La Olla Y Los Patios: An Ethnography Of Place, Selfhood, Violence, And Rehabilitation In Bogotá

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LA OLLA Y LOS PATIOS: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF PLACE, SELFHOOD, VIOLENCE, AND REHABILITATION IN BOGOTA

by

ANDRES ROMERO

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2022

MAJOR: ANTHROPOLOGY

Approved By:

__________________________________________________________________________________
Advisor Date
__________________________________________________________________________________
DEDICATION

Para toda la gente de la “lleca,” por compartir y enseñarme tanto

Para mis padres, Rosalba y Humberto

For Todd, for also showing what friendship was along the way
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been the greatest joy to be accompanied by so many others throughout this journey. The gestures, words, voices, and images of so many people have resonated with me through the years, informing this project, at times, in unexpected ways.

I am first and foremost grateful to all the people from the ollas, to all of the people I came across in the patios and in the streets of Bogotá. I am especially grateful for the people I call Stella and Duván for taking me into their world, for patiently teaching me, for questioning the many assumptions I would make, for being confrontational, for making me laugh, cry, and some. Stella has taught more than I am currently able to host within thought. She makes these pages here and there, but her presence, her way to orient my thinking, inform this project in its entirety and projects to come. Duván has been one of my many teachers, who has shared so many stories, showed so many worlds, and has taught me how to unlearn much of what I came into this project knowing. Without Stella and Duván, I am frankly not sure if I would have been received in the same light by so many of the people from the ollas I have met. I am also extremely grateful for Hecho whose life has left the biggest of impacts. His attention to detail, his capacity to show, his unapologetic way of being, have all made me want to write in a particular way. This project would not have been the same without Fernanda who has taken me up and down the streets of Bogotá, who has showed me so much of what I know about the ollas and Los Mártires. I am extremely grateful for Daniel and for his mother, Doña M. Daniel has taught me more than I can ever process. Juanita, Ciro, Guillermo, Esteban, Christian, and Mateo have left a huge impact on my thinking. I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the many others from the ollas, the streets, and the patios, for their trust, for their insights, and eternal offerings.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.........................................................................................................................ii

Acknowledgments............................................................................................................i

List of maps and illustrations..........................................................................................xi

Glossary............................................................................................................................xii

Introduction.......................................................................................................................1

Part one: La Olla ................................................................................................................28

El Cartucho.......................................................................................................................32

Sensory history...................................................................................................................35

Consultations......................................................................................................................38

Tetricus...............................................................................................................................42

Acclimating.........................................................................................................................44

Limit-experiences..............................................................................................................45

The collective sensorium.................................................................................................49

Tempos ...................................................................................................................................52

The ninja turtles.................................................................................................................53

Violence and domesticity.................................................................................................56

Lusting for abjection...........................................................................................................59

Contrapuntal histories in the flesh...................................................................................62

Interlude: EL Matadero.....................................................................................................69

El Bronx..............................................................................................................................77

La 15 was La L.....................................................................................................................84

Territorializing....................................................................................................................86

The sacred..........................................................................................................................91
The tipping point ................................................................. 94
Cunning design .................................................................. 96
In the zone ......................................................................... 99
Houses of dismemberment .................................................. 104
Crack-ed family ................................................................. 108
Regimes of perception ......................................................... 115
The death-in-life ................................................................. 122
The life-in-death ................................................................. 128
Nonhuman flesh ................................................................. 133
The coronel ....................................................................... 137
The tunnel of time .............................................................. 139
Interlude: Plaza España ...................................................... 143
Exit .................................................................................... 147
A Story of Bazuco .............................................................. 150
Matchsticks ....................................................................... 153
Glued (Here in the Elsewhere) .............................................. 155
Hulk .................................................................................. 158
The Binge ......................................................................... 164
Unearthing ......................................................................... 169
Possession ......................................................................... 175
Part two: Los Patios ............................................................ 182
Blue Angels ........................................................................ 185
The doors ........................................................................... 193
The frisk station ................................................................. 203
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The shower</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchrony</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The patio is like an olla”</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I need something to pass the time”</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurdling through documents</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The talk</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profe</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotores</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Departure</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lending oneself astray</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowhere to integrate</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue (graduation day)</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional sources</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autobiographical statement</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Image 1 ...........................................................................................................................................1

Image 2 ...........................................................................................................................................28

Map of El Cartucho ..........................................................................................................................30

Map of El Bronx or La L .....................................................................................................................78

Image 3 ...........................................................................................................................................80

Image 4 ...........................................................................................................................................147

Image 5 ...........................................................................................................................................182

Image 6 ...........................................................................................................................................259

Image 7 ...........................................................................................................................................268

Image 8 ...........................................................................................................................................269

Image 9 ...........................................................................................................................................274
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>GLOSSARY</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUC</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bazuco</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bicha</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bogotazo</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bomba</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Calatero</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desechable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desecho</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demonizado</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>El Bronx</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>El Cartucho</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ELN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Embalado</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FARC</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gancho</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hilles</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homero</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>La PJ</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manguera</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Memoricidio</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Muñeco</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ñero</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Olla</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Patio</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Profe</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promotores</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raya</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salla</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Solidario</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tombo</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the act of writing, as in spirit possession, sexual ecstasy, or spiritual bliss, we are momentarily out of our minds. We shape-shift. We transgress the constancies of space, time, and personhood. We stretch the limits of what is humanly possible.

Michael D. Jackson, The Other Shore¹
Introduction

 Suppose that the recognition of humanity held out the promise not of liberating the flesh or redeeming one’s suffering but rather of intensifying it?

 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*¹

 Part of the aim, then, is to dethrone the human from its metaphysical pedestal, reject the human, and explore different ways of existing that are not predicated on Being and its humanism.

 Calvin Warren, *Ontological Terror*²

 7/18/16. In the absence of the crowds, of deadlock traffic, we ride into the night. For two weeks now, I’ve been riding though Bogotá in the city’s white minivans from 11PM to 5AM. The mayor’s Secretary of Social Integration has been conducting a census throughout all of August 2016, counting the number of people living on the streets, and querying their daily plights, whereabouts, and general conditions. At nighttime, Bogotá belongs to the forcibly dispossessed, the recyclers, and those
who wander covered in sheets like ghosts, watching over the city. The census is one way to try chart the physical and phantasmatic travel of people living on the streets.

The census came in the aftermath of former mayor Enrique Peñalosa’s militarized takeover of “El Bronx,” the biggest olla, or open-air drug market and residential zone in Colombia at the time, on May 28 of 2016. Protests from businesses owners and other proprietors, along with news headlines, framed the seizing of El Bronx as ill-managed and sparked fears a social crisis wherein people from the streets would reside in other parts of the city. Crisis was understood in terms of trespassing and transgression, under the presumed logic that: people from El Bronx should not reside permanently in other parts of the city. That instead, they should be “saved” from their abjection and monstrosity, contained, corralled, into los patios, or the city’s rehabilitation centers—to which hundreds indeed were taken by the truckload.

The ollas helped to contain, to keep hidden, ways of life deemed non-normative whose presence, as the discourse of crisis evoked, was perceived as an assault on the broader polity. It is not so much that the ollas completely isolated the approximate 15,000 people living on the streets of Bogotá, but that these were assumed to be “their” assigned places. Generally, people in Bogotá spoke of the ollas (and adjacent brothel areas) as “zones of tolerance.” Zones where excessive drug-use and other heterogenous elements of life that didn’t assimilate to the project of “civility” were to be tolerated. Through this logic of licensed transgression in secluded places, it appeared that the city, and the project of civil society, needed the olla as a counterpoint, as its opposite, to maintain its presumed stability based on what it wasn’t. But this may not have been farther than the established truths since, as I will demonstrate in what follows, the olla’s boundaries were regulated yet porous, and the olla’s historical formation could not be understood in isolation from Colombia’s histories of armed conflict and forcible displacement.
As a response to the alleged state of flux and chaos after El Bronx’s takeover the mayor’s administration wanted numbers, data points, to counter the claims of crisis. So each night, three different groups in vans were given their route, their coolers packed with refrigerios, or snack bags for people living on the streets, and the census sheets that were to be filled out throughout the night. The census outreach workers remained vigilant. They cultivated skills to discern heaps of trash, from people asleep shielding in trash pits, or to discern which underpasses led to hidden tunnels, crevices, and communes that forged a life out of deserted space.

We had been riding through the far north of city, where the affluent are guarded by enclosures and walls, by armed security guards, their canine companions, and by surveillance cameras. Though these “security” conditions are characteristic of the broader city in general. Passing through a pitch-black street, one of the outreach workers tells the driver to slow down while pointing to a set of darkened clumps barely visible behind a row of bushes. As we get out of the van, we see a set of black plastic bags near the bushes that lead us to two people who were asleep behind the bushes and bags.

“Good evening,” the outreach worker yells while tapping the person’s back.

Moving in fear, the person’s bloodshot eyes, squinting, try to look pass the rays of light from another outreach workers flashlight and respond to their calling.

In that space between sleep and wakefulness, the person in fright looks up and says: Pense que eran la Mano Negra, “I thought you were Mano Negra.” Meaning the right-wing paramilitary death squads known to forcibly disappear people living on the streets of Colombia.

As he now sits up against the wall, still paranoid, the team of outreach workers try to comfort him with the refrigerio while asking how he is doing and his general whereabouts. As a woman sleeping nearby wakes up, she comes to sit next to the man against the wall. While opening their snacks, they share how their partner was recently abducted by the Mano Negro and hasn’t returned. They ask if they can report their friend’s disappearance with them.
The outreach workers appear perplexed by their question. The outreach worker holding the flashlight tells them that they have to go to a CAI, or a residential police station nearby, to which they both chuckle, perhaps knowing all too well that the police will not follow through with their claims based on their positions as people living on the streets.

The outreach worker, trying to console them while at the same time sideling the disappearance of a person living on the streets, says, *No, ustedes son ciudadanos habitants de calle, y eso significa que tienen derechos. Ustedes, tambien, son seres humanos.* “No, you are citizens living on the streets, which means you have rights. You both, too, are human beings.”

A retort to rights and recognition amid the ensuing terror and racialization that people on the streets face was indicative of the ultimate paradox of liberal humanism: its conceit that humanist ideals of rights, recognition, and inclusion help to *preserve* life rather than to also facilitate disposability. The outreach worker’s response, while trying to provide care, we can thus consider as part of a larger assemble of state intervention that Fred Moten calls “incorporative exclusion,” where one excludes *through* inclusion. Recognition lays bare the inherent premise that people on the streets, based on their social relegation, inhabit subject-positions outside the human and thus needed to be *reassured* of their humanity.

You, *too*, are human.

It is this institutional affirmation—through recognition, intervention, and rehabilitation—that attempts to corral people back into the socially accepted ways of being human that poses challenges for ways of life on the streets, partially untethered and indifferent to these ideals. Such ideals, I argue, are nearly impossible to sustain amid the social and material conditions of possibility for those living in the streets of Bogotá.

*La Olla y Los Patios* engages the lives of people living on the streets who struggle with drug use as they shuttle between the drug markets, the streets, and rehab centers in Bogotá. It demonstrates
how ways of being, fostered in the streets in the wake of Colombia’s perpetual wars and displacements, and social relegation, create other possibilities that attempt to shake off from the constraints of the category of the human. Other ways of inhabiting time and place.

**Exit**

In a world where “liberal humanism is the primary mode of recognition,” people cannot fully shake away the demands of humanism and its expected modes of being. Amid such strangleholds on existence, the lives of people that I bring to the fore in this project, showcase a yearning for an exit from these metaphysical and structural constraints, as well as a yearning out of themselves. Both types of yearning for an exit, however, are ultimately mired with the impossibilities of a knotty, “labyrinthine” existence. Yet attempts towards an exit persist, as people continue to secure breaks, instances of dissociation centered on the breakdown of selfhood, however brief.

I use the term “exit” throughout to think about the moments of break and release found at the limits of what can be experienced. Though others have used the term “escape” to reckon with drug use dissociation, I divest from escape as an analytic for its connotations in common parlance that often imply an attainable freedom or liberation. The yearning towards an “exit” that I demonstrate throughout, is rather a move within the labyrinth of existence where there is no way to fully escape or liberate from oneself. Like some of the labyrinthine passageways and tunnels that make up the drug markets I explore below, existence itself is aporetic—as in there is “no way out.” Existence is a “maze of contradictions” without any firm resolution. Thus, this yearning for an exit, is not specific to drug users, to those who wander erratically, or to any group for that matter.

Following Emmanuel Levinas, we could consider this yearning to lose oneself as an attempt to “break the chains of the I to the self,” or to dissociate from the continuous and stable self. That is, the fact that one is enchained, encumbered to the self, poses a desire to break, to exit oneself, or to exist through plural and relational modes of selfhood outside of bounded individuality. I should add,
the desire to exit oneself should not be necessarily conflated with a turn towards dying, “as death is not a[n] exit, just as it is not a solution.”

I also opt out of “escape” as term and analytic for its local ties to social “escapism” which frame drug users as irresponsibly abandoning personal duty and other moralist conceits, centered on the stable, self-actualizing, and utilitarian subject. Additionally, other phenomenological approaches have framed drug use and states of dissociation from oneself as a state of “timeless oblivion” where the self is “dehistorified.” Through the scenes that follow, I demonstrate that exiting from oneself and stepping out of normative time, is not into some ahistorical or atemporal void, since even in states of severe dissociation, one is still subjected to the world. Exit is passage towards an elsewhere that is also here. It is not escape.

**Abjection**

Throughout *La Olla y Los Patios* “abjection” will populate the scenes relayed. Abjection can certainly refer to conditions of extreme socioeconomic insecurity and violence, but it is also much more than that. “Abjection” is not so much an analytic or category but a term that makes itself present in relation to other things, namely: limits, norms, values, transgression, the death-in-life, the life-in-death. It is a threshold. That is, abjection is less a concept and more of an operation, something understood in relation to a cluster of other things. At the risk of flattening its elusive and formless character, abjection is about that which cannot be fully corralled, governed, domesticated into the homogenous order of things: waste, satanic possession, violence, “debauchery,” bewitchment, ubidden images, unruly affects, to name a few.

As a threshold, abjection disrupts the surety of things for normative society. It does away with the usual categorical dyads, such as subject/object, self/world, and life/death.

In what follow, through certain scenes, abjection appears to stand midway between life and death often demonstrating their inextricability, so that the death-in-life and the life-in-death constantly
circle back on one another. Abjection as an operation; as a movement I try to follow, is important for this project since, via its transgressive elements, it helps to demarcate the metaphysical scaffolding, or the normative order of things precisely at their limits. Furthermore, by attempting to follow abjection, we arrive at different understandings of place, the human, selfhood, the dead, social relations, and rehabilitation—prime analytics that suture this project.

“Abjection” also appears through two interrelated movements. There is a servile and larger scale form of social abjection produced by regulatory forces, as in when people are abjected or expelled from “formal” economic markets, from the domestic sphere, or when they are racialized and socially marked as existing outside of the category of the human. And there is also a personal relation to abjection as through a necessity to expel oneself from stable subjectivity in the face of such social abjection. Demonstrating the former through the latter, I remain attentive to moments when the normative order of things is partially inversed, when abjection rather than something to ward off becomes generative, as when people make-to-unmake themselves and unmake-to-make themselves through fractured and plural modes of selfhood.

The category of the human

Fernanda, a woman in her fifties who I met in 2016, had lived through Bogotá’s drug markets and on the streets since the ’80s. As we sat together with her peers from the drug markets in what was left of their former home, El Cartucho, she shared, “We’ve been on the streets for so long that we went from desechables (“disposables”), to ñeros, to indigentes (“indigents”), and now look at us, we are citizen street inhabitants!” As her peers and I laughed at her sarcastic enthusiasm, Fernanda’s critique brushed against the problems of liberal humanism. Fernanda had an experiential awareness of how the progressive and inclusive categories that the city began to recently deploy, would not save them from the pervasive violence and displacement that surrounded them daily. Fernanda, through
statements like this one, was gesturing towards how discursive affirmation and state recognition as fellow humans could not upend their social relegation and racialization as figures of abjection.\textsuperscript{17}

The abjection of people relegated outside the category of the human by the state and broader polity, in the context where I take up this work, can be traced back to Colombia’s colonial legacies and formation as a nation-state. We find glimpses of such relegations for people on the streets across the institutional archives—which have gone hand in hand with the disposability that carried on in the streets. Etched out of their singularities, the heterogenous masses of people who lived on the streets became legible in terms of repulsion and abjection.

At the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century in Bogotá, the figure of the mendigo or the beggar, the “vagabond,” appears as the conventional mode of address for those “problem-subjects,” who require aid and intervention.\textsuperscript{18} During the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the White and Mestizo ruling classes, framed those who lived on the streets of downtown Bogotá as contagious and “repulsive,” and called for their clearance away from the streets.\textsuperscript{19} Then, in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, came the figure of the indigent, the “needy” subject who required assistance based on how astray from civil society they were. Even as recent as 1996, the state’s documents still address people on the streets through the moralist frame of the indigent, or needy subject.\textsuperscript{20}

During the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century, with the rise of street children in Bogotá and other cities in Colombia, came the figure of the gamín, though the francophone term used in Colombia can be traced back to 1886.\textsuperscript{21} The gamines were those groups of “street urchin,” children and adolescents in the streets who, fleeing the wars playing out in the countryside and in the domestic space, roamed in fugitivity.\textsuperscript{22} Later, also came the figure of the ñero, framed as the drug-using and crime-doing shadowy subject. Like the rest of these terms, ñero became deployed in derogatory ways but has since been appropriated by some of the upper and middle classes as a term of endearment. As recent as 2011, the city’s administration continued to deploy “ñero” to describe the various kinds of people their projects
target. In the later 20th century, the figure of the *desechable*, the “disposable,” also arose. Along with it came the *limpiezas sociales*, the paramilitary “social cleansings,” that through this very frame of disposability exerted extra-judicial killings on people living on the streets.

As part of the “late liberalism” turn towards the governance of social difference and the discourses of rights and dignity that coursed globally in the early 21st century, the city’s administration began to progressively develop more “inclusive” terms for people living on the street. First came, *habitante de calle*, street inhabitant. Then came, the *cuidadano habitante de calle*, the “citizen street inhabitant” coinage that Fernanda had ridiculed.

Much of the social relegation of people on the streets was also considerably place based. The *olla*, as a drug market and forbidden place of “defilement,” was considered as a portal, an opening towards the bowels of the earth where mass graves and labyrinthine tunnels left intricate connections with the world of the dead. Thus, places like El Cartucho were considered, by both some of its residents and media outlets, as “infernos.” And similarly, the broader polity considered its inhabitants as the “souls of hell.” El Bronx was also framed as a threshold of life-in-death and death-in-life, or as one documentary special described it, as “the cemetery of the living-dead.”

It is at this juncture where what could be expected by scholars is to try to re-humanize those subjected, perhaps even to create new spins on “bare life.” In this project, however, I depart from the humanist stance that presumes that rights and re-humanization are the antithesis to violence—and not its conduits.

Instead, I am interested in another set of questions: What happens *after relegation*? What do people do, how do they mold to, transform, or re-enchant such subject-positions? *La Olla y Los Patios* is also guided by Christina Sharpe’s conviction that even those who have “experienced, recognized, and lived subjection…did not simply or only live in subjection and as the subjected.” In what follows, the scenes of such worlds are not only layered through the undeniably grim and bleak features—the
disastrous, the horrible, and the terrible—but also through the textures of life-giving and sustaining possibilities.

My approach throughout is heavily informed by anti-humanist scholarship that questions the promises of humanism—namely that “progress,” reason, rights, and self-actualization can lead towards the freedom of self and being.30 My approach is also deeply influenced and indebted to more recent scholarship within Black studies that poses the problem of Western metaphysics and the category of the human for racialized people.31 La Olla y Los Patios, as an ethnographic mosaic of the lives of people in the ollas, demonstrates a partial “desire for a different mode of being/knowing/feeling”32 in the world. Modes that are partially untethered from the constraints of the category of the human and which are not predicated on “a desire for fuller recognition within liberal humanism’s terms.”33

The thousands of people that live on the streets of Bogotá are a heterogenous mix of people who do not share any monolith set of ideals, horizons, or ways of being. Working with people from the ollas, I gathered that their shared world is not premised on identity or a logic of likeness. Thus, many people I met from the ollas did indeed express desires to “reintegrate” to the normative way of being a human, of having a job, or having their recycling “informal” practices be recognized by the state, or building a nuclear family to call one’s own, or to be recognized as part of the broader polity—desires which were often hard to sustain amid the horizons of possibility.

