). Alatríste stated in an interview that during his time as author and illustrator that he had produced somewhere around 900,000 panels of comic art (pepines.unam.mx). He is also responsible for at least twenty-one other storylines published in *Chamaco*, *Cartones*, and *Muñequita*. Like Alatríste's Antón Custer, many of the other crime comics showed European detectives and criminals, and very few comics took place in Mexico. A few exceptions were titles such as *Hotel Internacional* and *Nocturnal*, both published in *Chamaco* in the 1950s. One other notable comic that varied from the norm was the 1957 comic *Barrera Rota*, illustrated by Alberto Cabrera for *Pepín*. This comic told the story of Constantino Portuondo, who is described as the "casi olvidado criminalista negro" ["almost forgotten black detective"] (pepines.unam.mx). This example

signals that there was some diversity in the type of crime comics produced in the Golden Age, but as Hinds and Tatum discuss in their book *Not Just for Children: The Mexican Comic Book in the Late 1960s and 1970s*, often the publishers and editors would tell writers and artists to locate crime narratives outside of Mexico (189). They mention specifically the case of Rafael Márquez Torres, the editor of *La Novela Policiaca* published by Novedades, and that he "makes certain that stories do not deal with Mexican politics, and that the fundamental message, 'crime does not pay,' is incorporated. Márquez Torres continues to follow the dictate of his predecessor, Barcena, that stories should take place outside Mexico" (189).

Hinds and Tatum's chapter dedicated to *La Novela Policiaca* highlights its importance as a long running crime comic series that is specifically dedicated to the genre. This comic first appeared in 1956 and was successively directed by the editors Laura Bolaños, Carlos Vigil, Agustín Barcena, and Rafael Márquez Torres (187). Sales for *La Novela Policiaca* peaked in the 1980s, long after the Golden Age had ended, with sales of up to 350,000 copies per week (189). The research Hinds and Tatum performed in regards to the readership of *La Novela Policiaca* sheds light on the demographics that consume crime comics in Mexico; they state:

A general impression of the comic book's readership profile emerges from interviews with editors, writers, and vendors. There is general agreement that young, proletarian males are its mainstay. Márquez Torres believes that 80 percent of *La Novela Policiaca*'s readers are men. He reasons that they like its combination of sex and violence. Ferrer basically agrees, although

he stresses that he has also seen women reading it. [...]. The bulk of these readers, Márquez Torres, Santibáñez, and Ferrer argue, are the employed lower class such as servants, manual laborers, chauffeurs, construction workers, and plumbers. (190)

These demographic notes take on additional importance when connected with the comic creators' own ideas about how the readers respond to the content of these stories. While *La Novela Policiaca* tends to depict the police and detectives positively, the writer Raúl Santibáñez "believes that a portrayal of the police as faultless, even if they are foreigners, would simply not sell because of the widespread belief in Mexico that most Mexican police are corrupt" (192). In addition, Hinds and Tatum note that the narratives of the comic reflect other aspects of Mexico's criminal reality: "The police have a tendency to be more interested in solving middle-class crime and to have a class bias when administering justice" (192). These details emphasize that crime comics produce and reproduce popular culture ideas about crime and justice, and that the creators are aware of this fact as they develop their comics.

Yolanda Vargas Dulché's Editorial Argumentos launched a crime comic line to compete with *La Novela Policiaca* in 1966, called *Mini Policiaca*. The most important storyline to appear in, and later emerge from *Mini Policiaca* as its own publication, was "El Pantera", written by Daniel Muñoz and illustrated by Juan Alba. Pantera first appeared in *Super Mini #40* in 1971 and by 1980 the crime fighter had become popular enough to be given his own series. Daniel Muñoz continued to write the scripts and illustration was taken over by Alberto Maldonado with cover art by Guillermo Peimbert. *El Pantera* had a fifteen

year publishing run, with Muñoz ending out his character's comic trajectory by publishing two novels in the mid 1990s. Even after the series completed its original run, reissues of Pantera's adventures were printed starting in 2001 under the title *Lo Mejor de El Pantera*. When Televisa purchased Group Editorial Vid's licenses they produced a television adaptation of Muñoz's comics also titled *El Pantera*. The television series ran during three seasons starting in 2007. Pantera's more than forty-year trajectory across comics, literature, and television makes him one of the most significant characters in Mexico's crime fiction. Additional notes on Pantera can be found in chapter two of this project that deal specifically with this character's place in Mexico's popular imaginary and how it relates to concepts of criminality.

After the decline of the Silver Age comic industry in the 1990s there have been few Mexican comic creators to dedicate their work specifically to the crime genre. With this being the case there are only a few contemporary comic texts that come particularly close to falling into the category of crime comics. Here I provide brief notes on these works and their creators.

One of the most important contemporary comic artist in Mexico, Edgar Clement, published *Operación Bolívar* by installments in the independent magazine *Gallito Comixs* between 1993 and 1994. *Operación Bolívar* was later published in graphic novel format by Editorial Planeta in 1995, Ediciones del Castór in 1999, and Caligrama Editores in 2006. Clement was able to carry out this project with funds from FONCA (Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes). Bruce Campbell wrote extensively about *Operación Bolívar* in his book *¡Viva la Historieta! Mexican Comics, NAFTA, and the Politics of Globalization* and

described the basis of the graphic novel this way: "Narrated by an angel hunter, the story recounts how he and his partner, a brutish judicial police agent named Román, uncover and attempt to thwart a U.S.-based plot to massacre angels as a first step towards establishing total control over the global narcotics market, and thereby cementing unchallenged political control over the hemisphere" (165). While the graphic novel veers into the realm of fantasy it is clear that it borders on the margins of crime fiction and, as described in chapter one of this project, it connects with a critique of transnational neoliberal economics and politics. Campbell explains that, "Behind the novel's unique narrative premise is a long view of globalization in the Americas, from the European conquest of natives peoples in the early sixteenth century, to the subsequent forceful imposition of a Eurocentric mercantilism by the colonizing powers, to the transnationalization of domestic markets under the twentieth-century hegemony of the United States" (165). Most of Clement's works are available for free as digital comics via issuu.com/edgarclement, where other titles like *Sentimientos de la Nación* and *Islas Mariás* look at crime and violence in contemporary Mexico, although they do not conform to the traditional genre standards of crime comics.

In 2008 the internationally renowned Mexican crime author, Paco Ignacio Taibo II, published a graphic adaptation of his novel *Cuatro Manos* with illustrations by the Belgian artist Améziane. The graphic novel version of *Cuatro Manos* tells only a portion of the story contained in the more than four-hundred-page novel. Taibo II is famous for his intricate plots that explore a blend of historical fact and crime fiction. As the founder of the Semana Negra de Gijón festival, Taibo II is an extremely important voice in the world

of crime fiction, and the publication of his award-winning book *Cuatro Manos* in the medium of the graphic novel sets a precedent and connection between the world of sophisticated crime fiction and graphic narratives in Mexico, Latin America, and beyond.

