From Aesthetics as Critique to Grammars of Listening: On Reconfiguring Sensibility as a Political Task

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This paper presents an overview of my work in philosophy from my first book on Friedrich Schiller and the political sublime to my most recent project on listening to traumatic forms of violence. Starting with a reflection on the autobiographical character of philosophy, I propose to take up the question of an aesthetic dimension of philosophical critique, where aesthetics is understood as an always already embodied perspective on the world, on truth, and on philosophical activity, as well as an always already political realm, where the distribution of sense pre-determines our approach and articulation of experience. Departing from aesthetics understood and deployed as critique, the paper moves on to ask about the specific frameworks of sense or grammars that determine in advance the conditions of audibility in the realms of memory-building and history-making—particularly in those contexts where historical, political, and institutional forms of violence produce silencing and erasure. Putting in dialogue the latter with decolonial studies, I (re)interpret "traumatic violence" as a colonizing form of violence, understanding that one of its central aspects is that it is not only an assault on life but on the conditions of production of sense that make life legible as such. In this context, my project on grammars of listening seeks to carefully unpack these complex intersections while also explaining why I believe that a radical form of listening is an essential subversive/imaginative strategy against traumatic/colonial violence.

Key words: aesthetics; critique; grammars of listening; trauma; decoloniality; memory

How to write about oneself as a professional philosopher? On the other hand, does one ever write about anything else? The invitation to write this essay has given me an opportunity to realize that my writing has, for a long time now (perhaps always), moved between these two questions, attempting to navigate a dilemma that should be a false one—or rather should not be one at all—but which was, unfortunately, forced onto my practice as a thinker through my philosophical training. Does one need to avoid "getting personal" when it comes to writing philosophy? And also, crucially, what might philosophy *lose* in avoiding the personal?

The first person to take notice of the personal dimension of my philosophical writing and to affirm it as philosophy was, unsurprisingly, a novelist. While writing my PhD dissertation on tragedy and the sublime in Friedrich Schiller, my romantic partner at the time insisted that what I was writing was in fact philosophy *as* autobiographical reflection—an exploration of how to come to terms with pain as a liberating and community-building experience of the world. He is an accomplished writer in Colombia and also a cherished intellectual interlocutor of mine, who uplifted the personal *as* philosophical in my writing against what I was being told by professors and mentors—all of them male philosophers. This helped me believe that, no matter what I was told at the university, I was a talented philosopher and should not abandon my career just because many of my professors thought I was perhaps more "suited" for literature (a patriarchal translation of the otherwise simple fact that I was a woman in philosophy interested in aesthetics). Meanwhile, my dissertation advisor kept jotting in the margins of my drafts that my tone was just not right, that it was "too personal." In one of the

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most memorable instances of this marginalia, he went so far as to ridiculously admonish that I should stop "pretending I was Shakespeare." Even in derogatory comparison to a literary mind, the referent was a European male. As a woman writer, I was being disciplined for the act of refusing to answer his questions in the traditional white male philosopher's voice, which he was trained in turn to believe to be the only one worthy of professional recognition.

Later, as an assistant professor at Los Andes University in Bogotá, my work began to speak more directly to Colombia's political reality—after all, it was from this situation that the kind of questions I was answering via the history of philosophy had emerged. To position my philosophical thought in this way was alternatively interpreted as either nonsensical or sacrilegious. In fact, one of my male colleagues insisted my work was "no longer" in philosophy. He then sought to assuage me, adding that it was "good work," it just "wasn't philosophy." Never mind that he nonchalantly imparted this dictum from his office door, where seconds ago he had pinned a poster of the "Twenty Best Philosophers"—a list of names of white male philosophers, none of them born or working in Latin America. To speak about one's place and to produce philosophical thinking in and from the urgencies of political realities that *are,* as feminism has insistently taught us, personal, as well as from my commitments and experiences outside academia, had the effect—under the white male gaze embodied by most Colombian male philosophers—of turning my work into something "applied," and therefore no longer (true, hardcore, real) philosophy.

I start with these accounts not because I want to introduce my philosophical path as particularly onerous or obstacle-ridden. It is true that the sexist and patriarchal misrecognition of what constitutes philosophical thought has been part of my professional life in philosophy all the way through—not to mention the structural racism which I only felt once I moved to the United States, but which many people have to endure from day one. Nevertheless, I am also entirely aware of the privileges I have had access to along the way. I had encouraging parents who wanted me to study whatever I chose and had the means to support me in doing so—and this in a country like Colombia where very few people have the opportunity or resources to complete a university education. I also arrived at the university from a good high school, which is the reason I received such a high-quality education in the humanities and could imagine myself as a philosopher one day, like my philosophy teacher, Claudia Rincón, a queer woman who taught me G.W.F. Hegel for the first time and never once doubted I would read and understand him—even though she did not anticipate I was going to fall in love with his work. And I had access to excellent college and graduate education, to brilliant professors fully committed to teaching, who devoted time and energy to showing me how to become a philosopher myself, and who believed in me in spite of the sexism that, unavoidably, shaped in most cases their relationship to my work.[1]

So, once again, if I start with these accounts (a few out of many, some of them too personal, too intimate and humiliating to share), it is simply to call attention to the fact that, while philosophy has undoubtedly given me the critical tools to question its own unilateral, colonial foundations and point towards the urgent need for its (my) decolonization, its praxis has always been full of instances in which this critical potential conflicts with the way it is understood, practiced, and taught in academic environments. This sort of conflict—itself sometimes a blatant performative contradiction—continues excluding and gatekeeping philosophy against all those voices (colonized, racialized, sexualized, and gendered by philosophy itself) which would make it not only richer and more pertinent but, I would even say, *possible* today. If philosophy is to survive, it needs not only to broaden its spectrum, but even further, it needs to subvert and question to the very core the criteria that determine what is recognized as philosophy—what form of writing, what kind of questioning, but also, what kind of "who" is expected to carry out the inquiry.[2] And, to return to my point of departure, it is only in recognizing how close philosophy is to our lives (no matter what its subject is or how abstract it

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aims to be), how much it lives on, nurtures, and results from the way we inhabit our bodies, and how deeply embedded it is in our beliefs, our cultural and historical practices, and our geographical and social belongings, that we'll be able to acknowledge the difference between its vocation for truth and the very erroneous but extended idea that this protects it—or ought to protect it—from its ultimately autobiographical nature.

Perhaps because I refuse to believe philosophy is a disembodied activity, my work departs from and has always moved around aesthetics, understood as the realm where sense (through our senses, perceptions, and desires) is (re)framed, (re)distributed, and either made intelligible or rendered imperceptible (invisible, inaudible, untouchable)—that is, aesthetics as always already political and, if taken up critically, as a political task. This has involved, as I'll explain in detail below, a deep immersion in modern aesthetics, with particular attention to Schiller, who I claim inaugurates a singular conception of philosophical critique precisely through his approach to aesthetics. I have attended to the ways in which this conception of critique gets deployed—and becomes particularly powerful—as a critique of violence, turning towards contemporary political thinkers who are seeking to interrupt, subvert, and render inoperative the kind of violence that Walter Benjamin—and Hegel before him, I claim—asserted was structural to the law, and that contemporary postcolonial and decolonial philosophy has shown to be more pervasive, cruel, and devastating than Hegel and Benjamin ever imagined.