Yet many others I came to know had long ago abandoned these ideals, had found other horizons and forms of relating to one another. They had found footing, as tenuous as it might be, outside the ideals to which category of the human aspires to. This work centers on those who some might call “ungovernable,” and who prompted me to question the metaphysics and values by which they become legible in the gaze of the interventionist and “therapeutic state.”
As a heuristic, the category the of human has been able to demonstrate how forms of racialization, or the sociopolitical processes of inscribing value unto flesh, “discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans.” This compartmentalization of human beings upholds the ongoing hierarchy of being, which by default, structures the “possibility of impossibility” for certain groups to never attain full human status. This is what Frantz Fanon spoke of as the “epidermal” schema of racialization. Yet alongside flesh and phenotype, Fanon’s schema may also leave room for the filth, the putrefactive odors, for the dental duress, the injured limbs, the scars and open wounds, the jaundiced skin, the glossy eyes of gazes adrift, the encrusted grime, and other abject matter that when intermingled with the flesh, also bears the potential to catapult one outside of the human.

In a world where recognition of one’s humanity is compatible with one’s disposability, or where being “selectively incorporated into the liberal humanist project,” can further amplify violence and injury, I am as interested in the violence of humanization, as I am with de-humanization. Like so many others before me, I take up the category of the human as an impossibility, as a quandary without resolution. There are no “political, juridical, or even philosophical answers to this problem.” The category of the human is an ontological and metaphysical deadlock whose very formulation requires the abjection and relegation of some, to uphold its inherent value and importance.

In turn, through this work I place on hold attempts to redeem the subject, or to “humanize” people that live in the streets and struggle with drug use, precisely because the values placed on the category of the human and the ideals of liberal humanism operate as the very grounds that further entrench sociopolitical exclusion. In the fields of humanitarianism, as well as in the social sciences and the humanities, it is often taken as an existential given that people wish to be recognized and exist within humanist ideals of citizenship, stable subjectivity, and self-actualization. I prompt instead what happens when people follow other paths and embrace other subject-positions outside of the human.
I do so particularly by centering on those who find generativity and a “vital liminality” through abjection and wayward modes of being human.

La Olla y Los Patios attends to what sort of space of being is dehumanization. I show, for instance, that some people paradoxically re-enchant their abjection and social relegation, like Duván who embraces being hailed as a “thinking-zombie” for his capacities to connect through prayer with divine forces found in his immediate surround and to shuttle between states of fugue and lucidity. Surviving multiple tortures at hands of detectives in El Cartucho, evading amputations on both legs in a hospital, and outliving sixteen shots to the stomach and one in his mouth, have made Duván grapple with his existence as protected by the strange and occult. Through his relegation and self-exile, Duván embraces a subject-position that is not only outside the human, but through apotropaic protection, is more-than-human.

The other side of my approach takes up how attempts at humanization by the Colombian state of those living in the ollas take form. Through scenic, close attention to drug raids, expulsions, carceral detainment, humanitarian enclosures, surveillance, frisks, showers, and psychosocial rehabilitation, I come to bear on structural issues through both the overtly coercive and the more subtle “micro-physics” exerted on people, in attempts to reintegrate them into the idealized human. I engage structural violence not on a generalized, abstract level, but through a person-centered critical phenomenological approach that is attentive to the visceral, to the relays and points of contact between metaphysics (the ruling values and order of things) and the micro-physics of discipline (the subtle forms such values get inscribed unto the flesh).

A short, non-comprehensive chronology of the patios and the ollas downtown

Colombia has the second highest rate of internal displacement in the world. Over 10%, or 6 million people of the country’s entire population have been forcibly displaced due to violence. As of 2018, there were 80,472 officially reported people missing due to the country’s armed conflict.
Colombia, as one of the world’s most socioeconomically unequal countries in the world, where .04% of the population owns 46% of the countries fertile land, has left 37.5% of the total population living below the poverty line as of 2020. At least 4.5 million hectares of land have been either seized or abandoned during the five-decade long armed conflict.

At least 386,000 internally displaced persons are known to reside in Bogotá, which totals to 5% of the entire city’s population. The waves of forcible displacement often follow the trajectory of rural to urban, though errancy and exile appeared perpetual for many I came to meet who wander the country, the city, and back again as caminantes (“wayfarers”), troubling the fixed and singular rural to urban narrative. Others would move between the city’s ollas, the patios, and the ranks of paramilitary units in the countryside, or would enter demobilization programs only to join the ranks of organized crime in Bogotá’s ollas—a topsy-turvy journey seeming without end for many.

Since at least the late 18th century, the ruling elites of Bogotá have tried to corral and quarantine the forcibly displaced and others living on the streets into semi-enclosures and asylums throughout downtown. As in cities across the world, those living on the streets were relegated to the “place of the Leper of the medieval order and of the Mad of the monarchical.” During the late 18th and 19th centuries, people living on the streets of Bogotá were taken to asylums administrated by the Catholic church and their cases were legally overseen by the “Judge of the Poor,” (Juez de Pobres). The vanishing of the colonial Spanish reign after Colombia’s independence in 1810, and later, the War of A Thousand Days (1899-1902) at the end of the century, both generated the socioeconomic conditions that led many people toward exile and into the streets. Downtown Bogotá, where in 1887 the city’s main train station was built, La Sabana, would land many coming from the countryside directly at the city’s core.

In 1886, the governance of people living on the streets of Bogotá was legally transferred over from the Church to the state through treaty number 32 of this year, which created the “Refuge for
Beggars” (Refugio para Mendigos). Downtown where El Cartucho, the biggest drug market in Colombian history would later emerge, an asylum maintained by the Santa Ines church would continue to oversee people living on the streets from the turn of the 19th century. 

By the early 20th century, with the aid of the formation of the “Office for Beggars” (Oficina de Mendicidad) in 1914, there were over twenty-five institutions aimed to address and discipline people living on the streets and others in dire socioeconomic circumstance. By 1934, these services were compartmentalized by the Secretary of Governance and with the emergence of the Department of Hygiene. As in other parts of the world, the project of “civility” has always intertwined docility, hygiene, and governance.

In 1948, after the murder in downtown Bogotá of the presidential candidate and land reform advocate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the riots known as El Bogotazo took form. Many of the affluent proprietors left downtown towards the north of the city, allowing for the disinvestment of downtown and its material deterioration. El Bogotazo, is often considered the turning point that led to the Colombian armed conflict.

In 1960, with Treaty 78, the Administrative Department for Protection and Social Assistance (DAPAS) was founded and that called for greater responsibility from the state to attend to social problems. By 1968, DAPAS was transformed into the Administrative Department of Social Wellbeing (DABS), which is the predecessor of today’s social services, the Secretary of Social Integration (SDIS). Around this same time, with eighteen of the city’s twenty-four bus companies stationed in the downtown neighborhood of Santa Ines, many of those fleeing the Colombian armed conflict upon arrival in Bogota entered directly into this neighborhood.

Starting in the late 60s, amid economic disinvestment and geographic isolation due to main road constructions on all four fronts, the neighborhood of Santa Ines became a semi-enclosure for the dispossessed, and with the rise of the drug trade across Colombia, Santa Ines became El Cartucho,
a 17-block residential zone and drug market. Other smaller ollas adjacent to El Cartucho, including La 15 and La Favorita also began to take form downtown.

Yet the olla was not just a drug-market, it was also home, refuge, for those displaced and those living on the streets.

The leftover residue of cocaine production—cocaine paste-base—went from being a discarded byproduct to a major commodity economically accessible for people living on the streets and other impoverished communities. Known locally as bazuco, the leftover residue of cocaine changed the tempos of lives for those on the streets (See “A story of bazuco”). The formation of bazuco and the formation of the olla thus had a parallel relationship.

Padre Javier Nicoló, an Italian priest, founded IDIPRON, the District Institute for the Protection of Children and Youth in 1967. By 1971, he had already designed various patios for children and adolescents living on the streets, including La Once and Bosconia, which were inside El Cartucho. By the 1980s, a turn towards de-institutionalization and the release of people from asylums and other institutions took form, as the burden of care became more frequently outsourced to families and communities in attempts at “reintegration.” These attempts, like those in other countries facing conflict or disaster, were mediated by psychosocial intervention stemming from North American therapeutic ethos and social psychology models, centered on an approach of repairing the “dysfunctional” subject first popularized in the US. With the formation of the Secretary of Social Integration (SDIS) in 2006, DABS was replaced by SDIS, which maintains a psychosocial approach for addressing the lives of people living on the streets and struggling with drug use with the ultimate aim of “social integration.”

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The scenes that follow disrupt this chronological mode of telling. As I conjure people’s experience of place and history, the various historical junctures relayed often return or converge into
something that belongs not to compartmentalized, linear historical time, but to the revelatory intensity of the felt instant. The established truths and historical data points noted here, in the pages that follow, belong not so much to the singularity of the event, but to its phantasmatic and rippled protractions across time. My focus throughout is on the convoluted experience of history where multiple temporalities belong to the immediacy of the “now-time.” What follows in Part One are certain traces and shards of the constellation of history as something felt and lived, where the phenomenal and the phantasmal intermingle. My approach to historiographic telling is closer to Walter Benjamin’s theses of history, where multiple events consolidate as an ephemeral shock to the senses before receding back into the depths of the beyond.

**Form and approach**

The writing here divests from the singular narrative and argumentative tonality of social suffering through which the lives of people living amid violence or extreme socioeconomic insecurity are conventionally written from. The scenes conjured consist of polyvalent and convoluted hues. They explore the contradictory affective tonalities that contour much of the experiences for those living on the streets, such that suffering and states of ecstasy mutually affirm one another, or the lines between subjection and deliberately breaking from oneself come to blur. These are no doubt situations of impossibility, where what can be considered self-destructive is also simultaneously life-affirmative.

To engage such worlds, where self-destruction and abjection are coupled with modes of loss and exit from oneself that are desired, requires first bracketing the many values of liberal humanism. To explore situations of impossibility, situations that are simultaneously both self-destructive and life-affirmative requires holding in abeyance the often unquestioned virtue that life itself, its maintenance and continuity, is the ultimate good. Here, I follow Lisa Stevenson’s assertion that “presuming the value of life, staging it as the ultimate good, could be as dangerous as negating it.” To engage “life”
on people’s own terms, requires learning to disentangle what horizons we desire and want them to follow, from how they come to bear on their own lives.\textsuperscript{71}

Additionally, \textit{La Olla y Los Patios} situates the \textit{ollas} and the \textit{patios} in relation to the larger warfare and political conditions unfurling throughout Colombia. Though this work could certainly be read as providing purview to the urbanization of the Colombian armed conflict, I am less interested in thinking of these places as microcosms that refract that larger whole on a smaller scale, or of using these places as case-studies supporting meta-framings that try to explain away Colombia’s legacies of violence. By engaging violence directly, my work highlights the myriad forms violence can take, as well as to demonstrate how various scales of violence converge, including the structural, the interpersonal, and their phantasmatic protractions across time and place. Writing violence has many perils, including its discursive reproduction. Yet the belief that through elision one can step “outside of violence,”\textsuperscript{72} or that by sideling violence, one can corral oneself and others from the general conditions of violence in the world, appears equally as problematic.

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This work is informed by preliminary field research in downtown Bogotá in the summer months of 2012-2015 and long-term fieldwork conducted through twenty-four months of consecutive ethnographic and archival research between 2016 and 2017.

Through this period, with the support of the Bogotá mayor’s Secretary of Social Integration, I conducted hundreds of interviews in both the streets and inside the city’s \textit{patios}. However, this work centers on a smaller number of people for whom I was able to follow inside the city’s services or back into the streets of downtown Bogotá. Some vanished sometime during my fieldwork period. My relationships with these smaller number of people were facilitated by the fact that they were interned in long-term institutional centers that yielded to consistent engagement. I would not use the social science term “rapport” to describe the texture of these relations, as such term presumes a harmonious
mode of affinity between ethnographer and research participants after a certain period. These relations were, at least with some participants, generally murky and fraught.

*La Olla y Los Patios* is a polyvocal ethnography where multiple subjects caught up between the drug markets and rehab centers enter and exit the frame. There are some people like Duván, Stella, Fernanda, Hecho, Daniel and Esteban whose presence is felt more than others. This is partly based on my more sustainable relation with them as well as their tenacious skills as storytellers or beholders of social memory. My close (thought at times unstable) relation with Stella and Duván, given how high regarded and known they were by others from the *ollas*, partially allowed me to be more trusted by many others who inform this project or more explicitly enter the scenes that follow. I spent countless hours with Duván, Fernanda, Stella, and Hecho filming and conducting ethnographic work. The back-and-forth dialogue for months on end regarding their experiences in the *ollas*, while I accompanied them in and out the *patios* and into the streets, have sharpen my insights and informed the approach and modes of storytelling that I recount throughout this dissertation.

There are others like Cynthia, Juanita, Christian, Guillermo, and Aldo who heavily inform the pages that follow despite not consistently entering the scenes that follow. The existential weight of their lives lurks; their guidance in showing or gesturing to the worlds of the *ollas*, also scaffold and orient my arguments and modes of telling.

There are many others whose names I never knew, who I saw in passing, like those huffing glue, or those who playfully wander, those gambling until dawn, those asleep partially camouflaged below heaps of waste, or those cocooned on the medium finding shelter from the sun under a fleece hoodie, that have also guided and accompanied this project. At the beginning of each different section of the dissertation, I have placed a discordant list of human and nonhuman entities that course through the pages that follow for each part.
During the earlier stage of my fieldwork period, with the militarized takeover of El Bronx by the city’s administration, I followed the lives of people from El Bronx into the city’s *patios*, where many were taken. I documented drug raids, forcible expulsions, and people’s conditions of detainment when ejected from the city’s drug markets. The majority of this research was conducted in the city’s municipalities of Los Mártires, Santa Fé, and Puente Aranda downtown, though I also accompanied the city’s outreach and census workers across the rest of the city. I made use of my access to the Secretary of Social Integration’s services but did not rely entirely on them, as I also worked with many *parches* or groups of people on the streets who did not attend any of the services and others who were skeptical of the *patios* and of “rehabilitation” as a desirable horizon.

The *ollas* and the *patios* are heavily male-dominated spaces and within these spaces, there is certainly a disproportionately larger number of people who identify as men. Yet there’s still a substantial number of women who live on the streets, and who have managed to create a life alongside others. Within the *patios*, during my fieldwork period (2016-2017), the presence of women and trans populations did not accurately reflect the amount of women and trans people I came across on the streets. The city’s archives for the *patios* for the years 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2020, document an average of 1,472 people who identified as women that made use of the city’s services each year, which totals to only 12.37% of the total population served per year (11,897). When I prompted city officials about these gender-based discrepancies, they often retorted to gendered stereotypes, positing that women had better ways to repair ties with kin, and thus be accepted back at home much easier.

Though this dissertation does not explicitly focus on questions of gender and masculinity, I argue, however, that what these discrepancies within the *patios* come to gesture towards, is how the outreach targeting and approach is centered on the male figure. I gather that the male populations on the street are primarily targeted based on the “dangerous criminal” male figure trope, which frame them as posing a larger threat to the state. This prioritization on the male subject, is perhaps also
evident in the very design of the *patios*’ psychosocial rehabilitation, which was partially comprised of vocational training that centered on the inserting of people into labor opportunities mostly reserved for men, such as carpentry and electrical technical training.

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Even after working with people for months and reiterating my role as an anthropologist interested in writing about their lives, people living on the streets and in the *patios* would often address me as “*profe.*” *Profe* is what most people on the streets use for someone working with the state or with NGO’s. On the streets *profes* are the hundreds of outreach workers who roam the city. It is short for “professor” or “professional.” For people living on the streets, a *profe* can be deployed as both a term of endearment (*mi profe*) and as a distancing label for someone who works with institutions—Catholic soup kitchens, NGOs, and city’s outreach workers. When I realized that for many people living on the streets, the only two categories that made sense to label outsiders who engage them were the *rayas*, meaning the police, undercovers, and detectives, and the *profes*, I became more receptive to the latter label, though I made clear that I was an independent researcher and that aside from being voluntary, working or not working with me would not affect their relation with any institution or service.

Working with people living on the streets and struggling with drug use required different approaches as an ethnographer, from placing value on the immediacy of fieldwork, the ephemeral chances and encounters that would surge, to the more long-term sustained hanging out with people for months on end. For instance, thinking with states of loss, play, fugue, and dissociation required both engaging this world from a distance as an observer, in tandem with engaging with this world retrospectively with people who reflected on their lived experiences during rehab. The nuanced and culturally patterned modes of experience, the channeled intensities of watching others immersed in gambling and jovial acts, an attentiveness towards the corporeal and gestural, the intensities felt of people adrift, the spasmodic rhythms, the sporadic kinesis and oscillating tempos and mood, the
hallucinations and battles against states of possession, all became as important as what was said during other engagements that allowed for conversation.

Thinking with the lives of people whose modes of selfhood are not premised on stability, continuity or coherence warrants a conceptual and methodological approach that doesn’t assume a bounded identity. For this reason, my approach is centered on questions of sensation, the flesh, and the sensory experience of the drug market, the streets, and the patios in their ephemeral, immediate, and fractured ways. Drawing mostly from feminist, disability, and Black studies scholars, I take up the flesh and its sentience as the point of departure over the “body,” since the body as analytic presumes an integrity and completeness that is not already a given for many people. In turn, as Susan Betcher writes, “[w]hereas ‘body’ can invite the hallucinatory delusion of wholeness, and thus the temptation to believe in agential mastery and control, flesh . . . admits our exposure, our vulnerability one to another, if also to bios. Flesh, the dynamic and fluid physics of embodiment, cannot as easily as the body submit to transcendentalist metaphysics, to the logic of the one”. The writing in La Olla y Los Patios is thus visceral and demonstrative, attentive to the flesh “as the fluid physics of embodiment,” to the form and force of intensities that hold together a scene.

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I have chosen a narrative-oriented style with the aim of constructing what Michel Foucault would call an “experience book,” or a manuscript that aims to provide the reader with an experience that changes the angle and approach towards a given polemic, “[w]hich means that at the conclusion of the book we can establish new relationships with what was at issue.” Rather than carrying a core singular thesis forward, or positing a set of linear arguments, I am instead invested in bringing the reader through an experience that can alter the general terms of engagement. Through ethnographic scenes, my aim is to provide an alternative frame, a “redescription” following Robert Desjarlais, that engages the lives of people living on the streets outside the conventional humanitarian, clinical, and
political-economic models. Changing the terms of engagement, too, is literal, as I divest from the usual terms and analytics ("homeless," "addict," "lumpen," "marginality," "deviance," "recidivism," "social suffering," "bare life," "criminality," "the urban poor," "victims," "perpetrators") in order to see what images and relations cohere in their replacement. In order to maintain a storied mode of writing, my engagements with academic literature and other references, for the most part, will be found in the endnotes.

The writing that I take up is thus centered on sensuous storytelling, allegorical, and pictorial modes of thinking. I draw on Lisa Stevenson and others to garner an “imagistic anthropology” that can “express without formulating,” or show a world without explaining it away, or proposing a one-dimensional way to think through a problem. La Olla y Los Patios can be understood as a mosaic of scene-images. Each scene is meant to stand on its own, and home in on a particular sliver of people’s lived experiences as they shuttle between the ollas and the patios. I take up images as important for anthropology in their capacity to hold incommensurate aspects of a scene within the same frame without needing synthetic resolution. The image, as figure for thought, we might say, is “anti-dialectical” in its capacity to not try to resolve incommensurability and contradiction. In turn, thinking through the many impossible quandaries this work takes up necessitates the work of images. Though I am drawing on a lot of physical images, film, photographic, archival, and sound-images, I have omitted most of this material and thus I am referring here to mostly to their reconfigurations as “thought-images,” or ethnographic “scene-images.” Each section of La Olla y Los Patios begins with a discordant cluster of one-liner jottings from my fieldnotes and other jottings. They operate more as thought-images of what has informed the section that follows, than they do as short sentences with fixed meaning. The few photographic images shared throughout were all taken by me and to suspend their domestication into the formulaic and explanatory, they are left without captions.
To reckon with the limits of reason, knowledge, the limits of ethnography and archival research, as I do in this project, also required the capaciousness of images to conjure that which could not be known for sure. As reconstructions of worlds people can only gesture towards or that I myself could never know, through an attention to absence, traces, minor cues, and my own imaginative travel, some of the scene-images are what following Saidiya Hartman, we may call a “critical fabulation”. Here is as much about historical retrieval, as it is about attempting to track the phantasmatic in its immediacy, in its flighty movements that exude linear reasoning. What Robert Desjarlais calls a “phantasmography.” I engage people’s modes of storytelling and phantasmatic ruminations not based on their inherent truth-value or verifiability, but in terms of how they may gesture towards the indeterminacies and intensities of their lived world. A world where violence, as the general or atmospheric state of things, disrupts the categorical and logical order of things.

