



Introduction

The Afterlife of Prisons

Historical “understanding” is to be grasped, in principle, as an afterlife of that which is understood.

—Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

When thinking about transitions from dictatorship to neoliberal democracy in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, how do we critically analyze the transformations of time and place in cities, where the end of the dictatorships’ carceral imaginaries and the beginning of a postdictatorial consumerist life of new freedoms were most clearly seen? More specifically, how does analyzing the history of the life and afterlife of the different prisons and clandestine detention centers (CDCs) that were crucial to sustaining the dictatorships contribute to the historical understanding of the “post” of postdictatorship? I explore this problematic by focusing on the transformations of key prisons and CDCs into malls, cultural-commercial centers, museums, and memorial sites. I have created an itinerary of readings that show the questionable and unstable nature of dominant assumptions about the concept and the process of transition to neoliberal freedom. Tracing other (hi)stories that demonstrate how the notion of dictatorships “ending” becomes problematic, as does the notion of democracy and freedom after them, this book explores alternative textual and visual imaginaries that reveal spatiotemporal layers in and through which the dictatorship continued (and continues) to speak.

The postdictatorship era saw the emergence of the dream of a new time that demanded an erasure of certain unsettling temporalities and the proliferation of spaces of consumption that would become host to the free market imposed upon them. The material transformations in urban spaces throughout and beyond the transition from military regimes to democracy in Southern Cone countries entailed a wave of privatization of public space. These transformations coincided with an overarching modification of the experience of temporality within these spaces. In particular, there was an emerging official demand in the early 1990s to enter a new time severed from the dictatorial past, perhaps nowhere more evident than in the decisions made regarding the impunity granted to military crimes.¹

This book takes as its point of departure the case of Punta Carretas Prison in Montevideo, Uruguay, which was built as a model penitentiary at the beginning of the twentieth century. It functioned as a detention center for political prisoners in the late 1960s and early 1970s and was subsequently transformed into the most exclusive mall in Montevideo at the moment when decisions on the military regime's human rights violations were being made. The transformation of Punta Carretas Prison into Punta Carretas Mall represents a paradigm of postdictatorial reconfiguration of spaces of incarceration, in which prison features, systems of impunity, spatial fantasies from the Cold War, and ideals for democracy were equated to the capacity for consumption. The palimpsest created by the superimposition of the architectural models of prison and mall involved the temporal reconfiguration of a carceral space that bore significant political and semantic weight in the 1960s and 1970s. It evokes not only the imprisonment and torture of political dissidents but also the massive jailbreak in 1971 by prisoners from the Movement of National Liberation–Tupamaros (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional–Tupamaros, or MLN-T), the world's largest recorded escape of prisoners. At the time the escape was regarded as an insult to Uruguay's authoritarian regime. This architectural conversion, which won the International Council of Shopping Centers' prize, is an ideal starting point because the remodeling took place at the very moment of transition to democracy, thus making explicit the historic conjunction between freedom, democracy, the market, and the spatial management of the collective memory of the military past.

Taking the transformation of Punta Carretas as a point of departure, I analyze the afterlives of other key prisons and CDCs, examining the ways in which material spaces and temporal experiences have been reconfigured in different ways since the early 1990s. Other carceral openings that represent unique forms of superposition are the Buen Pastor Women's Prison in Córdoba, Argentina (now a cultural-commercial center) and a series of for-

mer CDCs in Buenos Aires: the Naval School of Mechanics ESMA (now a human rights memorial space), Olimpo (today a memorial site), and Automotores Orletti, run by Operation Condor (currently being transformed into a memorial site after being denounced as an underground sweatshop for undocumented Bolivian workers). The trajectories of these incarceration sites problematize the museification of memory, the naturalization of certain forms of violence, and the reformulation of the past that museification promotes. For instance, the case of the Buen Pastor prison is similar to Punta Carretas Mall (even with regard to the breakouts), but Buen Pastor's transformation was carried out a decade later as part of a process of memory marketing and museification. Like Punta Carretas and most of the penitentiaries, the Buen Pastor prison and chapel opened at the beginning of the twentieth century (in 1906) and became an important detention center for women in the 1960s and 1970s. Closed as a prison in 2004, it was made into a cultural, commercial, and recreation center as well as a historical site called the Paseo del Buen Pastor. Although the goal of the transformation was to preserve the memory of the place while adjusting it to the commercial necessities of the city, the whole complex of prison cells was demolished and replaced by commercial lots.

If Punta Carretas Mall was part of an architectonic of active amnesia paradigmatic in the early 1990s, the transformation of Buen Pastor that took place a decade later as part of a memorial boom is intriguing. The commercial function prevails to make memory a profitable operation. This prevalence became explicit when former political prisoners asked to speak at the inauguration ceremony and were told that the event was all scheduled (*sincronizado*) and that there was not much time left for the ex-prisoners to participate. This gives rise to a series of questions regarding the ways in which the open prisons redeemed by commercial and memorial functions can be read as acting out forms of imprisonment and surveillance of uncomfortable parts of the political past that are still kept under control to avoid a disruption of the scheduled time of the market. The forms of service sites (shopping malls, the hospitality industry, archives, spaces for cultural heritage) superimposed upon the prisons display cases of culturally relevant sites where property would become the stage for new official imaginaries. Within these sites the relationships established between social space and historicity are still operative today, as they were for the jail, forging a new neoliberal dominance.

