

Archive and/as Montage in *The City as Text*: Exposing the Chilean Social Uprising

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ABSTRACT

In October 2019, a government-issued increase in Santiago's subway fares served as the spark that ignited a widespread uprising against Sebastián Piñera's right-wing regime and, more broadly, against the brutal inequalities of the neoliberal system installed during the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and maintained over the last three decades by institutional political parties and the ruling classes. As the voices of the uprising overtly indicated, "It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years." Following the dictatorship—among pacts of silence, proclamations of an already reconciled future, and insufficient, incomplete processes of justice and reparation—cultural production has played an important role in establishing relationships with the past that do not monumentalize or silence its anachronistic overflows. It is in this context that I read *La Ciudad como Texto* (*The City as Text*), created by Carola Ureta Marín, which registers the graphic expressions of the Chilean social uprising, digitally displaying a photomontage of the graffitied walls of the Alameda on the thirty-sixth day of protests alongside thirty-six texts that were added to the montage in the form of "footnotes". I propose that, by exposing temporalities, authorships, and media to one another, and by exposing the narrative construction and deliberate mediation at play in historical representation, *The City as Text* fulfills the critical task that Derrida entrusts to fiction: to attest to the anarchic secret of the archive in ways that allow us to think its prosthetic nature and its aporias. It is this anarchic condition—this dependence on an exterior supplement—that grants the archive its redemptive possibility, the promise it makes to the future in rendering a past event (il)legible. These supplemental technologies make events of reading possible, readings that produce the originary moment and expose the voids it leaves for the future, readings that bring the event's possibilities and valences into appearance. I suggest that it is through the particular modality of montage that *The City as Text* proliferates events of reading, treating the archive not as "the site of a narrative but a site for denarrativization; not a region for understanding but a space for exposure," (Moreiras 10).

KEYWORDS

archive; montage; neoliberalism; Global South; digital activism

RESUMO

Em outubro de 2019, um aumento nas tarifas do metro de Santiago desencadeou uma revolta generalizada contra o regime de direita de Sebastián Piñera e, mais amplamente, contra as brutais desigualdades do sistema neoliberal instalado durante a ditadura de Augusto Pinochet, apoiada pelos EUA, e mantido nas últimas três décadas pelos partidos políticos institucionais e pelas classes dominantes. Como as vozes da revolta indicaram abertamente: "Não são 30 pesos, são 30 anos". Após a ditadura – entre pactos de silêncio, proclamações

de um futuro já reconciliado e processos insuficientes e incompletos de justiça e reparação –, a produção cultural tem desempenhado um papel importante no estabelecimento de relações com o passado que não monumentalizam nem silenciam seus transbordamentos anacrônicos. É neste contexto que leio *La Ciudad como Texto*, de Carola Ureta Marín, que registra as expressões gráficas da revolta social chilena, exibindo digitalmente uma fotomontagem dos muros grafitados da Alameda no trigésimo sexto dia de protestos, ao lado de trinta e seis textos que foram acrescentados à montagem em forma de “notas de rodapé”. Proponho que, ao expor temporalidades, autoria e média, e ao expor a construção narrativa e a mediação deliberada em jogo na representação histórica, a obra *La Ciudad como Texto* cumpra a tarefa crítica que Derrida confia à ficção: atestar o segredo anárquico do arquivo de modo a permitir pensar sua natureza protética e suas aporias. É esta condição anárquica – esta dependência de um suplemento exterior – que concede ao arquivo a sua possibilidade redentora, a promessa que faz ao futuro ao tornar (i)legível um acontecimento passado. Essas tecnologias complementares possibilitam eventos de leitura, leituras que produzem o momento originário e expõem os vazios que ele deixa para o futuro, leituras que trazem à tona as possibilidades e valências do evento. Sugiro que é através da modalidade particular de montagem que *La Ciudad como Texto* multiplica eventos de leitura, tratando o arquivo não como “o local de uma narrativa, mas um local de desnarrativização; não uma região de compreensão, mas um espaço de exposição” (Moreiras 10).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

arquivo; montagem; neoliberalismo; Sul Global; ativismo digital

All roads now lead to Pompeii, not Rome. Our birthplace is no longer the eternal city whose ruins lie, layer upon layer, in a gesture of circular totality. Here and now, our birthplace is that other city petrified in a moment's glory: Pompeii. Cut. Slash. Interruption.

-Cristina Rivera Garza, *The Restless Dead: Necrowriting and Disappropriation*.

This is marrano thinking: a rejection of the excavation of a buried truth in favor of an anarchaeological approach in which the future of the past remains unaccounted for: that is, the very possibility of reading.