Overview

Part One, La Olla, is a critical fabulation of Colombia’s most notorious drug markets, El Cartucho and its annex, El Bronx. I draw on its former inhabitants’ practices of remembrance through cartographic methods, improvised reenactments, and participatory walkthroughs. I also draw on my own audiovisual and photographic capture alongside archival research and secondary audiovisual sources, including news specials, documentaries, and online video footage. I demonstrate how in the thick of uncertainty, there’s an attention to the minor frequencies of daily living which require alternative ways of listening, seeing, and perceiving. People, for instance, avail to histories that reverberate and are felt through the spectral. People forge intimacies, communication with vermin and spirits, or with graffiti’s that return the gaze. Sustenance in a world of continual threat requires tearing from the coherence of stable subjectivity and linear reasoning. Coherence is replaced by concatenation—often begetting a monadic world of continuity where things don’t add up, yet somehow, they are all connected.
Through an elaborate attention to the specificities of the *ollas*, their spatial arrangements, modes of surveillance and governance, their affective and *phantasmographic* geographies, their modes of sociality with human and nonhuman forces, I demonstrate how the *olla* is a place of heterogenous, incommensurate, and transgressive elements that defy any attempt at cartographic mastery. Both “El Cartucho” and “El Bronx” begin with maps only to unmake them throughout, or to disrupt their integrity, as by the end of each section, the scenes illustrated unmoor the presumed stability of the spatial coordinates that the maps rely on. The scenes that are conjured describe the *olla* as what following Katherine McKittrick we may call a place of *demonic grounds*. The term *demonic* is used in its double sense, as a “defiled” place saturated with the dead, the occult, the sacred, and the satanic, and in the terms’ mathematics connotation, as a zone mired with uncertainty and a “nondeterministic schema” hinged on its incommensurate and irreducible particularities. Along with its transgressive charge, the *olla*’s labyrinthine qualities, described through scenic imagery, resonate with what others describe as a *heterotopia*, or a heterogenous place, that “claws and gnaws at us,” defying full legibility or apprehension.

The section “El Cartucho,” provides a contrapuntal historiography where, in the face of state-administered historical elision of this place, the past cannot be declared dead or surpassed, but instead ripples and surges across time and felt as a tension, often at the limits of the barely perceptible. My focus is on the flesh, sensation, and the mnemonic charges that are brought forth from one’s return to place.

In “El Bronx,” the scenes extend this comingling between history and the flesh, the dead and the alive, by illustrating a world functionally at odds where etic categorical dyads falter. In this section, death and life, as locally culturally patterned conceptions, intermingle and take hybrid forms as the death-in-life and the life-in-death. Through unstable images of a world in flux, the scenes conjure a sense of widely diffused mutable forces that populate “beings,” “objects,” and place, while turning
distinctions between disparate phenomena on their head. Following a world of concatenation, where the “agency” of *who or what is doing what to whom*\(^2\) gets blurred, the writing gets “lost in its object”\(^4\) of pursuit.

Part One *La Olla* is also a story of forcible displacement and exodus, documenting what people on the streets referred to as the *vuelo de locos*, “the flight of the folly,” or their continual relocation by state, paramilitary, and organized crime entities. Through the interludes, El Matadero and Plaza España, this section charts the state of continual warfare and militarization that shaped people’s trajectories from El Cartucho, to La Carrilera (a railroad alleyway), to El Matadero (a former butcher-shop-turned-humanitarian-enclosure), to El Bronx, and finally to Plaza España (a commerce plaza), before many were brought into *los patios*.

The following section *EXIT* is a vignette-based, focused lens, on ways of being and relating to one another outside of the socially accepted ideals of the “human.” It is thus a digressive segue way that by considering how the self is made and unmade, connects Part One on *las ollas*, the drug markets with Part Two on *los patios*, the rehab centers. This section can also be considered as a mosaic of scenes concerned with questions of selfhood and kinesis. Kinesis both as in proprioception, or movement in physical space, and as in “interior kinesis,” the incessant movement in and out of conscious experience found in phantasmatic travel and states of fugue.\(^5\) Through these scenes of errant kinesis: spatial, visceral, and phantasmagoric movements, alongside the animate qualities of nonhuman entities, are brought to the fore. Fleshing out these limit-experiences that disrupt the stability and continuity of selfhood, are often overwhelming situations that the self cannot fully experience or know. In turn, limit-experiences prompt narrative challenges. I draw on the immediacy of encounters, as well as on fabulatory practices, that attempt to import the vitality of encounters found at the limits of experience in order to depict how selfhood is made and unmade.\(^6\) Drug use, the erotic, demonic possession, friendship, objects that teem with momentary charge, the rush of gambling, the joviality and bliss of
the nocturnal, the grueling experience of withdrawal, the troubling experience of coming back home
to a family altar that declared you dead, through disparate scenes, are taken up in their singularity.

Part Two, *Los Patios*, is a critical phenomenological approach to the experience of drug rehab
in the *patios*, exploring the lived dimension of social policy and how the metaphysical ideals of the
“human” come to dictate the local valuation of life. As a compilation of scenes, *Los Patios* questions
the “psychosocial” approach and its incommensurability in addressing the culturally patterned
experience of drug use in Bogotá, an experience understood in relation to demonic possession and
other coterminous attachments related to the lived world of the *olla*. I focus on the “micro-physics”
of violence that play out in rehabilitation. The violence of humanization introduced earlier, is brought
back to fore in these scenes. Through a person-centered approach, I home in on the lives certain
participants who show the challenges they face trying to get better, while also knowing that, in a
context of deeply lacerated kin ties and high unemployment, the streets can only be temporarily
defered.

I close *Los Patios* with an epilogue scene on people’s graduation at the mayor’s office. The
scene, in the space between the Plaza Bolivar Square and the Third Millennium Park (formerly El
Cartucho, where *La Olla y Los Patios* begins), is not a conclusive ending but a rumination on the horizon
of indeterminacy for many exiting *los patios*.

I close out *La Olla y Los Patios* with a conclusion that demonstrates the current state of El
Bronx through a final ethnographic scene. Later, I provide some closing ruminations on how people’s
experience of violence and place in the *ollas*, invite alternative considerations for how violence could
also be engaged outside of the event/aftermath paradigms in anthropology. Lastly, I provide some
brief summarizations of some of the core arguments expressed in *La Olla y Los Patios* through its
ethnographic scenes and consider how the vast range of impersonal forces that course through
people's lives call for alternative engagements for understanding the formations of selfhood and history outside the prominent discourses of “agency” and the volitional subject.
Part One: *La Olla*

We are summoned by place into entanglements with each other and with nonhumans, whether in conflict or cooperation or both, as all of us, willy-nilly, live in coexistence with multiple others through intricate relations that define our very way of being.

Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics* ¹
Fieldnotes

opacity, its depth
fire pits, muddled vision, and tactile sounds as compasses
silenced rivers under the concrete
children’s homework on sacks of potatoes
the backsplash of puddle water
hip-hop, vallenato, and rancheras
sure-shots connecting with light posts
the conviviality of cats, gnomes, and spirits
baroque ornaments and boxes of matchsticks
ironmongeries and recycling warehouses
laughter
trash bags as bed sheets; trash bags as coffins
cold bodies asleep next to colder blue bodies in el Container

El Cartucho

boxer glue and fiery eyes
congressman lusting for the abject
rivers as cemeteries
faded wallet-size portrait photographs
infants teething in brothels
#2 ball point pens and aluminum foil
Italian priests immune to violence
oily hair and fidgety bodies
the internally displaced in Bolivariano busses
the hands that heal
ninja turtles in helicopters
screams from the asylum and their sonic reverberations across time

the density of place and memory
El Cartucho/Barrio Santa Ines
Duván

Stella

Fernanda

Malandro’s Ghost

Tito

The Ekeko Doll

Juan

Muñecos

Echo el Desecho A.K.A. Hecho

Arturo

Marcos

The Ghost of Gaitán

Don N

Kuru

The Ninja Turtles

Mayor Peñalosa

The Soldados (armed forces)

G., The City Official

Doña S

Dario

The Congressman

El Loco Calderón

Father Nicolo

Bayona
He has survived to tell. Being in place with him communicates a very different sense of the events than looking down on the model – it brings the past up close, past as actually not past. Now. Here. And in many parts of the world, as we speak. I am suddenly rooted to place restored as practice. I too am part of this scenario now; I have accompanied him here. My eyes look straight down, mimetically rather than reflectively, through his downturned eyes. I do not see really; I imagine. I presence; I presence (as active verb).—Diana Taylor.

My three companions and I enter the Third Millennium Park from La Caracas avenue (14th), one of Bogotá’s most congested and notorious avenues. Today the public park has been closed. I approach one of the military police and ask why the park is cordoned, he tells me: “the president is in today,” referring to then-president Juan Manuel Santos, and more specifically an event 500 meters away from where we stand, in the Plaza Bolivar square where the Presidency and Palace of Justice are located. The police presence is a precautionary measure that serves as a reminder of the bombs that landed in both El Cartuco—the razed neighborhood where this park had been built—and the Plaza Bolivar square on August 7th of 2002, the day of the president’s inauguration ceremony. The bombs were intended to disrupt the inauguration of former Colombian president Alvaro Uribe; instead, they landed in El Cartuco, in houses run by organized crime networks—filled with drug users who live on the street. Places so close, yet — in so many ways — worlds apart.

I had met my three companions, Fernanda, Stella, and Duván, in the city’s patios, or rehabilitation centers for drug users living on the street some months before. The three had been brought to the patios in 2016 after a set of drug raids, and mass displacements of people on the streets of downtown had been executed by the city’s mayor. Today, we returned to the Third Millennium Park where they once lived, in order to film and recollect what life was like here before the park had been constructed at the turn of the 21st century. A visual reenactment of history through the mnemonic features of place and the improvised embodied re-tellings that sprout from one’s return to place. “Look Andrés, this part of Medicina Legal (the city morgue), was always here, that part there was later
added,” Fernanda says. Her experience of this place carries depth. She holds a certain purview of this park that exceeds what I could see before me. Buildings like the city’s morgue are material infrastructures that allude to the presence of an absence, to that which for Fernanda is still adjoined despite its demolition. El Cartucho’s remnants were a virtual sphere—that somewhere between perception and recollection—Fernanda can still grasp when strolling through the Third Millennium Park.

This section performs a sensory history of the neighborhood of El Cartucho in Bogotá, Colombia, one that enlivens and reconfigures archival material in relation to oral history. A history comprised of personal biographies and told through a set of ethnographic scenes and memory-images narrated to me by El Cartucho’s former inhabitants that give contour to non-linear histories that are at once personal and political. Scenes that “continually disrupt the possibility (or expose the impossibility) of linear time and progressive historical narrative.”1 Through detailed lived accounts and scenes of a place fraught with violence, abjection, domesticity, and a form of life which I argue was partly fostered and sustained by the imposed tempos of organized crime networks, this section provides a mosaic of life in El Cartucho.

Remembrance, demonstrates both how “history works,”2 and how violence and its protractions across time, can turn inescapable. Thinking through the practices of relatedness and remembrance that my interlocutors drew upon, it became clear how there was no stepping out of violence, no narrating around it. Here, in the Third Millennium Park, violence and its protractions across time sprung open intricate connections to forbidden and forgotten histories, brushed over by other waves of violence in the form of urban demolition and historical elision. The scene-images that follow, standing “midway between history and fairytale”3 conjure a psychogeography of place where acts of violence and their phantasmatic traces operate as the conduit for remembrance.
This section provides a contrapuntal historiography of El Cartucho, one whose analytical scope does not center strictly on its aftermath, or one that figures El Cartucho as a dead remnant, as rubble, or strictly as a case-study for understanding urban renewal and displacement. By centering on the affective intensities of place and how life was lived, I engage El Cartucho as a contemporary force with the potential to return and unfold from the depths of history and the virtual.

In the wake of El Cartucho’s memoricide, or state-administered historical elision of this neighborhood, this section prompts, how is El Cartucho sensed, felt, performed, and remembered by its former inhabitants?

The structure of this section is premised on the linkages between person and their inhabited world through the domain of orientation in both time (through the fractured and montaged temporalities of memory and lived experience) and space (through street and avenue coordinates, as well as the embodied rhythms of a place). Though it is perhaps loss and disorientation that informs the lived experience of El Cartucho, as much as orientation. While I rely on spatial coordinates to orient the reader, my attempts at organizing this psychogeography of El Cartucho ultimate exceed cartographic logics premised on mastery. The olla as a place, full of openings, labyrinths, and errant loopholes, requires yielding towards its incommensurability. It requires an understanding of the ollas as host to heterogenous entities that densify place to the point of epistemic exhaustion. El Cartucho, can be considered a heterotopia, a heterogenous place, that “claws and gnaws at us,” defying full legibility and apprehension. It is a place that “draws us out of ourselves,” or whose affective and ghostly intensities come to fracture the stability of those who make claims to fully knowing this place.
Sensory history

In the summer of 2017, I returned to a place that Duván, Estella, and Fernanda know too well. It is a place that no longer remains as it once was. Located in downtown Bogotá, and spanning between 6th street to 10th street, and between 10th Avenue and 14th, part of this territory is now known as the Third Millennium Park. In the early 1990s and 2000s, this used to be their place of refuge—their home. El Cartucho.

Since the park was closed, we began filming closer to La Caracas until the park opened back up. Sat on a bench, Duván stood in the center of the frame, his short grey hairs shining in the sun as the brisk wind made his windbreaker’s hood wave like a flag. I am positioned across from him on another bench sitting between Fernanda and Duván’s partner, Stella. We joke about how Duván looks great on camera (“como todo un rey!”). The camera is rolling and there are no instructions. Besides, Duván loves to lead the way and thoroughly explain about the intricacies of life on the streets; the staying alive amidst the terror of the police, organized crime groups, and other drug users. Based on where we are sitting, he is taken aback by the events that once happened here.

Standing next to Medicina Legal, he remembers his dead friend “Malandro” (the bad one), part of an organized crime band known as “Los Gomelos,” adding that wherever inferno he may be in now, he continues to cherish him, “las buenas pal’ malandro.” Stella interjects, “You are standing right below him.” My camera follows Stella’s eyes into Duván’s sneakers and the concrete and grass where they stand.

Since then, I’ve re-watched this footage endlessly. Perhaps trying to re-enter the scene. Stella’s remark in passing stuck with me, it resonated in more ways than the joke it was intended to be. A joke that carried the force of history and some truth-value nonetheless, since like others from El Cartucho, it was likely that Malandro’s corpse may still be buried below us. Stella’s comment in passing bore to the potential to un-wind threads of history.
El Cartucho was the biggest *olla*, or criminally organized open-air drug market in Colombian history. *Olla* means pot, perhaps an apt description for a place where intensity is always brewing, and where heists and cocaine paste base are cooked up. The place that the World Health Organization described in 1997 as the most dangerous street in Latin America,¹ where from 1997-99 an average of 40 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants was formally recorded.² A place where, as my interlocutors repeatedly commented: life wasn’t worth a matchstick (*la vida aquí no vale ni un fosforo*).

El Cartucho, formerly known as the neighborhood of Santa Ines, was also the bus station for many of the country’s main transportation companies and thus many Colombians fleeing violence in the second half of the 20th century, entered another war-torn landscape upon arrival—this one made up of worn concrete, brick tile roof baroque buildings, and dilapidated warehouses.³ Thus, the Colombian armed conflict generated many of the structural inequities and features that gave form to the *olla* as a particular kind of place in the city’s turbulent and socioeconomically stratified geography.

Home to 12,000 people living on the street, El Cartucho fostered a certain exposed relation to violence and murder to these inhabitants, while at the same time sheltering people from the violence that often awaited them outside El Cartucho.⁴ This place’s history is as dense as its labyrinth streets and buildings.

The openness of the green space and the silence of the park in an otherwise congested downtown just feels wrong. To sit in the Third Millennium Park is exhausting. I feel tangled by a web of thick affects and layers of history that are simply too much to bear. My companions, appearing caught up in an unbearable silence would make refrains to the rest of the group here and there: “This area reminds me of Horacio he would always play here, by the age of eight, he was already known as a serious killer and for piercing another child’s heart,”… “I once ran through all this zone jumping roofs and being chased by the *tomibos* (police) during a raid.” We’d fade back into silence absorbing the weight of words and the strange aura of a demolished place. An overload of images, histories, and the omnipresence of violence and its lingering aftermaths take precedence here.⁵ They occupy the
openness and silence of this place. Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the seventeen-block neighborhood and its sixty-three houses and buildings had been razed and transformed into this park as part of the larger ongoing urban development projects the city had begun downtown.⁶

Sitting with my interlocutors, and later virtually returning through the moving image, it became clear that no bulldozer or militarized intervention could efface what once was and continues to be. El Cartucho continues to be palpably sensed; a web of virtual potentialities gaining force as people return to their former place of inhabitance. In what follows, I aim to re-enter these scenes in order to illustrate the traction of social memory and the force of embodied history.
Consultations

Duván is sitting on the park’s bench, looking at the floor where the remains of his friend Malandro may lie beneath, or not. It is the being *here* that brings forth certain memories about his friend Malandro. The weight of Stella’s comments regarding Malandro gains new intensities as they all appear arrested by a moving shadowy figure heading our direction. Like a godly halo, the figure’s silhouette erects out of the rays of sun. The person becomes more discernible once closer to us. It is one of the park’s workers transporting piles of mowed grass in black plastic bags on a cart. Fernanda comments while laughing, “look, just how calm that guy is walking … is how calm people would walk their cart on their way to dump the corpse.” Duván adds, “those plastic bags have been around since the beginning.” Their thickness, size, and durability make them constitutive of the material culture of violence in El Cartucho.

Continuing his re-enactment, Duván begins to explain how in this corner of *Medicina Legal*, Malandro would drop off the corpses of his victims. He recalls the first time he met Malandro, the notorious Cartucho resident whose reputation preceded his presence. “From the first time he met me,” Duván adds, “Malandro was fond of me because I had shown him that I can stand tough” (*me paraba duro*). He then proceeded to tells us that him and his rival “Fiasco,” *se encendieron a chuzo* or “lit up” in a knife fight that lasted over an hour in La Reja over a dice game. Malandro handed Duván his personal knife, “the knife was alive! I felt a shock when it was handed it to me,” says Duván.

Hands crossed, Malandro stared admiring Duván’s swift hands and movements that evaded Fiasco’s knife blows.

Located between 8th and 9th street with 11th avenue, La Reja was Malandro’s turf in El Cartucho. It was a huge *olla*. At the entrance stood a small altar to cherish the saints. Towards the back, Malandro kept an *Ekeko*, a mythical doll popular in Peru and other Andean countries to bring forth prosperity. Malandro’s *Ekeko* sported the traditional Colombian countryside *Paisa* apparel and
pouch. A thick mustache over his lips and a sombrero sat atop of his round face. “I would feel that that Ekeko could look into my soul—and into my being. Yeaaa…It was a strange sensation,” Duván tells us. Fernanda laughs in agreement and adds, “porque era un muñeco maléfico,” because it was a doll of malevolence. Building on Fernanda’s comment, Stella prompts Duván: “Can’t you see? it was a cursed doll” (un muñeco rezado). Both Fernanda and Stella were perplexed as to why Duván was spending so much time in trying to articulate to the camera, what was obvious to them both: dolls can be bewitched and malevolent.