Throughout my work, the question of structural forms of violence has been inseparably bound to the question (aesthetic, once again) of the power to control the means of representation (of visibility, audibility, intelligibility), and thus to an inquiry into what is granted recognition in the political realm, inscribed as memorable and indexed as historical. It is here that my work starts to be more and more involved with my context, namely, Colombia's more than seventy-year-long armed conflict and the unspeakable horrors plus normalizing forms of pervasive and devastating violence that characterize the history of the country's last century, together with the institutional forms of silencing that have accompanied this history and that are currently, starting with the transitional justice process in 2005, being addressed via institutional and non-institutional forms of memory as reparation. Art has played an essential role in this regard. My engagement with questions of memory and history, particularly with the erased and silenced memories and histories of violence, and the injustice of their access to representation, all come from the kind of demands that, in Colombia, due to institutional systemic forms of silencing, I believe only art has skillfully been able to voice without risking censorship. And it was precisely these questions that ultimately led me, outside academia, to my current commitment to historical and liberatory memory practices—initially through the Colombian Historical Memory Center (from now on CNMH), in the context of the transitional justice process in the country, and later on in connection to the Chicago Torture Justice Center and Memorials (from now on CTJC and CTJM), in the context of reparations for police torture survivors.[3]

This experience outside academia, working with survivors of extreme forms of violence, listening to their stories and trying to figure out how to make them audible in a more public context—to gain both legal and historical recognition for the harm inflicted on them—was decisive for the kind of philosophical work I am currently doing. Even though I initially perceived it as a quite dramatic turn in my career, I realize now—in recounting this path all the way back to its beginnings—that I've never truly abandoned my original task. The question of how to approach memory and history after trauma, and of what sort of experience is required in order to listen to what has systematically been silenced, erased, and rendered inaudible (unbelievable, unintelligible), is a profoundly aesthetic question (and one related precisely to aesthetics as a form of critique). Thus, as I'll explain below, my project on "grammars of listening" is in a way a continuation of my original and still ongoing project, of understanding the critical potential that aesthetics both inaugurates and demands.

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Throughout the process, however, I have had a number of experiences, both in academia and political activism (and in particular, through a combination of the two, like, for instance, my experiences at the CNMH, and later, at CTJC and CTJM), which have shown me the clear limitations of the perspective I was taught to be the only one: the European white male voice and gaze that determines most of what is taught as philosophy and that, in my case, was the only one to which I had access until very recently in my career. If I never had a woman as a professor throughout my entire studies (undergraduate and graduate in Colombia), I was also never asked to read the work of a woman in any of my classes (with the exception of Arendt in one advanced PhD class). I was never taught anything connected either to feminism or Latin American philosophy, I read almost no non-European or non-North American philosophers or thinkers, and I was never encouraged to explore any questions related to any of these absences. I should have perceived them as absences, indeed, but I did not for a long time. Therefore, I always thought that the deep dissatisfaction that accompanied my readings—and for which I was attempting to compensate in my own writing, searching for a philosophical voice that would sound a bit more like mine—was my problem alone.[4]

Here, however, another crucial aspect of my education helped open my perspective and allowed me to move beyond this. Teaching the kind of brilliant, inquiring, critical students I've always had the opportunity to have in my classes, reading groups, and research projects brought radically into question the kind of philosophy I had been taught and was teaching in turn. It was thanks to the students I had at Los Andes University (particularly those who were part of the research group on Law and Violence), and then later at DePaul University in Chicago, that I started reading everything "else": feminism, Latin American and Caribbean philosophy, literary trauma studies, postcolonial and decolonial thinkers, Critical Black Studies and afro-pessimism, and the very enriching combination of all these that has populated the world of theory for decades, and has begun to transform—although unfortunately slowly and not without pain—the world of academic philosophy. I also built a small but supportive academic community with friends and colleagues, who have become my essential interlocutors and to whom I owe a great deal—if not all—of what I have written.[5]

And so, it is not without this caveat that I want to stress the continuity in my work, from an intense immersion in modern aesthetics and its critical and political potential, passing through my work on political philosophy and the question of community in connection with a critique of violence, to my project on grammars of listening and its more recent developments. Though I doubt I could ever "complete" my ongoing education in the forms of resistance to the coloniality of knowledge that continue to permeate philosophy's institutional and pedagogical life, even the little I have been able to read, track, and incorporate into my work has changed radically the way I do and understand philosophy today. I am still in the process of exploring the decolonial potential of what I've so far called grammars of listening, and my involvement with this project has simultaneously offered me the chance to understand why this decolonization is as essential as it claims to be.

Let me offer, then, in what follows a bit more of detail on two of these moments in my academic path—the two most important, I would say, given that they still frame the work I do. I'll explain first my approach to aesthetics as critique, via Schiller, and the kind of engagement with art that it has elicited in my work in Colombia. In my work, art is not merely a point of departure for critique, but rather, is itself the critical standpoint par excellence, allowing me to see the limits of theory, as well as its future possibilities. I'll then give some context to my current project on grammars of listening, and its most recent developments in my explorations of decolonial work. Doing so will give me the chance to make more tangible what so far must seem to any reader like a very abstract approach, and it will allow me (indeed, *has* allowed me) to make more explicit my own process towards finding a home and a voice in philosophy.

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1 Aesthetics as Critique

As mentioned above, my work on aesthetics has been entangled from the start with a philosophical approach to the question of the political. Reading Schiller, I quickly understood that there is no political revolution without a revolution in sensibility. There is no political change, and more importantly, no change in the realm of what we call "the political"—the realm of "appearance" in Schiller's work—without a *suspension of* and *resistance to* the frameworks that give shape to what has already been recognized and accepted as truth. In Schiller's words, if we are to avoid reproducing the very structures we mean to interrupt, the path towards freedom must begin with aesthetics.[6] I've devoted much of my work to understanding what this might mean and translating it into a notion of philosophical critique that continues to inform the way I practice philosophy today.

In my first monograph on Schiller and the political sublime,[7] my intention was to put into dialogue two sides of Schiller's work that rarely come into contact in the secondary literature, namely, his political proposal in the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Humankind*—where the main reference in terms of aesthetic experience is beauty—and his work on tragedy and the sublime, which is present throughout Schiller's philosophical work, starting with his first essays on theater, and even before that, I claim, with his medical writings. My intention in that book was to show the "unspoken" in Schiller's theory of aesthetic education and how it changes the way we interpret his political proposal.[8] If what Schiller calls "beauty" in the *Aesthetic Letters* can be understood in connection to his more sustained involvement with the question of the sublime, it becomes clear that "unity" and "harmony" are not the only sides to beauty, and accordingly, also not the only guides towards what Schiller imagines as an alternative political path. Instead, as I show, discord and opposition better describe Schiller's notion of "play" and the "play drive," and beauty is as much about resistance and suspension as it is about balance and "reciprocal action" between forces.[9] Only by taking this into account can one also properly understand the fragile balance required for and performed by what Schiller calls "aesthetic freedom."[10]

Schiller's "aesthetic path" is therefore something much more complex than the secondary literature usually gives him credit for, and it extends far beyond the narrow confines of how "aesthetic experience" is often understood, opening onto a form of writing and philosophizing,[11] a way of experiencing and being in the world,[12] and most central in my work, a dimension for critical thinking that changes the conception of (philosophical) critique altogether.[13] The "aesthetic" provides an outlook for sensing the world otherwise. Through its *resistance* to already available forms of conceptualization, it brings to light a mode of relation (of judgment, of experience) beyond the paradigm of determination (interpreted by Schiller as a unilateral and typically modern form of dominion), while simultaneously exhibiting the violence involved in categorization.[14] By making possible the experience of temporality *as* suspension, that is, by interrupting a notion of temporality experienced only in terms of a means to an end (production and *telos*), it opens time within time, Schiller claims, rendering sensible (by bringing them to appearance) the unrealized potentialities at the core of the historical present.[15] This site of "real and active determinability,"[16] as Schiller calls it, opened up by the aesthetic (as an outlook, a dimension for thinking), further becomes a point of departure for imagining ways in which the forms of violence structural to the present can be interrupted, overturned, rendered inoperative. Thus, it ultimately offers a way of *being* otherwise—another altogether different form of *praxis* outside of the frameworks imposed to us by the various types of modern dichotomies Schiller diagnoses in his analysis.