In this sense, as the cultural theorist Andreas Huyssen has proposed, it is crucial to examine how “memory and forgetting *pervade real public space*, the world of objects, and the urban world we live in.” These modes of con-

stituting inhabitation are rarely lived critically or reflected upon, given that they constitute the horizon of everyday trajectories and habits. Huyssen maintains that “we need to discriminate among memory practices in order to strengthen those that counteract the tendencies in our culture to foster uncreative forgetting.”² When addressing postdictatorial geographies, it is important to problematize the “we” that one is assuming when addressing memory practices. Who are the subjects imagined or presupposed by such practices? Where and for whom may these memory practices prove meaningful? The figures of the prison and the commercial center—specifically malls and hypermarkets—allow me to explore what is included in and excluded from the “we” that produces the fantasy of the transition, in the material sense of organizing the habitus into certain spaces (and trajectories traversing and tracing them), and likewise the specific temporalities these materializations uphold. I analyze both real prisons that were transformed during processes of redemocratization and the image of the open prison as a central trope that emerged in the literary and visual realm as dramatization and critique of the reduction of freedom to the spaces of the neoliberal market and a questioning of the subjects that qualify for such space-time of freedom.

Examining the afterlife of certain penitentiaries and former CDCs that were central to dictatorial operations also leads me to interrogate the temporal meanings and passive subjects of the temporalities implied by the category “transition.” This word was central to the end of the dictatorial processes and to the beginning of a democratic imaginary of consumerism. By exploring the spatial meanings of transition, I show how the production of new spaces for consumerism and memory museification has functioned as stages for official performances of advancement to a postdictatorship society at different historical moments. The book analyzes how the temporal imaginaries of entering or transitioning toward a new time of freedom was spatially materialized or translated into built space at two different moments: one being the early 1990s, when the open prison became an architectural event that conveyed a sense of opening society to a new time of freedom of the market; the other being the years that followed the economic crises of 2001, when the open prison began to be linked to a memorialistic process centered around the appropriation and transformation of former sites of detention into spaces for memory. At this point the development of a politics of memory was opposed to the politics of amnesia of the 1990s, thus becoming a territory for exploring other forms in which the dictatorship had outlived its so-called end. So, a decade after the architectonic of transition was configured, the transformation of spaces that had been highly symbolic of state authoritarianism became a central issue within the development of a struggle for social

memory and a demand for justice. The book takes the open prison as a common trope that traverses different spatiotemporal imaginaries and practices, and analyzes the ways in which the end of the dictatorship has been problematized, questioned, and figured in different signifying practices.

The figure of the open prison leads me to explore the notion of afterlife in the sense that is posed in the quotation by the philosopher Walter Benjamin at the opening of the chapter—that is, the ways in which and through which those forms of figuring the afterlife have also been transforming the understanding of the ways in which the dictatorial past had been conceived. The afterlives of confinement produce a constant process of resignification of the ways in which the past has been understood. How do the practices of resignification constantly change the ways in which the past is understood? How can an analysis of the afterlife of certain key spaces of confinement—an afterlife essential for establishing a logic of inevitability of authoritarian rule (and its pursuit of economic progress and market freedom)—help us create a different historical understanding of the idea of transition? Here, the notion of afterlife becomes crucial, because it allows us to question temporal sequences in a nonsequential and nonteleological way. The term “afterlife” acquires the sense of a mode of experiencing the echoes of a past that is lost to history but that has the potential to be heard and made legible. It is a missed possibility that keeps open the promise of that which did not / could not take place.

In “The Task of the Translator,” Benjamin talks about the translatability of a text in the sense of a certain potentiality that any historical form has of outliving something.³ In a fashion that resembles the way he speaks of quotation in “One-Way Street,” Benjamin uses the image of echoing to convey the singular process of transformation that takes place in the act of reading and listening to (and thus, of reconfiguring) a text in the act of translation.⁴ In my analysis of the afterlife of prisons, I observe how the processes of transformation to different forms and functions (prison to mall, CDC to museum and memorial space) can resemble the act of listening to echoes not only of that which the transformation is superseding but also of that which has been always left unheard—the zones that did not and do not qualify as recyclable or memorable themes or subjects for the current market and citizenry.

Within this context the book focuses on the ways in which confinement affects the modes of historicization (the making perceptible of the past)—a process that is continually contested by different forms of art and literature that insist on refiguring unstable and uncomfortable layers of pasts. Therefore afterlife poses an instance of dislocation of the teleological enframing of time, thus deconstructing the supposedly “common” understanding of the

dominant narrative of redemocratization as an opening up and passage toward neoliberal modes of freedom (from/for consumption, choice between imported brands, deregulation of labor and the market). The issue of how to translate the past life of these former spaces of confinement into the present puts the critic in a singular situation where the very possibility of listening to the echoes of the past is problematized, for in what form and by what means can the echoes be heard? What idea of historicization does this practice of listening imply, and why is it connected to the material sense of a space that is always about to become a place?