Malandro’s violent killings were mostly “pre-meditated.” Not only in the judicial sense of the term, necessarily. Duván performs for us Malandro’s trance of meditation with the Ekeko who granted the power to kill, and who could foresee events. The Ekeko meditations would answer Malandro’s callings. He would place a cigarette at the tip of the Ekeko’s bottom lip and consult with him. Query about the drug business, and before every killing, he would consult with the Ekeko who appeared to license transgression. “If the Ekeko would smoke the cigarette, Malandro can kill his victim. If the cigarette went out on its own, Malandro would not go through with the killing…,” Duván remarks. El Cartucho’s stray cats who moved through the ollas rooftops were somehow also part of Malandro’s consultations. If they decided to come down while the Ekeko was smoking this was also taken into consideration in the repertoire of signs of confirmation. The occult seemed to work through its own chains of signification.

Duván recalls the other systematic and ritualized features of Malandro’s enactment of violence. Despite the quotidian quality of knife-fights, they would still spring crowds that would encircle the people fighting in El Cartucho. People chanting, swaying back and forth through mimesis, as they followed every swing back and forth waiting to witness the moment of death as though there was something to gain from it.
As I continue to record, Duván reenacts Malandro’s procedures, fleshing out further a choreography of violence and the occult. “He would always kill them the same way, looking into their eyes and stabbing them in the heart. When they were dead, he would twist his knife into the corpse and take their heart out.” Once the heart was withdrawn, Malandro would raise his victim’s heart with both hands above his head. Looking into the crowd of the olla he ran, Malandro would lick the heart’s blood and then place it close to his own heart. “The cats would never come down to La Reja unless the Ekeko were smoking,” Duván adds, digressing back to his previous story.

“Malandro would use his bigger knife,” says Duván while shifting gears, size-ing it for us by pointing to his wrist with his other hand. With this knife, “Malandro would not cut victims into small pieces like others would. He would first cut into his jugular and would leave the corpse near a ditch to drain out the corpse (desangrar). He would then cut into both of his inner thighs so as to disarticulate the tendons.” This process was done in the armpit, neck and knee areas, “until the corpse folded like luggage, right Stella?” Stella slowly nods in agreement. Once the muñeco, or dummy (used colloquially to mean corpse), was folded like a “nice package” (paquete bonito), Malandro would place him in those thick black garbage bags. When he was done, he would enter into prayer with the saints at the front of the olla and the Ekeko towards the back.

The park’s worker laps around us again. The cart slowly rotates. I catch myself adrift staring into the cart, perhaps taken elsewhere by Duván’s voice and reference to these bags. I continue recording.

“I would always say that no one in El Cartucho, took more care of their cart than Malandro!” Duván adds. “El carro funebre,” the hearse, Fernanda recalls. A well-maintained cart that even had thick air tires—as opposed to the usual thin and loud rubber wheels that texture the city’s acoustics. Malandro would exit his olla with the corpse bundled into his carro funebre, but not before telling the
campanero or the olla’s security: “pilas hijueputa, no se vayan meter los rayas o le hago lo de este!”, careful, son-of-a-bitch, don’t let the cops in, or I’ll do you like him!

As passers-by stare, Duván continues reenacting, fusing Malandro’s character with his, those times, with now.

Malandro would walk with no worries with the cart towards Medicina Legal, where we currently stand. Duván imitates Malandro’s cheerful walk with his cart and directs our attention towards 8th street where now the beginning of the park’s basketball court stands. “Where you see that post at,” Duván adds, “huge piles of garbage would accumulate, and every day, the trashman would find one or two muñecos.”

On our way out of the park towards La Caracas, we pass by the worker again, he smiles politely at us, while Duván and others break out laughing, staring at the “hearse.”
Tetricus

I first met Tito in one of the city’s patios or rehab centers in 2017 and would later follow him back into the streets. His first night in El Cartucho back in the late ’90s, he recalls entering the dense serpentine-like paths of El Cartucho from 10th avenue and 8th street. He roams deeper into its depths. As a newcomer standing on a corner after much wandering, he gets caught in the wrong place at the wrong time and gets mistaken for a suspect on the run for breaking into a house. A crime boss takes him away to one of the torture rooms, an intense man with a “psychopathic” gaze that’s hard to look back at. Tito is now tied up and at the mercy of this man and his protruding knife.

Words are left unspoken, communication channeled instead through affective intensity and the pulsing anticipation of violence. Noses inches apart from one another, Tito is met with a strike in his rib cage and later his chest. After every blow, the man would laugh “demonically.” “My body turned cold,” Tito says to me. The man would put the knife down every few minutes in between blows to sniff cocaine from his house key. The chilling sound of a key chain dangling became the induction of the intermediary resting phases between blows for Tito. Each cocaine key “bump” fueling the man’s flaming gaze and demonic laughter; an accruing of excess intensity harnessed into subsequent knife blows. The experience of time changed as an hour patterned with such rhythms felt eternal for Tito. Temporality turned elastic; instants began to stretch towards the infinite. An hour or so went by, and Tito is released, his hands tied above his head now free to dangle. Tito looks down at his body realizing that the knife blows never penetrated his skin as they must have been executed with the back end of the knife.

The night arrived during his abysmal experience and stepping out, he now had to navigate El Cartucho at night for the first time. Still troubled by what he just endured, he now had to find refuge without a single cent to his possession. Walking carefully through a field of bodies on the ground and
imperceptible to the eye he had to find a way to sneak into an *olla* where he would feel safer passing the night, without any income to buy the *trabas*—the price of admission to score refuge.

He stands close by but not too close from the *campaneros*, organized crime’s lookouts at the door, finding safety from their surveillance optics in the pitch of night—waiting for the moment a group of bodies rush in so as to join them in dissimulation (*pa’ entrar disimuladamente*). Tito manages to trespass his way into the *olla* and claims the first empty spot he sees pretending to be asleep amid the mass of bodies smoking uncontrollably. Tito tells me, “each *olla* is *tetrica*, each *olla* has its own demon, its own devil.” The word *tetrica* derives from the Latin *tetricus* and comes to mean something dismal and funereal, a kind of haunted atmosphere one is encumbered by. Resting in the fetal position in a cluster of “greasy” bodies, Tito remains petrified unable to fall asleep amid the thicket of smoke, the indistinct chatter, and the commotion from being caught amid El Cartucho’s terror and *tetrico* atmospherics. “What I’ll never forget,” Tito tells me, “is trying to fall asleep in that room with all those bodies passing air, the room felt possessed.”
Acclimating

To enter El Cartucho required certain modes of attention to its shapeshifting atmospheres: from being subjected to the hyper-surveillance by organized crime staff; to in contrary, recede, and become subjected to the depths of darkness at night—opacity operating like another form of governance, fixing people into clusters of paranoia and paralysis (induced in tandem with bazuco or cocaine-paste binges).

As a place, El Cartucho bore a certain spatiotemporal complexity that required fine attunement to its narrowness, density and labyrinth-like qualities (tunnels, canalled rivers, dead-end streets, hidden rooftop escape routes), and its oscillating rhythms (carnivalesque tempos, to militarized encroachment and drug raids, to the more relaxing flow of leisure and play). A cultivation of attention and an alerted sensorium proved fundamental for inhabiting El Cartucho.

Thus, to enter El Cartucho for the first time; to be shocked into place and its assemblage relations was often an unforgettable experience for my interlocutors. A kind of rites of passage where people come to reconsider their personal limits: bodily, moral, existential; a limit-experience, we might say.
Limit-experiences

Juan is in his mid-thirties. We had met in the city’s *patios*, where he is characterized as a long-time dweller. He had been attending many of the city’s services since he was a child living on the streets. Juan first arrived in Bogotá in the early ’90s with his twin brother as street children fleeing domestic abuse from their home in Villavicencio, Colombia. Like many others fleeing violence in the countryside whether from the armed conflict or domestic, Juan and his brother’s first stop in the city was El Cartucho where life was known to be cheaper.

Too scared to enter El Cartucho’s depths, Juan and his brother sought to hang out and find rest in its margins. From the congested Caracas avenue (14th) and what could be considered El Cartucho’s main entrance, 9th street, Juan and his brother set themselves up amid a couple dozens of bodies and the piles of garbage they sorted through in El Cartucho’s main garbage dump known as El Container, a long white metal container.

People would find a pile to rest in, establishing possession of the discarded material they would recycle and sell the next day. Juan tells me he would never forget his first night at the banks of El Cartucho in El Container. Waking up the following morning half asleep and stretching his arms, his hand comes in contact with another hand—soiled in grease and darkened by dirt and rubbish—like his. He figured it was his brother who he slept next to. Juan begins to tap this hand so as to wake his brother up.

The tactile message received no correspondence.

Juan then gets up to shake his brother into wakefulness. As he gets up and removes the trash piles used as bed sheets, he realizes that the hand so close to him while asleep, doesn’t belong to his brother. It belonged instead to a *muñeco*, he tells me. A corpse.

El Container, the biggest trash pit in El Cartucho, was notorious for being people’s last stop (alongside *Medicina Legal*). “Every day, one would find one or two *muñecos* in El Container, at least,” a
man who sometimes called himself “Echo el Desecho” once told me. Others, like Arturo, a man in his fifties, also spoke of El Container as the site where the desecharable or the disposable material converge with the alive and the dead.¹

Documenting people’s lives on the streets of Bogotá, especially in the ollas like El Cartucho, it become evident that such forms of life were premised on a co-inhabitation with violence, and its materiality. Common refrains often heard about El Cartucho was that there was “no law,” and that the only duty one had, was to make sure you either discard the corpse yourself or pay someone to do it for you. This is how many people made do.² Take for instance, Echo el Desecho who lived in El Cartucho for over two decades, and who came to regard himself as an “ambulance” that much like the other ambulances in Colombia, arrived only when it’s too late, serving more as a funerary hearse. “I’d go around seeing what needed to be done and could score two bichas for taking the body out to El Container or to La Sexta (6th street across El Cartucho),” he once told me.

Back in the 90’s people on the streets with access to El Cartucho could purchase a bicha (a paper sack of bazuco) for 200 Colombian pesos almost half what they would cost outside in the rest of the city.³ Many came initially on an errand to purchase but ended up overstaying another twenty years or so. Marcos, who was displaced from the countryside first entered El Cartucho to buy bazuco. In between El Container’s entrance and the infamous street in El Cartucho known as El Callejon de la Muerte (the street of death), on a side corridor sat Marcos after purchasing. Preparing his pistolo, a cigarette laced with bazuco—the former way bazuco was consumed prior to the emergence of the handmade pipe in the mid ’90s—and ready to rest for the day as the sun came down, he joined other drug users who leaned their backs on the wall.

A young woman sat by herself on her own trip a few inches from Marcos (“en su propio vuelo”). Zoning in and out, arrested by his own serenity and inner dialogue he sees two young men stumbling
through the corridor where many sat reclined. They asked the lady next to him for a match to light their *bazuco*.

She didn’t have one and in response, they shot her in the head from close range. “They kept walking like nothing happened.”

Marcos recalls the reverberations felt through the wall from the shots entering her head from so close. The wall was a prosthesis for Marcos, directly transmitting an impact—from her head, to the wall, to his. A lingering sound and haptic memory that introduced Marcos to El Cartucho. A memory that lives with him today, thirty years later. This transmission of vibrancy for Marcos has become a sound-image, an image whose frequency warrants a responsibility to keep the story of the murdered woman whose name he never knew alive in her aftermath. She was there, she lived, and someone must keep that fact alive.

For many I came to know from El Cartucho, the same set of events appeared to occur day and night producing a feeling of temporal dissonance, like a *déjà vu* or the witnessing of a scene showcased on replay mode: matchsticks aren’t lit up, so bodies are; people are slumped, killed in front of others and non-response becomes response, only the people involved—etched out of their singularities—come to change. Marcos once argued that the senseless violence was premised on the massive influx of the forcibly displaced who were at the mercy of more seasoned street dwellers and the organized crime *ganchos* or bands, whom “never controlled the violence” in El Cartucho. *Violence always took an impersonal tone*. It “just happened.”

Colombia’s armed conflict thus provided people with nowhere to go but El Cartucho. Many people whose names we never knew, who arrived fleeing violence from the countryside, ended up below El Cartucho.

Might the historical formation of *la olla* then be an annex—a continuation of the armed conflict playing out in the countryside? Or did the armed conflict take off from the pavement of downtown
Bogotá and boomerang its way back? I want to reconsider the formation of *la olla* in relation to the rippling effects of what is known as *El Bogotazo*. The 1948 revolt that took the city and later the country by storm when leftist, land reform advocate, and Presidential candidate, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, laid shot dead in the asphalt three blocks away from what became El Cartucho. The event many consider the historical turning point for the emergence of leftist guerrilla forces and the Colombian armed conflict. In the decades that followed, the forcibly displaced in Bolivariano busses ended up stretched out close to where Gaitan once laid; his land reforms were never received and instead many came to join the asphalt that remembers, that *gathers*.
The collective sensorium

Plunged into the corner post of 8th street and 11th avenue, this is where you would most likely find Duván throughout the ‘90s. Gaining the trust of Don N and other big-time leaders from 11th avenue, he worked his way into the ranks of organized crime. Like many, his first job was working shifts as a campanero, a “look-out,” the surveillance security of the olla.

This was a high stakes job, if the police entered through your street, you could be killed or beaten. Being a campanero required a cultivation towards fine-grained detail. As people walked into your street: their posture, gait, how dirty their nails were, their clothes, their visage, their affect, and so on—needed to be scanned within seconds. A guesswork built on scanning surfaces for intentions and interiors, like some type of physiognomic revelation.

En el ping-pong, they called it. To be immersed in the scene, like eyes following a game of ping pong; a back-and-forth sensing that extended beyond the ocular. The system of campaneros formed a collective sensorium. Duván’s flesh worked like a relay point connected to others, all transmitting signals that kept the 17 blocks of El Cartucho attuned to the same rhythms.

The reenactments and sensuous stories of Duván (and other campaneros) foregrounded the vitality of place itself and the synchronies between their sensory organs and rhythms of the olla. The bodies of campaneros and the general mood of place in turn partially converged. They formed a collective sensorium—a social nervous system encrusted into the territory. To enter El Cartucho was to be sensed, watched, surveilled. To be bound to a “contact affective-aesthetic,” or an imposed tempo fostered by organized crime which often elicited an anxious mood.

Each entrance to El Cartucho had two campaneros posted on each corner. These campaneros were connected at all times to those at the other end of their street. Within the avenues where the different ganchos, or drug markets were positioned, each particular gancho was connected to the campaneros on all corners of the avenue. The campanero at each gancho was then relaying to the campanero
that followed at the door entrance of the gancho who served as a gatekeeper, and lastly, was himself linked to the soldados or billes, the armed forces of organized crime. A system of relays connecting bodies into a coherent horizontal structure.

The campaneros would often yell “Mario, Mario, Mario!” a code name shouted for suspected infiltrators and undercovers. The next line of campaneros would follow up and so on. The campaneros also kept a whistle strung to their necks for when detectives tried to bombard on foot.

Duván got the job by accident as him and Stella would live in Doña Rubiela’s residencies on 11th avenue and 8th and later across the street in the Peña residencies—the best hotel in El Cartucho, where Stella worked as a mucana, or housemaid.

He would hang in the corner of his residency on 11th avenue and 8th shooting dice and befriending the entire campana of his sector. A campana known to be “hot” since people fleeing police after robberies or homicides would enter to hideout in El Cartucho through the 10th avenue entrances. This campana was formerly run by Kuru, an older man known to recruit young campaneros who he’d lure into intimate relations. One day, Kuru borrowed a revolver from the band that controlled 6th street and 12th avenue, Gancho Amarillo, but was unable to return it as during a scuffle with the police the revolver was confiscated. One of the leaders of Gancho Amarillo, under the presumption that Kuru, was “singing” or snitching to the police, put out a hit for him. A couple days later, around 1pm, Kuru was shot down at the corner of his campana. “He got shot in the head multiple times, everyone thought he was dead. I still can’t believe how he got up and walked himself out of El Cartucho towards 10th Avenue and 6th,” Duván tells us.

Kuru died on the outskirts of El Cartucho.

Later that day, Don N and his entourage came down to the campana. Duván with one knee on the floor slinging dice on rugged concrete turns around as he hears Don N say: “we found our new campanero.” Don N was referring to Duván. “We’ve been watching you; you know how to move on
this street.” Duván tells him that this campana sector is “too hot” and people end up dead. After some pleading from Don N and afraid of any repercussions, Duván eventually accepts the position.

Taking over this campana would mean being directly in charge of one of the 10th avenue entrances into El Cartucho and to be in direct communication with the campanas connecting with 11th avenue and 6th; the campanas in charge of the other 10th avenue entrances closer to the food market plazas on 10th street, the campana on 12th avenue and 8th, and all of the ollas on his strip of 11th avenue: La Reja, La Ancheta, Donde Eva, to name a few.

Duván had a staff meeting and decided to keep most of Kuru’s former staff and hired two friends from the 11th street ollas. He retained most of the signs and gestures from the former staff. A hand swayed across the chest meant to not go forth on something; a hand combed across the back of the head meant that all was under control. Refrains like: “Mario rompepuertas!” signaled a special task force coming with the battering ram—meaning they were coming to break down into a specific olla—and had the means to do so; “Lobos del aire” or wolves of the air, gestured trespassing into El Cartucho via helicopters, or through the roofs from 10th avenue.

Looks, gestures, signals, whistles, and sounds made up the repertoire of signs that kept the collective sensorium—a “nervously nervous, nervous system”—onboard day and night.
Tempos

The collective sensorium also fostered la olla’s tempo through pitch, rhythm and voice. The jibaros (dealers) would stand in front of the ollas, or hybrid campanero/jibaro like Duván would chant refrains to lure customers into their product. Each jibaro had his own personalized commercial saying, repeated over and over throughout the shift. The kinetics of movement matched by fast-paced repetitive refrains often struck a rhythmic balance between movement and acoustics, thus keeping place, movement, and sound aligned through various synchronies, as well as cacophonies. Those walking la olla would enter a new acoustic field every few meters; a soundtrack on shuffle partially dictated by one’s kinesthetics.

Narises de todo lado
El perico mas buscado
Narises de todo lado
El perico mas buscado.

La traba que lo traba
La pega que lo pega
La traba que lo traba
La pega que pega.

Rocaaa…Rocaaa
Roca escama del abogado

El mayor perico del Guacalado!
The Ninja Turtles

It was ’93. Around the time Duván held down the campana on 11th avenue and 8th, and Pablo Escobar had been captured and killed. As for me, I was some blocks south of here in the municipality of Kennedy, where I spent my formative childhood years before departing for the US. You could probably find me with friends playing futbol outside of our housing apartment, or inside obsessed with the likes of Faustino Asprilla, El “Pibe” Valderrama, and Andrés Escobar, Colombia’s national team’s rising stars. If it wasn’t futbol, I was obsessed with the G.I. Joe soldiers my sister would send from Elizabeth, New Jersey. I would have them play out the Colombian armed conflict that was relayed on the news daily. I would play the FARC Guerrillas, bombarding encampments and making sounds of collision—re-enacting the structures of feeling that saturated Colombian life throughout the ‘90s. There was also Donatello, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael: The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. In that other era before Duván and I met, he had also been captivated by the Ninja Turtles. This is what they called the police’s special task force units that would bombard El Cartucho through urban warfare strategies; dressed in riot gear entering in gas spilling and high-pressure water shooting tanks and flying out from helicopters. Las Tortugas Ninjas. Duván and I were “captivated” by The Ninja Turtles quite differently.

In the early 90s, with years of experience in the ranks of organized crime and the drug trade, Duván is also a chemist. A man of many trades, campanero, perico slinger, arm robber, and now a bazuco cook. A magician in his trade who can turn one gram of pure cocaine into 99 grams of bazuco. Each gancho had their own trademark product with its own logo and unforgettable taste and smell, as well as potency. Gancho Amarillo (original) was known for having some of the best merca or merchandise in the whole city. Its sweet taste and aroma affirmed its customers of the merca’s trademark potency, which kept lines extending around the corner, having up to 15 open-air taquilleras or distributor stands serving at the same time. Once when Stella prompted Fernanda about Gancho Amarillo’s product,
Fernanda snapped her tongue on the roof of her mouth, recalling its taste and aroma as though the taste-memory had recreated its exquisite taste upon recollection.