The aesthetic as a critical standpoint, therefore, is not, as it would have been for Immanuel Kant, a transcendental perspective on the conditions of the possibility of experience. Schiller's philosophical project, rather, is interested in understanding what he sees as a modern—and thus

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historically determined—mode of experience. A mode of experience that he describes as alienated, subjected to forms of violence that come from a misinterpretation of both sensibility and reason as coercive forces. The aesthetic, Schiller argues, allows for an experience—and ultimately for an understanding—of these forces different from coercion, allowing us to see the full range of possibilities opened by opposition and conflict rather than merely conceiving them as unilateral and detrimental. This understanding makes it possible to uncover and to put into question the conceptual categories that shape this modern, estranged way of being. Critique in Schiller is thus a philosophical-historical activity, one preoccupied with addressing the historical conditions of the present. Furthermore, as I have shown in my work, it is preoccupied with bringing to light *the very conceptions of history and experience* that are a-critically assumed and structurally operative in his present (the latter all the more so because of the former). This is why aesthetics—understood also as the framework in which these conceptions take shape in the first place—becomes *the* critical dimension par excellence, precisely because—and not in spite—of its historicity.[17]

This is where aesthetics *and/as* a critique of violence come together. Hegel and Benjamin have played important roles in connection to this side of my work, together with more contemporary thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler, Adriana Cavarero, Roberto Esposito, Frantz Fanon, Achille Mbembe, and Jean Luc Nancy; and more recently, with Latin American and Caribbean thinkers such as Édouard Glissant, Nelly Richard, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and Sylvia Wynter, to mention just a few. The power of the aesthetic is at least twofold, in that it allows access, as mentioned before, to the very frameworks shaping the organization and hierarchization of the sensible—and thus of sense—while also creatively subverting, inventing (Fanon), deciphering (Wynter), from within the opaque (Rivera), the fragmentary (Richard), the archipelagic (Glissant),[18] alternative topologies for thought, different configurations of temporality, resistant forms of occupying/taking over space ("tomarse el espacio") that not only disturb the given but are also capable of bringing together other forms of being in common.[19]

Structural violence is all the more operative while it simultaneously controls the means of representation and is able to occlude this control. The critical power of aesthetics as critique, and with it, paradigmatically, of art (I think this is ultimately Benjamin's claim) is to denounce structural forms of violence, to reveal how they consolidate their power by hiding themselves, and to interrupt (depose, subvert) their monopolistic sovereignty over appearance—which is the ultimate source of their power.[20] Art—if free, Schiller stresses—can play an essential role in this regard, therefore, while also showing the limits of any theory to respond fully to the present's most pressing tasks.[21]

My engagement with contemporary Colombian art grew out of a commitment to pursuing philosophy's intuition that art first articulates something that then can be taken up as political and philosophical practice, pointing out the places where the present is no longer sustainable and needs to be brought to its own collapse, while simultaneously imagining an otherwise—with its unexplored and unprecedented possibilities. Nevertheless, it was only engaging with art, or better said, letting art address me in truly powerful ways—as only art can do!—that I really understood what all of this means. I never reduce art to an example of what theory has already elucidated. On the contrary, it is rather art, with its power to disorganize our senses, radically question the pre-established ordering of the sensible, and inaugurate new grammars to address what otherwise runs the risk of remaining unthought (unseen, unheard, untouched), that shows me the way into theory.

It is thus through my ongoing engagement with the work of Colombian artists that I've come to the realization, each time singular and renewed, of the kind of questions that the political and historical situation in Colombia poses with such urgency.[22] In responding to the work of artists such as Oscar Muñoz, Doris Salcedo, and Juan Manuel Echavarría, I began to understand the paradoxical task of memorialization (Muñoz), the silences and erasures that were loudly demanding to be attended

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to (Salcedo), and the practices of mourning that had emerged in the context of Colombian conflict as powerful forms of resistance (Echavarría).[23] José Alejandro Restrepo's work inspired me to look deeper into the history of forgetfulness that constitutes Colombia's officially produced and controlled memory of violence, and the colonial structures that permeate its narratives and forms of representation.[24] Clemencia Echeverri's installations have allowed me to reflect on the power of mourning to defy official institutional modalities of forgetfulness, and on the demand for a form of memory that will be able to give resonance to the silenced yet resilient murmur of the disappeared.[25]

It was as a result of my work on these questions that grew out of my encounters with contemporary art that was I given the opportunity to work with the Colombian Historical Memory Center.[26] Getting involved "on the ground" with issues of memory, community building in the wake of devastating violence, trauma, and institutional and non-institutional reparation strategies, brought my questions around representation, violence, and the political potential of aesthetics to unanticipated places—besides, obviously, showing the clear limits of dealing with them abstractly. It was mostly, as mentioned before, in confrontation with the experience of *listening* to testimonies that I discovered the need for a philosophical reflection on trauma, and I found in philosophy tools helpful for elaborating what I was experiencing on the ground as an impossible dilemma. Let me then go into some detail around the source of the problem and the kind of questions it elicited in my work—which remains very much in progress.[27]

2 Grammars of Listening ("gramáticas de lo inaudito")[28]

My current project inquires into the kinds of "grammars" that need to be inaugurated, instituted, and recognized in order to render audible what otherwise remains unheard and unheard-of as a consequence of what I call "traumatic forms of violence" and their capacity to silence, erase, hide, and deny their own shattering effects. In Spanish I call them "gramáticas de lo *inaudito*," since the word "inaudito" points both to the unheard and the unheard-of, namely, what hasn't (yet) been rendered audible and what is ethically unacceptable. There is a close connection between the two in my work: my claim is that it is precisely because traumatic violence inaugurates unprecedented forms of harm—forms of harm absolutely unheard of and which thus challenge our ethical imagination in radical ways—that we do not *yet* have the grammars to approach them properly and make them audible, much less intelligible[29] or even believable, as I have also tried to show.[30] On the other hand, established grammars also help to silence and normalize, make inaudible and unapproachable, forms of violence that not only cannot be heard in our already available meanings, but also remain constitutively excluded in order to let those meanings continue to be stabilizing forms of control. By "grammars" I mean *frameworks of sense* broadly speaking—taking sense here both in terms of the perceptual, sensible, as well as in terms of meaning, conceptual and otherwise. Accordingly, to ask about these grammars—their necessity, or rather, their urgency—is to ask how to radically redistribute sense in order to subvert the frameworks that decide in advance what "deserves" to be audible, memorable, grievable—or not.[31]

This project, then, results from a combination of my ongoing engagement with aesthetics—and particularly with the kind of questions that emerged from my work on art in Colombia—together with the dilemmas I first encountered, as mentioned above, in listening to testimonies.[32] While working for the CNMH, participating in workshops with communities who had survived and bravely resisted devastating forms of violence and mass atrocities, one of the first difficulties that arose in the context of the workshops was how to truly *listen* to what was happening and being passed on in these encounters. It was not merely words—including their failure to name properly the experiences in question—that were being communicated, but also profound and eloquent silences, grounded in a