-Erin Graff Zivin, *Anarchaeologies: Reading as Misreading*

A series of inherited readings of Wilhelm Jensen's *Gradiva*—by Freud and, later, by Derrida, who reads Freud's reading—have revealed an “incessant tension between the archive and archaeology” (Derrida, 1995: 58). Jensen's protagonist, Hanold, is an archaeologist whose obsession with a woman depicted in a Roman relief leads him to dream of an encounter with her. In the dream, he sees her walking the burning streets of Pompeii, granting him an unmediated perception of the moment represented in the relief, the originary moment when her footstep and its imprint on the ash were indiscernible (Derrida, 1995: 61). But *Gradiva* has been dead and buried, not walking upon the ash, but petrified beneath it since the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD. Even the most advanced archaeological excavation cannot reveal her as she really was (if she really was). At best, Hanold might find a *Gradiva*-shaped void preserved in ash and pumice, a void that, when filled with plaster, might cast her dead body in distorted versions of the ancient relief. In this sense, the archive is more akin to the volcano than it is to archaeology. The archive preserves violently, dividing the impression from the imprint, accumulating layers that overlap, overlay, and frame one another in an iterability that “haunted it from the origin” (Derrida, 1995: 62). Hanold can dream of *Gradiva*'s footstep precisely because of this violence, this constitutive divisibility of the origin, its anarchival secret. This secret

that haunts the archive, what Derrida calls “the very ash of the archive” (62), is what the Vesuvian ash preserves and exposes: a void, an origin that exists only as a projection from its inscription. For Derrida, literature—reading Jensen, reading Freud, reading Freud reading Jensen—attests to this secret and allows us to think it (63).

In this paper, we will encounter a different kind of eruption on city streets. Unlike Hanold, who became “a master in the art of deciphering the most indecipherable, the most enigmatic graffiti” (Derrida, 1995: 61), we will attempt to read graffiti from an anarchaeological register and in a distinct literary space, a realm of digital writing similar to what Cristina Rivera Garza calls the “New Pompeii” (Rivera Garza, 2020: 120). Although she refers specifically to writing through Twitter, we can extend her idea of the “Pompeii second”—the always-mediated *happening*, the anachronistic present fabricated in a written message (115)—to a Pompeiiic day: November 23, 2019. *The City as Text*, an archive of productions of that day’s *happening*, will be our focus here.

The City as Text is an artistic and archival project that registers the graphic expressions of the Chilean social uprising, digitally displaying a photomontage of the graffitied walls of the Alameda on the thirty-sixth day of protests. Following this manual and digital production, thirty-six short texts were added to the montage in the form of “footnotes.”¹ As an archive, *The City as Text* functions according to the same tensions that preserved and destroyed Gradiva. The originary event as such is shown to be already aporetic in the very possibility of its preservation, and November 23rd proliferates as an accumulation of iterations inscribed on technological substrates—the graffiti on the walls of the Alameda, the walls in the photographs, the photographs in the montage, the montage and footnotes in the digital slider. It is this anarchic condition—this perpetual lack and dependence on an exterior supplement—that grants the archive its messianic possibility, the promise it makes to the future in rendering a past event (il)legible and open to iterations that, in the words of Erin Graff Zivin, “we know not how to read, though read them we must” (Graff Zivin, 2020: 43). These supplemental technologies make events of reading possible, readings that produce the originary moment and expose the voids it leaves for the future, readings that bring the event’s possibilities and valences into appearance (Naas, 2015: 128).

1 Since the initial writing of this paper, five new footnotes have been added to the original thirty-six. *The City as Text* has taken many forms, including print and digital books, but this paper focuses primarily on the web version as it appeared in December 2021.



Fig. 1. Graffiti on and near Av. Nueva Providencia 199. Copyright La Ciudad como Texto. Captured by Daniel Corvillón and Carola Ureta Marín on 23 November, 2019.

Unlike the stratified ruins of Rome—which gesture toward the past as a “circular totality” that can be revealed through archaeological excavation—the uneven layers of *The City as Text* are more akin to the cuts, slashes, and interruptions of Pompeiic preservation, producing and exposing a largely unreadable, constitutively fragmented *happening* “based on principles of juxtaposition and montage” (Rivera Garza, 2020: 115). In preserving and performing the immanent divisibility of the origin, and in staging the violent mediation of that preservation, we propose that *The City as Text* fulfills the critical task that Derrida entrusts to fiction: to attest to the anarchic secret of the archive in ways that allow us to think its prosthetic nature and its aporias. Through the modality of the archive as montage, then, *The City as Text* proliferates events of reading, treating the archive not as “the site of a narrative but a site for denarrativization; not a region for understanding but a space for exposure” (Moreiras, 2018: 10). It is the series of exposures of temporalities, authorships, and mediations in the montage of archival layers—as opposed to the divided strata of the archaeological ruin or the progressive teleology of historicism—that attests to the fictional nature of the originary, foundational moment (the *arché*), preserving the uprising instead as a *happening*, maintaining its gerund, and potentializing relationships with the past that interrupt excavational thinking and its closure of the untimely nature of revolt.