The idea of afterlife implies a problematization of the dynamic and finite way in which past and present are signified, as with the idea that an echo is related to the voice producing it. In the texts where Benjamin analyzes this word, his “The Task of the Translator” and “Convolut N” from the *Arcades Project*, the “after” in “afterlife” emerges as a search for spectral echoes between times (echoes between past and present) and as an ongoing task of historical interpretation that works on and with the afterlife of other interpretations of history surviving the past. “Afterlife” refers to the impossibility of full translatability between times and spaces, as well as to a counterintuitive relationship between the original and the translation, since the former not only exists as a consequence of the latter but also undergoes changes according to it. This is a notion that aims at the historicity of language whereby history becomes perceptible and narratable. As stated by the cultural theorist Werner Hamacher, Benjamin’s notion of historicity relies on his proposal of afterlife not only as the rescue of an alternative temporality to the prevailing one. It also relies on a way of thinking the affective structure of the political as a demand that starts to reshape a different “us” by listening to the echoes of a past within the present.⁵

This book examines the perspectives of those who built the spaces analyzed, showing how they became something different according to the forms in which their histories were imagined and rebuilt. For instance, in the case of the former Punta Carretas and Buen Pastor prisons, the different outlooks of prisoners, consumers, and architects end up reshaping sites that are problematic and incommensurable among themselves in light of their different historicizations. Benjamin refers to a way of making history perceptible at different times, how each present is opened or fissured upon the emergence of a “now time” in which a certain image becomes recognizable, understandable (legible)—a now that fissures the continuity of the illusory timeline linking past and present. Nevertheless, the way in which the image of an untimely past irrupts and links different irreducible (incommensurable) times refers to a relationship in which not only is the past told in the present but

also each present makes different ways of understanding that past recognizable (legible). Thus Benjamin's quotation at the opening of the chapter refers to a notion of afterlife in which the historical emerges as an ongoing work of resignification and reinvention of what becomes understandable and recreated with respect to that which we believed to be already understood. On the verge of historicity's excess and *mise en abyme* lies the potentiality and promise of rethinking the dictatorship not so much as an "object" of thought but as a form of reading and criticism, since it is in historicization itself that we will find the new areas awaiting exploration. Although the present time of the postdictatorship is heir to the dictatorship, the ways in which this relationship is signified and resignified vary over the decades, thus acquiring different conceptual figures.

My use of the word "afterlife" aims to problematize the ways of understanding and resignifying the temporality of "after," which marks and becomes involved in the "post" of postdictatorship in a way that rejects the linearity of market-driven progress and adds to the complexity of approaches to dictatorship as a field of study. Although the "post" of postdictatorship is marked by the discursive and affective horizon of the idea of transition as passage, this book seeks to problematize that perspective, not only by examining the prevailing allegorization of failure that has governed the horizon of studies but also by proposing—within this theoretical horizon—the possibility of reading another temporality of the political, which the notion of failure apparently cancels. Another reading of Benjamin is thus presented here: the possibility of transforming the postdictatorial obsession with the politics of memory (which often involves selective forgetfulness of certain affects linked to politics) into a memory of politics, which the transitions marked by "post" sought to cancel through the time horizon in which they were shaped as a token of the "end" of history.

Since the early 2000s, the issue of spaces and territories associated with the memory of state authoritarianism has been one of the major focal points for resignification of dictatorships in the fields of history and the social sciences. Based on historian Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire* and on sociologist Maurice Halbwachs's collective memory processes, Argentine sociologist Elizabeth Jelin's pioneering studies on memory works in postdictatorship situations have foregrounded the relationship between territoriality and memory, promoting the study of urban planning and monument construction processes.⁶ This book can be ascribed to the field of studies on territoriality and memory. Its contribution lies in problematizing the ways in which the politics of memory have turned into a profitable business, thus bypassing the question of the frames delimiting what is acceptable and rec-

ognizable in these memories. I pose the inconvenient question of what subjects and histories are assumed by these memories, not only within the map of the postdictatorship but also within the framework of that which neither qualified nor qualifies as a memory subject, either in the past or in the present. I am posing a question about subalternity (the nonsubject in politics) in social science studies and historicization processes, which tend to neglect it as a problem concerning politics and therefore outside their sphere of interest. This book also returns to the field of early postdictatorship studies to introduce the question about prisons, historicization, and literary and artistic imagination processes that the studies of the early 1990s made possible.

Spatializing Histories: The Trope of Postdictatorship as Open Prison

The French philosopher Michel Foucault has argued that writing a history of spaces, which is simultaneously a history of different powers, could be considered “from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat, from institutional architecture of the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations.”⁷ Such histories confront us immediately with a complex network in which structural repetitions are interwoven to constitute a particular spatial organization. The histories of repetitions urge us to think of what makes them at once possible and impossible, the subjects they involve and exclude, and the ways in which a temporalization of the recently lived past is elaborated from spatial figures (the vector of progress, the impossibility of forgetting what this vector attempts to erase, and so on). Within this context a question arises: What kind of histories and critical itineraries can be configured when one takes the prison as a problematic nucleus from which to rethink and question the histories that mark the “post” in postdictatorship? Constituting crucial instances of control, detention, and/or extermination of what the military administrations considered subversive (political dissidence), the places of imprisonment did not lose their social significance immediately after the military regimes were officially concluded. On the contrary, key sites of imprisonment continued to be important in order to mark a certain power over the past in a present in which they became refunctionalized, thus remaining the targets of certain operations in which the past and the present were (and are) joined by means of different signifying regimes.