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kind of harm and pain that accompanies a shattering of language altogether when it came to speaking about what had happened. On many occasions—including in later work with police torture survivors on the Southside of Chicago—it became clear that, beyond the need for listening and the challenge of inscribing the breakdown of language itself in the record,[33] what was especially needed was a further experience of being *believed* in spite of the fragmentary, sometimes contradictory, and many times "illegible" forms of narrative that emerged. The kind of violence that many communities in Colombia have had to endure under paramilitary rule was so extra-ordinary, both extreme and massive and yet sometimes also pervasive and normalized, that any stories coming out of these contexts seemed "unreal," more like nightmares than what we are usually trained to recognize as "true." [34]

My initial reaction to the encounter with these difficulties was paralyzing. I had neither the tools nor the proper training to offer anything beyond my willingness to listen—a listening, however, that was more and more aware of its failures and limitations to do justice to what was being shared. The philosopher in me, however, felt the need and the responsibility to investigate further—not because of a confidence in the capacity of philosophy to deal with trauma, but, quite the opposite, because I understood what a radical challenge these experiences posed to my philosophical training. The problem, I insisted, needed to go further than pointing out language's limited ability to name the horror. What one hears in testimony is also the shattering of all the available frameworks to make sense of what is being communicated. This is due not only to the unprecedented forms of violence to which it bears witness, and thus to the lack of available categories that can properly name and render intelligible what is being communicated; it is also due to the fact that the form of experience struggling to communicate itself is one we are not accustomed to recognizing *as* experience, since it radically challenges the frameworks that allow us to relate to it as past, to turn it into a memory, and to inscribe it in history.[35]

Trauma theory in literature, together with the historical memory tools that had been developed by the CNMH in conversation with affected communities, provided me with helpful insights into the kind of questions I was trying to formulate.[36] I understood then that what challenges us at the site of trauma is what Cathy Caruth describes as a paradoxical encounter between an *absence and an excess* of memory.[37] One of the great difficulties in listening to trauma survivors is that in most occasions what we listen to is not strictly speaking a "memory" but rather the mark left behind by its "unforgettable" absence. This is because the original event that has triggered the traumatic reaction is trapped in a very specific form of deferral: the event has *not yet* been processed by the psyche as past, that is, as something that *has* happened. Accordingly, it *has not yet* been experienced and cannot therefore be remembered. The event is consequently not available to the survivor—at least not in the usual ways in which we speak about the availability, and thus the *communicability*, of our experiences—since it is in a way unlocatable both spatially and temporally: it cannot be located as a memory (its irruption has been so violent that it cannot be retraced), and so it somehow "lives" in the latency of its obsessive return as present (what Freud described as the "repetition compulsion"[38]). Following Caruth, then, in listening to trauma, we encounter a voice "that defies, even as it claims, our understanding."[39]

Translated into a philosophical question, trauma thus presents us with an experience which breaks with traditional epistemology by radically putting into question the very concept of "experience" and the spatio-temporal structures that undergird it. Trauma introduces the need for an analysis and critique of a violence which lodges itself in the psyche all the more tenaciously precisely because it erases the traces of its breach while paradoxically leaving that erasure as its only (un)traceable trace. This erasure only helps to ensure its pervasiveness and renders its indelible effects all the more unlocatable. Thus, by "trauma" I do not mean a diagnosis that pathologizes the survivor, predetermining their role in their own process of healing as largely passive. I mean rather a particular type of experience, or better, a particular *structure* of experience—and the form of violence that causes

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it—that, in its devastating effects, profoundly colonizes the subjectivities, identities, bodies, and languages it traverses.[40]

Pushing further into the consequences of this paradoxical form of "experience" by attending to the ways in which it manages to communicate itself, we would have to say that attempts to listen to testimonies in these contexts can also be described as a paradoxical encounter between an absence and an excess of *sense*. Trauma brings about what Nelly Richard aptly calls a "catastrophe of meaning."[41] There are certain types of violence, Richard argues, that cause "the collapse of traditional categorial orders,"[42] all while introducing unprecedented, unheard-of forms of violence whose excess has not yet been—and perhaps is not entirely meant to be—made intelligible. Not only are these realities abominably original,[43] but their originality is also meant to remain unthought, hidden, for only as such can traumatic forms of violence and the structures they bring about preserve all the force of their operativity. They do so, above all, through the pernicious strategy of stripping these unprecedented realities of their audibility in a regime of the perceptible and the intelligible that violence seeks to control and determine in advance. In this way, *traumatic forms of violence* could be understood, as I was suggesting above, as *colonizing forms of violence* because they seek to saturate every space of the production of sense and strip those subjected to it of any possibility of participating in this production other than by means of an operation of subtraction.[44]

At this point, a new dimension of the problem of listening is revealed, one that is above all—following what I've argued above—aesthetic. A philosophical perspective on the question of listening in traumatic contexts leads to the necessity of a critical analysis of the *criteria and conditions of possibility for becoming audible*. In the case of trauma, these criteria require a revision of the very structures that determine experience and render it legible, recognizable, and rememberable (memorable, "grievable"),[45] including its spatio-temporal frames. In my more recent engagements with decolonial studies, I have also realized the close connections between this form of critique, the kind of structural violence it wants to denounce (together with its forms of representation), and the possibilities embedded in the creative resistance demanded in these contexts in order to subvert, interrupt, and irrupt into the regime of the audible.[46] Following Wynter, the task should not only be to give voice to what has been erased and obliterated, rendered inaudible, scratched and redacted from the archive; rather, "we shall ask: what is the systemic function of their silencing […]? Of what mode of speech is that absence of speech […] an imperative function?"[47]

In order to take up this task with the rigor and thoroughness it demands, my project has moved from what was initially a psychoanalytic and perhaps more figurative understanding of trauma towards a greater emphasis on its historical dimension, which entails addressing the issue of the production—and, more to the point, the *destruction*—of meaning as a structural and political question, instead of thinking of it exclusively as a psychic and epistemological one.[48] In doing so, I (re)interpret "traumatic violence" as a colonizing form of violence, understanding that one of the central aspects of this kind of violence is that *it is not only an assault on life but on the conditions of production of sense that make life legible as such*—all of this, however, with the caveat we must not confuse both experiences or both forms of violence. There are, however, connections I consider very productive, and to which I believe my project can contribute by developing the critical tools for listening to the types of violence and historical erasures that come from and are perpetuated by coloniality.

In this context, my project of *grammars of listening* seeks to carefully unpack these complex intersections while also explaining why I believe that a radical form of listening is an essential subversive/imaginative strategy against traumatic/colonial violence. By radical I mean a form of listening committed to producing, in its enactment, the conditions that make this listening possible in the first place, namely, an act of listening that needs to create and imagine the grammars that make audible what otherwise remains unheard—and unheard-of. In signifying, a grammar of listening is

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also one capable of denouncing erasure, concealment, and silencing and thus interrupting the further concealment of erasure itself—its inaudibility—which allows traumatic violence to perform its colonizing function by continuing to present itself as illegible to a colonized listening. What I call grammars of listening thus searches for a distribution of sense and the sensible capable of making audible (and, at least to a certain extent, politically and strategically legible) those lives designated as or constantly under the threat of being defined as impossible (as unbelievable) by traumatic and colonizing forms of violence—a search which responds to the *demand* that such categories be found, produced, or wagered.