1. EXPOSING TEMPORALITIES

Mira: Hay conexiones fractales clandestinas a la vuelta de cada calle. ¿Te has dado cuenta que se puede trazar una línea perfecta entre un torniquete de un metro y una barricada?

-Valeria Hofman, Footnote 14 in *The City as Text*

In October of 2019, Sebastián Piñera's government raised the subway fare in Santiago by 30 Chilean pesos. A group of secondary students responded by jumping the turnstiles, evading the fare altogether. This act of disobedience has been discussed as the "spark" that ignited the uprising against Piñera's right-wing regime and, more broadly, against the brutal inequalities of the neoliberal system installed during the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and maintained over the last three decades by institutional political parties and the ruling classes. As the voices and writings of the uprising have overtly indicated, "It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years."

The City as Text begins with a similar contagion of temporalities, presenting as its first image a building whose number, 199, has been partially slashed and rewritten as 1973, the year of the military coup (see Fig. 1). The words "ZONA DE BALAS" appear alongside images of Pinochet and Piñera in the crosshairs of two red targets. "NO+" frames the building's front door, reiterating an intervention by the Colectivo Acciones de Arte, who disseminated the same tag across the walls of Santiago in the 1980s as an open text to be appropriated and completed by citizens, often producing anti-dictatorship messages, such as "NO+ muertes" or "NO+ CNI" (Red Conceptualismos del Sur, n.d.).² A series of similarly accusatory anti-police tags—"ACAB," "1312," "LOS PACOS VIOLAN," "LOS PACOS DISPARARON PRIMERO"—accompany stenciled figures of Negro Matapacos, the stray dog that famously attacked Chilean police forces during the 2011 student protests.³ Anonymous propositions call out to no one in particular: "RESISTE," "NO BAJEMOS LOS BRAZOS," "EVADE." This collectively produced constellation makes an image in the anachronistic sense Didi-Huberman describes: "to make an image is, fundamentally, to make a gesture that transforms time [...] it is to act in history and on history" (Didi-Huberman, 2018: xxvii). In this case, historical time becomes simultaneously continuous (drawing attention to legacies of repression and resistance) and anachronistic (joining 1973, the

2 The Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI) was the political police that replaced the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA) in 1977. Leftist militants suffered brutal interrogation, torture, murder and disappearance at the hands of both government bodies during the dictatorship.

3 ACAB (All Cops Are Bastards) is an acronym borrowed from English, and 1312 is its numerical equivalent. "Paco" is a term used to refer to the Chilean police.

1980s, 2011, and 2019 in the disjointed here and now of the *happening*). This anarchival montage begins, then, by selecting an anonymous, collective image that performs the divisibility of the origin, exposing the iterability of both past and present as actualities whose futures remain unaccounted for, whose events and potentialities are still unfolding, still divisible and exposable.

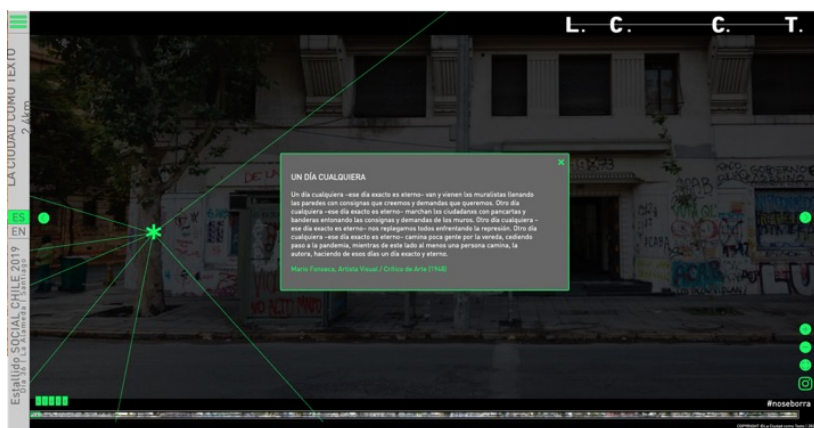


Fig. 2. Footnote by Mario Fonseca superimposed on images of graffiti on and near Av. Nueva Providencia 199. Copyright La Ciudad como Texto. Captured by Daniel Corvillón and Carola Ureta Marín on 23 November, 2019.