The different forms and functions that the prisons and CDCs have acquired in their afterlives open up a still-unexplored field in which one can read different processes and zones of the past(s) that continue to be uncomfortable over the past decades. A careful analysis of the figure of the open(ed) prisons in architecture and literature leads us to reflect on the different forms

and possibilities for historicizing zones of the past that have been lost and disappeared, locations that become key for performing different practices of reading and imagining those (political) pasts and their (dis)connections with the present. For instance, in the elite Punta Carretas Mall it is interesting that there are no markers of the past of the prison. However, just when it opened as a mall, a plaque commemorating the victims of the Holocaust was being unveiled around the corner. Since the early 2000s in Argentina, many well-known landmarks in Buenos Aires have been marked with the words: “A center for the torture, disappearance and extermination of political prisoners functioned in this place during the last military dictatorship.”

These contrary gestures, which continued decades after political transitions to neoliberal freedom were over, make one reflect on the ways in which places and histories are composed as well as on how different literary and artistic practices insist on approaching them from different critical perspectives. I offer a contribution to the study of (post)dictatorship and memory practices by creating the first critical history and analysis of the afterlives of prisons as spaces that question the temporal framing of repressive regimes. They open up the possibility of searching for invisible processes in which the imagination of time and freedom is materialized and contested. The goal of this book is to articulate ways in which the creative and critical cultural practices of literature and film problematize the connection between democracy and freedom in the form of the open prison. I explore how these cultural practices question the restrictive geography of the open prison and posit other forms of opening connected to the task of rethinking parts of the past that remained outside of the dominant architectonic of neoliberal freedom. Exhibiting correlations between historicity and spatiality, the creative and critical works studied here point to the modes of framing performed by these spaces of new time and freedom, questioning the manner in which action, performance (in the theatrical sense), and temporality (both dominant and subaltern) are interconnected. A theory of postdictatorship spaces emerges when one examines their ways of recounting history; therefore I question the ways in which political imagination itself is the crucial node that the different spatiotemporal dramatizations attempt to redefine.

In “Postdictadura y reforma del pensamiento,” a seminal article in the creation of postdictatorship cultural critique, the cultural theorist Alberto Moreiras has connected the possibility of a transformation of critical thought to an insistence on the role of historicity. Inspired by Benjamin, historicity emerges as a perspective from which to engage in a critique of persisting forms of oppression hitherto camouflaged by the dominant discourses on postdictatorial neoliberal freedom (of/from the market). Moreiras states: “In

its more radical Benjaminian sense, historicity is that which the oppressed try to save and what the oppressors erase.”⁸ In this vein he emphasizes the difficulty of creating alternative histories that would avoid two evils: on the one hand, the trap of adopting a melancholic position that, finding no political alternatives, would end up “embracing misery” as the “only possible horizon”; and on the other, the historicist attempt to reconstruct the finite past into an epic of the left containing an atemporal, idealized figure.⁹

The postdictatorial critical project uses Benjamin’s problematization of the writing of history both as its source of inspiration and as promise of the creation of a different perspective from which to consider the relation between marginal languages and temporalities. The Benjaminian inspiration was, however, progressively reduced to an exclusive focus on the figures of mourning and melancholy, which became theoretical stereotypes in any study of postdictatorship thought. In an attempt to avoid falling into either a historicist or a positivist account of the past, the possibility of articulating a sense of historicity connected to the history of oppressed struggles was reduced to the expression of a failure. Here I do not intend to argue against the relevance of mourning and melancholy to the analysis of postdictatorship literature. What I question is rather the reduction of a loss of historicity to the idea of a “truth of defeat” posed by the paradigmatic reading of Benjamin’s allegory in cultural theorist Idelber Avelar’s *Untimely Present*, a book that became, and still remains, a mandatory reference in the study of postdictatorial art and literature.¹⁰

Avelar follows Benjamin’s study of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* in order to analyze what he has called “mournful literature”—a literature that, in trying to “overcome the trauma” of the dictatorship, “remind[s] the present that it is the product of a past catastrophe.”¹¹ To define the notion of the defeat that permeates his allegorical reading, Avelar poses an opposition between what he calls a “factual truth” and a “truth of defeat.”¹² The former works as a critique of testimonial narratives valued only for their “factual truth,” while the latter works as a key for “mournful literature” as allegorical configurations of defeat. Although Avelar’s analysis cannot be reduced solely to this point, it limits the Benjaminian reflection on historicity to an opposition between the “factual” and the “allegorical,” limiting the allegorical to the textual expression of a “truth of defeat” that runs the risk of treating the historical and historicity as two uncontaminated poles. It thus runs the risk of establishing an opposition that the allegorical in Benjamin already tried to question. Therefore, it is important to note how the reduction of allegorical readings produced an idea of historicity that was limited to the idea of the truth of defeat and that forestalled other possible

approaches to configuring historicity (for example, another style of thinking of past struggles).