The duo of Juan Villoro and the comic artist BEF (Bernardo Fernández) published *La Calavera de Cristal* through Sexto Piso in 2011. This graphic novel falls more into the category of adventure than crime fiction but it has some elements of the amateur sleuth. While *La Calavera de Cristal* tells the story of a young man trying to unravel the mystery surrounding his missing father and a strange map, it is important to note that both Juan Villoro and Bernardo Fernández write crime fiction. Villoro's novel *Arrecife* is considered a non-traditional *novela negra* set in the desolate town of Kukulcán, and BEF's 2005 *Tiempo de Alacranes* tells the story of a Mexican hitman at the Northern end of the country. BEF has published multiple crime fiction titles such as *Hielo Negro*, *Cuello Blanco*, and *Azul Cobalto*, among others. His *Tiempo de Alacranes* was awarded the Premio Memorial Silverio Cañada for Best First Crime Novel at Paco Ignacio Taibo II's Semana Negra de Gijón in 2006.

This brief summary of crime comics within Mexico's larger comic industry reveals that while they did not form a massive portion of the market these narratives about crime have been present throughout the medium's history. The role of the detective as a cultural figure is important because, as Pablo Piccato stated, “era democrático en su método para llegar a la verdad – su epistemología” [“it was democratic in its method of arriving at the truth – its epistemology”] (Piccato). These narratives provided a sense that justice was achievable even when faced with the most complex or horrifying crimes, and are

democratic when equality and fairness are not often made available to all. As the economic and political realities in Mexico produce new types of violence and crime it is important to continue an analysis of the cultural texts that negotiate and articulate the means of achieving justice and develop an epistemology of interrogation and inquiry even when faced with the violent realities of narco-violence and neoliberalism.

II. The Golden Age of Chilean Comics 1962-1975: Zig-Zag, Quimantú, and Gabriela Mistral

The Editorial Zig-Zag was founded by Agustín Edwards in 1905 but it wouldn't be until 1962 that Zig-Zag would become the leader of comic publishing in Chile and find itself at the center of the Golden Age of Comics. Elisa Pérez, who from time to time would use the pseudonym Elisa Serrana, struck a deal with Walt Disney on behalf of Zig-Zag to obtain licensing to print Disney comics in Chile in 1962. The revenues and success of these North American comics allowed Zig-Zag to create its own Department of Comics which began producing original works by Chilean artists in 1965. Between 1965 and 1966 Zig-Zag launched at least twenty titles that contained original content created by Chilean writers and artists, many of these series ran for over a decade. The combination of Disney comics from North America, Fleetway comics from England, and the local creations by Chilean artists made Zig-Zag the largest and most important publisher of comics during Chile's Golden Age.

The election of Salvador Allende to the presidency in 1970 set significant changes in motion with regards to the production of comics at Zig-Zag. The publisher was

nationalized by Allende's government while the owners of Zig-Zag were allowed to keep the foreign Disney licenses. The newly nationalized publisher changed its name to Quimantú, taken from the indigenous language Mapudungun meaning "Sun of Knowledge" ("Sol del Saber"), and decided to carry over only ten comic titles from those produced by Zig-Zag. These titles were: *Infinito*, *Dr. Mortis*, *Jungla*, *El Intocable*, *Far West*, *Espía 13*, *El Jinete Fantasma*, *Agente Silencio*, *007 James Bond*, and *Guerra*. While the James Bond title was immediately discontinued "habida consideración de su cariz manipulador, aventurero y parte de la agencia secreta de países imperialistas" ["due to considerations about its manipulative and adventurous tone and being part of the secret agency of an imperialist country"] (Hasson 85), the other titles were eventually transformed through new editorial processes instituted by Allende's government. These new processes included the intervention of sociologists whose role was to see that Allende's national ideology was conveyed in these state sponsored publications. For example, due to the dark content of *Dr. Mortis* the series' evil protagonist was launched into space in a silver coffin thus putting an end to the character's story arch. After this change the series took on more science fiction themes and was eventually cancelled. Notwithstanding these changes to the content of the titles carried over from Zig-Zag to Quimantú, the industry still provided work for the local artists who had developed their craft with Zig-Zag in the Department of Comics.

The military coup of 1973 produced drastic changes in comic production and eventually led to a state of "apagón" ["blackout"] in local Chilean comic publication. After the coup the new regime took control of all the nationalized industries, one of which was

the publishing house Quimantú. Diego Barros Ortiz, a writer and aviation commander, was placed in charge of Quimantú. The new regime left behind the indigenous name and renamed the publisher Editorial Gabriela Mistral. The new political ideology of Editorial Gabriela Mistral deconstructed much of the Quimantú era system and kept only four titles with reconfigured storylines and characters. Manuel Tapia Rodríguez was named the new director of the Comics Department, and only a few artists remained working for the newly restructured publisher, among them were Mario Igor, Hildegardo Igor, and Ernesto López, with José Zamorano working as a script writer. Other artists, such as Lincoln Fuentes, Julio Berríos, Santiago Peñailillo, and Juan Bley contributed work on a sporadic basis. In addition to these established and well-known creators, new artists were brought on: Manuel de la Cruz, Jorge Yáñez, Avelino Sestado, and Onofre Díaz. The few comic titles still produced by Editorial Gabriela Mistral focused on a genre they called *fantasía heroica* [heroic fantasy] with stories that tended to mix fantasy and science fiction, but finally, in 1975, all comic production by the publisher was cancelled, thus concluding the Golden Age of Chilean comics.

III. Comics from the Underground 1975-2000: Fanzines and the Independent Boom

Editorial Gabriela Mistral completely ceased all comic production in 1975 and left the Chilean market dominated by foreign comics, mostly reproductions of Disney, Hanna-Barbera, and Marvel products. Local comic creators were left without work and were either forced into working for foreign publishers, taking graphic design jobs in marketing, or leaving the country, if possible. Any independent comic production existed only at the

underground fanzine level during the majority of the military regime. Before Disney and other transnational comics completely dominated the Chilean market under Pinochet's government, Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart criticized the overwhelming presence of North American comics in the country in their book titled *Para Leer al Pato Donald* in 1972. Once Editorial Gabriela Mistral shut down local comic production, their criticisms were surpassed by reality, leaving the Chilean comic market completely dominated by foreign interests. This situation can be seen as a microcosmic vision of how Pinochet's North American led economic policies functioned.

Few fanzines were independently published during the mid 1980s under the height of Pinochet's cultural blackout. Moisés Hasson mentions only two titles in his exhaustive catalog of Chilean comics. Between 1983 and 1984 *Tiro & Retiro* appeared under the direction of Sergio Mardones and Jorge Sasía with Angel Arias as editor. The fanzine contained multiple short comics that focused on dark and satirical humor in the face of economic and political adversity. This publication turned up in the magazine section of several libraries and showcased the work of young artists such as Orlando, Joel Espinosa, Malatesta, Papaette, Ricardo Fuentealba, and Alejandro. *Tiro & Retiro* was able to put out four issues during its one year run. The other fanzine that was produced during this period was *Ariete*. Only one issue was ever created and it appeared with the number zero on the cover. This fanzine contained an homage to Julio Cortázar in the form of a comic adaptation of his text "Historias de Cronopios y de Famas" as well as other short comics. Artists that contributed to the single issue of *Ariete* were: Ricardo Alvares, Marco Esperidión,

Leonardo Valdés, Ricardo Fuentealba, Luis Olmos, Luis García, Jaime Lee, and Juan Vásquez.