The first footnote, which appears on the left side of the image as a clickable asterisk, introduces another layer of temporal exposure (see Fig. 2). As an intermedial arrangement, this digital element is superimposed onto the photomontage, sustaining a tension that exposes the discordant temporalities of the “text” (the photomontage) and the footnotes without subsuming them into progression or synthesis—into what Walter Benjamin (1968) calls “homogenous, empty time” (261). When selected, the asterisk emits a cluster of linear fragments, visually referencing the laser pointers that members of the Primera Línea used to down surveillance drones and disorient police forces during the uprising. The same click opens a short passage by artist Mario Fonseca titled “Un día cualquiera,” which describes a day that is simultaneously precise and eternal—a day for ephemeral inscription on city walls and protest banners, a day for retreat and reorganization when police repression and the COVID-19 pandemic force the multitudes out of their shared spaces.⁴ As opposed to the reconstructive

4 Fonseca’s text can be accessed directly at the following URL: <https://laciudadcomotexto.cl/#N10>.

and rationalizing narrativization that the archive traditionally imposes in order to make historical events legible, this short text *denarrativizes* the uprising through convulsions of temporality.⁵ The anachronistic allusion to the pandemic—which did not reach Chile until three months after the photos were taken—“blast[s] open the continuum of history” (Benjamin, 1968: 262), suggesting a disjointed coexistence between the nearly deserted streets in the images, which retain traces of the already transtemporal inscriptions on the walls, and the deserted streets of the pandemic, as if the uprising’s temporality could remain suspended in this perpetual imminence, as if the pandemic could not close off its potentialities.

The interrupted phrase “DE LA REBELI-,” the white paint that threatens erasure, the symbol of infinity inscribed with the words “TIEMPOS MEJORES,” and the lyrical repetitions in “Un día cualquiera” attest to the imminence and iterability of the uprising in its archivization as montage, demonstrating that the trace persists, “but having separated from its origin it does not remain as a present trace of a past present [or of a future present]. Because the separation is immediate, it remains [...] beyond every present and every ontology rooted in the present” (Naas, 2015: 140). In other words, *The City as Text* does not fix November 23rd in an already finished, already legible, already forgettable temporality, but instead functions as a “lugar de reunión de una multiplicidad de tiempos históricos que desordenan cualquier narrativa destinada a sosegar dicha multiplicidad” (Villalobos-Ruminott, 2018: 158). A montage of traces that, like the very gesture of uprising, is able to actualize the past and disrupt the foreseeability of the future. For Nelly Richard, memory and history inevitably produce these temporal overflows and disruptions, which allow for readings that “translate the event to unexplored networks of historical intelligibility” (Richard, 2004: 24). Following Graff Zivin, though, we would insist here on the equally important role of *unintelligibility*: the non-synthesis that defines the aesthetics of montage, the (an)archival (im)possibilities of the event, the uprising’s suspension, gathering, and disorientation of historical time. These temporal layers expose traces that cannot be monumentalized into logocentric legibility, remaining instead as ephemeral impressions of ephemeral imprints, as absent presences.

5 This is a play on Nelly Richard’s idea of “convulsions of sense” as an “unleashing of memory” that the Transition governments sought to neutralize in their politics of consensus and forgetting of the past (Richard, 2004: 17).

2. EXPOSING AUTHORSHIPS AND MEDIATIONS

Montage makes any authority of message or program equivocal, improbable, and even impossible. This is because, within a montage of this kind, the elements—images and texts—take positions instead of becoming discourse and taking sides.

—Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Eye of History: When Images Take Positions*

In *The City as Text*, archive is exposed to montage, image is exposed to text, and the archival power of consignment—“which aims to coordinate a single corpus...in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (Derrida, 1995: 10)—is stripped of its (already broken, empty) sovereignty. Graff Zivin (2020) calls this undoing of discourse “exposed, indisciplined thinking” (151), a thinking that “reveals the identity of each discourse as a nonidentity: the secret flaw or defect that resides at the core of every genre, every discipline, every concept, that also stands as its single and singular condition of possibility” (152). In the archive as montage, any discourse, any “authority of message” is impossible. Rather than becoming fixed in the rigidity of taking sides, image and text—“ABORTO LEGAL,” “HAZTE VEGANX,” “PIÑERA A LA CÁRCEL,” “NO OLVIDEMOS LAS MUERTES,” “WALLMAPU LIBRE,” a poster of a hooded student, a painted image of a bleeding eye—take positions that are not synthesized into a master narrative, but suspend the possibility of such a narrative: “sobre [los graffiti] se escribe y reescribe, conformando capas que anuncian una cierta biografía del rayado y la coexistencia de diferentes visiones y maneras de vivir el estallido social” (Márquez et al., 2020: 114). Rather than archontic “classification and hierarchization” (Derrida, 1995: 30), rather than individual authorial control, we have exposure and rewriting, modes by which the trace proliferates (through) overlapping layers of time, authorship, and media. At the level of the “text” (the photomontage), we saw this in the first image in the reiterations of NO+, Negro Matapacos, and ACAB, in the citation and actualization of past resistances.⁶ These tags and others repeat themselves in different styles, colors, and locations, revealing