In a way the very notion of defeat and the narrativization that it assumes requires further analysis. What kind of temporal imaginaries does the defeat imply? What happens with the figure of mourning, reduced to the truth of defeat, when we engage other areas in which the very notion of postdictatorship (like the category of the transition itself) becomes problematic, with the continuation of the forms of exceptionality that characterized the dictatorial past (lack of rights, police abuse, and so on)? A question that still needs to be addressed within postdictatorship critique is: Who are the subjects of that specific form of narrating mourning as the truth of the defeat? What are the zones that this truth leaves aside, without meaning by this a mere either/or between factual truth and the truth of a form of defeat? These questions call for a different form of historicization, in which a rereading of Benjamin could play a crucial role, as he attempts to think about the role of awakening as a permanent form of questioning the formation and transformation of the remembrance of the past.

This book approaches the image of the open (refunctionalized) prison in different realms (literature, film, architecture) to provide a cultural history of the life of prisons and detention centers after the first legislation of impunity for military personnel was passed. The dramatization of postdictatorship as a form of open prison poses for readers the question of how and from where this seeing is made possible (visible) and what marks the differences between functions and subjects that it implies. This needs to make us think about how to trace the border that produces the differentiation (which the texts analyzed in this book dramatize in their style, composition, and word play) and how spatial indistinctions open the possibility of seeing the miracle of market freedom as a great discursive prison where the expropriation of time is also an expropriation of any possibility of thinking or imagining the relationship between emancipatory temporality and the political. The image of the open prison appears in some key authors of postdictatorship literature and film as a way of questioning a dictatorship's legacy of limits and limitations of the ability to imagine politics and reimagine a political past that had become object for both the right and the left.

If the main problem posed in the literary texts analyzed here is how to use the open prison as a place to rethink an escape by reimagining imprisoned fragments of political pasts (citing action), then the other task that remains is to question the citability of the critical tools used throughout the 1990s. I take the writings of Benjamin that were crucial to the elaboration of postdictatorship thought in the countries of the Southern Cone in that

decade—namely his last works on the *Arcades* and on Brechtian epic—and rework them to decenter what I call the paradigm of postdictatorship focalization on the figure of the defeat to open a different allegory of reading the postdictatorial for/from our times. Instead of erasing Benjamin's name and the relevance of mourning, I propose to open up and read another line of investigation within his work, one in which he reinvents politics in his attempt to rethink the writing of history and the possibility of creating other ways of imagining (quoting) political histories.

This book is a response to the great discursive void in postdictatorship studies on the relevance of the trope of the prison not only during the dictatorships but also after them—that is, in their different afterlives. The prison is a central theme in literary reflections on the narrative possibilities of a past as a political past and, above all, on the areas of political imagination that remained confined by the limits and limitations inherited from dictatorships in Southern Cone countries. I emphasize this problem in the literary works addressed throughout this book by looking at the figure of the prisons' discursive afterlife (its literary form) and by examining how the texts can be transformed in different ways for territorial readings capable of gesturing toward other relational forms between emancipatory (revolutionary) past utopias and present utopias of unlimited exploitation in the democracies of neoliberal consumerism. Here my approach takes a double form: I analyze both real prisons that were transformed during processes of redemocratization and the figure of the open prison, which emerged in the literary and visual realm as dramatization and critique of the reduction of freedom to the spaces of the neoliberal market and a questioning of the subjects who qualify for such space-time of freedom. The open prison appears in each literary analysis in a different relation with respect to what I call the “architectonic of transition” and to the different critical openings that the literary texts question by means of a spacing of that which attempts to become fixed in the process of signifying the consensus. Words become sites for the emergence of an ambivalence that seeks other ways to historicize zones where freedom never arrived, thus forcing readers to rethink the historicization of labor and emancipation against the grain of the dominant neoliberal epics constructed in postdictatorship by both the right and the left.

If the architectural quotation of the prison has become the form in which renovation attempts to relinquish its ties to the past, how is this quotation cited within the field of reading and writing? Likewise, as these renovations propose other forms of quoting the past, what alternative imaginaries do they posit regarding democracy and freedom? It is within this network of reiterability that my work attempts to encounter images I find crucial to

this multiple field, opening up to real and literary spaces. By analyzing these images, I search for a method to guide this book toward alternative modes of imagining freedom canceled out by the postdictatorship notion of a restricted, exonerated democracy. The images throughout my book—not as viewed objects, but in the Benjaminian sense of a dialectical constellation of readings, heterogeneous temporalities and writings that suggest processes of awakening—are approached as instances that not only space the present within which they irrupt, but also as a mode of reinventing and writing about multiple, invisible areas of the past. Following leads from the connections between multiple temporalities and spaces, my reflection turns to the globalizing, neoliberal world to expose its limitations, driven by the need to reimagine other freedoms where space proves crucial to imagine other possible worlds and interrupt the homogenizing aims of a world that closes in upon itself.

Imprisonment within the Open: Spaces of Control and Global Freedom

Imprisonment within the “open” is the figural form that permeates the different chapters in this book, and it departs from the hypothesis of reading the idea of “opening” as a crucial trope used to stage the passage from dictatorship to freedom and redemocratization. Within the context of the transitions to postdictatorship, “opening” became the keyword that worked as a stage for different signifying processes, thus constituting a sort of foundational matrix that attempted to replace the main figure of confinement and enclosure that characterized the dictatorial society. It constituted the privileged stage within the discursive realm of neoliberalism, where transitional freedom(s) were figured as an act of opening up to the global market. One can see the word “apertura” used throughout different areas of life, such as a democratic opening (*apertura democrática*), an opening to the global market (deregulation), and an opening to a vision of the future (to stop needing eyes in the back of your head [*los ojos en la nuca*]). In spatial language this opening can be seen in the gesture of closing prisons and detention centers that played a key role during the dictatorships, and reopening them transformed and fulfilling other, key functions in the new society. This leads me to think about what kind of closure and opening this freedom of consumption involves—a freedom of consumption that was installed within the discursive paradigm of the postdictatorship era as the end of history.¹³