My engagement with decolonial critique has thus allowed me to realize that in my initial conception of aesthetics as critique there was already this other essential imaginative and creative side, namely its power to inaugurate unanticipated possibilities through the invention that comes with resistance. This means, first of all, that the task is not only to listen to what has been erased, silenced, obliterated by violence, and also, not only to listen to the erasures of these erasures—that is, the epistemological and aesthetic violence that has made the former psychic and historical erasures inaudible and illegible. One also needs to find ways of *making audible* the operations—the political actions, the creative acts of resistance—that seek to interrupt both of these levels and forms of silencing.[49]

From this point of view, both listening and making oneself heard are, at the same time, responding to the task of *producing a world that was not but should have been.* This is a subversive act of invention, whereby invention is not opposed to history but rather actualizes it, making possible resistance to structural forms of oblivion.[50] The first step towards this is the aest-ethical demand of reclaiming the memory of what *should not have happened.*[51] Grammars of listening, therefore, should also be conceived as the articulation of frameworks of sense capable of granting us access to this ethical face of both history and memory. This is the resistance to acceptance that memory must exercise in the face of violence and its radical forms of destruction. The resistance—perhaps even in a psychoanalytical register—to admit the world as it is, and the aesthetical-political task it entails of imagining and producing an otherwise—for the present, for thought, and for the sake of a past that is not yet over.

This is now where my work is heading. If my book *Gramáticas de lo inaudito* ends by highlighting the necessity of articulating grammars of listening which not only create the conditions of possibility for audibility, but which, in doing so, also subvert, rearrange, and imagine *another* history and—in Gwendolen Pare's words—"the memory of another reality,"[52] then the next step is to address these grammars in their concrete and creative acts of resistance. Furthermore, in this context I would like to pay closer attention to what I've described above as the redistribution and disorganization (subversion) of the sensible, namely by following an intuition left open in my current project—that attending to the audible must not attempt merely to replace the privileged centrality of vision in the history of philosophy with another sense. I would rather like to take the direction of what I've more recently been calling the "aural" in my work, which involves a relation to and among the senses in terms of vibration and resonance, allowing for an altogether different comprehension of the sensible and the subversion of any hierarchy that, in prioritizing one sense over the others, and thus one framework or regime of the sensible over and against others, normalizes classifications which limit our interpretation of experience.[53]

Thus I have moved from aesthetics as critique, through grammars of listening, towards what I would provisionally call "aesthetics of resistance," whereby both "resistance" and "aesthetics" need to be (re)read through a decolonial lens while also being deployed as decolonizing strategies. If the encounter in my work with the question of trauma has allowed me to realize that perhaps, in listening to the trauma of others, I was finding a way into my own untold stories, and if my project on grammars

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of listening has further given me the possibility of naming the circumstances that have marked my past and present as a woman in philosophy, as a memory worker, and as a rape and sexual violence survivor, then I hope my engagement with a decolonial perspective will ultimately elicit an honest revision of the path that has brought me here and will demand of me radically different modes of embodiment. As Rivera Cusicanqui clearly states, decolonization must start at home and with one's own.[54] Thus, it is not so much that "the personal" becomes philosophical, but that philosophy is always already an embodied activity that starts with—and never ends—the de(con)struction of oneself with others … always with others.

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Her most recent publications are devoted to F. Schiller's aesthetics, aesthetics of resistance in Latin American art, decolonial perspectives on memory and history, and epistemic injustice and epistemic violence. She is currently working on the final revisions of her next book, *Gramáticas de lo inaudito: pensar la memoria después del trauma* (Herder, 2022), and on the final editions of two forthcoming books, one in Spanish on community in Hegel, Nancy, Esposito, and Agamben (*Narrativas de la comunidad: de Hegel a los pensadores impolíticos*), and one in English, *The Unstoppable Murmur of Being-Together,* co-authored with Jean-Luc Nancy and the Group on Law and Violence. A book on Schiller's aesthetical-political project, provisionally titled *Aesthetics as critique*, is also in the works.

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1 There is a long line of professors and mentors who have devoted time and careful attention to my work and have opened important spaces for me in philosophy and its institutions. Germán Meléndez, thanks to whom I remained a philosophy student as an undergraduate and whose generosity as a reader and teacher I'll always cherish and be thankful for; Jorge Aurelio Díaz, a friend, a mentor, and an example of true vocation for philosophy; Lisímaco Parra, thanks to whom I was exposed to aesthetics and understood its political potential and who guided me through my PhD studies; Fernando Zalamea, who believed I was a philosopher and had a voice of my own before I even knew it; Bernardo Correa, who introduced me to contemporary philosophy and encouraged me to follow my own instincts in my readings and writing; John Sallis, who meant for me the entrance into the continental philosophy world, where I discovered a home and a voice to which I hadn't had access before; Christoph Menke, whose trust in my work and unconditional support have accompanied me throughout all my professional career; and Rodolphe Gasché, whose joy for philosophy has shaped in important ways my own relationship to the discipline. To this I should add a list of women who I wish I could have had as teachers and who have become the examples I had lacked while studying philosophy in Colombia: Marcia Cavalcante, Cathy Caruth, Angelica Nuzzo, and María Victoria Uribe. Their strength, creativity, and rigor have inspired me and kept me going throughout my various crises regarding my vocation.

2 In connection to these latter points and the commitment to "save philosophy from itself," I found particularly powerful and enlightening my recent conversation with Axelle Karera for REC

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Latinoamérica y el Caribe (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCt-zaLBHM8). As I write these lines, furthermore, I have to recognize that even though I believe philosophy can change and survive, I myself could not survive any longer in philosophy departments. It is too soon for me to understand what exactly makes philosophy as a discipline so perverse in its institutional practice—and I admire everyone who, from within philosophy, are voicing and attempting to think through the forms of violence that affect the practice of the discipline today. I am still very much committed to "saving philosophy from itself," and I still define my practice and my work as philosophical, but I am thankful for the opportunity to move to a Hispanic Studies Department where I have felt welcome because of my discipline while also invited to participate in a more interdisciplinary conversation.

3 Unfortunately, the CNMH (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica) has radically changed its politics since the most recent president of Colombia, Iván Duque, decided to orient it, against its original mission, towards an official institutional version of the conflict. The work done by the Center until 2016 was essential for the recognition of the dimensions (both in terms of quantity and quality) of the violence experienced by the more than sixty years of war in Colombia. Cf. the final report produced under the direction of Gonzalo Sánchez and conducted by the original team of researchers, Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *Basta Ya. Colombia Memorias de Guerra y Dignidad*, Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013. Cf. also Chicago Torture Justice Center (http://chicagotorturejustice.org/) and the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials (https://chicagotorture.org/), and the interview for DePaul University on my involvement with the latter two.

4 Things have been changing quite a bit in the last two decades in Colombia, even though the situation of women in philosophy is still very worrisome. Diana María Acevedo-Zapata and María Lucía Rivera-Sanín, who are the real force and creative spirit behind the recently founded Colombian Net of Women Philosophers (http://diotima.net.co/), have been advancing a really impressive work through their Observatory on Gender and Philosophy in Higher Education (http://diotima.net.co/observatorio/). The data speaks for itself and shows how much work is still needed in order to start changing the very disparaging gender inequality in academic philosophy in the country.