Duván worked for their competitors, the people of 11th avenue. He mixed *bazuco* for the *ollas* of La Ancheta, an expansive house that covered half the block between 8th and 9th street. In the colonial era, La Ancheta was home to Spaniard elites. Worked to its limits, the house still showed signs of its glamor and architectural beauty, the massive interior courtyard; the wide spiral staircase leading to the second floor, and a “haunted” well once pumping fresh water from the San Francisco river. La Ancheta was known as a time-machine trapping ghostly forces within its premises. The screams of a female spirit made claims on those present from time to time; the apparitions of the devil widely referenced. And then there was the gnome, a small child-like shiny figure who timidly came out of the sunken well from time to time becoming scared of the alive as much as they were scared of him—moving with agility and leaving glimmer and rays of light in its wake. After never believing what people would say about the gnome of La Ancheta, he manifested in a playful manner before Stella. Duván, also came across the gnome when bagging up the *merca* in La Ancheta. “I could never look directly into his face, light always intercepted our eyes from connecting,” Duván tells me.

In the time of gnomes and Ninja Turtles, El Cartucho’s atmosphere was pressing: state forces looked for entry while ghostly forces lost in time sought for a way out. La Ancheta was the playing field.

“*Mario, Mario, Mario!*”

Whistles rang from *las campanas*. The ninja turtles had entered through the roofs off of 10th avenue. The *ollas* of 11th avenue and elsewhere rolled down their metal doors, locks propped in. *Taquilleras* grabbed the *merca* on a second’s notice and discombobulated bodies dispersed throughout the streets. The *soldados*, or soldiers of La Ancheta closed its door hoping to secure its premises. Each *olla* had their pre-designed escape routes and stash pots to hide the money and *merca* during these raids.
Duván was on the second floor as the calatero of La Ancheta or person in charge of knowing where the merca is stored and hidden.

His next step was to enter a hidden passageway in the attic. A tall and gorgeous taquillera, with the “nose of a witch,” sought to capitalize on the disorder, stuffing as much bills as she could in her fanny pack. Duván tried to get her through the hole and into the attic but the fanny pack wouldn’t let her through. She refused to let it go.

Hearing the rayas (the police) closing in through the roof, Duván left her on her own and jumped into an adjacent room, landing upright but into worn out wooden tile. His right foot sunk through the tile, followed by his left foot as he nestled a couple bombas, or sacks of 100 pre-packaged bags of bazuco on his arms. Six-inch rusty nails pierced through his ankles, leaving him anchored into the floor.

“I passed out from the impact.”
Violence and domesticity

Duván woke up in the San Juan de Dios hospital downtown with tubes stuck to his veins. Both legs marked with color pen lines. The doctors wasted no time and told him that they’ll have to cut his legs before the gangrene spreads to the upper body. Two blue pen lines circled inches below his knee served as the frame between a red line where the amputation would take place. “I cried and pleaded for them not to take my legs away, I rather die than to have no legs,” Duván tells me. The doctors tried to calm him down, but his anxiety had him on edge. *Doctors were not to be trusted.*

With my camera rolling, he demonstrates how he crawled out of bed; how he plucked away the needles from his arms, weaponizing them by holding them up close to his head. Duván writhes his way into the elevator with nothing but a thin hospital gown, half-exposed, and a pair of needles gripped nervously. Doctors, nurses, and security staff all at bay as he made his way out the door, crawling himself down to El Cartucho some 10 blocks away until a taxicab picked him up after feeling for him. The cab took him to 11th avenue and beeped the horn in front of Dario’s *olla* where his partner Stella and his friend Frutiño came down to get him. They tried to pay the cab, but he insisted that this was not necessary. Dario, the *olla’s* boss, yelled out to everyone and no one in particular “*pilas con el taxi gonorreas,*” securing that the taxi driver would make his way out of El Cartucho safely.

Frutiño’s mother-in-law, Doña S, was known to dabble with the occult and to be an expert in plant-based healing practices. She told Frutiño to head to the food plaza (on 11th and 10th street) and to bring her back some plants: *cola de raton* (peperomia); *calendula* (pot marigold), and *cola de caballo* (field horsetail). Doña Stella sent Stella to one of the pharmacies of El Cartucho where you could find all kinds of stolen and/or cheap expired pharmaceuticals, pain medications, ethanol alcohol, and a whole lot of *Rivotril* (Clonazepam).

Stella returned with some syringes and pain meds. Doña S injected the pain medication to Duván’s buttocks as he continued to weep. She cleaned the *calendula* and *cola de caballo* plants, leaving
them to soak in cold water with salt while she began to boil water in a huge dark pot. She mixed the
two plants into a blender and inserted the potion into the pot. Doña S looked deep into a Duván that
was distraught, held him by his hands and told him to trust in God. She told him that he must be
berraco, or tough, and before Duván could answer, she sunk both of his legs into the boiling hot pot.
Both Stella’s held Duván down, anchoring his legs into the boiling water as he shook restlessly while
sobbing.

These healing baths would go on three times a day, the water much hotter each day. After
four days, she began to add cola de raton to the potion so as to close up the wounds and scabs. Saltwater
shot into the wounds from Doña S’s mouth. The sounds of healing maxims and chants accrued
intensity as the days went on. In return for staying in Dario’s olla, Duván would mix up the merca and
bag it from his bedside all day. This went on for six months until the fever, and the lymph nodes the
size of tennis balls in his inner thighs and armpits gradually began to wane and finally, he was able to
walk again: a sign of the miraculous and the invisible forces that were palpably present in the life of
Duván, Stella, and others.

I want to consider how la olla paradoxically hones an air of violence and embracing domesticity,
the modes of care and healing—often forgotten from El Cartucho—that sustained many. For people
on the street, la olla is both tetrica or terrifyingly haunting, and deeply caring. For the tens of thousands
who passed through El Cartucho throughout the second half of the 20th century, this was one of the
only places where they could score refuge in a city that was ever so hostile to displaced, injured and
abjected bodies. For its residents, in the face of nowhere else to go, the olla was both welcoming and
uninhabitable. Kin relations carried oscillating gradients of both ruthlessness and generosity, loyalty
and betrayal. An impossible situation. The olla as a place-world gives form to a reality that is difficult
for some to sustain into thinking, an inexplicability that resists thought, and thus presents us with the
“difficulty of reality.”! Because, like Duván once told me: “duele matar a los que uno ama, pero toca.” At times, one simply has to kill loved ones—in spite of all.

The strength of love, care, and trust are not necessarily cumulative forces accrued through the trials and tribulations of social relations. Each new scene of life we’re presented with holds open new slates and stakes. Sharp turns hit us out of nowhere. Loving partners may try killing one another, and upon failed attempts, may attempt to return to camaraderie the next day amid different circumstances and scenes of life. Like Duván and Stella who tried killing one another a few times, but would also kill anyone if they got out of line with their beloved partner. In the Peña residences, with a Coca-Cola bottle loaded with ethanol and some matches, Stella almost took Duván out. Duván also brutally beat Stella down in hopes of killing her on 6th street, some days after he killed someone for kicking Stella in the stomach while pregnant.

An unpredictable and radical oscillation between a trust-no-one disposition and attempts at repair within kin relations seemed to guide the course of events. New circumstances and gut feelings established holds on the present moment and how best to reckon with the difficulties of reality. Sometimes stab wounds from interpersonal violence, and murder attempts have yet to finish scabbing while those involved are back sharing trabas in modes of reciprocal care. Other times, things drastically fell apart.
Lusting for abjection

Synchronized to the rhythms of labor, day and night Duván oversaw his *campana*, keeping an eye on those that keep their eyes on others, while also immersed into the worlds of play and fantasy: the dice games, the orgies, the drug use. As he got more comfortable with his new position, he wanted to take advantage of his access to 10th avenue and the oncoming traffic of curious wanderers outside looking in: the *gringo* tourists, the lawyers, councilman and politicians that worked feet away. He placed two *campaneros* outside 10th avenue as people from the “masked society” as he called it, passed by looking for *perico*, or cocaine.

The *campanero’s* tasks were to safely escort them to Duván’s main *campana* corner at the end of the street where he’d serve them, while the other remained on the lookout for both possible clients and police infiltrations: high-stakes guesswork. Duván figured he could make a lucrative killing out of his *campana* on 11th since, except for Don Julio’s recycling warehouse, the *ollas* on his strip didn’t sell *perico*, focusing instead on *bazuco*. *Perico* was sold down on 9th street closer to El Container in the ‘90s.

So Duván decided to head to PPC an *olla* that sold *perico* to buy some work and hustle out of his corner. He was already earning substantial money at that time. Every morning he’d go to each *olla* on 11th and collect the day’s security toll of 5,000 pesos ($1.60USD). Out of each 5,000, he’d keep 3,000 for himself and break off the rest for his staff. They’d also get commissions for escorting his drug clients into the *campana*.

As business blossomed and he kept his work as a *campanero* boss on top of any looming threats, Duván decided to build some *cambuches* or improvised shacks on his corner so as to be present even during his sleep and for other *campaneros* to also be there 24/7. He built three *cambuches* adjacent to one another. Made up wooden boards and suitable carpentry material, the *cambuches* were durable on the outside and comfortably spacious in the inside with bed mattresses and improvised wooden bed
frames anchored to the floor. The roofs were suitable for Bogotá’s endless rain as they were supplemented by soft top fabric covers found in Jeep Wranglers.

His clients from 10th avenue began to ask him if they could use the *cambuches* and would rent them from Duván for three-four hours on end. Picture congressman after a day’s work in the Palace of Justice walking down a few meters to 10th Avenue and into Duván’s *campana*. Loosening their tie, sniffing profusely and ordering *guaro*, short for *aguardiente*, a sugar-cane liquor to down their *perico* with. They were enthralled by their own perceptions of the “netherworld,” the possibility to experience for themselves and upon entrance—the shelter and grounds for self-exile a *cambuche* for people on the streets provided them with.

So much fascination from the outside, the quests for experiencing “the real,” “the authentic” world of the streets, to take flight in its surreality. “The underworld is the phantasmagoric paranoid construction of the ruling class.” Duván attended to their needs, “I need another half of *guaro* and bring me two girls,” the congressman shouted propping his head out of the *cambuche*. They only wanted *ñeras* or women from the street, “if they didn’t come dirty and smelling like shit, it’s like they wouldn’t get hard,” Duván tells me. The unmasking of “masked society,” the same politicians with the means that eventually destroyed El Cartucho would also lust for abject experiences—repulsion as attraction—they became Friday regulars in Duván’s *cambuche*.

Thus, it forces me consider the allure for transgression and an eroticism towards what is considered filth; the desire to be drenched in the stench of El Cartucho, and how the imagination about the so-called netherworld is fueled through *perico* binges and erotic flight. The abject as festive, as commodified.

There were other politicians, councilman, and people of the ruling class who came to temporarily lose themselves on the other,³ to eject themselves from the worlds of upright posture and into the joys mired in abjection. *Abject*: to eject oneself; to be torn from oneself, to unsettle the grounds
of stable subjectivity.\textsuperscript{4} Thus, let us think of abjection here not solely as the dire circumstances and the repugnance’s they propel, but through the transformative potential of such extremities—what they do to selves amid encounter.

In El Cartucho, a reinversion of value in abjective experiences, or in what was locally considered “social decomposition” became a \textit{happening}. The fulfilling of appetites fostered in the bourgeois imagination became the line of work. “I want what my wife at home \textit{can’t} give me,” a councilman told Duván while inside his \textit{cambuche}. 
Contrapuntal histories in the flesh

What sort of distance is travelled from event to its re-actualization, and from memory to its re-enactment? Why is it that memory gestures towards re-collection, when those memories can be as palpable as what is materially before us? That is, how does one reckon with the stuff of memory that never quite recedes, dissolves, or enfolds, and instead continuously actualizes in leaping instants found in daily life? These are the kind of memory-images that take a life of their own; like the impacts on a cranium transmitted through rippled vibrations on the olla’s wall and into one’s own—a frequency that is somehow still felt; the voice that is still there of a young girl abducted in El Cartucho.

On the other hand, there is also a hosting within corporeal experience of returning spectral apparitions that preceded your time in a particular place. Put otherwise, I’m referring to the history that gets regimented into place and transmitted in the form of borrowed images you never experienced but must now behold; carry forth through embodiment: an immemorial past. Because like Fernanda once told me: we’re not just fumones (drug users), we know this history in the flesh.” What is it like, then, to know history in and through the flesh?

Rather than to provide a linear and administrative history of El Cartucho, thus far, I’ve been interested instead in relaying images, scenes of life that cling to the flesh of bodies and places long way after. Thus, in the wake of El Cartucho’s attempted memoricide through urbanist warfare models premised on a tabula rasa approach to “space,” I want to evoke this history in and through the flesh that continues to live on. Through a combination of walkthroughs, performances, film recordings and mapping workshops, a compilation of scenes encountered made this history radiate in the present. Kinesthetic scenes that sought to illustrate how memory gets “pressed into place,” or put differently, make present what for long-time dwellers is already there.

Evoking this history of the flesh, my companions offered a montage of memory-images: the food plaza of El Cartucho off of 11th Avenue, a vibrant ambiance where you could score anything
from a *combinado* (leftover food wrapped in newspaper) to a whole month’s grocery list. Fresh food and matter in decomposition alike. The sacks of potatoes and yuca that became the sofas for children that would accompany mothers through the day’s work. Their slow retreat from attending the Santa Ines school on the other side of El Cartucho next to *Medicina Legal*. The hundreds of families who just happened to live here; the trying to keep it together amid the slow encroachment of organized crime and crooked police alike. Stories of street children, who grew up *way too fast*; the existential breadth accrued—outpacing bodily growth, a long way back. Next to the food plazas closer to 9th street, you would find the second-hand clothing stores. The fast transactions of freshly snatched shirts and hoodies (*el raponazo*); the moist and warmth of use-wear still clinging to stolen fabrics upon exchange.

Those coming in and out of El Cartucho, making runs, or simply going adrift and embracing a deregulated kinesis towards nowhere in particular. The heist-masters, the strollers, the wayfarers, and the “social poesis that sustains the dispossessed.” The making something out of nothing.

There were also the *cavicherias* or flea market goods dispersed throughout narrow streets. The hoarding and the tinkering. The bird figures wrought out of copper. The Christmas time atmosphere of “El Madrugon” happening closer to La Jimenez—a massive clothing market in the porous fringes between El Cartucho and the San Victorino neighborhood that would make downtown crowded as can be during the holidays. Closer to “El Container,” a white garbage container notorious for storing corpses in El Cartucho’s main entrance on 9th street, there was also El Loco Calderon’s five-story building: part recycling warehouse, part *sopladero* (inside corridors used for drug-use) and shelter filled with rows of mattresses for people living on the streets. Closer to 10th street and La Jimenez, resided the multi-ethnic groups of Indigenous refugees for whom El Cartucho became home. The radical transformations some of these groups underwent from the introduction to glue huffing—initially to numb hunger pains.
El Cartucho sat atop of the canalled waterways below the asphalts that Tito, Duván, and others knew too well—where corpses floated adrift. There were dozens of recycling warehouses, the collected material tipping scales paid either in trabas (drugs) or coins; the pharmacies, auto part, and hardware stores, and the printing presses all up and down 7th street.

On 7th and 8th street between 11th and 12th, rows of brothels lined up; vallenato music blaring from rockolas or jukebox machines. The sex-workers on 6th street and 10th, that like Fernanda used to say: “would rob you quicker than their boyfriends hanging a few meters away.”

In between 10th street and Duván’s campana, you could find the beloved Padre Javier Nicolo, Colombia’s proclaimed savior of street children. A charismatic Italian priest who provided human warmth and shelter for the city’s street children and adolescents. He founded the Bosconia patio, a house of passage shelter right in El Cartucho. His loving presence seemed to defy El Cartucho’s no-man’s-land atmosphere as he was able to move freely throughout and was widely respected by people on the street and organized crime bands alike. “El Padre Nicolo had diplomatic immunity in El Cartucho,” was another common refrain.

Then there was Rompiendo Cabezas next door, another rehabilitation center right in the olla and founded by a former drug user from El Cartucho who prior to arriving in Bogotá, worked for no other than Pablo Escobar in Medellín. Fernanda interned herself for two years at Rompiendo Cabezas. She even got her partner to join her inside when the center was just starting up from scratch. “I would also go into La Reja some meters away and drag women out and into the center.” El Cartucho with its own morgue, school, food plaza, pharmacy, and institutions, felt for some like a city within the city, where not even undergoing drug rehab or dying would let you exit this shrunken milieu.

But Rompiendo Cabezas and Padre Nicolo’s Bosconia weren’t the only institutional spaces that took place here. In the late 19th century, the church of Santa Ines (initially built in 1645) created an asylum to quarantine the mentally ill and beggars just a few meters away from La Ancheta on what
today is 10th avenue. It is widely known among those I came to know in the streets that screams from the asylum continued to haunt these blocks—an immemorial past whose callings they nonetheless respond to by way of oral preservation.

I want to consider then, the felt reverberations of screams from the asylum across time as the history in and through the flesh of El Cartucho/Santa Ines Fernanda spoke of.

In relation, I want to further contemplate on those screams—and, how for those who inhabited El Cartucho, they come to not only reverberate through ghostly intensities but also resonate with other screams across time as though a set of happenings that perpetually return, disclosing themselves here and there. The repetition of history in a given locus or place, a set of reoccurring “entangled scenarios caught up in palimpsestic time and space.” The hosting of such history within the flesh of long-time residents, and the flesh of the world.

Take for instance how the asylum at the end of the 19th century was built so as to quarantine “repulsive” bodies through police sweeps. At the end of the 20th century, and in the wake of what came to be known as limpieza social—the killing and disappearance of people from the streets, trans sex-workers, and impoverished populations—the police would in almost identical fashion, forcibly displace people on the streets into El Cartucho. Police quarantines and paramilitary killings working in tandem.

The ghostly reverberations of screams from the asylum would thus be joined by a chorus of other voices relegated to the same place where madness and abject poverty were sought to be contained. For my interlocutors, like Stella, Fernanda, Marcos and others, there was a responsibility to acknowledge, and to make claim, to histories that preceded their lived experiences. The haunting intensity of place had appeared to summon them into relation with an immemorial past. The hauntedness I am describing could be considered as a sign of some return, yet here, the haunting is not an indexical reference or a metaphor for repressed content, but rather, it is an embodied experience—
The historical vibrations that return, piercing the flesh. The ghosts and gnomes of La Ancheta; the screams from the asylum (which was destroyed with the church in 1957 in the name of development projects and urbanization no different than the razing of El Cartucho in the early 21st century). The intrusive silence of the open field of the Third Millennium Park where we stood in 2017, which as Echo el Desecho told us as we stared pensively amid gaps of silence and zoning in and out commentary: “this isn’t a park, it’s a cemetery…” All of these examples we can consider, as history making contact with the flesh. As history found in the flesh.

Thus, histories repeating themselves like the screams of ghosts trapped in republican houses like La Ancheta crystallized what Fernanda, Stella and others I came to know continued to gesture towards: the co-existence of multiple temporalities found in the leaping instant; how the long gone is still here. On another occasion, as we filmed inside the Third Millennium Park, I happened to ask Fernanda, Hecho el Desecho, Duván and others if they knew where we were. They all responded in synchrony “uff…obvio,” obviously, while telling me exactly where we are at and whose territory this belongs to. “We’re in el maton de Bayona’s calle,” Fernanda told me. This was still Bayona’s Street, a virtual world inadmissible to me. They can sense and feel the textures of El Cartucho still here, the virtual that becomes re-actualized in the present moment; perhaps a way to leave space for those like Malandro and thousand others who dwell beneath us. It is then the incredible density of place and memory that has carried these scenes forward.