In one of his works on control societies as configurations of global organization emerging with the Cold War, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze has proposed a unique form of opening as the central figure within the control society hatched in metropolitan countries at the end of World War II. In turn, this

paradigm acquires its most salient features in developing bodies of knowledge and spaces in the United States as part of the Cold War.¹⁴ In his essay “What Is a Creative Act?,” the control society is differentiated from disciplinary power since the idea of closure governing disciplinary spaces dovetails with the notion of an opening that involves a controlled freedom, which Deleuze locates in the spatial metaphor of a highway: “Control is not discipline. You do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control. I am not saying this is the only aim of highways, but people can travel infinitely and ‘freely’ without being confined while being perfectly controlled. That is our future. Let’s say that is what information is, the controlled system of the order-words used in a given society.”¹⁵

Deleuze continues by tracing a similar idea in relation to the role of language within the new control diagram, in which words and concepts are expected to become information—that is, data that would be added to the new ideal of culture as service. I connect this double figure of space and language (the freeway and the word in the information machine) to the way in which also the memory of past atrocities (suspiciously disconnected from current ones) is progressively assembled into a marketing machine. The passage from the architectonic of amnesia of the early 1990s to the boom of memory marketing and memory politics a decade later can be seen as following this process of a controlled freedom in which cognitive processes are transformed into practices of data accumulation (of information, products, and artifacts). In Deleuze’s analysis, “control” refers to a new imaginary of limited freedom in which the technique of power that worked in the spatial figure of enclosure is progressively replaced by an idea of control that works through the fantasy of an opening. This is a crucial departure for this book, as it implies a problematization of freedom that involves a form of revelation in language. Deleuze states this pretty clearly when he says that “control is information”—that is, control is the fantasy of transforming practices of imagination into mere “cultural information.”

Something similar to the Deleuzian notion of unconfined yet controlled freedom is what seems to govern a global system that prescribes new functions to prisons—a system that involves new modes of confinement in which prisons are made invisible by being privatized and moved to the outskirts of cities, while new state imaginaries for the neoliberal market are developing. The architecture of the open prison is becoming a kind of global phenomenon of prison transformations that pair cultural heritage with the service industry. Even though my analysis focuses on postdictatorship experience in Southern Cone Latin American countries, similar transformations of prisons in societies in “transition” can be seen elsewhere in the world, given the worldwide

change in production and consumption in which the prisons become “cool” spaces for tourism. Some examples of these characteristics are present in the Russian prison Kresty, built at the end of the nineteenth century as Europe’s largest prison. It was repurposed as a “museum” while the prison was still active and slated to offer other services once prisoners could be transferred elsewhere. The complex was to become an alternative site that could provide visitor services: tourism, entertainment, shopping, and a museum.¹⁶

Other projects, some of which came to fruition and some of which were abandoned, include plans for the prison in Alun-alun, Bandung, Indonesia, which was transformed into a mall, or the original idea to convert Musheerabad Central Jail, today the Gandhi Medical College, into a mall.¹⁷ Another recent case is the Turkish prison that was monumentalized by director Oliver Stone’s film *Midnight Express*, today the Four Seasons Hotel, and the Hostel Celica in Ljubljana, Slovenia, a prison turned into a youth hostel and “tourist attraction.” Aside from projects that transform prisons into malls, retaining the original architecture for its double function as “cultural heritage” and a feature “of tourist interest,” there exist other paradigmatic sites in the disciplinary schematic that have been turned into malls: the former Ford Assembly Plant in Milpitas, California, known as “The Great Mall”; and the project for a model public school turned CDC, Patio Olmos, which is today a mall in Argentina. The transformation of Patio Olmos was carried out by J.C. López & Associates, the company in charge of the Punta Carretas Mall conversion in Uruguay.

From the standpoint of genealogical research, these juxtaposed spaces allow us to read an architectonics of the present, for they organize certain imaginaries of the crisis that the present leaves behind (a crisis made apparently visible in the 1950s) and the material that is superimposed upon or juxtaposed to the disciplinary sites as a new series of functions around which daily life would revolve: shopping, information, tourism, and entertainment. The functions of state preservation and protection of these sites’ cultural heritage suggest a kind of embalming action on the part of the state, which transforms to rescue the past as a quasi-autobiographical monument to the state for consumption by foreign tourists. The prison that no longer functions as such is then turned into a mall or a hotel, in a kind of fantasy (from which the prison itself was born) of progress as regeneration, recycling the Hegelian notion of sublation as a simultaneous preservation and negation that frames the grammar of progress. The architectural history of dreams for modernization and progress coupled with different modes of social production contrasts with architectural redemption as an erasure of violence from previous processes in the attempt to promote, once again, the idea of

advances that demand that a prison from a former time be renovated. Thus architectural recycling operates as an attempt to erase the ruin and turn it into a symbol without fissures—a past that has been recycled to become a new fantasy that embodies a present capable of both remembering the past and using it to produce income.