The waning years of Pinochet's regime saw a resurgence and even a boom in independent comic production. The late 1980s were an era of struggle in the world of comic production in Chile. Many independent comics were published with short runs as attempts to both provide spaces for local artists to develop their craft and to kick start local comic culture once again. During this period the majority of these publications appeared in the European format of magazines, with black and white printing, and roughly fifty to sixty pages with contributions from multiple creators. Some of these magazines contained essays, interviews, reporting, and even pages dedicated to the history of comics in Chile. Magazines such as *Acido*, *Matucana*, *Trauko*, *Bandido*, *La Mancha*, *El Carrete*, and *El Cuete* published controversial material and targeted an adult readership. During this time relatively few locally produced comics were made for children. Imported foreign comics filled the children's market until local comics like *Cachipún*, *Kichos*, and *Pimpín* appeared between 1989 and 1994. By the late 1990s a few new publishers dedicated to creating a local market for adult comic readers managed to appear. Editorial Dédalos was founded in 1998 by Jorge David and published series such as *Rayen*, *Media Noche*, *Salem*, *Kat Boxing*, and *Sicario*. Another publisher that managed to make a mark on contemporary comic culture was Editorial Jucca, which later changed its name to Montealegre. This publisher produced *Anarko* as well as a series of comics that satirized North American films and comics; among these are titles like *Star Mal*, *Harry Potto de Botella*, *Barsa Man*, *Spuber Man*, and *X-Cremen* (166). The comic creator and historian Carlos Reyes summarized the

state of Chilean comics at the end of the 1990s in his 2008 article "La Historieta Independiente en Chile: Las Revistas Sin Lomo" when he wrote:

La industria de la historieta nacional fue liderada en la década del 60 por Zig-Zag, luego retomada brevemente en los 70 por Quimantú y finalmente por Dilapsa y Gabriela Mistral, hasta su casi total desaparición hacia fines de los 70. Tras su caída, la independencia y la autogestión se convirtieron en los únicos caminos posibles para la historieta local. Sin embargo, la aparición de aquellas revistas ochenteras marcó un hito en la producción local, significaron un despertar, un boom en la producción independiente. Estas publicaciones surgieron desde las carencias económicas y las necesidades expresivas de una generación de artistas ahogados por la dictadura militar de la época." (29)

["The national comic industry was led by Zig-Zag in the 60s, later it was taken up briefly in the 70s by Quimantú and finally by Dilapsa and Gabriela Mistral, until its almost complete disappearance towards the end of the 1970s. Through its fall, independence and self-publication became the only paths possible for local comics. Nevertheless, the appearance of these magazines in the 80s marked a milestone in local production, they marked an awakening, a boom in independent production. These publications emerged out of economic scarcity and the expressive needs of a generation of artists suffocated by the military dictatorship of the era"].

IV. The Resurgence of Chilean Comics as Graphic Novel, The Blackout Generation, and Beyond 2007-2016

The late 1990s and early 2000s continued to produce underground comics in mostly magazine form until the appearance of *Road Story* in 2007, which marked another transition in Chilean comic production. The underground scene had created a cultural context for locally produced comics that situated them as a subversive medium targeted towards adults, and the publication of Gonzalo Martínez's graphic novel adaptation of Alberto Fuguet's *Road Story* pushed the medium in the direction of large publishing houses and literary circles. This nexus between Chilean literary figures and the new era of the Chilean graphic novel proved to create significant collaborations across literary and comic mediums. The decision by Alfaguara of Chile to invest in a graphic novel illustrated by a local artist opened the field and was a milestone for contemporary comic production. In his introduction to Moisés Hasson's book *Cómics en Chile*, Carlos Reyes explains the importance of Martínez's graphic novel: "la publicación de *Road Story* de Gonzalo Martínez en 2007 instala nuevamente a la historieta en la grandes ligas, al ser la primera novela gráfica publicada por una editorial multinacional desde la llamada 'época de oro'" ["the publication of *Road Story* by Gonzalo Martínez in 2007 puts comics back in the big leagues, being the first graphic novel published by a multinational publisher since the so-called 'golden age'"] (7).

Since the publication of *Road Story* local publishers dedicated to the medium of comics have appeared, some thriving, others disappearing quickly, while a few continue to produce for the sheer love of comics. Publishers like Visuales, Arcano IV, Mythica

Ediciones, Feroces Editores, Acción Cómics, Piedrangular, Dogitia, and Tabula Rasa all strive to reach readerships beyond the traditional realm of the comic industry. Carlos Reyes explained that these independent publishers are attempting to break out of, what he calls, the sequestering of comics ("secuestro del cómic") as a reference to the underground survival of the medium during the "apagón" ["blackout"] that left the industry in the "incubadora del ghetto" ["incubator of the ghetto"] (7). The majority of these new publishers produce comics in the form of graphic novels rather than the traditional monthly or weekly comic book or magazine of the past. While publishers such as Unlimited Cómics attempted to produce traditional comic books by local creators, they eventually turned to printing North American comics by DC and Marvel. Marco Rauch explained this situation in an interview with Carlos Reyes, stating: "Unlimited comenzó apostando por varios títulos de historieta chilena (*Barrabases*, *Dr. Mortis*, e incluso una versión de *Papelucho* en este formato), pero prontamente se decantó por lo que ha sido su sello: cómic extranjero (con varios años de desfase), colecciones que se ponen al alcance del lector común años después de su aparición original" ["Unlimited began wagering on various Chilean comic titles (*Barrabases*, *Dr. Mortis*, and even a version of *Papelucho* in this format), but quickly opted for what has become their staple: foreign comics (with several years of lag), collections that are put within the reach of the everyday reader years after their original appearance"] ("El estado actual de la historieta chilena: parte 1"). This means that there has not been a return to the days of mass comic book production like in the Golden Age but this new era may be considered the Age of the Graphic Novel in Chile. Besides these independent publishers, larger presses have printed important graphic narratives such as

Historias Clandestinas from LOM Ediciones, *Mocha Dick* published by Norma (which won the Premio Marta Brunet for youth literature in 2013 and was re-edited by Planeta in 2016), *Los Años de Allende* from Hueders, or *Quique Hache* by Alfaguara. Notwithstanding the number of independent publishers and large presses that are producing graphic narratives, the editor of Mythica Ediciones commented on the immaturity of the industry in his opinion,