5 No one does philosophy alone, and real thought only emerges in permanent dialogue and confrontation with others. I am grateful to all the people who, not only by their mere presence in my life, but further, by actualizing for me what a real community grounded in friendship and bound by mutual commitment to the power of thought and education looks like, have encouraged me to find my own voice in philosophy. I cannot write this paper without mentioning them explicitly here: Alejandra Azuero (who is most of all my "feminist police" and has taught me to name and identify all the ways I have not yet entirely incorporated my own feminist voice), Alejandro Cortés and Jaime Santamaría (who have shown me how to come back to my roots with the commitment to change them to the core), Miguel Gualdrón (who has the ability to be lovingly critical and has been there since the very beginning), Ronald Mendoza-de-Jesús (who, coming from comparative literature, is the true philosopher among us), Nicolás Parra (whose faith in my work has always been encouraging in moments of doubt), Juan Diego Pérez (whose generous reading and astonishing erudition have always taken my work further), Esteban Restrepo (who reads me and understands my writing better than myself), Fanny Söderbäck (whose feminist force does not cease to inspire me), and Rocío Zambrana (my "intellectual soulmate"). A few brilliant women philosophers and theorists have also recently joined this list: Ilit Ferber, Miriam Jerade, Axelle Karera, Rosaura Martínez, Aicha Messina, and Nassima Sahraoui. And to add a final indispensable name to this list, Benjamin Brewer, currently my research assistant, but also a friend and a generous interlocutor, from whom I've learned more than I could ever teach him. I must also thank him for patiently and carefully copyediting this paper. Alejandra, Miguel, Miriam, and Juan Diego also read previous versions and gave me really helpful insight.

6 Cf. Friedrich Schiller, "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man," in *Essays*, ed. Walter Hindereder and Daniel Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 2001), Letter 2, 90.

7 Cf. My *La tragedia como conjuro: el problema de lo sublime en Friedrich Schiller* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia/Universidad de los Andes, 2008).

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[8] For a good brief summary in English of the main claims in my book, see María del Rosario Acosta López, "Making Other People's Feelings our Own: From the Aesthetic to the Political in Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters,*" in *Who is This Schiller Now?*, ed. Jeffrey High, Nicholas Martin, and N. Oellers (London: Camden House, 2011), 187–203.

[9] Schiller takes this notion from J.G. Fichte [*Wechselwirkung*] and uses it to translate what Immanuel Kant in the third *Critique* describes as the "free play" between the faculties involved in the experience of beauty. For a detailed description of this, see María del Rosario Acosta López, "On an Aesthetic Dimension of Critique: The Time of the Beautiful in Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters,*" in *Critique in German Philosophy*, ed. María del Rosario Acosta and J. Colin McQuillan (Albany: SUNY, 2020), 89–110. Most of what follows has been recounted in this essay with more detail.

[10] Schiller (2001: Letter 20, 146).

[11] Cf. María del Rosario Acosta López, "On the Poetical Nature of Philosophical Writing: A Controversy about Style between Schiller and Fichte," in *Philosophers and their Poets: The Poetic Turn in German Philosophy Since Kant,* ed. Charles Bambach and Theodore George (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), 21–45.

[12] Cf. María del Rosario Acosta López, "The Resistance of Beauty. On Schiller's *Kallias Briefe* in Response to Kant's Aesthetics," *Epoché* 21, no. 1 (2016): 235–49.

[13] Cf. Acosta López (2020) and María del Rosario Acosta López, "The Violence of Reason: Schiller and Hegel on the French Revolution" in *Aesthetic Reason and Imaginative Freedom: Friedrich Schiller and Philosophy*, ed. María del Rosario Acosta López and Jeffrey Powell (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018), 59–82. All of the elements just listed above are also the subject of my second book on Schiller, *Aesthetics as Critique*, currently in progress.

[14] Cf. for this reading of beauty particularly Schiller's analysis in his 1793 letters to Körner, published as "Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner," in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics,* ed. J. M. Bernstein, trans. Stefan Bird-Pollan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[15] Schiller, (2001: Letter 14, 126).

[16] Schiller, (2001: Letter 20, 145).

[17] As I'll explain below, this conception of critique as preoccupied with putting into question not only historical conditions but also simultaneously the very notions of history and experience that they presuppose is very much in line with my reading of trauma and, in connection to it, my most recent interest in decolonial approaches to history and memory. It is telling I only later encountered what should have been there since the beginning, namely, a decolonial approach to philosophy. It is also telling that my reading of Schiller, since the beginning, and entirely unknowingly, was already searching for a form of critique that has led me in helpful ways to a decolonial approach to critique.

[18] See for instance Fanon's claims about "invention" in *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), Wynter's notion of aesthetics as deciphering practice in "Rethinking Aesthetics: Notes towards a Deciphering Practice," in *Ex-hiles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1992), 237–80, Richard's use of the fragmentary as subversive in *Fracturas de la memoria. Arte y pensamiento crítico* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2007), Rivera Cusicanqui's approach to the quechua notion of chi'xi in *Un mundo chi'xi es posible: Ensayos desde un presente en crisis* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2018), and Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

[19] My work on "community," understood critically, has taken me to different places and is still very much at the center of my thought. I will not devote space to discuss this side of my work here. I've read Hegel against the grain to show how, at least in his early writings, he is engaged in developing a notion of inoperative community close to the so-called "impolitical" thinkers such as Agamben, Esposito, and Nancy. Cf. among others "An*other* kind of Community: Hegel on Law, Love and Life in the Frankfurt Fragments," in *Der Frankfurter Hegel in seinem Kontext*, ed. Thomas Hanke and Thomas Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2015), 191–208; "The Gorgon's Head: Hegel on Law and Violence in the Frankfurt Fragments," *New Centennial Review* 14, no. 2 (2014): 29–48; "Hegel on

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Communitas: an unexplored relationship between Hegel and Esposito," *Angelaki: Journal for the Theoretical Humanities* 18, no. 3 (2013): 13–31; and my forthcoming book in Spanish, *Narrativas de la Comunidad: de Hegel a los Pensadores Impolíticos* (under review). For my work on Nancy, and in conversation with Agamben, cf. more recently "From Inoperativity to the Coming Community: Agamben vis-a-vis Nancy" in *Open Borders: Encounters Between Italian Philosophy and Continental Thought*, ed. Silvia Benso and Antonio Calcagno (Albany: SUNY Press, forthcoming 2021); "Ontology as Critique: Jean-Luc Nancy's Inoperative Community," *Research in Phenomenology* 47 (2017): 108–23: and co-edited with Nancy and the Group of Law and Violence, *The Unstoppable Murmur of Being-Together. Conversations with Jean-Luc Nancy from Latin America* (in progress).

20 I've also recently proposed a reading of all this in connection to what I call a postcolonial form of critique, as it takes shape, among others, in the work of Jean and John Comaroff. Cf. "From Critique of the Postcolony to a Postcolonial Form of Critique. On the Uses and the Misuses of Foucault in Jean and John Comaroff's Work," *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 67 (2019): 17–25. As I make explicit in this essay, the work of Banu Bargu has been an important guide to understanding the deep entanglement between (dis)appearance and power in the postcolonial world. In Colombia, the work of María Victoria Uribe has been essential in showing the importance of the aesthetic side of violence and how it has been used and performed in Colombia's conflict throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Cf. my interview to the author for REC Latinoamérica y el Caribe (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKxg_qwrkkI).

21 As much as Schiller finds in art the possibility of a "way out" of the violence of the present, he is also fully aware of the dangers that surround not only art's instrumentalization, but also art's capacity to turn itself into a powerful political tool. I cannot go in detail here about this discussion in Schiller's work, and also in the secondary literature, that critically points out the dangers of aestheticization in his own work. For the time being, let's just keep in mind that art must be free, Schiller insists, and this means it must be able to be profoundly historical without letting itself be used for the purposes of history. A very difficult balance to achieve, and perhaps, just a task that "free art" can, at best, strive for.

22 For a critical discussion of my engagement with Colombian contemporary art, see also the first part of the workshop devoted to my work at UC Irvine, organized by Carlos Colmenares and Isabella Vergara, and published with my responses in *Ideas y Valores* 68, section "Debate," 223–83.