But in those gaps of silence between my companions and I at the Third Millennium Park, what to make of such hauntedness, partially inadmissible to me while ever-so-present to them? The screams, the gnomes springing from wells, the ekekos, the spirits, the atmospheres one is entranced by? Modern historiography has long ago done away with such modes of telling. And yet such modes return—swelling up the way history is felt. If history makes its claims on the past by declaring it dead, the contrapuntal sensory history and biographies I’ve tried to demonstrate through these scenes punctures
such modes of linear history by showing how multiple temporalities come to co-exist, even converging at times. And as many before me have already noted, the haunting is thus the surfacing of what refuses to be dead and how such returns in the form of images and sensations of the uncanny could be considered the “insurrectionary somaticity” that bring forth the insights that allows people to reconsider their relationship to the past. These images implicate my companions in not only forging connections with the disappeared and the past, but also to shape how they reckon with the contemporary.

PlACES gather; accrue density, excess. El Cartucho morphed into the city’s ultimate site of transgression: the crossed boundaries that emplaced corpses, spirits, human bodies, materiality and limbo-space to the beyond into compressed relations, in turn appeared to cause wreckage to the normative order of linear time.

The markings of violence and defilement on place can indeed confuse temporality. As Allen Feldman, writing about political violence in Northern Ireland, notes:

“Defiled space never goes away. Its reoccurrence negates time as distance…The appearance of confused space and time implies that a residual order that held space and time, life and death, in a differential relation no longer governs, that these constituent dimensions are now in a new uncodifiable arrangement.”

Could it be that the multiplicity of violences had unsettled the socially normative categories we live by? An epistemic and existential murk that returns us to a point prior to the distinctions between the real and the spectral; substance and phantasm and, the “assumed knowability of society’s material base.” Such is the approach taken by El Cartucho’s former inhabitants whose flesh is host to non-linear histories.

Perhaps that’s what so disturbing about the silence of the Third Millennium Park, the presence-absence that it connotes, its intrusive encroachment whose point of origin we could never locate. Spectrality at its finest. Perhaps silence isn’t lack or void, but unruly excess. Silence, single-
handedly splinters the presumed *tabula rasa* that this park is the embodiment of; the spectral silence breaks open this plane exposing the very *memoricide* it is meant to conceal. Perhaps.

In sum, the accounts provided in this section evoke modes of non-linear history to reflect El Cartucho’s former street inhabitants’ experience of history in which multiple temporalities come to co-exist, and where people forge connections with both a memorial past and an “immemorial past.” By the latter, I refer to a history of place that came before or exceeded their lived experiences. Such an immemorial past, as I’ve demonstrated throughout by way engaging the haunting as something palpable and viscerally felt, returns and can morph into an ethical responsibility—to remember, to re-enact, to keep alive—that the person builds with place and history, through the affective intensities of place.

Through these scenes on El Cartucho, I have argued that non-linear modes of history—which converge and take hold of the present moment—bear the potential for alternative understandings of time and history, as well as how the person responds to the callings of history by way of keeping vectors with a negated past open so that new configurations of time and history can continue to persist.

Let us consider Fernanda and others we came to know as the beholders of the density of memory and place, a laborious task whose endgame isn’t simply to resurface repressed content as counter-history to state-administered historical elision, but to keep disjunctures open so that new configurations of co-existing temporalities could continue to emerge. Like the gnomes springing from wells they came to know, they are the “ambiguous mediators” that hold open relations to some other possibility of history and place-making.
Interlude: *El Matadero*

The dust of demolition appeared to be more psychedelic than the *bazuco* as it drove drug users to a state of folly.—Humbert Ariza

04/2005. Brick by brick, block by block, starting from 6th street and 10th Avenue, El Cartucho was coming down.

Returning to the visual archive, you can feel the rippling vibrations of state violence with every tear gas and rubber bullet shot against people on the streets protesting to maintain El Cartucho. Shuffling through the footage, you can feel the constant historical returns of state violence in El Cartucho since its formation as a drug market in the 70s. Drowned by the reeling images of bombardments that make the frame ripple, one is arrested by the footage of El Cartucho’s takeover. Namely by the similarities between El Cartucho’s final encroachment and other instances of urban warfare that have played out since, and before this event. The fires, the stand offs, the swat-gear men closing in on El Cartucho are all uncannily familiar. The images jolt me to recall other acts of violence here, reminds me of ninja turtle drug-raids, and of the tortures people underwent in El Cartucho.

*Hecho el Desecho,* who survives El Cartucho’s urbicide, tells me that once the demolition process began in the 2000s, the crime bands weren’t allowed to open their *ollas* and sell *bazuco* during “protest hours.” The opposing crime leaders, despite their rivalries, all joined in on the cause. *Hecho* relays scenes of political organizing, of a couple thousand of El Cartucho’s residents marching towards the Plaza Bolivar Square, 500 meters away from home; how upon pleading at the Colombian president’s front yard for their home not to be destroyed, they were met with further violence and displacement.

State violence against people from the *ollas* perhaps never felt as rampant and deliberate as it did through the reigns of Enrique Peñalosa, the two-term former mayor of Bogotá (1998-2001, 2016-2019). “El Hitler de los ñeros,” the Hitler for people living on the streets, as many from the *ollas* would
call Peñalosa. He was known for his tough-on-crime urban policies, his anti-informality and “indigency” measures, and for participating in the implementation of Plan Centro, a massive urban renewal plan that included the demolition of El Cartucho and other ollas downtown.

There was a “revanchist” edge to Peñalosa’s politics to take back downtown. The so-called recuperation of public space that he advocated for was deeply rooted in classist imaginaries of downtown as a space that should belong to the upper classes. These imaginaries were often fueled by the Bogotázo riots of ’48 that left downtown in flames and which caused many wealthy proprietors to abandon their lots. So Peñalosa, “el Hitler de los ñeros,” was here to efface El Cartucho, to hallow out its dense history into erasure, all in the name of recuperation and development. An all-too-familiar story across the globe.

In the final act of encroachment in April 2005, the Tortuga Ninjas staged their presence. Along for the final seizure also came the gas-throwing tanks, and of course, the bulldozers with vicious claws jabbing their way into El Cartucho. Creative destruction some would call it. Urbicide, memoricide, the forcible disappearance of place—these are some of the outcomes of demolition.

Now, all is that can be seen is the muck. The rubble. The dust particles suspended in the air, lingering as the aftermath.

In this aftermath, 12,000 people living in El Cartucho have vanished. Some were taken in vans by the state into rehab. Others were abducted never to be seen again. Then, there were thousands of others shepherded by military police and their wooden batons that corrected any errant digressions. Private-owned volquetas or dump trucks from nearby businessowners later entered the scene. These were borrowed by the police to relocate people, in hopes to expedite expulsions. The police-forced relocations brought thousands to La Carrilera, an old railroad back alley some ten blocks from El Cartucho.

People were dumped, hidden from plain sight.
Soup kitchens and news reporters also arrived. La Carrilera, hidden from purview behind 19th street, spans from 30th Avenue to 16th avenue. It is stacked behind Paloquemao one of the largest food markets in the city. La Carrilera’s alleyway connects down to the ollas in Barrio Santa Fé, also known as the city’s red-light district.

Stella was one of the many brought to La Carrilera. She recalls the chaos and commotion in the dense back alley as kin-ties became fractured by the relocation. “Have you seen so and so?” people asked her.

The crime bands also set up shop, serving the thousands at La Carrilera while others scrambling with nowhere to go, arrived once word was out. Between day and night, a temporary olla came into being.

Cambuches, fire pits, and people occupied the alleyway. The usual spatial arrangements of night life in the streets were reproduced.

The next morning, nearby businessowners and proprietors put out complaints and expressed public concern that they feared that this area would be devalued due to the heavy presence of people living on the streets. An area known to be an “elite” part of downtown, where city hospitals and urban development was on the rise.

La gente toda asustada que los híbamos a atracar, “People were all scared that we would rob them,” Duván shares with me as he recalls his first days expelled from El Cartucho in La Carrilera. Después vino la amenaza que nos hicieron en La Carrilera, “Then came the [death] threats that they made to us in La Carrilera.

Stella summarizes these threats against her and others in La Carrilera with just three words: La mano negra, The Black Hand. Meaning, the right-wing paramilitary death squads known for their “social cleansing,” or killings of people on the streets.
As people socialized, ate, and smoked in La Carrilera, they saw a black truck on reverse no different than the trucks used to transport fresh produce to Paloquemao. As the truck continued reversing and closing in, people thought it may the police again. “But it was una mano de paracos [a handful of paramilitaries] dressed in all black, with their faces covered that jumped out,” Stella vividly shares. Armed to the teeth, the paracos positioned themselves in a standoff line no different than the ninja turtles that people from El Cartucho were accustomed to facing. Besides the anti-riot gear, there was in fact no way to tell the paracos and the ninja turtles apart.

People whistled and shouted, informing those farther away of the incoming intruders. As people rose from the floor shouting, the paracos formed a blockade on one of La Carrilera’s exits while encroaching deeper into the alleyway. One of them, loudspeaker in hand, was a few steps ahead of his unit. “You have twenty-four hours to get out,” the paraco repeated over and over. As Stella recalls, there were no other words spoken, no opportunity to plead back. Soon after their spectacular entrance, the paracos left, leaving nothing but fear in their wake.

Around 6PM the next day, the military police arrived and cleared everyone out. Nos llevaron como cordero, “We were taken like cattle,” Duván says. Nobody knew where they were being taken, as they were once again being ushered by force. This constant relocation and being shepherded towards an unknown elsewhere was what many began to call el vuelo de los locos, the flight of the folly.15 There was no clear horizon to position oneself before, no fixed orientation in a world that wanted them doubly lost—disoriented and disappeared. Errantry was the only position afforded.

Hecho was dragged out of La Carrillera among his peers. He remembers the swarms of masses moving through downtown, how the police could barely keep everyone under control. Todos los ñeros reumputados rompiendo todo y los dueños corriendo a cerrar sus negocios cuando nos veían, “Everybody from the streets was infuriated breaking things and businessowners rushing to close their stores as soon as they
saw us coming.” If the metal doors didn’t roll down fast enough, the storeowners were at the mercy of those they ultimately got expelled.

Six blocks later, the shepherded crowds had arrived at their tentative destination. As people awaited entrance to a gated lot, an incinerator towering menacingly could be seen from without.

The gated entrance led to El Matadero, the city’s former municipal slaughterhouse.

El Matadero, comprised of 2.5 hectares of land, was divided into a factory lot in the front, and an open field where livestock was corralled in the back. G., a mid-tier city official who was in charge in 2005 of the municipality of Puente Aranda where El Matadero is at, tells me how the police commander of Los Mártires at the time, proposed that very same day, for people to be brought to El Matadero because it was city-owned. When I asked G., if there were any preparations to accommodate people on the streets, he told me that there were none, that this was the city’s “the most irresponsible act” he had ever witnessed.

The municipal slaughterhouse had been closed in 1993 due to unsanitary regulations, including the olfactory assault on the nearby areas downtown. El Matadero had first opened in 1929, when what today is downtown’s Industrial Zone, was still considered peripheral farmland. Since then, this has been a site of violence and “sacrifice,” where, as a historian of El Matadero recalls, tales of abducted people brought to the incinerator still linger.

El Matadero reopened, but this time to keep people from the streets, rather than livestock, contained indefinitely.

Soon after people were stuffed inside El Matadero, a heavy downpour came down. At the last minute, the police set up large tents (cazetas) for people to refuge. They began to randomly group people into the large tents, but turmoil and frustration began to ripple through El Matadero.
El Matadero turned chaotic as neither state officials nor their social service professionals knew what to do. G., who was present, told me he feared for the worst when he saw the thousands of people brought in by force and clustered into the back field.

G. was called to meet with Secretary of Health officials in their building, which is adjacent to El Matadero. They watched from the Secretary of Health’s rooftop as El Matadero had been charged with a new tempos and social life. “We didn’t know what to so we conducted a census to find out how many people there were.” G. and his unit gathered the information over a few days and concluded that roughly 2,500 people had been brought to El Matadero.

In the coming days after the census, informal vendors selling snacks and cigarettes, humanitarian soup kitchens, and El Cartucho’s former crime bands became staples of El Matadero’s ambiance. The compressed space of El Matadero led to contention between the different crime bands and their loyal customers who kept bumping heads. People began pleading for the space to be re-organized to avoid further violence. The crime bands and other leaders from El Cartucho got together with the police and social service officials. The bands promised to reach a truce if they could re-organize El Matadero so as to mirror El Cartucho’s spatial layout. Different tent spaces became different territories controlled by the crime bands.

El Matadero became a real-life diorama, a mini-replica of El Cartucho.

Duván who had been part of the crime bands from 11th street in El Cartucho recalls how the different ollas took ownership of their different sectors and each tent became its own dispenser slot. After this spatial re-organization, various parches or groups rekindled with their kin. A strange mix of chaos and social cohesion would saturate El Matadero.

Duván further explains, *Cada uno con su parche como estabamos en El Cartucho. ‘Esta es la gallada que sopla en Paloma, esa es de Puerta Café, esta es de Gancho Verde’...entonces vamos distribuyéndonos en tal forma.* “Everyone with their own parche, like how we were in El Cartucho. ‘This is the crew who smokes in
Paloma, that one is Puerta Café, this one is of Gancho Verde’…so we started distributing ourselves in such form.”

From G.’s perspective, however, the re-organization of El Matadero’s spatial arrangement didn’t necessarily happen through lateral agreements between the state’s services, the military police, and organized crime. Instead, it organically manifested by the very forms which organized crime could rapidly extend into any given space or context. Ellos se co-optaron al espacio, ya uno tenía es que pedirle permiso era a ellos. La única autoridad era los capos de micro-trafico. “They [organized crime] co-opted into this space, one had to ask them permission. The only authority was the capos of micro-trafficking.”

The military police still controlled what G. called a “military and humanitarian cordon,” throughout most of El Matadero’s circumference, frisking and monitoring people from the streets as they came and went. But inside this cordon, El Cartucho’s former bands reigned, smuggling bazuco under fences and zones of shade at the limits of El Matadero. The crime bands began to dig holes in the back fields near the gates which were used to smuggle their product into El Matadero and take the money out.

The best bazuco in the city was to be found in the state’s improvised militarized encampment, El Matadero. A place that straddled between registers. Between a site of violence and expenditure, and a site of life-preservation and hibernation. Part olla and part patio, El Matadero as an environment rapidly yielded towards its inhabitants. It is perhaps places that “co-opt” into sociality. Places like La Carrilera or El Matadero bring into purview how lived environments conform to shared forms of life, that is, how “shrunken milieus”19 come into being. And how quickly they can come apart.

The hustle and bustle of El Matadero would go on for forty-five days. Then, came the ninja turtles. Expulsing everyone. Again. This time, they tried to take people into larger rehab centers also located in downtown’s Industrial Zone. But people sought other places to be, places that wouldn’t cordon them like livestock once again. There was word that people had found new crevices, new zones
of shade outside the gaze of the state in La 5ta, 5th street near the San Bernardo neighborhood downtown.

State violence, its reckless expenditure of force and attacks appeared beyond calculated action. Displacement, too, felt like a futile project. There was something quite foolhardy about the state’s *modus operandi* which consisted of perpetual cycles of forcible displacement to sweep social problems under the rug, so to speak.

As hundreds dispersed, moving waywardly throughout the city with nowhere to go, another *olla* was gaining traction, one that was adjacent to El Cartucho but had previously been overshadowed or regarded as its annex, La 15. It is *La 15*, later called “El Bronx,” that I turn our attention towards next.
Fieldnotes

stringed canopies obstructing vision
melted popsicles frozen in time
black cats growling in withdrawal
tunneled labyrinths to the beyond
messenger rats
graffiti that returns the gaze
love
trash pits and corpses
intimate strangers
acid tanks and crocodiles
blankets and recycled food
bed bugs flamed into pipes
sulfur and the breeze left behind by the devil’s visitation
the homogenous time of labor
metamorphic, shapeshifting entities
dogs healing wounds
electronic bazuco
the proliferation of signs and images
Dragon Ball-Z and omnipotent adolescents
letters to the dead circulating in the currency
police coronels on double pay roll
human remains grinded into sacred substance
teddy bears and toys
ecstasy, drifting into shared transgression
bright wall colors with somber undertones
violence transferred to the inside
the dead’s omnipresence
the nervous system of a place

the atmospheres of the sacred and profane

El Bronx
Map of La L/El Bronx
Doña Bertha

Macaco, The Paramilitary

Mayor Peñalosa

Óscar AKA Mosco

Cesar AKA Homero

Mayor Petro

Rigo

The Sallas (armed forces)

Hecho el Desecho AKA Hecho

Duván

The Ghost of Bataille

Oscar Javier Molina

Crack Family

Aldo

The Campaneros (look-outs)

Ciro

Stella

Doña J

Ronco, The Salla

Alex

Cynthia

Todo Copas

Bomba, The salla

The Dutch Tourist

Esteban

The Police

Daniel

Contino, The Cook

Christian

The ESMAD AKA The Ninja Turles

The Rats

Carolina

Raul

The Cat-Addict

El Mono, The Labrador Retriever

El Calvo, The Police Coronel
The space of death was a space of transgression, more like a time out of time in which anything could happen and catch you by surprise. As I figure it, this space of death allows for unworldly visitations and interior journeys, as by shamans with their hallucinogens, but it also occurs when terror strikes or the world falls apart, as with disease and tragedy and everyday states of emergency…Then, no shaman is necessary. The space is charged, “shamanic,” one might say, all on its own.—Michael Taussig

The mortal body is gradually assimilated to the mass of things. Insofar as it is spirit, the human reality is holy, but it is profane insofar as it is real. Animals, plants, tools, and other controllable things form a real world with the bodies that control them, a world subject to and traversed by divine forces, but fallen.—Georges Bataille

The uncanny can lie gathered in the ordinary, the sacred can penetrate the profane, and a visit can become a visitation.—Kathleen Stewart
The narrow space between the metal gates was the point of passage. From the outside of El Bronx, looking in, I was witnessing a scene of the in-between. A threshold between, separately demarcated yet connected worlds, between the police and organized crime. On the outside of the gates, stood two police officers, their army green apparel and neon green jackets foregrounded my perceptual frame. On the other side of the gates and shoulder to shoulder to the police, stood the campaneros or look-outs, anchored to these limits. They blurred into their context, their faces and bodies receded into their hoodies and apparel. The campaneros alert to those coming in, the police to those stepping out. They worked in tandem, together but separate. I watched as discombobulated young men made their way out towards where a police frisk awaited them—one way, the city tried to keep weapons and violence contained.

Upon entrance, you come to question the integrity of boundaries between self and world. Your nasal passages forge a continuity with this place as you simply yield to the smell of open sewers, urine, fried food, joints ablaze, and burning materials that travel through the airscape. Affect, here, more than a fleeting trail of public feelings, is an infrastructure that interlaces you with the world at hand.4

Your senses stretch outwardly as much as you feel the intensity of this place within the intestinal. 90’s Hip-Hop punctuates the tempos of life. Wu-Tang, La Etnia, Mobb Deep, and others play the soundtrack to the densely layered scenes that take place here. Your sense of scale, of space, get distorted as you move through narrow corridors that open towards tiny rooms and gigantic lounges, to dead ends and hidden depths. You gather that these corridors are closing in on you, all on their own. The narrowness of corridors is the by-product of buildings that are extended—annexed, by wooden shacks, corrugated metal tin sheets, and plastic roofs on both sides of the street. Flexible materials that adjust and re-adjust, that conform and cater to shared ways of living. Below the improvised shacks, there are lounges, dealer stands with large pots of cannabis and sacks of bazuco or cocaine paste-base. You try to get some purchase on the eerie that courses through the ambiance but fail and fail some more. Paranoia tries to turn to social theory in motion.5 Except that thought is arrested or lagging behind trying to keep up. Except that, in the moment, there are no concepts, no
categories, that can help you reckon with the lived intensity of place. Retrospectively, you are left with a whole lot of traces, phantoms, and shards. A whole lot of sensations and dreamy visions that make you question the order of things.