No hablo de calidad, que la hay, ni contenidos atractivos, que los tienen, sino de madurez como industria [...]. Hemos visto grandes logros individuales en la materia (el caso de Gabriel Rodríguez es paradigmático al respecto) y conocemos el apoyo que tuvo *Mocha Dick* de su casa editorial, sin embargo, también conocemos el colosal esfuerzo y sacrificio de Miguel Angel Ferrada (Arcano IV) para cumplir con su meta autoimpuesta de editar en Chile toda la saga *Locke & Key*, un producto que por su calidad (si realmente viviéramos un buen momento de la historieta chilena) debió haber sido mucho más sencillo de desarrollar. La gesta heroica (no estoy exagerando) de Ferrada es más bien una muestra de su inmenso amor por lo que hace, más que un buen momento editorial." ("El estado actual de la historieta chilena: parte 1")

["I'm not talking about quality, we have it, nor attractive content, we have that too, but rather about the maturity of the industry (...). We have seen huge individual achievements in the subject (the case of Gabriel Rodríguez is respectively paradigmatic) and we know the support that *Mocha Dick* had

from its publisher, nevertheless, we also know Miguel Angel Ferrada's (Arcano IV) colossal effort and sacrifice to fulfill his self-imposed goal of publishing the complete *Locke & Key* series in Chile, a product that for its quality (if we were truly living a good moment for Chilean comics) should have been much easier to develop"].

This point emphasizes that while there is growth and success in the current comic industry the majority of Chilean comic creators cannot survive solely on their work in this industry. Most have to work a day job or do long distance commissions for foreign publishers. For example, the artist Rodrigo Elgueta who has had tremendous success as the illustrator of *Los Años de Allende*, written by Carlos Reyes, also works as a forensic artist with the Santiago Police Department.

Many of the artists currently producing mention how the disappearance of the comic industry during the military dictatorship impacted their consumption and later production of comics. The theme of disappearances is taken up in the first chapter of this dissertation and I find it necessary to identify this absence as an important characteristic of many of the comic texts produced by what I call *La Generación del Apagón* ["The Blackout Generation"]. In conversations with comic creators such as Francisco Ortega, Gonzalo Martínez, Carlos Reyes, Rodrigo Elgueta, Miguel Angel Ferrada, Gabriel Rodríguez, German Valenzuela, or Bernardita Ojeda Labourdette, it becomes clear that memory and history play an important part in the stories they choose to tell and in their connection to the medium of comics. Carlos Reyes identifies the following creators as important figures in the Generación del Apagón: Cristiano, Gonzalo Martínez, Félix Vega,

Vicente Plaza, Marcela Trujillo (Maliki), and Juan Vásquez. Many of these creators, and their contemporaries, began creating comics in the underground magazines of the late 1980s and 90s while pursuing other careers. For example, Gonzalo Martínez is an architect by training and Bernardita Ojeda Labourdette is an anthropologist working at the Museo Histórico Nacional de Chile. This generation developed their skills while national comic production was non-existent and were influenced by nostalgia for the Golden Age comics from Zig-Zag and Quimantú. This generation has been responsible for the current resurgence of the Chilean comic in the form of the graphic novel and the establishment of the new independent comic publishers. With significant achievements like the international publications of *Mocha Dick* and *Los Años de Allende*, the awarding of an Eisner to Gabriel Rodríguez in 2015, and the appearance of Chilean publishers and creators at San Diego Comic-Con International and the Angoulême International Comic Festival with the support of the state through ProChile, the Generación del Apagón has clearly brought Chilean comics out of the underground and put them on the national and international stage. I have found that questions of violence, memory, and history, especially related to those dictatorship years of *apagón*, is a central theme in many of the graphic narratives produced by this generation. In their wake, many younger comic creators have opened the field to explore issues that are less preoccupied with the country's violent past. Authors like María José Barros, Gabriel Ebensperger, Koté Carvajal, Rodrigo López, or Natalia Silva (Natichuleta) among others, have produced works that deal with international adventure stories, coming-of-age/coming-out narratives, romance, and subjective visions of contemporary life that take place in a world not directly related to the dictatorship era. The

author and illustrator of *Corazón de Obsidiana*, María José Barros, emphasized the importance of this aperture in the range of comics when she said, "Necesitamos historieta que haga sentido a las distintas necesidades del Chile de hoy, que atiendan a la necesidad de entretenerse, pero también a la memoria, a los afectos, a la sátira política, a la construcción de nuevos héroes, al entendimiento personal, a la lucha por construir una sociedad más justa, a pensar el Chile del futuro, a soñar; es la única forma de que las editoriales y los autores podamos seguir creando por mucho tiempo" ["We need comics that make sense of the different needs of Chile today, that attend the need for entertainment, but also attend to memory, to emotions, to political satire, to the creation of new heroes, to personal understanding, to the fight to build a more just society, to think of the Chile of the future, to dream; it's the only way that the publishers and authors can continue to produce in the long term"] ("El estado actual de la historieta chilena: parte 1"). Barros' idea of a Chilean comic industry that can produce texts that respond to a diverse readership and can face the past, present, and future seems to be both a correct assessment of the current situation and a promising vision of the industry's future. With both the Generación del Apagón and younger artists producing at the same time, the current variety and strength of Chile's comic industry appears to be very promising.

V. A History of Crime Comics in Chile

For the second annual Santiago Negro Festival Iberoamericano de Novela Policiaca in 2011 the Centro Cultura de España published a book on the history of crime fiction in Chile titled *Huellas de Papel: Tras la Pista de la Novela Policial en Chile*; this book

contains chapters written by Natasha Pons and Ramón Díaz Eterovic with a section dedicated specifically to the "Presencia de la novela negra en la historieta gráfica" ["presence of crime literature (noir literature) in graphic comics"] (3). This section makes reference to only two contemporary examples of crime comics, and both of these are comic adaptations of literary detective characters. The graphic novels *Heredia Detective* and *Quique Hache Detective* are adaptations from fiction by Ramón Díaz Eterovic and Sergio Gómez, respectively. It is also interesting to note that both of these characters have found their canonized graphic versions taken from the art of Gonzalo Martínez. While these two texts provide an important step into the realm of Chilean crime comics they alone do not give a full picture of the presence of crime fiction in the nation's comic history.