23 Cf. "Memory and Fragility: Art's Resistance to Oblivion (three Colombian cases)," *New Centennial Review* 14, no. 1 (2014): 71–98. And in Spanish the compilation organized with the Group on Law and Violence, *Memoria y Arte en Colombia: Resistencias al Olvido* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, Departamento de Arte, 2016) and the special issue "Art and Memory in Colombia: Resistance to Forgetfulness," *Dialogo: A Journal for Latin American Studies* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2019).

24 Cf. "*One Hundred Years of Forgotteness*: Aesth-Ethics of Memory in Latin America," *Philosophical Readings*, Special Issue on Philosophy in Colombia 11, no. 3, (2019): 163–71, and in Spanish "Tras los rastros de Macondo: Archivo, Memoria e Historia e *Musa Paradisíaca* de José Alejandro Restrepo," in *Estudios de Filosofía* 58 (2018): 41–64.

25 Cf. "El arte como resistencia a lo inaudito: sobre *Fragmentos* de Doris Salcedo y *Duelos* de Clemencia Echeverri," in *La violencia y su sombra. Reflexiones desde Colombia y México*, ed. Rodrigo Parrini and María Victoria Uribe (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana and Universidad del Rosario, forthcoming 2021). Translated by Julian Rios and updated for Lina Britto and Ricardo López-Pedreros, *Colombia Revisited* (2 vols), Routledge (forthcoming). Cf. also my conversation with the artist for REC Latinoamerica y el Caribe (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IM8xChDMPZo).

26 I am indebted to Maria Emma Wills for this invitation and everything that I learned working for the CNMH. Her guidance and mentorship, the generosity with which she shared her own extensive experience on the ground (its successes and failures), and the importance of self-care she brought to our practice were invaluable. Her own work on the subject, together with the work produced by other

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members of the CNMH, should be important references for any initiatives on historical and liberatory memory. What makes it particularly valuable is the fact that it was built on and was meant only to make audible the knowledge, resilience, and memory initiatives developed already by the communities themselves all throughout Colombian territory during the so-called transitional justice period. Cf. Pilar Riaño and María Victoria Uribe, "Constructing Memory amidst War: The Historical Memory Group of Colombia," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* (2016): 1–19. I brought this knowledge with me to the Chicago Torture Justice Center and Memorials, and in conversation with the survivors and their families, it turned out to be a very powerful liberatory toolbox.

27 Parallel to all of this, I also started working with colleagues in the Law School at Los Andes University on a research project on legal representations of mass atrocity. My work on trauma informed and was challenged by the critical legal approaches that colleagues like Esteban Restrepo and Isabel Cristina Jaramillo brought to my attention. This has led me to inquire into transitional justice issues from a legal and a philosophical perspective, which has in turn impacted my approach to questions of memorialization and/as reparation and restorative justice. I have continued working with Restrepo during all these years on questions of law, representation, and violence. For the time being, I have to leave this dimension of my work to the side. Cf. among others "Derecho, violencia, crítica: dos variaciones latinoamericanas sobre *Por qué el derecho es violento* de Christoph Menke," co-authored with Esteban Restrepo, introductory study to Menke, *Por qué el derecho es violento* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2020): 9–50. A first version of this paper appeared in English as "Between Law and Violence: Towards a Re-thinking of Legal Justice in Transitional Justice Contexts" in *Law and Violence*, *Christoph Menke in Dialogue* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 79–95.

28 Much of what I recount here has been explained in more detail, and in the case of some paragraphs has been taken out almost verbatim from "*Gramáticas de lo inaudito* as Decolonial Grammars: Notes for a Decolonization of Memory," slated to appear in *Philosophy and Liberation in Latin America, a Primary Source Reader*, ed. Alejandro Vallega (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming). Even though I refer throughout this section to my already published work on the subject, much of the work I've done connected to this project is part of my forthcoming book, *Gramáticas de lo inaudito: pensar la historia después del trauma* (Barcelona: Herder, forthcoming).

29 Cf. "Totalitarianism as Structural Violence: Towards New Grammars of Listening" in *Logics of Genocide: The Structures of Violence and the Contemporary World*, ed. Anne O'Byrne and Martin Shuster (London and New York: Routledge, 2020): 173–86.

30 Cf. "One hundred years of forgetfulness" (2019), and "Perder la voz propia: de una fenomenología feminista de la voz a una aproximación a la violencia política desde la escucha," *Fuera de sí mismas. Motivos para dislocarse*, ed. Luciana Cadahia and Ana Carrasco Conde (Madrid: Herder, 2020): 121–56, which is soon to appear in English, updated and modified, as "Being Robbed of One's Voice: On Listening and Political Violence in Adriana Cavarero," in *Political Bodies: Writings on Adriana Cavarero's Political Thought*, ed. Paula Landerreche Cardillo and Rachel Silverbloom (Albany: SUNY Press, forthcoming).

31 In terms of secondary literature, my claims are very close to those of feminist approaches such as Judith Butler's (see particularly *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable* (New York: Verso, 2009), but also her earlier claims in works such as *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990) regarding the power of grammars to both silence and name for the first time structural and normalized forms of violence) and Miranda Fricker's inauguration, in her *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), of what has developed into a very rich discussion around epistemic ignorance, epistemic violence, epistemic silencing, and epistemic forms of resistance. See among others Kristen Dotson ("Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing. *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236–57) and José Medina's work (*The Epistemology of Resistance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). I am however interested in adding to the literature on testimonial and hermeneutical injustice the question of what kind of listening is required in the particular case of *traumatic* violence and the specific forms of

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epistemic and aesthetic silencing that need to be brought to light and confronted in such cases, as well as the specific forms of responsibility and "hermeneutical virtues" that are demanded by them.

32 It has also been pointed out to me recently that my engagement with the question of trauma and testimony seems a logical development of my earlier engagements with the question of silence and the sublime (cf. besides my book on Schiller *Silencio y arte en el romanticismo alemán,* Bogotá: Colección Sin Condición, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2006). This is also a possible way of connecting the dots between my work on aesthetics and my current project on grammars of listening, particularly if one attends to the sides of the project that are concerned with forms of communicability that will not just translate and betray therefore the breakdowns of language characteristic of testimony but that will rather be able to pass on the experience as never entirely reducible to communication.

33 Cf. María del Rosario Acosta López, "La narración y la memoria de lo inolvidable. Un comentario al ensayo "El narrador" de Walter Benjamin" in *Walter Benjamin, aquí y ahora*, ed. María Mercedes Andrade (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2018), 175–96.

34 This is not to deny that there are also structural forms of violence that operate in and on everyday life, and that complicate the distinction between the "exceptionality" of trauma and what Lauren Berlant calls the "overwhelming ordinary" or "crisis ordinariness" (cf. *Cruel Optimism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011, 10). I agree with Berlant that sometimes the "exceptionality" of trauma is used to hide and erase these overwhelming ordinary forms of violence, and that it is essential for a critical historical outlook to "put catastrophe back into the ordinary" (Berlant 2011: 54). I would, however, also like to insist on the extra-ordinary character of certain forms of violence, and particularly of their effects on one's life, as well as on the conditions of meaning production and the tools that are available to make sense of these lives. If we let go of this exceptionality, we also lose the critical capacity to signal, name, denounce, and even historize (I would argue here against Berlant) what otherwise remains erased from experience. I would say that, like Berlant, I am looking for the "genres" that can turn into historical experiences (into "events" in the language of Berlant [cf. 2011:16]) the kinds of violence that, without a genre, remain untold—unheard, inaudible.