This section is an ethnographic and a partial scenic reconstruction of the drug market zone and residency downtown known as La L or El Bronx. Reconstruction serves the purpose of keeping alive histories often negated, elided, or reduced, based on their transgressive or heterogenous elements that cannot fit easily within the mold of official and administrative history. Through reconstruction, and importing the vitality of place, this section attends to the intensity of this place. The felt, the seen, and the dissociative or limit-experiences that leave us beside ourselves. The ethnographic scenes conjured, draw on the memory-work of La L’s former inhabitants and the audiovisual material generated through research collaborations with them in the city’s rehab centers and in the streets of Los Mártires in downtown Bogotá. My core ethnographic focus is on the cultivated sensorium and perceptual apparatus of those who worked and lived on its streets and residencies. This line of work demonstrates how the senses activate certain relations to the realms of the sacred, the dead, and the palpably phantastical, as well as how the “self” is transformed by these unbidden forces; by the atmospheres fostered by organized crime’s violence and the dead and buried below.

In the ethnographic scenes that follow, the distinctions between “subjects” and “objects,” and “matter” and “spirit,” start to fade. Thinking with La L as a place, like other “heterogenous” places, as I will demonstrate, leaves categorical thinking muddled, and requires an attention to the incessant movement and shuttling of disparate phenomena across these realms. This section thus centers on the mutual becomings of self and place; the dead and the alive, that scaffold daily living here. It also highlights the sacred as the grounds for both ecstatic dissociation from oneself, and as the grounds for cultivating modes of extra-somatic perception that yield to preserving one’s life, amid a murky and violent everyday.
Lastly, this section is doubly concerned with situations of “sovereignty.” Sovereignty in both a macro-sociopolitical register, and in an embodied, experiential, and intimate register. I argue that amid the various “sovereignties” that exist in the olla—whether we take sovereignty as a quest for mastery (the state and various crime bands competing for governance over La L), or a quest for self-dissolution that undoes mastery (sovereignty as a personal exit from servility, from oneself)—these attempts towards sovereignty are ultimately mired with impossibility. As the scenes below will bring to the fore, in La L, and perhaps more broadly, there are only partial attainments of “sovereignty.”
La 15 was la L

Though from the outside, this place is nationally and internationally renowned as El Bronx, I will refer to it as La L, how most of its local inhabitants call it. La L was given its name due to the L-shaped street at the core of this three-block assemblage. This place had been a fully developed olla since at least the 1980s. Though as J, one of its long-term residents since the 1990s once told me, “back then, cars could still enter La L.” Only one long street that in the middle was adjoined by an L shaped half-street, La L could be considered spatially small. Yet its depths, invisible boundaries, and hidden intricacies, left its inhabitant with a sense of inability to fully navigate, experience, and reckon with this place’s “wholeness.”

As adjacent to El Cartucho, the biggest open-air drug market in Colombian history, in the late twentieth century, La L was regarded mostly as a small-time annex olla. It was primarily known as La 15 (15th street). As J, Stella, and other former inhabitants I became close to during fieldwork made clear to me, La 15 (La L) was run back then by two main crime bands, Los Santadereanos, a name based on their place of origin in the Colombian region of Santander, and Los Tolimenses, from the Tolima region.

Duván, who lived in El Cartucho throughout the 90s recalls passing through the calmer La 15 (La L) back then when Los Santadereanos ran some of the houses on 15th B avenue closer to the 10th street entrance. Which, back then, was known as El Horno (“The Oven”). On the other avenue, 15th A with 9th street, at the corner of the “L,” Los Tolimenses ran “El Palomero” a four-story building whose spiraling staircase made the interior space feel expansive. El Palomero would later become the main building of the “Manguera” crime band in the mid-2000s (See map on page 81). J remembers other smaller ollas in La 15 (La L) including Casa Chica, Casa Loma, and El Juvenal.

Much like El Cartucho, La 15 (La L) was also susceptible to drug raids and police violence, though its streets were less dense. Combat vehicles made their way through. J began living in La 15
(La L) in the early 90s when he got a job in a taquillera or a drug dispenser slot, selling bazuco (cocaine paste-base). He recalls the constant harassment of the police during drug raids and the temporary relocations of people from La 15 (La L) into El Cartucho. The contentious ambiance that would swell up when him and others entered El Cartucho displaced, “trespassing.” These drug raids and relocations would ensue throughout the early 1990s, until during an intervention, the police decided to set ablaze many of the drug-dealing houses to the point of La 15 (La L) becoming vacant. Many of La 15’s inhabitants, including J, ended up deep inside El Cartucho. “The fires had to be around ’94,” J recalls.

A few years after the state’s destruction of El Cartucho, and the displacement of its 12,000 inhabitants in the early 2000s however, La L became the most feared olla in Bogotá. An “independent republic of organized crime” as the former Bogotá mayor Enrique Peñalosa declared it. The same mayor who, during his first term (1998-2001), destroyed El Cartucho. La L was the place where approximately 2,000 people living on the streets permanently lived and where the influx of drug users coming daily could turn its cluttered passageways into temporary impasses. Yet, the seemingly spatial disorder from without is evidence of an untrained gaze as La L was nothing short of articulate design and order disguised in the form of carnivalesque chaos and social abjection.
Territorializing

La L was organized by territories controlled by the different *ganchos* or crime bands. Though the power of certain *ganchos* strengthened and/or weakened from the early 2000’s up until its complete seizure by the military on May 28th, 2016, La L was arguably sustained by seven main bands: Homero, Mosco, Manguera, America, Nacional, Morado, and Escalera.

In the “L” shape intersection where 15th A and 15th B avenues connect, there was an invisible boundary that divided La L into ultimately two main jurisdictions: that of Homero/Mosco (15th B) and Manguera (15th A).

In the early periods of La L’s formation in the 2000s as the city’s epicenter of organized crime and illicit markets, many of the former bands from El Cartucho tried to set up shop in here, but Homero and other bands already stabilized, through a set of shootouts denied their attempts. Gancho Amarillo for example, one of El Cartucho’s most dominant crime bands never managed to reign inside La L. Duván, who was displaced from El Cartucho and who came to La L after various relocations and digressions throughout the city, recalls the first wave of inter-band shootouts over La L. “Gancho Amarillo could never take over, you had to have seen the handful of lead over these houses” (*la mano de plomo*), Duván explains when prompted about his early years in La L.

During the initial post-Cartucho years in La L in the early-2000s, through a set of disputes between bands, as well as the joining of forces between various dealers, La L’s main crime bands burgeoned into articulate vertical networks that oversaw the entire territory. Two of the most prominent bands gained power sometime in 2003 when Doña Bertha González, who became the matriarch of La L, along with her two sons, took over certain houses here.¹ Her son César González set up shop on what became one of the most popular venues inside La L known as Homero—referencing the Homer Simpson cartoon character. His lounges adorned with Simpson murals and his bags of *bazuco* recognized both by their potent distinct scent and the Homer logo.
Doña Bertha’s other son, Óscar Alcalá González, known as “Mosco” (mosquito) for his thin frame, became the leader of *olla griz* and later the founder of the Mosco crime band setting up in the houses across from Homero on 15th B Avenue. He was captured in May 2003 for the homicide of one El Cartucho’s kingpins some years before that.² From 2003 to 2009, he oversaw his Mosco enterprise in La L from behind bars. After being released on house arrest, he fled to Ecuador in 2009 and was recaptured there in 2013.³

After the demobilization process of certain paramilitary groups (AUC) amid the Colombian armed conflict in 2005-6, one of the demobilized combatants from the Risaralda region of Colombia, Rigoberto Arias Castrillón (“Rigo”) switched battlefields as he began to organize a group to take over parts of La L.⁴ After winning some disputes with the Homero and Mosco bands, he took over 15th A Avenue inside La L by 2008, consolidating the Manguera band and drug trademark.

Rigo was trained under the notorious AUC paramilitary leader, and drug dealer Carlos “Macaco” Jiménez, and such warfare training and tactics become directly applied in the quest to reign the capital city’s drug markets. Prior to entering Bogotá, Rigo gained military momentum and might in Colombia’s broader paramilitary and drug trafficking scene. After demobilizing from the AUC in 2005, Rigo joined another paramilitary band known as La Cordillera. As he rose in the ranks of La Cordillera he ordered the killing of a few important members and split this band to form Los Rolos band. Los Rolos, comprised of a hundred members, first took over the drug trade in the Risaralda region before taking over Bogotá through La L’s markets in 2008.

In a 2013 television news special from *Testigo Directo*, the then main Bogotá police general Luis Martínez was interviewed about La L. By then, he had already put out a roughly 40,000 USD reward for Rigo’s capture. The general explains how Rigo and the Manguera band took over La L through attacks on the Mosco and Homero bands.⁵ According to general Martínez, the bands met and reached an agreement of co-existence so that the violence would cede, and the police wouldn’t further interfere
and close down La L. After the shootouts and agreements between the bands, Rigo and his Manguera enterprise took over half of La L—charting its territory from the 9th street entrance to 15th Avenue A, all the way to the middle of where 15th B and 15th A intersect at the “L” street.

While the former bands in Bogotá’s olla’s like El Cartucho and other nearby drug markets had already developed an articulate system of security over its territory, Rigo’s militarized techniques arguably created a much more organized system, that under paramilitary logics, centered on sovereignty, regulated and clandestine violence, and providing “security” to nearby businesses. Opposing bands mimed their organizational and policing techniques, learning from one another in the process. From such engagements rose what became known as the sayayines (the Saiya-yin), La L’s security units, not unlike the hilles or soldiers of organized crime in El Cartucho (see the previous section).

The name sayayines or “sallas” their shorter abbreviation, derives from the Japanese show, Dragon Ball-Z, where the Saiya-yin (サイヤ人) is an “aggressive warrior” clan who seeks to conquer territories.6 Most of the salla’s I came in distant contact with during fieldwork appeared to be in their 20’s and early 30’s—a generation most likely raised by Dragon Ball-Z in the mid-’90s and early 2000s given the show’s popularity in Colombia. In La L, they entered worlds just as phantastical and violent—eventually embodying these omnipotent figures.

The sallas were in charge not only of everything that happened in La L, but also in the surrounding streets in Voto Nacional, La Estanzuela, and La Pepita—a mix of industrial and residential working-poor neighborhoods downtown full of recycling and ironmongery warehouses, contraband and pirated merchandise stores, and textile goods. In exchange for making sure that La L’s residents wouldn’t commit crimes or intervene with their businesses, the sallas charged a daily security fee known as the vacuna, the vaccine immunity from the violence.7 Lícit and illicit markets,
security and extortion, violence and care, all blended seamlessly in downtown Bogotá where organized crime permeates, diffuses, and becomes the “atmospheric state of things.”

In the summer of 2017, during a workshop on La L I hosted inside one of the state’s rehabilitation centers with a number of its former inhabitants, they broke down how the sallas interacted with the broader region outside of La L. 10th street between 15th and 16th avenue, for example, is filled with textile and blanket warehouses which not only must pay the daily security fee but were deeply intertwined with La L since some served as routes of passage for money and drugs. These outside vendors were so much part of La L that many research participants referred to La L’s 10th street entrance as *por donde las cobijas*, near the blankets. A wide array of thick blankets adorns the storefronts near La L’s entrance and all throughout 10th street.

Hecho who spent multiple decades on the streets of El Cartucho and La L tells us how America’s *olla* and hotel residency was always a desired lot by the crime bands since it connected in clandestine to a long blanket warehouse outside of La L. “That’s why no one from America would ever get booked during the raids. They could store and hide their *merca* (product) within minutes because of the factories,” he tells us. Similarly, on the other entrances of La L via 9th street, the ironmongeries and stores were all linked to La L’s crime bands.

During my first meeting with a city official who reviewed the work I planned on doing in the *olla’s* downtown and in city’s rehab centers for people on the streets, he warned me not to hang out in the store tavern outside of La L, “La Novena,” since it was controlled by the sallas and its top floor operated like a panopticon overseeing traffic from one of the 9th street entrances. From Duván, who worked for the Homero band, I would later learn that these stores outside of La L on 9th street were connected to the famous *billares* (billiard lounge) lot first owned by Homero and later taken over by Mosco inside La L. An underground labyrinth-like tunnel that only the sallas and other band members knew how to maneuver would lead to La L’s outside.
Duván explains that this is how they would take out the money daily. “You got to remember that drug money often came in coins, and so to take it out was a pain in the ass [un chicarron]. At first, they would use the carts of recyclers and pay drug users to take it out. But once the police started frisking these carts more frequently, they started using the tunnels,” he adds. In 2018, while I was filming inside La L after its seizure by the state, another former inhabitant tells a crowd of media and people how Manguera had also built a tunnel that would make its way from one of its houses to an outside factory on 16th Avenue between 9th and 10th street. He points to the warehouse still within the horizon of where we stand.

La L and its limits were both rigid and porous. Rigid in the boundary policing and gatekeeping that made this place not accessible to all. Porous in its fluidity to mix various realms; to extend itself. The olla is never an isolated enclave but becomes a gravitational force that draws others in, while stretching beyond its presumed boundaries. The centripetal and centrifugal as intimately linked. As I will demonstrate throughout, La L’s subterranean depths stretched outwardly like the roots sprawling from a tree, converging licit and illicit economies; those buried below with those alive; and realms of the sacred (violence; ecstasy) with the profane (governance; labor). Through the inscription of governing rhythms unto an environment, organize crime partially dictates the tempo for the experience of place. It territorializes place.

As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari write:

“The territory is in fact an act that affects milieus and rhythms, that ‘territorializes’ them. The territory is the product of a territorialization of milieus and rhythms… It is built from aspects or portions of milieus. It itself has an exterior milieu, an interior milieu, an intermediary milieu, and an annexed milieu. It has the interior zone of a residence or shelter, the exterior zone of its domain.”

Yet territorializing place doesn’t guarantee sovereignty. The olla is a site of co-existing sovereignties, not only between the various organized crime bands and the state, but also between the dead and the alive. The various kinds of “sovereignties” and their relation to the sacred and profane that scaffold this place must first be addressed.
The sacred

The outside of La L is as historically dense as its inside. It is a street away from Caracas Avenue (14th), one of the city’s main arteries connecting the city’s north and south regions. Downtown, La Caracas is infamous as a hotbed for robberies and insecurity. From La L’s 9th Street entrances, looking past La Caracas, one can still get a glimpse of the haunted Third Millennium Park where El Cartucho’s historical remnants continue to be experienced.

From the 10th street entrance, La L is adjacent to the historic Plaza de Los Mártires where, as the name of this municipality suggests (Los Mártires), it is a place of martyrdom. In 1861, this was the site of killing and sacrifice. The plaza used to be a papaya garden known as La Huerta de Jaime. The Spanish crown’s military would hang its victims, those seeking independence, high up in the garden’s trees.

The nation’s independence and foundational violence are thus symbolically landmarked here with the plaza’s center monument for those sacrificed. A 17-meter obelisk whose plaque, inscribed in Latin reads: “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori,” To die for one’s homeland, is decent and sweet.

Today, the shielding monument at the center of the open-space plaza, serves as the site of defecation for many on the streets. Whenever I would walk through the plaza, I would often find human waste serving as a semi-circumference for the erected obelisk. Perhaps an unconscious daily defacing of the high sacred with the body’s waste.

On one side of the plaza, stands one of the city’s most historic Catholic churches, The Sacred Heart of Jesus Basilica. It is known colloquially as the Voto Nacional Church for the district it was built on. The church had been built at the beginning of the 20th century to bring peace between the opposing political parties in one of Colombia’s most violent civil wars. The War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902).
The French photographer and filmmaker Stanislas Guigui shot scenes from his unreleased docudrama film “El Cartucho: The Kingdom of Thieves” in the church. Duván tells me that him others from La L, paid in bazuco, were summoned to take part in the church’s scene. A couple of dozen bodies sitting on the ground forming a circle. Creating a center stage for the aesthetics of knife-fighting to be put on full display at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Basilica. The moving-image captures them in the church following each move, fixated, drifting into shared transgression.

When In 2017, I asked the women who oversaw the church about the film scene shot here, I had struck a nerve. I realized I had transgressed the public secret by granting it linguistic frame. Through the words that travelled across the room, I had opened the floodgates about that which should not be mentioned: for the right price, the church too, can momentarily become an olla. “Ni me lo recuerde,” Don’t even remind me, she said, before walking away leaving Duván and I to ourselves in the space of the knife-fight scene.

On the other side of the plaza, across the street from the church, and literally brick-to-brick with La L, stands one of the Colombian military’s battalions and recruitment headquarters. Many of those thrown into compulsory military service pass through here before being taken elsewhere to fight the so-called War on Drugs. The uncanny proximity between the battalion and La L could also be the stuff of movies.

Some of the most prominent landmarks of the church, state, and organized crime in the city were all compressed into this space. These were sacred places indeed.

The presence of the church and state we might consider as part of the high, or “right-hand” sacred. Which is considered to be the realm of hierarchy, pureness, military order, and “parental majesty.” The right-hand sacred is the hidden, “ideal image” behind the normative, alienating, homogenous project that is the profane. Its inherent logic is ascension. This right-hand sacred strives towards “the noble sovereignty of individualized power,” like fascism or ecclesial hierarchies.
could say that this profane world, guided by the “high sacred” is partially, the world of the church, state, and organized crime. There is no understanding of La L’s competing sovereignties and organized crime, or the mayor’s attempt at rehabilitation for drug users without this high sacred (see “Los Patios”).

The negative, or “left-hand sacred” is, in contrast, associated with that which negates or refuses servility to the profane world. It discards instrumental reason. It is often activated by unexpected or fortuitous instances, chances, or affectively charged encounters.

The negative sacred is found in experiences that often consist of heterogeneous qualities. Or irreducible differences that by default, are contradictory. Horror and bliss, violence and pleasure, attraction and repulsion, holiness and defilement. Qualities that often patterned the experience of La L’s residents.

These kinds of sacred experiences temporarily dissolve stable subjectivity. The negative sacred strives towards establishing a communion with others, with the world, beyond productive ends. It is the means towards no end. In doing so, it breaks open another kind of sovereignty, one that runs counter to the individualized power of state and organize crime leaders, or of the autonomous individual. This other form of sovereignty is what we could consider “immanence,” or the “boundless receptivity’ by which the world is immediately experienced.”

Some of the experiences in the olla that I will describe much later in this section, including kin relations, gambling, drug use, violence, possession, divination, the dead and eerie, all secure instants that foreground this latter form of “sovereignty.”

In short, I want to consider La and its neighbors as the historically dense grounds for the various quests for sovereignty found in the right hand and left hand sacred. Thinking with the depths of La L as a place, first requires an understanding of its relation to these other societal sectors, and spatial neighbors. It requires an understanding of the porosity of inside and outside, despite the transgressive limits that this space demarcates in relation to the broader city and polity.
The tipping point

La L’s *salla* security system prior to 2013—though keeping an eye close—allowed various state entities and NGO’s to enter La L and co-existed in La L with other kinds of governance and humanitarian aid. During a 2016 meeting with state officials, David who had been working for the city’s Secretary of Social Integration since La L began growing as the epicenter for people on the streets, told me all about his former shifts in La L “Back then [2009], we had outreach shifts *inside* El Bronx, three or four of us would spend several hours drinking *tinto* (black coffee) and reaching out to people on the floor. We knew most of the *sallas* and *campaneros* by name since we stood with them day in and day out,” David tells me. Some of La L’s former inhabitants later remind me that every Wednesday, a catholic NGO would be allowed to serve soup in Manguera’s territory. “They would be stationed right by the parking lots and the window store that sold the cheap single cigarettes?” Stella recalls. A few months before this conversation with Stella and others, I had taken a photo of this site where multiple murals still stood years after in 2016. A graffiti of the “soup of El Bronx.” A huge boiling pot at the center of the frame encircled by a number of people crowding around it marked the corner of that street.

In September 2012, the former Bogotá mayor Gustavo Petro launched an outreach program for La L known as CAMAD or the mobile attention center for people struggling with drug use. On the outskirts of La L on the 9th street entrance and 15th B, the former mayor’s administration began to have a frequent presence in the region through the mobile van which attempted to oversee the health of the population interned in La L. In the inauguration of the CAMAD van in La L’s border, the city managed to reach an agreement with one of La L’s lot owners, Don S, as they set up shop inside a part of his recycling warehouse. Banners of the CAMAD outreach program adorned the walls as a small line of people awaited entrance. The co-habitation of the state’s and NGO’s services in La L came to a halt a year later after the crime bands began placing restrictions into La L due to contentions
with various sectors of the state. The murder of Secretary of Social Integration outreach worker, Óscar Javier Molina, on September 28th, 2013, was the turning point.