In Natasha Pons' chapter titled "La Narrativa Policial Chilena a Través de sus Libros" ["Chilean Crime Narrative Through Its Books"], she points out that crime fiction in Chile began as a marginalized genre that first appeared in the form of the *folletín* and in newspapers before it was taken up by the publishing houses (10). One of the earliest Chilean detective characters to appear in literature was Román Calvo, who was called "El Sherlock Holmes Chileno" ["The Chilean Sherlock Holmes"] and created by Alberto Edwards in 1914. Besides Edwards, authors such as Luis Enrique Délano, Juanario Espinosa, Camilo Pérez de Arce, Tancredo Pinochet, and L.A. Isla were some of the first writers to explore crime fiction in Chile. Pons explains, "Estos autores desarrollaron el relato policial clásico, el de la escuela inglesa impuesto por Conan Doyle en los cuentos y novelas de Sherlock Holmes" ["These authors developed classic crime stories, from the English school imposed by Conan Doyle in the stories and novels of Sherlock Holmes"]

(11). Zig-Zag was responsible for printing many of these pamphlets and books before bringing this type of narrative into its comic series. Titles like *La Tierra No Es Redonda*, *El Misterio de la Estrangulada*, and *Nap y Moisés: Detectives* were published by Zig-Zag, but the earliest mention of detective or crime narratives in comics comes from *Barrabases*. Guido Vallejos created the magazine *Barrabases* in 1954 as a "Revista Deportiva Infantil" ["Youth Sports Magazine"]. Eventually one of Chile's most famous comic creators would join *Barrabases'* creative team, Themo Lobos (who also used the pseudonym Juan Nazario). This addition to the team brought about the creation of Nick Obre, a short trench coat wearing detective with a pet dog named Watson. Nick Obre originally appeared as a sports detective in *Barrabases*, but by 1965 Themo Lobos had begun working with his own series titled *Rocket* and he took Nick Obre with him into this new comic. *Rocket* was a science fiction series and would go on to be considered "la mejor revista de historietas hecha en Chile" ["the best comic book made in Chile"] (Hasson 48). Although Nick Obre's adventures were not specifically sci-fi he did investigate crimes involving robots and space stations, among other things (48). *Rocket* is currently considered a legend in the Chilean comic community and its production and director, Themo Lobos, were fictionalized in Patricio Urzúa's novel *Las Variables Cataclísmicas* along with the contemporary comic creator Carlos Reyes. Nick Obre would go on to appear in *Mampato* and *Cucalón* but primarily as reprints of the stories previously printed in *Barrabases* and *Rocket* ("Las Mil Vidas de Nick Obre").

Besides Nick Obre the 1960s saw the appearance of several other detective narratives in the titles *Rakatan*, *Robot/Comiconauta*, *Espía 13*, and *007 James Bond*. The

detective Florian González and his sidekick Miss Margaret were created by Pepe Huinca for *Rakatan* in 1965. The series *Robot*, which later changed its name to *Comicznauta*, introduced the space detective Pepe Loc and was first illustrated by the famous Lukas (Renzo Pecchenino Raggi). Although both *Espía 13* and *007 James Bond* were foreign titles printed by Zig-Zag they both contributed to the creation of local Chilean detective and crime narratives in the future. In 1967 *Espía 13* was launched through Zig-Zag's licensing of the British publisher Fleetway Comics, but this series did not contain locally produced comics until much later. However, this series told the adventures of Sexton Blake, an English detective, which helped to popularize the genre in Chile. When Zig-Zag was nationalized by the Allende administration and converted into Quimantú, *Espía 13* was part of the productions carried over to the new state sponsored publisher. After this 1971 transition *Espía 13* was renamed *Delito* at issue 111 and left behind the English content for all locally produced stories (*Cómics en Chile* 87). Creators such as Manuel Ahumada, Roberto Tapia (Tom), Onofre Díaz, Manuel Ferrada, Ernesto López, E. Videla, Juan Bley, Ventura Marín, and Eugenio Morales worked on the newly renamed and reimagined series. The reimagining of *Espía 13* was to "entregar una imagen distinta de acciones de civiles y policías enfrentados al crimen" ["to provide a different image of civilian and police action in the face of crime"] (87). *Delito* touted three new storylines, each with a unique perspective on crime. The story titled "Suspenso" ["Suspense"] told police stories from the most famous national and international authors, while "Patrullera 205" ["Patrol Car 205"] was described as a comic determined to show the work of the uniformed police, and "Archivo S" ["Archive S"] revealed a type of crime that had remained hidden, white collar

crime (*Delito #119*). This state-sponsored approach to crime comics tended to be didactic and attempted to teach the idea, that was also common in Mexican crime comics, that crime doesn't pay. With storyline titles like "El Hombre que Se Arrepintió" ["The Man that Repented"] or introductory narrations such as "Tres jóvenes aficionados al cine de acción hacían su debut en el mundo delincuencia, fracasando ruidosamente. Ahora huían de una ronda de investigaciones que los había sorprendido robando la caja de un restaurante" ["Three young fans of action movies were making their debut in the world of delinquency, failing noisily. Now they on are the run from a round of investigations that have caught them robbing a restaurant cash register..."] it is clear that the series had a strong didactic approach as part of the state's effort to dissuade young readers from stepping into the world of crime (*Delito #119*). After the military coup, *Delito* was discontinued in 1973 at issue 137. The case of the *007 James Bond* comics produced by Zig-Zag was unique because the publishing house obtained the licensing to create Chilean adaptation of Ian Fleming's *007* novels and films in 1968, but all the comic content was produced locally in Chile based on the English originals, many of which had not yet been translated into Spanish (*Cómics en Chile* 70). The Chilean comic creator Germán Gabler illustrated and scripted the majority of the issues and structured the comic after the Sean Connery films by not presenting a title page to the story until three pages into the narrative (70). When Zig-Zag transitioned to Quimantú *007 James Bond* was cancelled, as mentioned above, but Germán Gabler went on to self-publish a crime series titled *Killer* between 1973 and 1974 that was loosely based off of the James Bond stories he made under Zig-Zag. This series manage to produce only

twelve issues before being negatively impacted by the post-coup economy (MacFarlane 20).

After the disappearance of both *Delito* and *Killer*, crime comics wouldn't return until the boom of underground independent comics in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Even among the underground comics where torture, violence, and sex were common themes, stories focused on detectives or investigation were basically non-existent. The underground art collective Deartefactos, comprised of Fabián "H3ll" Zambrano, Daniel "Evil" Daza, 8 5 12 12, Mauricio Gálvez and Nicholaz Reyes (Narf!), created a fanzine titled *Borracho* that explored anarchism and dark humor ("La Historieta Independiente en Chile" 40). The punk detective Nixon Pérez, who originally appeared in issue 11 of the fanzine *Futuro Comics*, became a recurring character in *Borracho* (40). Mauricio Gálvez described this character as "un detective 'a la chilena', que vive en la sociedad actual y enfrenta los peligros y engaños de la imaginación humana, mientras vive con lo mínimo en el Gran Santiago" ["a detective 'a la Chilean', that lives in today's society and confronts the dangers and tricks of human imagination, while living in poverty in the Great Santiago"] (40). The stories of Nixon Pérez have since been compiled and published in an independent collection titled *Nixon Perrez Vol. 1* in 2009 with hopes of printing future volumes and narratives, and in 2011 Deartefactos Publicaciones had plans to produce another titled starring Nixon Pérez called *Underground Story* (the-arte-factos.blogspot.com).