6 In *A Dictionary of Catch Phrases*, Eric Partridge traces the acronym’s usage throughout 20th and 21st century England among striking workers, prisoners, punks, and anarchists. The tag has also appeared in popular movements across the globe (see, for example, Radwa Othman Sharaf’s “Graffiti as a Means of Protest and Documentation in the Egyptian Revolution”), including protests related to the Black Lives Matter movement, and has taken on the additional meaning of All Capitalists Are Bastards (see Mary Louisa Cappelli’s “Black Lives Matter: The Emotional and Racial Dynamics of the George Floyd Protest Graffiti”).

the plural authorship behind this exposed, indisciplined image/text that is non-discursive, nonlinear, and non-hierarchical.⁷

The addition of the footnotes attempts to follow this “exposed, indisciplined thinking” in a very literal way, as they are composed by 36 professionals and students from a variety of disciplines, but also through modes of citation similar to what we see in the collective “text.” In a footnote called “Prefacio 2,” which—contrary to what one might expect of a preface or prologue—appears about halfway through the photomontage, Nicole Cristi describes how the addition of the footnotes

permite ver las tensiones de un Santiago habitado en múltiples dimensiones que difícilmente se relacionan de manera simbiótica. En este punto, es el mismo registro fotográfico kilométrico de la ‘ciudad archivo’, el que nos llama desde los muros a repensar la existencia de estas dimensiones paralelas, para transformarlas en una ecología e interdependencia, en constante intercambio y transformación mutua como un cuerpo colectivo.⁸

Without saying so explicitly, Cristi’s text suggests that citation can serve as a mode by which these parallel dimensions—which she refers to as “las huellas anónimas de la primera línea” and “las voces autorales de intelectuales, artistas y críticos”—might relate to and traverse each other. Her footnote appears in the photomontage above the graffitied words “A RAYARLO TODO!!” (see Fig. 3), which Cristi integrates into the title of her preface: “A rayarlo todo! Ciudad Archivo de una Ecología de Resistencias.” Her text interprets this call to action beyond the material inscription on the walls as a demand to “rayar” the limits between plural and individual—popular and specialized—authorships, to expose them to one another as a practice of citation, archivization, and curatorship that is not merely a production or preservation of a narrative, but a continuation and iteration of the expressions of the uprising in forms that delay their closure: “Writing, in this context, is always rewriting, a going-back to what others have put into words and sentences, a practice that delays and belabors the finished version of any text. An exercise in unfinishedness” (Rivera Garza, 2020: 48).

7 We should recognize the influence of Cristina Rivera Garza’s discussion of disappropriation—a practice that “endeavors to unveil the different forms of collective work that structure and constitute a text” (Rivera Garza, 2020: 55)—here and throughout our reading of *The City as Text*.

8 The footnote details Cristi’s professional profile: “Diseñadora y Licenciada en Estética / Magister en Cultura Material y Visual / Candidata a Doctora en Antropología en Cultura Material.” The footnote can be accessed at the following URL: <https://laciudadcomotexto.cl/#N39>.



Fig. 3. “A RAYARLO TODO!!”. Copyright La Ciudad como Texto. Captured by Daniel Corvillón and Carola Ureta Marín on 23 November, 2019.

Cristi’s preface, then, is an event of reading of the “text” that becomes an event of rewriting, supplementing the material prosthesis of the walls with the digital prosthesis of the footnotes. This proliferation through citation appears in many of the other footnotes, which traverse each other as they read and rewrite the “text.” Artist Sebastián Jaña takes a fragment of a partially illegible tag (see Fig. 4) and rewrites it: “NUESTRAS LUCHAS INTERNAS están ahí, están aquí, y les tememos más que a las balas (imaginarias). Sin miedo. Las luchas internas explotaron.”⁹ Jaña uses quotation to “complete the work by fracturing it,” exposing the sense(lessness) of words beyond their original contexts in a process of fragmentation and reconfiguration that is ongoing (Ferris, 2008: 90). Similarly, María Paulina Soto Labbé begins and ends her poem with words from the walls, words that are “desechad[as] de las galerías de arte y de la ‘alta’ literatura...aquellas poéticas frases extraídas de la calle: ‘Las paredes son la imprenta del pueblo’” (quoted in Fajardo, 2020). Soto’s poem ends with “Chile despertó. Dime algo más lindo k eso,” a phrase written on a bus stop (see Fig. 5) whose location she provides in her text (Alameda y Presidente Juan Antonio Ríos). Navigating to that point in the photomontage, one finds the phrase on the bus stop and at the beginning of an accompanying footnote by Silvia Aguilera Morales. Aguilera’s text ends with a phrase that appears in various locations on the walls—“Hasta que la dignidad se haga costumbre,”— and so on.¹⁰ Through citation, the