Such predeterminability refers to a certain control over the narration of the historical past that lies not in the promotion of amnesia but rather in a sort of memory surplus that paradoxically erases the possibility of establishing a link between historicity and social transformability. Turned into a fetish par excellence in the memory market, the act of remembering involves two focal points: the impossibility of questioning either the types of subjects implied by those memories or the type of temporality implied by this obsession with the collection of memory. My hypothesis is that the afterlife of dictatorial confinement observed in the conversions of prisons (the central figure and space within authoritarian regimes) into malls, cultural memory tours, or museums involves a form of control over any alternative possibility that might change the current state of affairs. In other words, by turning any act of the past into available material, memory becomes an artifact and factum that evades the question of what type of memory citizenship is implied by the systems that govern the politics of and about memory. It also leaves out the types of historicity (and therefore of the imaginary of freedom) that are both canceled and opened by those regimes of memory (not history). Since control, in the sense proposed by Deleuze, takes opening as the central figure of its imaginary, the questions that arise in each chapter are: What is the meaning of escape when the prison becomes an open prison? What form of historicity is to be rescued when memory becomes a market-driven artifact and object as well as the central concern of certain state policies of the neoliberalized left?

Each chapter deals with a form of articulation of this problem, proposing—by means of a text, film, or particular architecture—a counterpoint between the pseudo-opening system through which the freedom of the “post” in postdictatorship is signified versus a history that disturbs and upsets the new meanings of freedom and the right to remember implied. For instance, in the two cases of prison-mall transformations, I analyze the erased figure of the escapes of political prisoners as a break point regarding that memory regimes in control societies fail to tolerate. My goal is to shift the focus from the politics of memory to the forms of memory characteristic of other ways of thinking and perceiving politics that memory regimes seek to negate or control by means of a selective opening. While the main topic of postdictatorship studies in the 1990s was the politics of forgetfulness as an almost

exclusive form of remembering, maybe now the question that we can start to explore is the politics of memory and how selective forgetfulness has turned into a surplus in terms of controlled memory.

The overabundance of memory and memorials not only continues a pattern of forgetfulness (as is always the case) but also functions to control the disclosure of past events within the framework left by the dictatorship. I refer here to the fact that certain limits are imposed by the market and by both left- and right-wing policies on what is tolerable for the politics (management) of memory, thus excluding certain areas that are currently undesirable (such as social transformability; memories that exceed the framework of remembrance of the educated middle class; and remembrances of the past that repeat the limitations experienced by those policies in the past). In contrast to the fantasy of spatiotemporal adjustments without fissures, this book attempts to create an alternative textual and visual corpus that makes visible those features that were never part of the national architectonic—elements which, as an excluded outside, do not and never did count as supposedly free subjects for a modern liberal citizenry. The prison serves as the framework in which this exclusion emerges, revealing a series of questions related to what I term the “minor epic” (“minor,” because it refers to what goes untold, to what has no place in the global or national imaginary). Nevertheless, to advance critical thought on globalization, it is necessary to articulate these remains, which evoke the always disturbing image of what is missing from the fantasy of progress, and to examine those imaginaries likewise excluded from the modernizing neoliberal fantasy: collective laboratories of state transformation, revolutionary projects, and other emancipatory projects.

Afterlives: Reading as Stage for Different Transitionings

The figure of the open prison proves central to my analysis because it is one way of configuring the postdictatorial world in literature, and even more so, because during the processes of transition malls represented the dream of cleanliness and hygiene formerly embodied by the prison at the beginning of the previous century (more on this later). Not only does the figure of the prison call into question how to create a different history of the past from its traces remaining in the present. It also provides an alternative dramatization (whereby the page is the stage itself) of political imaginaries captured and whitewashed by the dominant organization of the postdictatorship city of consumption. In the texts and images I analyze, “free” postdictatorial life emerges as a staged occurrence in the figure of the open prison and the doubly excluded forms of subalternity (the prisoners and those who do not qualify for market freedom).

Taking these spatial histories that express ways of imagining freedom from prisons that were the ultimate symbols of totalitarianism, I ask a series of questions: Who were (or are) the subjects imagined by the transition? Where and when does the transition begin and end? How did the dictatorship continue to be evoked through spaces in which transformations and adjustments (homogenization) of times were produced, which delineated the geography and inhabitation of a limited kind of democracy of the market? What idea of rescue and temporality does this form of cultural heritage assume? How is it spatially materialized as a form that, translated into an act of reading, suggests different ways of reading between the lines?

Space and language are two theaters for reading the gestures of unique forms of continuities and discontinuities in dictatorial sites that were made invisible in their subsequent refunctionalizations. In the world after them (the “post” in postdictatorship), they create dislocations regarding the kinds of temporalities they assume and constitute through different processes of signification. On this matter it is helpful to bear in mind cultural theorist Gayatri Spivak’s now classic problematization of the notion of transition, in which she points to the necessity of transforming a language based on economic models (transition between modes of production) or modes of consciousness into a “theory of change” that can be thought of as a “theory of reading,” understood as the site where an “active transaction between past and future” can take place.¹⁸ Inspired by this possibility, my analysis takes the afterlives of prisons as spaces from which to think of other modes of reading and thinking about the relations between past and present forms of violence, modes that question the dominant fantasy narratives of the transition (whether in literature, the museum, or consumerism).