In the current era of graphic novel publication in Chile, two significant crime comics have been produced: *Heredia Detective* and *El Viudo*. In 2011 LOM Ediciones published the graphic novel adaptation of a collection of short stories titled *Muchos Gatos*

para Un Solo Crimen by the renowned crime fiction author Ramón Díaz Eterovic. This graphic novel is important because it is a collaborative text written and illustrated by more than twenty Chilean comic creators, and thus provides an significant vision of Chile's contemporary comic artists. The artists and writers who contributed to *Heredia Detective* are: Carlos Reyes, Cristián Petit-Laurent, Gonzalo Martínez, Abel Alizondo, Demetrio Babul, Rodrigo Elgueta, Ítalo Ahumada, Félix Vega, Diego Jourdan, Christiano, Daniel Bernal, Alan Robinson, Carlos Gatica, Gabriel Garvo, Claudio Muñoz, Claudio Romo, Don Liebre, Joze, Nelson Castillo, Nelson Dániel, Huicha, Jorge Quien, Vicho, Nicolás Pérez de Arce, and Tite Calvo. Likewise, this graphic novel reflects the importance of Díaz Eterovic's crime fiction on the Generación del Apagón comic creators, and their enthusiasm for developing this collaborative work. A more complete description of *Heredia Detective* and Ramón Díaz Eterovic's role as an author can be found in chapter three of this project, but suffice it to say that the detective Heredia is arguably the most well-known and prominent private investigator in Chilean fiction along with Roberto Ampuero's detective Cayetano Brulé.

In 2012 the comic writer Gonzalo Oyanedel debuted his masked vigilante in the comic *El Viudo: El Fin del Luto*, illustrated and inked by Rodrigo Campos and Cristian Docolomansky. Oyanedel referenced classic noir visual influences and set his comic in a nostalgic version of 1950s Santiago de Chile. This short graphic narrative relied heavily on historical facts from the era; a feature that Oyanedel brought to the longer, follow-up, graphic novel *El Viudo: La Cueca del Manco* in 2014. The same year the original team of Oyanedel, Campos, and Docolomansky made the extremely rare decision to completely re-

create their 2012 *El Viudo: El Fin del Luto* by redrawing and inking the entire story. The "Definitive Edition" was published as a sixteen-page small format magazine by Dogitia. The contribution of Gonzalo Oyanedel to the field of crime comics stands out as unique because he created a truly original Chilean detective who was made specifically for the medium of graphic narrative. The visual style of the Viudo comics, at the hands of Rodrigo Campos, Juan Nitrox Márquez, and Cristian Docolomansky, also reflects a sophistication in the genre that captures a noir aesthetic that perfectly compliments the era and narrative explored by Oyanedel.

It is clear that the military dictatorship's effect upon the comic industry as a whole also had a massive impact on the type of narratives told in Chile's crime comics. In the post-dictatorship era the Generación del Apagón has produced graphic novels that explore the implications of the nation's violent past. As mentioned in chapter three, crime narratives are particularly concerned with how the past cannot leave the present be, and it is this concern with Chile's criminal past, that still influences its present, that tends to emerge in these narratives. Whether it be El Viudo's nostalgic noir vision of the 1950s when right and wrong were more clear-cut or Heredia's haunting stroll around Santiago's streets, these crime comics interrogate the links between the violent past and the present that is constantly emerging from that past. This development in the type of crime comics created by these artists can be seen as a uniquely Chilean feature in that they are constantly reflexive on their own history as part of their production of crime comics.

VI. Conclusions

Mexico and Chile both share histories of flux in their comic industries that have had to constantly compete with transnational publishers from the North American and European comic markets. With industries that both at times attempted to control the types of crime narratives produced in their comics, Mexico and Chile's comic histories reveal that when local creators set out to tell local stories they tend to reveal and reproduce larger cultural ideas about crime and corruption in their national contexts. The historian of Mexican crime fiction Pablo Piccato explains that this reflexive look at the nation, crime, and corruption are all part of a shift from the European Sherlock Holmes style of investigation towards the *novela negra*: "Por eso la transformación de la detectivesca hacia el género negro significó una respuesta a la corrupción y la violencia de la realidad, pero también una búsqueda de una verdad que ya no se asociaba con el puro ingenio, como en las novelas de Conan Doyle, sino con una lógica capitalista de egoísmo, desencanto y acción" ["This is why the transformation from the detective to the crime genre meant a response to the corruption and violence of reality, but also a search for truth that was no longer associated with pure genius, like the novels of Conan Doyle, but rather with the capitalist logic of selfishness, disenchantment, and action" (Piccato). In Mexico this reflexive and dark mirror was stifled and covered by editors and publishers in their attempts to protect profits and appease a traditional and conservative public. On the other hand, in Chile Allende's government tried to use comics as a didactic tool for warning the public against the dangers of criminal activity, and later, under the military regime the comic industry almost completely disappeared. As the means of production and publication have changed in both nations it is clear that few comic creators have had success at producing

crime comics that are able to openly criticize the corruption and violence of their neoliberal realities. In Mexico, *El Pantera*, *Operación Bolívar*, and *Cuatro Manos* are examples of graphic narratives that point out the corrupting and violent consequences of globalization and neoliberalism. The Chilean counterpart to these Mexican crime narratives are *Heredia Detective* and *El Viudo* that tend to turn back onto the nation's past in order to understand how the military coup, years of dictatorship, and the violent implementation of neoliberalism have shaped the present.

While the history of crime comics in Mexico and Chile may be brief I believe it is important as a means of providing a context by which we can understand that both the narratives that displace crime outside of the nation or use crime comics as didactic lessons and the comics that directly point out police and political corruption show how the medium of comics informs, negotiates, and reproduces ideas about how Mexican and Chilean popular culture responds to crime. These narratives show the limits of reality and legality and how these vectors cross and contradict one another. To conclude, I look to two quotes to summarize how these crime comics confront reality. Pablo Piccato explains, "Estos detectives poco ortodoxos servían para explorar los caminos inciertos de la justicia mexicana. La ineptitud policial no consistía sólo en dejar ir a los culpables sino, fundamentalmente, en pensar que todos los crímenes podían ser castigados legalmente." ["These unorthodox detectives served to explore the uncertain paths of Mexican justice. Police ineptitude did not only consist of letting the bad guys get away, but, fundamentally, of thinking that all these crimes could be punished legally"] (Piccato). This signals the reality that many crimes committed go unpunished and their impunity rests in the hands of

the state as both the inept prosecutor and often the merciless perpetrator. Daniel Muñoz's character Pantera functions precisely as a means of serving justice against a corrupt government and legal system that otherwise is free to continue operating because legal justice is not possible in reality. Second, in a review of Gonzalo Oyanedel's *El Viduo: El Fin del Luto* the author poses the question: "¿Qué ocurre cuando la justicia no basta?" ["What happens when justice is not enough?"] (elmultiverso52.com). This is a question that runs throughout the crime comics presented here, especially those that reach into the critical and reflex areas that make crime fiction such a vital part of popular culture. I believe that these crime comics are a result of the limits of legality and justice being insufficient in times of neoliberalism and political violence aimed against citizens. El Viudo's words at the close of *El Fin del Luto* echo the importance of crime comics as a means of resistance and negotiation in the realm of popular culture. He states, "Hasta aquí les llegó la fiesta. Ahora van a responder. No habrá mas abusos con el desvalido. De una vez por todas, se termina el luto" ["Their party stops here. Now they are going to pay. There will be no more abuses against the defenseless. Once and for all, the grieving ends"] (*El Viudo: El Fin del Luto* 12). The imaginary that these cultural products develop is one where crimes can be punished even when the law is complicit or helpless to do so. When artists are able and willing to create works that reflect and challenge their society's beliefs and actions then they become part of the broader cultural movement to end the perpetual violence and grieving that has marked the histories of both Mexico and Chile.