35 I don't have any text in English where I explain in detail the first dilemmas and difficulties that came out of my work on historical memory. For more on this see "Gramáticas de la escucha: aproximaciones filosóficas a la construcción de memoria histórica," *Ideas y Valores*, special issue "Philosophy and Conflict, Female Voices," 68, suplemento no. 5 (2019): 59–79; and "Aproximaciones filosóficas a la construcción de memoria histórica" in *El postconflicto colombiano: una perspectiva transversal*, ed. Alejandro Aponte (Madrid: Cuadernos de Estrategia, 2018), 183–202.

36 Mostly the work by Cathy Caruth (*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, and *Literature in the Ashes of History*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013) and Shoshana Felman (*The Juridical Unconscious. Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), which has played a key role in the formulation of my project. Cf. my discussion of both of their works in detail in "Grammars of Listening, Grammars of Addressing: Towards a Philosophical Approach to Trauma and History in Conversation with Cathy Caruth's Work," *diacritics*, special issue *Women in Theory* (forthcoming 2021), and in Spanish, "Hacia una gramática del silencio: Benjamin y Felman," in Camila de Gamboa and María Victoria Uribe (eds.), *Los silencios de la guerra* (Bogotá: Universidad del Rosario, 2017), 85–116. Also central to my project, as mentioned above, is the work being done on the ground by all the people in CNMH with and from whom I had the honor to work and learn, and the kind of knowledge that communities themselves had developed around their own memory initiatives and historical claims. This was very much the case later on in working with the Chicago Torture Justice Center: it was the knowledge developed by the survivors and the experience of their legal and political activism which became a central pillar of my ongoing explorations into memory after trauma.

37 Cf. Cathy Caruth, *Listening to Trauma. Conversations with Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 157.

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38 Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," trans. James Starchey, in *Selected Writings* (New York: Norton., 1997), 269.

39 Caruth (1996: 5).

40 Cf. "Being Robbed of One's Voice…" (forthcoming). I am aware that using the notion of "colonizing" violence in connection to trauma complicates the connection between my approach to trauma and my approach to coloniality. I am also aware that a metaphorical use of the term in the case of the former can be seen as profoundly problematic from the latter's perspective. However, as I explain briefly below but have been trying to carefully develop in my work, to pose these connections is a strategy to underscore the radicality of the harm connected to traumatic forms of violence, while also pointing to an important side—undertheorized, in my opinion, in the secondary literature—of the kind, extension, and quality of violence connected to coloniality.

41 Cf. Nelly Richard, *The Insubordination of Signs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 5.

42 Cf. Nelly Richard, *Fracturas de la memoria. Arte y pensamiento crítico* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2007), 13.

43 Following Hannah Arendt's dictum: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1967), 441.

44 It is important to keep in mind here that while this is the goal of colonizing and/or traumatic forms of violence, they do not necessarily succeed in doing so. The force displayed by resistance to colonizing forms of violence is never to be taken for granted since it is born in conditions designed precisely to impede it—but it is also precisely where the most creative, unexpected, and admirable forms of resistance, subversion, and resilience take place. Giving testimony in the conditions I've been describing so far is one of these instances of resistance where everything—including the mechanisms designed to "give voice" to victims—is designed to silence, erase, or present as "illegible" (inaudible) the memory of the survivors. In spite of all, they do speak.

45 Cf. Butler (2009).

46 I am thinking here first of Frantz Fanon, a central referent for the notion of decolonization as it is taken up by Latin American decolonial thinkers such as Anibal Quijano, and after him, María Lugones, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Walter Mignolo, and Alejandro Vallega, even though my reading of Fanon is rather influenced by the insightful recent readings coming from Critical Black thinkers such as Axelle Karera (see her forthcoming "Frantz Fanon and the Future of Critical Phenomenology in an Anti-Black World," *Political Theology*), David Marriott (See his *Whither Fanon? Studies in the Blackness of Being*), and Will Paris (see his forthcoming *Looking for Tomorrow in Yesterday: Black Critical Theory and the Epistemology of Utopia*). Eduard Glissant is also for me an important referent for a genealogy of the decolonial turn—mostly thanks to Miguel Gualdrón's work on the subject (see his "To 'stay where you are' as a decolonial gesture: Glissant's philosophy of Antillean space in the context of Césaire and Fanon," in *Memory, Migration and (de)colonisation in the Caribbean and Beyond*, ed. J.D. Webb, R. Westmaas, M. del Pilar Kaladeen, and W. Tantam (London: University of London Press, 2019, 133–51). Finally, in most of my references to decolonial thinkers, I am thinking of the powerful work on resistance and decolonization proposed by Caribbean and Latin American feminists such as Marisol de la Cadena, Yuderkis Espinosa, María Galindo, Raquel Gutiérrez, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and Sylvia Wynter, to mention just a few.

47 "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman,'" in *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), 365.

48 Thus, as Rosaura Martínez Ruiz has noticed recently in reference to my work (cf. "Collective Working-Through of Trauma or Psychoanalysis as a Political Strategy," *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*, 2020), if my emphasis is precisely on the ethical and epistemological responsibility that falls on the listener, there is here also a political approach to the question of trauma in its psychoanalytical connotations. Or, better said, there is here an approach to trauma that underscores the political possibilities—and hence,

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perhaps, also responsibilities—entailed in the kind of listening that psychoanalysis can perform and offer.

49 I am following here mostly Rocío Zambrana's argument around the "illegibility" of certain radical political actions—and how this is precisely a sign—and an effect—of their subversive power. Cf. Zambrana, "*Pasarse Políticamente*: Interrupting Neoliberal Temporality," *diacritics* 46, no. 2 (2018): 98–116. By insisting on the need to "make audible" acts of resistance, I am also opening the question of whether we can take up this task without having to renounce entirely to their illegibility, which makes them subversive and powerful in their own way. Making audible, thus, but not necessarily legible—or at least, not translatable into already given political grammars.

50 See for a more detailed explanation of what this entails, "Gramáticas de lo inaudito," and my references there to the work of Saidiya Hartman (*Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) and Miguel Gualdrón ("Transversality as Disruption and Connection: On the Possibilities and Limits of Using the Framework of Trauma in Glissant's Philosophy of Caribbean History," *Philosophical Readings* 11, no. 3 (2019): 152–62).

51 I realize these two gestures are not necessarily the two sides of the same coin and do not necessarily entail each other. It is one thing to wonder whether the history produced in the present, as an act of invention, must also point to what could have been and was not. It is another to reclaim a memory of what should not have been. I've started to theorize on these two sides of the issue through what I call "the invention *of* history" and "the resistance *of* memory," both understood in the double sense of the genitive, as two important "decolonizing strategies." Cf. "Gramáticas de lo inaudito," op. cit., and my reference there to the work of Rocío Zambrana ("Decoloniality as Reparations" in *Colonial Debts. The Case of Puerto Rico*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021). As always, art has played a fundamental role in understanding where theory still needs work. The films of director and screenwriter Paz Encina have been a fruitful challenge in this regard. Cf. "Hamaca Paraguaya de Paz Encina (notas sobre la resistencia de la memoria)," as part of the panel *Estéticas decoloniales: resistencia, desciframiento, posibilidad*, read at II Encuentro Filosofías de la Liberación, September 10, 2020 (unpublished).

52 Cf. Pare in Colmenares and Vergara, op. cit., 235.

53 I owe the use of this term and its interpretation to the work of Juan Diego Pérez. See "Hacia una (re)vocalización del trauma: una crítica a Caruth desde la ética de la escucha," *Perífrasis* 9, no. 18 (2018): 117–33 and "Sonorous Rubble, Mourning Affect," in Clemencia Echeverri, *Duelos* (Bogotá: Museo Nacional, 2019) 67–79.

54 Cf. *Un mundo chi'xi es posible: Ensayos desde un presente en crisis* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2018).

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