I point toward the necessary possibility of imagining them from the unlivable zones in which and through which the dictatorship continued calling out to a certain layer of the population, particularly to those who would consider the equation of “more consumerism equals more freedom and more democracy” to be a prison itself. The temporal crossroads created by narratives on the prison furthermore involves suspending the exceptional character of this specific recent transition (to a neoliberal postdictatorship market and freedom), to question not only the repetition of systems of exceptional violence throughout the century, but also the past promises that remain open (that have not been fulfilled), which the Chilean philosopher Pablo Oyarzún has called in his reading of Benjamin the “truncated past.”¹⁹

As the Chilean critical theorist Nelly Richard has argued in her introduction to *Pensar en / la postdictadura*, on a discursive level, transition assumed the logic of the market as something inevitable that was naturalized

in language as a stage for a naturalized temporal imaginary in a line that went from less to more.²⁰ Thus the transition was embodied in a formula that posited an equivalence between more freedom = more consumption = more market = more democracy. Challenging this discursive framework, the philosopher Willy Thayer has proposed reading the transition as being the dictatorship itself, which in the case of Chile involves the economic process in which the dictatorship was a worldwide laboratory for neoliberalism—the stage chosen by the Chicago Boys to experiment with deregulation and freedom of the market (an economic framework that continues to be its matrix).²¹ On the other hand, following Argentine political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell's analysis of the uses of the word "transition" in the case of Argentina, the Uruguayan historian Aldo Marchesi proposes questioning the ideological imaginary one assumes by naming the transition, arguing that perhaps it is time to stop speaking of transitions, since the word evokes a language of inevitability and an erasure of a series of political discourses that remain silenced by the effects of the dictatorship in the present.²²

Many texts have pointed to the histories and political imagination closed by the transition in its aim to homogenize times to the same clock. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to explore further the word "transition," in the performative sense of signifying processes that materialize a kind of temporal imaginary and narrativization of politics, as well as the languages that the imaginary of transition needed to exclude from its discourse time and time again (its "constitutive constraints"—that is, its conditions of possibility *and* impossibility).²³ This would lead us to ask what happens to the word "transition" if one looks at it from the figure of the open prison, which is stressed in the literary texts I analyze as a reiteration of processes of containment and control. The idea of the transition can be approached as a process that has been consolidated over time by different systems of repetition. Here architecture plays an essential role in the creation of systems of repetition that consolidate circuits of meaning and further processes of resignification. A critical approach to the afterlife of the architectural spaces that served to contain political dissidence during the dictatorship can open up a different approach to the zones that continue to disturb the teleological narratives of the transition as a passage to an unquestioned freedom of the market. I take the figure of "repetition," which is crucial for the creation of certain habits in architectural works, but use it to examine how repetition constitutes certain norms while also exposing us to a spacing that deconstitutes and transforms naturalized spatiotemporal conceptions.²⁴

What I am suggesting is that in the linear temporal imaginary of the transition, what remains imprisoned is a truncated past that had been cen-

tered on the word “transition” but in different ways related to the idea of the transformability of society as envisaged by the leftist movements of the 1970s, right before the coup. That is, if one brackets off the period of the dictatorship and focuses on a textual zone in which the word “transition” becomes a zone of indifferentiation, of a mixture of languages in which, while still prisoners of the economic imaginary (the passage to another mode of production, a socialist one), one can hear certain possible echoes of a political imaginary of truncated social change that was never allowed to take place and is therefore irrecuperable. Among these imaginaries, linked by a moment of intense political imagination (which was full, obviously, of problems and limitations), there is something untranslatable left over when we stop taking the word “transition” as an inevitable event imprisoned in the neoliberal universe and open it up to the act of reading.

I am interested in analyzing how the open prison that the market establishes in its architectural recycling can be read as an invisible metaphor of the limitation of the language of political imagination. It is odd that there are almost no critical works that place the word “transition” in the sphere of an imaginary that does not refer to neoliberalism. In this sense the word may be taken as a way of limiting in the inclusion of zones of the past where language becomes the site of thought and imagination. The literary works I turn to—*La fuga de Punta Carretas* by Fernández Huidobro, *Mano de obra* by Diamela Eltit, and *Nocturno de Chile* by Roberto Bolaño—all point in different ways to a certain emptying of the constellation-world of what did *not* happen, the truncated notion of social change as a way of incorporating the yet-to-be-imagined formation of an idea of transformability of politics as an experience that connects the historical with a perception of space and time.

This leads to a difficult negotiation, since I am not talking about idealizing a truncated past (transforming it into a big Epic) nor about denying and erasing it as being indistinguishable and identical to the neoliberal appropriation of the term, as a changeover to the shopping world. It is as if it were an element of the unnameable transition (the dual power of the MLN-Tupamaros in Uruguay in the late 1970s, the laboratory of Popular Unity in Chile in the early 1970s) that is suggested at a textual level as an empty quote, emptied by neoliberal architecture that the texts construct as a prison, but an open prison, a controlled prison, like Deleuze’s freeway. This allows us to begin talking critically and creatively about zones or layers in which the word “transition” can be spaced out, relaxing the fixity of meaning imposed on it by the economy (unchangeable) or by the logic of defeat that governed post-dictatorship studies throughout the 1990s.