CONCLUSION: Closure

*Agitamos y agitamos hasta que los huevos
se les suban a la garganta a los neoliberales.*
-El Fisgón

*Y somos muchos, somos tantos los que así vamos...
y somos la no humanidad, los no hombres, los no dueños...
y los no dueños somos más, muchos más que
los guardianes de los dueños y más que la hierba
de este lado y de aquel lado de la cerca y más que
las piedras del camino y más que las gotas de la lluvia
que ha empezado a caer pero que no nos moja porque
los no dueños inventores han inventado la forma de detenerla
y entubarla para que los dueños la vendan a los no dueños.*
-Elda Nevárez Flores

*Comic panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged,
staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us
to connect these moments and mentally
construct a continuous, unified reality.*
-Scott McCloud

The crime comics presented here approach representations of violence, crime, and justice from multiple perspectives, and yet are they sufficient to give a truly complete vision of the realities of neoliberalism as experienced across Mexico, Chile, or Latin America in general? Scott McCloud explained that our vision of the world is always fragmented and incomplete - we can only perceive parts of the whole (62-63). He explains that the "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole has a name. It's called closure" (63). This process of closure usually works in the spaces between comic panels, known as the gutter, and is how multiple images come together to create a unified meaning. This project has brought together fragmented visions that all negotiate the violent realities of neoliberalism from Mexican and Chilean crime comics. This attempt has been to braid

together these fragments in order to better understand the whole of popular culture's experience of neoliberalism. Fragments from Rafael Barajas' graphic essay on neoliberalism, to Daniel Muñoz's depictions of the dehumanization of Mexican citizens in *El Pantera*, to the detective Heredia's flâneur-ism around Santiago as he recalls crime in the wake of the gentrified city, to *Los Penitentes*' explanations of how Mexico and Chile's realities share many of the same characteristics under the guise of democracy, all of these panels open up spaces that allow us to approach the whole through the local, through the fragment. The street-level approach to these comic panels that I propose in chapter one helps to situate us at the ground level, where we can walk the new gutters, explore the comicscapes, and find new links and meanings through the constellation these comics create when placed in a multibraided network. While McCloud points out that we only see fragments, and as this project is necessarily fragmentary in nature, it is his statement that, "In an incomplete world, we must depend on closure for our very survival" that allows me to find the very vital importance of this network of fragments (63). I believe that it is through these very fragments of space and time that we can perform brave and meaningful acts of closure. For this reason, I have proposed my theories of the multibraided network, the new gutter, and the necessity of reading Latin American comics from the perspective of Ashes in the Gutter. These approaches attempt to take the model upon which comics function, closure, and apply it to the reality they depict on their pages and in their fragmentary panels. I believe that these disparate comic panels can be read together, through the new gutters opened up between them, as means of processing neoliberal violence and disappearance in the realm of popular culture. Just as closure operates in the

empty spaces, the absences, between panels, so we can perform operations of closure in the violent empty spaces that neoliberalism has left. As McCloud said, our very survival may depend on these acts of closure.

In most cases the work of neoliberalism happens far from those who feel its consequences most deeply. In Mexico the multiple economic crises that occurred between the 1970s and the post-NAFTA peso crisis saw the intervention of the International Monetary Fund and the US in the nation's politics. Mexico began the neoliberal transformation during De La Madrid's presidency (1982-1988) with this process being put into greater effect during Carlos Salina's term (1988-1994). During De La Madrid's presidency, "In the period between 1983 and 1988, per capita income fell at a rate of about 5 percent per year and the value of workers' real wages fell between 40 to 50 percent" (Cutter). Carlos Salinas was a Harvard-trained economist who "abandoned the PRI's traditional socialist platform - economic protectionism, generous social spending, and government control of industry and finance - and instituted a series of neoliberal reforms designed to modernize the economy" (Gallo 2). When Salinas left office, Ernesto Zedillo found himself president during a time rocked by political assassinations and the Chiapas uprising. The large amounts of money that flooded Mexico's economy in the wake of NAFTA were pulled as foreign investors saw the Mexican situation as unstable: "The country's foreign reserves fell from a high of 29 billion dollars in March 1994 to 5.8 billion by the end of 1994" (4). Zedillo devalued the Mexican peso, inflation and interest rates soared, borrowers defaulted on their loans, bankruptcy went rampant and millions of jobs were lost (4). The International Monetary Fund pressured the government to drastically cut

social programs which negatively affected poor Mexicans. Martin Hart-Landsberg pointed out how these economic and political realities effected everyday citizens when he wrote:

Labor market trends highlight the human costs of this outcome. From 1991–1998, the percentage of urban workers employed for wages fell from 73.9 to 61.2. Over the same period, the percentage of unpaid workers rose from 4.6 to 12, and the percentage of self-employed increased from 16.6 to 22.8. Moreover, over the same period, wage workers and self-employed workers suffered massive declines in average hourly income, 26.6 percent and 49.6 percent respectively. While wages did rise in 1999 and 2000, average earnings still remained below 1994 levels. And, because of Mexico’s recession, these wages once again began falling in 2001.

The movements and shape that neoliberalism took in Mexico make it, in some cases, more difficult to trace, but in Chile's case, neoliberalism took hold in a drastically different manner. As mentioned in this project, neoliberalism was imposed upon Chile in the wake of the 1973 military coup. Since its implementation many have attempted to signal Chile as a neoliberal success story, but as Patricio Escobar and Camelia LeBert explain in their research, this is not exactly the case:

This type of development has, however, a hidden side. Problems of poverty and the distribution of wealth do not correspond to the evolution of the indicators that broadly describe the functioning of the economy [...]. For example, with regard to the behavior of productivity and real wages in Chile [...], what is striking is that the growth of the economy over time has been

translated into a functional distribution of income that operates regressively. [...]. The distribution of income, generally stagnant for the past decade, has worsened in relation to the poorest of the poor. (70-71)