9 Jaña’s footnote can be accessed directly at the following URL: <https://laciudadcomotexto.cl/#N15>.

10 Soto is identified as a “Doctora especializada en Políticas Culturales Iberoamericanas”, and Aguilera as the “Editora de LOM Ediciones”. Soto’s footnote can be accessed at the following URL: <https://laciudadcomotexto.cl/#N34>. Aguilera’s footnote can be found at <https://laciudadcomotexto.cl/#N01>.

prostheses continue to accumulate, iterate, and interpenetrate. For Graff Zivin (2020), a narrative form of expression “discovers its asymmetries when it is exposed (or exposes itself) to another form” (151). *The City as Text* reveals these asymmetries, subverting linear narratives and demonstrating the profanation and propagation of the event as an accumulation of inscriptions in prosthetic technologies that are themselves flawed, incomplete, and supplemented by other media.



Fig. 4. “NUESTRAS LUCHAS INTERNAS”. Copyright La Ciudad como Texto. Captured by Daniel Corvillón and Carola Ureta Marín on 23 November, 2019.

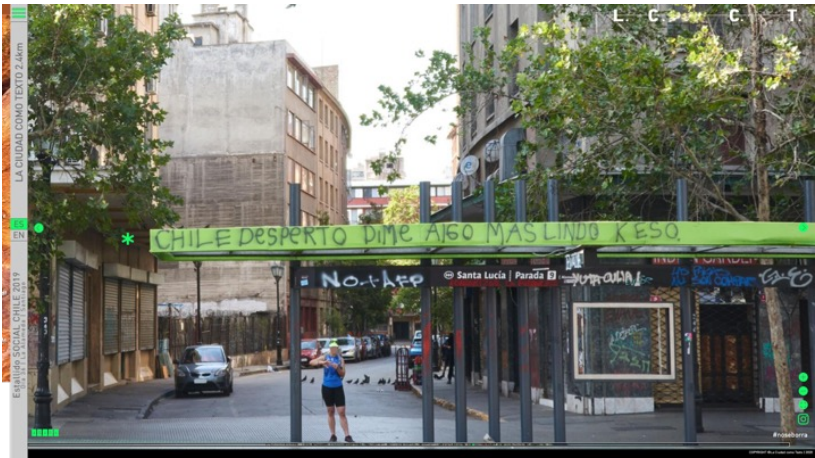


Fig. 5. “CHILE DESPERTO DIME ALGO MAS Lindo k Eso”. Copyright La Ciudad como Texto. Captured by Daniel Corvillón and Carola Ureta Marín on 23 November, 2019.

In a footnote called “Las Calles y la Pizarra Mágica,” designer Marcos Chilet compares the city walls to Freud’s Magic Mystic Pad, exposing prosthetic operations of inscription and citation as he reflects on the ways that “cada escritura permanece influenciando la escritura que vendrá [...] las calles vuelven a blanco, pero debajo de esas capas de nueva pintura, la vieja pintura sigue hablándonos.”¹¹ On the one hand, the footnotes allow for traces of the uprising to continue to “speak,” but this secondary inscription, this condition of possibility, is also an act of archival violence that “leav[es] a mark right on the substrate” —in this case a clickable asterisk—that cuts, slashes, and interrupts the “text” and reveals its constitutive divisibility into fragments (Derrida: 1995, 22). For Benjamin, citation requires this violent element, which like archivization, is destructive in its preservation: he finds in quotation (at least in Karl Kraus’s use of it) “the only power in which hope still resides that something might survive this age—because it was wrenched from it” (quoted in Ferris, 2008: 90). The footnotes perform this violent preservation in their wrenching of the graffitied phrases from their places on the walls, in their dismantling and reconfiguration of the montage that is also, to some extent, a dismantling and reconfiguration of historical, narrative time and authorial originality.

The photomontage stages a similarly destructive operation as it dismantles mimetic representation, exposing the violent cuts and slashes of mediation and preservation. These disorganizing and disassembling cuts are necessary “to move [images] to another level of intelligibility and legibility [...] The photograph might *document* a moment in history, but, once it has been assembled in a montage with the others—and with the accompanying text—it may *induce* a more profound reflection,” a reflection, perhaps, on the illegibility of historical documents, on the impossibility and undesirability of merely imitating the order of factual reality (Didi-Huberman, 2018: 24, emphasis in original). In the archive as montage, this dis-order is in constant tension with the organizing principle of consignment, a tension materialized in a series of photos of the construction of *The City as Text* (see Fig. 6). These photos show artist Carola Ureta Marín surrounded by scraps, scissors, and tape as she disassembles and reassembles the 136 images that make up the montage. Her sharp tools and white gloves give the photos an almost surgical quality, transparently displaying the manipulations and cuts she enacts on the visual field of the 136 images, preserving certain aspects, severing others, and suturing the raw spaces in between. At the same time, she seems to oppose this archontic, historicist violence to the extent possible, using obsolete modes of photographic mediation that do not optimize factual representation but

11 Chilet’s footnote can be accessed at the following URL: <https://laciudadcomotexto.cl/#N06>.

confound it. While she could have chosen to employ the “panorama” function on any smart phone camera—which would have produced a more fluid and accurate spatial depiction—it is clear that her goal is not strictly to document a historical event, creating instead a performativity that breaks with mimetic systems of equivalence and moves the images to the (dis)order of the archive as montage. What is preserved and exposed, then, is not the event, but the “cuttings and discontinuities, and not just out of some malevolent pleasure in nonsense, but rather out of a given responsibility to historical time” (Moreiras, 2018: 10). The archive, even in the modality of montage, cannot avoid mediation, production, and the incorporation of form, but by visibilizing its construction, as well as its sutures and discontinuities, *The City as Text* situates the event outside of the smooth, teleological movement of historical progress, introducing alternative ways of approaching the past that acknowledge its aporetic and prosthetic nature.



Fig. 6. Artist Carola Ureta Marín constructing the photomontage in January 2020. Copyright La Ciudad como Texto. Accessed in the “Libro Digital I” version of the project on pages 82-3.

In other words, by making narrative construction and deliberate mediation transparent, *The City as Text* suggests a denarrativization of historical representation. This is similar to Brecht’s epic theater, which “moves forward in a different way—jerkily, like the images of a film strip” (Walter Benjamin quoted in Didi-Huberman, 2018: 117) or to what Benjamin calls photography’s “capacity for lyricism” (quoted in Didi-Huberman, 2018: 231), its capacity for fragmentation, disassembly, and reassembly, its possibilities to construct “montages capable of punctuating for us the apparitions and deformations that are capable of showing us, in images, how

the world appears and how it is deformed” (Didi-Huberman, 2018: 251, emphasis in original). Throughout the photomontage, we find many of these jerky movements and deformations: the once solid, sovereign architecture of the Casa Central de la Pontífica Universidad Católica de Chile multiplies into a series of structures interrupted by uneven seams (see Fig. 7). With a slight tilt of the camera, the poles of a bus stop become the “I”s in FEMICIDIO, and a person’s silhouette—rounded at the abdomen by what could be a pregnancy or a backpack—becomes the “O” in NO (see Fig. 8). What these images tell us about the history of the uprising, then, is that it is multiple, interrupted by discontinuities, fractures, and voids that bear its traces so that they might remain recombina-ble, exposa-ble, and (il)legible.

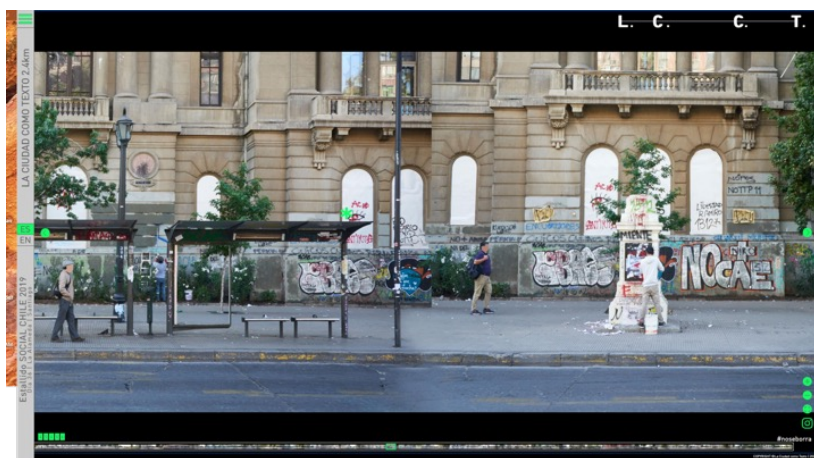


Fig. 7. Casa Central de la Pontífica Universidad Católica de Chile. Copyright La Ciudad como Texto. Captured by Daniel Corvillón and Carola Ureta Marín on 23 November, 2019.