These different experiences of neoliberalism in Mexico and Chile appear in dialogue through their artistic production in the medium of comics. Returning to Francisco Ochoa's 1974 comic, I find that Latin American artists see the realities of neoliberalism as a unifying aspect of contemporary modernity. As comics are inherently tied to the city, it follows that comics as a medium be linked closely with the realities of neoliberalism. Ochoa's comic braids together ciphers that calculate the violence carried out in the name of democracy in terms of bodies - many of them disappeared: "Pinochet es un gorila muy grueso. Es directamente responsable de la muerte de veinte mil chilenos. ¿Qué no será lo mismo veinte mil, que diez mil, que cinco mil, que dos mil, que ochocientos? A todo esto, ¿cuántos murieron en Tlatelolco? Cuántos murieron el 10 de junio? ¿Cuántos campesinos han sido asesinados y sepultados clandestinamente?" ["Pinochet is one thick gorilla. He's directly responsible for the death of twenty-thousand Chileans. I wonder if twenty-thousand isn't the same as ten-thousand, five-thousand, two-thousand, eight-hundred? After all, how many died at Tlatelolco? How many died the 10th of June? How many workers have been murdered and buried secretly?"] (12). Ochoa clarifies his ideas by stating, "Pinochet es tan mentiroso como lo es Ford, como lo es Kissinger y como son todos los gobiernos de las dictaduras disfrazadas de democracias en América Latina" ["Pinochet is as much of a liar as is Ford, as Kissinger, and all the governments dictatorships disguised as democracies in Latin America"] (17). While many may see the economic and political

actions of Mexico and Chile as unique and distinct, it is important to recognize their similarities as illustrated by their citizens and artists. Sergio Villabolos-Ruminott expressed a similar concept in his theories of General Geology of Latin America and Cindrology by explaining that beyond their differences the practices of violence and disappearances connect Mexico, Central America, Chile and the nations and peoples in between, by this exceptionally unexceptional reality in the age of neoliberalism (9). In this light, I see the fragmentary nature of this project as pieces of a sort of puzzle that work together to form this larger image - these fragmentary crime comic texts all reflect upon the exceptionally unexceptional violent reality of neoliberalism.

In chapter one of this project I weaved together a multibraided network of Mexican and Chilean comics that depicted crime and violence as carried out at the map-level, as well as panels that suggest tactics for surviving neoliberalism on the street-level. The process of closure mentioned above plays an important role in the analysis of this multibraided network because through closure this network of fragmentary panels creates new gutter spaces for reading these comics in new ways. This crazed reading of Mexican and Chilean comics as part of a single network can bring the close readings performed in chapters two and three into dialogue and reveal how pop culture imaginaries negotiate the realities of neoliberalism.

The various version of Pantera in Mexico City put on display how his indigenous body is manipulated by the state in order to combat the nation's own corruption. The production of Pantera as a *homo sacer* shows the willingness of the State to dehumanize its citizens in order to enact its plans. The nationalization of corruption and criminal

violence, a key feature of neoliberalism's bipolar politics according to Villalobos-Ruminott (13), necessitates that Pantera operate outside of the limits of the law, but outside the bounds of life as well. The neoliberal city as embodied by the Distrito Federal contextualizes Pantera as a lawless, lifeless hero and bandit that is forced to dismantle and rebuild the corrupt state from the realm of bare life. In this situation Pantera can be seen as a specter haunting the neoliberal city. The contradictory and liminal placement of Pantera between living/dead, human/animal, and hero/bandit, reveals the dehumanizing texture of neoliberalism.

The human-as-specter is confronted with the city of Santiago de Chile as a ghostly, haunted space in the graphic novel *Heredia Detective*. The disappearance of the City Bar Restaurant, described as the violent act of a heart being ripped out of the city, sends the detective on a haunted tour of sorts. As Heredia is confronted with urban spaces that cannot be read as reality but must be read in terms of violent memory, the urban landscape becomes filled with specters. The protagonist deciphers the reality of neoliberal Santiago in contradictory ways that leave the space dwelling between the present and the past, haunted.

Weaving these two visions of the dehumanized spectral homo sacer from neoliberal Mexico City with the haunted places of memory in neoliberal Santiago de Chile suggests that the transnational and translinear experiences of neoliberalism create absence, they disappear the individual as well as the city, leaving *ashes in the gutter*. This project then takes on the operation of interrogating the disappearance of disappearance itself. Each of the crime comic narratives included in this project open new gutter spaces where we can

walk the spectral streets of the neoliberal city that exist between Mexico and Chile, between Pantera and Heredia, between military coups and narco-violence. In the end, the effects of the neoliberal city upon the citizen are similar no matter where that city may physically appear on a map. If we are to dwell as *homine sacri* in the haunted cities of neoliberalism then let us take to the new gutters to walk them unafraid and untarnished - we can look to the tactics of the street to negotiate, navigate, transgress, and reimagine the city as neoliberalism has attempted to organize and dominate it.

The fragments braided together in this project represent only a tiny portion of the whole, and while these fragments can help up perform closure and decipher the reality of neoliberalism in Latin America, they should also be taken up and united with new projects. I hope that this dissertation can serve as an aperture in the fields of Latin American literatures and cultures, crime fiction, and comic studies among others. Likewise, I hope that the fragments I have pulled together may be used in useful ways to create new gutters when juxtaposed with works and ideas not included here. I look to expand this multibraided network beyond the scope of Mexico and Chile in the future. I believe that these popular culture texts can continue to provide insight into how individuals confront the violent realities of neoliberalism, and that comics from places such as Argentina, Colombia, and Brazil will bring important new contributions to this study.

Just as I opened this project with Rafael Barajas' comic *Cómo Sobrevivir al Neoliberalismo Sin Dejar de Ser Mexicano*, I would like to conclude the same way. Throughout Barajas' graphic novel the protagonist, a charro who is unable to find any work, is looking for a cure for his disease: neoliberalism. This project began by looking at the

symptoms and I want to close by looking to Barajas' proposed cure. The curandera Beba Toloache narrates the final pages of the graphic novel and explains:

Quienes buscan una sociedad más justa tienen que renovar su capacidad democrática y creativa. No se deben repetir los errores que arruinaron los proyectos socialistas. Lo que viene tiene que ser más democrático, organizado, antidogmático, culto, libre, inteligente, y creativo de lo que fue el viejo socialismo. Así como la historia juzgó los crímenes del fascismo y el stalinismo, deben juzgar los crímenes del neoliberalismo, entre los que se cuentan robo a gran escala, usura, despojo a las naciones y el sacrificio de millones en todo el mundo. ["Those who want a more just society have to renovate their democratic and creative capacities. They must not repeat the errors that ruined the socialist projects. What comes has to be more democratic, organized, anti-dogmatic, educated, free, intelligent, and creative than old socialism was. Just as history judged the crimes of fascism and Stalinism, it must judge the crimes of neoliberalism, among them are theft at a grand scale, usury, plundering of the nations, and the sacrifice of millions around the world"]. (185-186)

ASÍ COMO LA HISTORIA JUZGÓ LOS CRÍMENES DEL FASCISMO Y EL STALINISMO, DEBEN JUZGARSE LOS CRÍMENES DEL NEOLIBERALISMO, ENTRE LOS QUE SE CUENTAN ROBO A GRAN ESCALA, USURA, DESPOJO A LAS NACIONES Y EL SACRIFICIO DE MILLONES EN TODO EL MUNDO.



Figure 30. Rafael Barajas (El Fisgón) illustrates how neoliberalism dismembers society and individuals around the globe.

While this project has proposed new approaches to the depictions of neoliberalism in popular culture texts, I believe that dissertations are not enough to change the violent realities of neoliberalism. For this reason, it is important to follow Beba Toloache's words and to try out her recipe for curing neoliberalism: *hartos huevos y sesos* [lots of balls and brains].

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