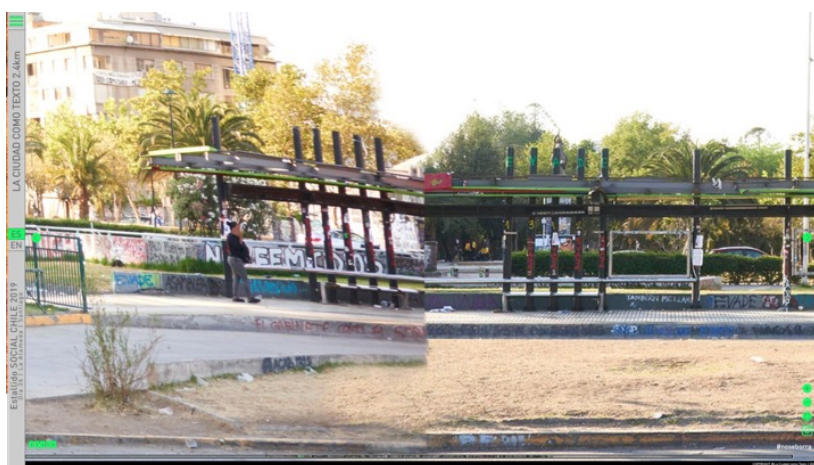


Fig. 8. “NO FEMICIDIO”. Copyright La Ciudad como Texto. Captured by Daniel Corvillón and Carola Ureta Marín on 23 November, 2019.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Ruido visual necesario.

Superposición de acontecimientos históricos.

¿Rastro de lo construido o de lo que se debería construir?

¿Cómo lo registro?

-Felipe Fontecilla, Footnote 11 in *The City as Text*¹²

In her 2004 book on the political-cultural panorama of post-dictatorship Chile, Nelly Richard finds in cultural production certain residual continuities that reveal fissures in the transition from dictatorship to democracy, pointing to

representational and counter-representational apparatuses that can be identified with either contemplative memory (a memory recorded in the static image of the literal past) or transformative, non-mimetic memory (a memory that heterogeneously combines its archives and testimonies according to different times, places, and modes in which the memory being convoked by the present is resignified). (xxvi)

Following the dictatorship, among government pacts of silence, proclamations of an already reconciled future, and insufficient, incomplete processes of justice and reparation, these non-mimetic forms of memory were of particular importance in establishing relationships with the past that did not monumentalize or silence its anachronistic overflows. With this legacy in mind, the archival practices in *The City as Text*—its aporetic exposures of temporalities, authorships, and media that open spaces from which unforeseeable pasts and futures might arise—have political consequences that point to the limitations of totalizing notions of democracy, history, reason, and representation. Certain elements of the project threaten to undermine those consequences, namely the website's landing page (see Fig. 9), which falls into mimetic patterns, a kind of contemplative memory that presents a traditionally representative map of the space, a description of the project that suggests the uncomplicated possibility of “reliving” the experience of the uprising, and a somewhat reductive depiction of the movement as a “dispute between citizens and their government”. Even the seemingly innocuous phrase “YOU ARE HERE” solicits a totalizing notion of

12 Fontecilla's footnote can be accessed at the following URL: <https://laciudadcomotexto.cl/#N11>

presence that implies an easy coherence between the physical space and its graphic representation, a coherence that obscures mediation and the traces of the absent plurality that is not here where “I am.”¹³



Fig. 9. Landing page for <https://laciudadcomotexto.cl/> depicting the 2.4 km trajectory registered in *La Ciudad como Texto*. Graphic designed by Carola Ureta Marín. Copyright La Ciudad como Texto.

Beyond the landing page, though, *The City as Text* abandons this contemplative, mimetic approach in favor of the “ruido visual necesario” of anachronistic temporalities that are both continuous and disjointed, of readings that are rewritings, of images that are fractured and distorted. This is the Pompeiic cutting and slashing—or cutting and pasting—that produce and preserve the uprising as a *happening*, as the imminent potentiality of return and reiteration. Perhaps this is why *The City as Text* does not show the usual energy that photos of revolt or revolution tend to contain—the impassioned images of raised fists and outraged faces, the rubber bullets and bleeding bodies—focusing instead on a lull in that energy, on the traces it leaves, on the open possibility that it is about to begin again.

13 Cristina Rivera Garza discusses this idea in the context of the collective labor of writing: “Our bodies occupy spaces from which others have been expelled—which is what makes the apparently innocent ‘YOU ARE HERE’ signs on contemporary maps into political insinuations. Who is not here where I am? Who will be here when I am forced out? There is no originality. There is only an ongoing writerly conversation, an exacerbated system of layered quotations, that may—or may not—help us reconfigure the labor of whomever paved the way beforehand” (Rivera Garza, 2020: 53).

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