Óscar Javier Molina, who had lived through El Cartucho as a drug user himself, was known for his capacity to reach populations on the street and to enter the depths of La L to offer the state’s rehabilitation services to its residents. David, who was his longtime colleague, tells me that Óscar Javier had been receiving threats by the bands as he was no longer welcomed inside La L. Two weeks prior to his murder, he had been interviewed on national television about his work in La L. In the interview, he described La L as a “mine where everyone is working for their substance,” and denounced the ties between La L’s crime bands and the broader paramilitary structures some of them derived from.³

During a Saturday day shift, the day of his murder, he was kicked out of La L by the crime bands campaneros who weaponized excrement against him. As he left, his back was soiled in excrement. That night in his home in the southern Bogotá municipality of Usme, he was murdered by La L’s crime bands. When I returned to Bogotá in the summer of 2014 for preliminary fieldwork, my access to La L felt even more truncated and up against higher risks, even when entering with “regulars,” I had met through the outreach services of local NGO’s the previous summer visits (2012, 2013). Even La L’s outsides like 9th and 10th street felt denser and surveilled as they had placed campaneros on the outsides of La L and had blocked purview into La L with stacks of rubber tires, gates, and heaps of trash.

The murder of Óscar Javier Molino radically changed the state’s outreach services for the people of La L, and their overall relation with La L’s bands. A tipping point that arguably had a domino effect, causing many other tipping points until, eventually, the olla exploded.
Cunning design

Inside La L, much like in El Cartucho, the campaneros worked in tandem strategically positioned in close range from one another and operating like relay points communicating with one another. Attuned to the traffic, and what was happening inside and outside. The campaneros on the outside, across the street from the 10th street entrance where a blanket retail store is located, stood on its corner, scanning cars and traffic moving through 10th street. Their sensory registers connected to the campaneros at La L’s 10th street entrance who oversee the Mosco/Homero territory.

Upon entrance to La L from its only 10th street entrance, a file of stolen bikes cluttered the right side of the street. The bike shop was part of a broader stolen goods market that covered the entire right side of this half street until the street curbed into its “L” shape. Fernanda, who we’ve met in the last section, a gentle and astute woman known for her skills in heist schemes, knew everyone on this strip and their exchange practices. Weapons, clothes, legal documents, bikes, and other goods from the city most likely made their way into this strip. The makeshift shacks with fluorescent lights hung brand apparel garments all across their wall racks. Fernanda also recalls “El Chino’s” shop since he would pay the most out of anybody in the olla for “las cedulas” or the national ID documents that wore brought stolen.

Starting from the left side of the 10th street entrance looking in, an expansive republican house known as El Laberinto (the labyrinth) initiated La L’s territory.1 This entire half-block across from the stolen goods markets consisted of drug dispenser lots on the outside and lounges leading to the known rockolas or jukebox and gambling slot machine rooms. Some of these houses were run by the Nacional crime band. The dense and narrow passageway between the markets and drug dispenser lots were also overseen by the central campanero of this half-block who sat above a wooden round table in the middle of the street, scanning traffic back and forth from above like a tennis chair umpire. This campanero connected with those at the 10th street entrance and those at the end of this half-block.
For *campaneros* and the crime bands more broadly, narrowness, density, and obstructed vision for people moving through La L were architectural and spatial tactics that played to their territorial advantage. Such designs premised on malleable construction and miscellaneous material, allows the crime bands to both entice new customers deeper into unforeseeable depths while keeping security under control. Partially obstructed vision and pathways arguably engender curiosity while orienting movement towards what lies beyond.

In turn, what appears to be chaos and disorganization is not the antithesis to architecture, but sometimes, its very result. Architecturally designed disorientation, in other words, becomes a technique that rivets through “cunning confusion.” The maze-like design and the possibility to re-model based on working with makeshift material and pathways thus allowed the crime bands to reel new customers deeper in while allowing them to discern those who knew the path ahead from those still figuring out its contours.

To be a *campanero*, required a heightening of perception through the combination of various senses, including intuition. Under this synesthetic and vigilant perceptual regime of *campanear*, the ambulant body under scrutiny became a site to discern, its movements deciphered, and its tact and finesse (or lack thereof) in withstanding the *olla*'s atmospheric pressure became an affective barometer for La L’s *campaneros*.

Duván, who had mastered the art of *campanear* since his days in El Cartucho tells his peers from La L and me about what it was like working as a *campanero* for Homero. He was strategically positioned at the end of this half-block, where the street divides in the L Shape. “To be attentive (*para estar en la jugada*), we would stand on top of certain surfaces,” Duván tells us.

As he continues to share his story, he tells me to pull out my cell phone and look up a music video on YouTube of one of Colombia’s biggest Hip-Hop groups, “Crack Family.” Crack Family was known to be affiliated with the Homero crime band (see section below). A much older-looking than
his earlier days at the top of El Cartucho’s ranks, Duván appears in the video. Positioned at the corner where he had mentioned, in the video, Duván is featured for a few seconds.

“I would sit on a top of a trash barrel campaneando for Homero all day,” Duván tells me while he and his friend laugh, reminiscing of him being stationed at this spot. Through this top-view visual domination of La L’s scene, Duván as one of the middle campaneros connected with those at the end of the 9th street entrance.

The campaneros’ senses became weaponized. Which, along with the created surround, sustained more subtle forms of domination. Overt violence becomes no longer needed under the salla system. As though domination is instead exerted through the air, the ambiance. A certain atmosphere of vigilance and induced paranoia is generated and experienced as the general mood or state of things. Paniqueado, panic-ridden, was what many of La L’s inhabitants I encountered called it.
In the zone

The entire left side of 15th B Avenue in La L was known to have the best coin slot gambling machine rooms. These machines are locally referred to as *tragamonedas*, coin guzzlers. The gambling machines stores were many people from La L’s favorite places to hang out due to the music and general vibe of joviality and sociality. Though many entered as attempts to retreat from their lived environment and into this other plane of gambling and its roller-coaster emotions. Rows of slot machines occupied these rooms. The smaller gambling rooms could consist of just a jukebox, a bar stand, and machines covering the room’s circumference.

Ciro was a quiet, light-skinned man in his late 40s. He looked a lot younger than his age, considering he’d been on the streets of El Cartucho since his mid-20s. When I met Ciro in 2016, in the city’s transitional center re-named in memory of Óscar Javier Molina, Ciro had been taken there directly from La L. Ciro’s former job was to work in one of the slot machine stores in the Homero/Mosco territory. “The most popular machines were the poker and fruit machines,” Ciro tells me, referring to the three-reel screen slot machines people spent hours on. There were also the “pirates,” “Zeus,” and the “horse” *tragamonedas*, to name a few. In 2016, there was a total of eight hundred and thirty *tragamonedas* in La L.

Like so many of her peers in La L, the gambling rooms were Stella’s favorite pastime. One of her jobs was cleaning the drug and billiard lounges for the Homero band. “In between jobs, I would go to play my machines (*maquinitas*) until someone would come and yell, ‘Stella, so and so is looking for you to clean…’,” Stella shared with J, Duván, myself, and others after reflecting on some images of La L I had taken. The machine slot rooms were, at times, Stella’s place of retreat from La L’s drama. “*Me embalaba,*” I would blast off, or take flight, she adds. The flicking lights, the textures of the buttons, the ambient sound effects, and the illuminated screens all cater towards this gambling experience of “flight.” To “*embalar*” is a verb often used to describe the experience of “getting high” or going astray.
Its literal meaning expresses the trajectory of a bullet taking flight. While using the same colloquial expression people use for drug use for gambling, Stella draws connections between these two experiences as leading one elsewhere.

The embodied and mechanical rhythms of working the machines lend themselves towards inhabiting the gambling “zone.” Zone here connotes both an affective state of absorption that users are riveted towards, and a site—a spatial layout in La L that lends itself towards these very states of immersion. To be in the “zone,” embalado, we can argue is to inhabit time differently, to live in states of sheer intensity where the instant is experientially foregrounded over a broader temporal horizon. For Stella, hours would pass by fleetingly—experienced in sets, grooves, this moment’s bet, followed by the next one, until her zone was interrupted. Either by losing all her coins or by people’s demands of her labor. La olla’s enticement coin slot machine strategies often left me wondering if people were playing to “win,” or to inhabit time differently in the spatiotemporal-portal known as the embalado zone.

The zone that Stella and others described to me strongly resonates with what Natasha Schüll describes as the “otherworldly ‘zone’ of machine gambling” that users are subtlety ushered towards by the built environment. “On this ‘different plane,’ embodied existence in the material world is exchanged for a timeless flow of repeating moments.”

Much like Stella’s connections of drug use and gambling patterns as both premised on inhabiting the world through a similar zone of immersion and flight, Hecho el Desecho’s experiences in the gambling zones also gestured towards these connections. Hecho, who lived on the outskirts of La L’s 9th street entrance to the Homero/Mosco territory, spent his time and coins collected from panhandling in the tourist sector of La Candelaria downtown in the gambling zones. He loved Doña J’s gambling room as he had developed good relations with her by running errands for her from time and time being a “trustworthy ñero,” or street inhabitant.
Whenever his peers saw anyone enter the gambling rooms with money, they would crowd around to experience second-hand the thrill of gambling and to try to score some bazuco in the process. “Once you start packing the pipe, all of the ñeros would crowd around you in case something fell from your seat,” Hecho tells me while laughing. In his telling of his experiences gambling, it’s as though his peers recede from his perceptual horizon once he lunges strictly into this zone. The combination of bazuco and slot machines left him in states where he no longer spoke but communicated with the machine through paralinguistic gestures. He called the slot machines “electronic bazuco” for their capacity to cast one adrift.

Through some film recordings we did together, Hecho kinesthetically performs states of intoxication where most of his speech was temporarily suspended during his gambling and drug binges. Through movement, bodily gestures, and the relaying of affective moods, he tries to demonstrate how he would inhabit the world absorbed by the currents of euphoria and the vertiginous fall that often followed these states. Hand swings, groans while pressing down buttons, facial expressions sparkled with excitement and disappointment, immersion and disorientation became the repertoire for reenacting the experiences of winning, then losing; smoking, then losing the high: a set of seemingly eternal returns experienced in sets of moments. A zig-zag chase of various intensities that the embalado zone pried open.

The thought that people weren’t perhaps chasing monetary gains but forms of inhabiting time and place differently also surged when I realized that “winning” could potentially have perilous setbacks. Much like Stella, her partner Duván also spent some of his leisure time in Doña C’s gambling room across the Homero lounges. He remembered “winning big” once and the fear that that spun for him. Though people would indeed be rewarded in cash or in bazuco, there was also a general sense of fear if one won too big or too consistently. Such fear stemmed from the number of brutal beatdowns that took place if you were thought to be cheating the gambling rooms. In quests to remain in the
“zone” of gambling, some inhabitants had managed a way to continue hours of playing by designing counterfeit coins.

Through fine craftsmanship, people in La L would improvise their own currency through counterfeit coins that were carefully molded and hardened out of their recycled cardboard material and other goods. Once the bands noticed, store workers like Ciro and others, had to open the coin storage in the winning machine whenever somebody earned a significant prize so as to scan for cardboard coins. “You had to sit there and wait until they looked through all the fucking coins, praying no ñeros played with cardboard coins in that machine,” Hecho tells me.

Though Echo never cheated the machine rooms, he didn’t escape the beatdowns that were reserved for the counterfeiters. After a day’s work of panhandling downtown, Hecho entered Doña J’s store, exchanging bills for coins. Like usual, through multi-tasking, he prepared for his departure into the zone: inserting coins and twisting knobs while powdering his pipe and lighting matches. “I would get excited in those machines!” he tells me while performing his multi-tasking procedures once seated. From such excitement, he threw his match, still cherry-red at the tip, behind him without looking. Before he knew it, he was slammed into the floor by one of the sallas who happened to be posted by the entrance. The match landed in Ronco’s neck. “Ronco was a big salla who worked for the Morado band across from Doña J’s store,” he explains. “He and another salla from Morado stomped my face and began dragging me towards Morado” he adds while tracing the destined trajectory with his index finger on a map I shared of La L.

As he was being dragged out of Doña J’s gambling room, Ronco and his boss, the main salla of Morado tells Ronco to take him to “Cara Malo”, “Bad Face,” the infamous pitbull of Morado. Morado held one of La L’s biggest properties, a four-story republican house at the corner of the “L” shape where Mosco/Homero’s territory lead to Manguera’s. Bulletproof doors and a Pablo Escobar mural both protecting the building. The Morado building was known in La L for its cells, acid tanks,
and torture rooms, which the Colombian state also later documented and filmed in 2016.\textsuperscript{4} From 2013 to 2016, the police registered fifteen cases of acid-based homicides.\textsuperscript{5} Morado was also regarded as the casa de pique, the house of dismemberment.

As Hecho el Desecho was being dragged towards Morado, Doña J happens to be coming out of her father’s store, Don H, which was positioned adjacent to Morado. Hecho pleads to Doña J that he didn’t mean to offend the salla and that he launched the match his way by mistake. Doña J tells Ronco’s boss to let him go, that Hecho el Desecho is a “good crazy,” un loco bueno, and that he doesn’t deserve to be taken into the Morado cells. “If Doña J hadn’t run out of alcohol at her store and gone to her dad’s, they would have killed me that day,” Hecho exclaims, while looking at an image of Morado next to one of our maps.
Houses of dismemberment

Within Mosco/Homero’s territory, la casa de los sallas, was the primary center of operations for the sallas who oversaw this side of La L. A few doors from Doña J’s gambling room and across from Morado, sat a three-story building with a long vertical window accompanying the flight of stairs. The casa de los sallas was a mix of residencies and the headquarters for the sallas. During a discussion I hosted with various women from La L, Stella shares that the salla’s center of operations was on the third floor of this building. She would be called from time to time to clean their floor. After certain killings, it was Stella’s duty as a person of trust to clear the blood and stench.

Contrary to El Cartucho, with the system of sallas in place, for the most part, both Manguera and Mosco/Homero had relocated their practices of murder inside. Murder, sexual violence, and everyday disappearance became the public secrets materialized behind closed doors. These public secrets generated a certain opacity and mystique about organized crime which in turn reproduced fear across its territory. Yet the revelation of rumors and secrets weren’t only encountered discursively but also somatically through the presences of the dead through mirrors, shadows, images, sensations, and the strange (see “Life-in-death” and “Death-in-life” below). There was burgeoning presence of apparitions and visitations of the spirits of those disappeared here, many insisted. Like Stella, who was visited upon by the dead who would toy with her belongings and misplace them mischievously. “No one had access to where we slept and yet things kept disappearing,” she would reiterate, trying to reckon with the unexplainable.

Prior to Ciro securing a job at the gambling room, his subsistence was premised on robbing up and down Caracas (14th) Avenue. 200 pesos of chamber, or ethanol alcohol mixed flavored sweeteners, and 50 pesos of leftover food would be enough to get his day going (total of 6 US cents). Knowing people would return with valuables, the chasas or stores in La L would lend people shots of chamber as this was the “fuel” to get some people to go through the motions of robbing without a fear
day in and day out. During one episode of intoxication from the bar, Ciro miscalculated his wit and was caught robbing right across from La L near the Plaza Mártires church. He was told on, and upon his return to La L, the sallas we’re waiting for him at the entrance.

Taken to the casa de los sallas, he passed by other cells that held others in custody. Ciro was severely beaten by five sallas “plus later by another with a knife,” he tells me. Ciro passed out during the beating and woke up in the Santa Clara Hospital downtown. He didn’t return to La L for months and interned himself in the smaller olla known as 5 Huecos, a few streets behind La L. “Out of fear, I stopped robbing completely.” Months after waking up in the hospital, Ciro ran into an old friend from La L who told him that the main sallas involved in his beatdown no longer worked there and that the coast was clear. After this incident and re-entering La L, Ciro told me he just focused on work and “sustaining his vicio,” his drug habit, by working non-stop at the gambling rooms until La L’s last day.

The cells in La L were also known as the salas de masajes, massage parlors. As many people from La L told me throughout fieldwork, the tablazos were the primary form of punishment for minor infractions. “45 tablazos” or forty-five blows with a wooden board to one’s bare backside were the common norm a thin framed adolescent, Alex, once shared. Alex had lived in La L since his early teenage years. He recalls robbing a bike and being chased into La L. He managed to sell the bike at the entrance shop but not before being taken by the sallas for “bringing heat” (calentar). “The salla who had to punish me knew me, so he did them fast, others would really take their time,” Alex shares, recalling the tablazos.

Cynthia had grown up in the ollas since the El Cartucho days. Her presence amongst her peers always noticeable through her singular charm and outspokenness. I had heard many stories about her prior to us meeting in 2017. During a set of discussions while undergoing drug rehab, Cynthia once shared how she was given multiple rounds of tablazos in the casa de los sallas for stealing a bag of bazuco
from one of the open-air slot distributors in La L. “You should have seen how they left me, BLACK-BLACK,” she emphasized. “They also killed my [female] cousin there,” Cynthia adds in passing.

A few months after La L’s seizure by the Colombian military (on May 28th, 2016), the state’s forensic unit, CTI (Technical Investigative Team), discovered hidden burials inside La L.

A few doors from the casa de los sallas, a video from the Fiscalía (Office of Attorney) demonstrates the procedures taken by the forensic team: the machines scanning depths, the green indexical arrows, the excavation dugouts. Another video shows certain retrievals from these depths, a cluster of cement and human remains making its way to the fore. “1.45 (meters) to excavate the cadaver…immersed in concrete cement,” a Fiscalía official explains. A netherworld of “mass graves” (fosas comunes) soon was to be charted.

Above these mass graves in the houses of dismemberment, the cells look expansive, vacant, as the open space is occupied by dust and gleams of daylight entering through the windows. Flies circle the space, doing laps in the company of one another. The tile and walls are worn. The floor still stained with blood pools and encrusted marks. Hardened fecal matter is scattered throughout. Perhaps the remains of “Cara Malo” and other canine companions. Perhaps the remains of those disappeared. Ropes, black plastic bags, frayed rugs and garments, and a set of plastic buckets make up the inventory in the various cells.

Though the casa de los sallas belonged to Mosco, other ollas including Morado, Manguera, Escalera, and Homero, were known to have their own version of a mix of cells and torture rooms. Yet, while the ollas may have generated mass graves, many of my interlocutors stressed that the corpses would leave La L in bags. Or the muñecos, or corpses would end up in the heaps of garbage that would sometimes reach the height of second floors. Hecho, who slept on 9th street near the sala’s La Novena tavern, would often find the corpses in the trash pits near Don S’s recycling warehouse. When I asked Aldo, a man in his late 20’s who lived near La L’s entrance about the muñecos, he mentioned that him
and his peers had to move their *cambuches* much deeper inside La L due to the stench. The hidden graves, the plastic bags, and the *muñecos* buried in the waste piles facilitated everyday killings.
Crack-ed family

Let’s return to the formation of the Mosco and Homero crime bands. As mentioned, Óscar, the founder of Mosco and Cesar, his younger brother, rose to stardom in the drug business here in La L through different bands. Óscar and Cesar had already learned about setting up an olla first-hand by coming up in El Cartucho.1 Óscar took over La L quite fast by taking over the strip in the middle of 15th Avenue B where the casa de los sallas would later be his bands’ headquarters. Prior to his throne being known as Mosco, his line of merchandise was known as olla gris (grey).2 Olla gris become just one of his properties as “Mosco” become the logo and name. Duván had been around since the beginning. “He [Óscar] set up his team quickly. And once he was booked for that body [homicide] from El Cartucho, he stopped coming around,” Duván recalls.

It was around 2003. Duván was no longer the “menacing” figure or the ranked leader he was in El Cartucho. His long body worn from years on the street and drug use. He had known Cesar since he was younger. Cesar had grown up in Cuidad Bolivar in the city’s periphery before moving downtown with his mother to La L. When they moved here, Doña Berta and Cesar first lived in a room in Puerta Negra (Black Door). They began their business with just one bareque or drug slot dispenser. Duván had helped Cesar from the beginning.

Duván had always occupied an ambiguous positionality in La L’s circles. His reputation from El Cartucho granted him a kind of street veteran credibility as part of the legacy of organized crime in downtown. Yet, as a drug user on the streets and an older, worn-out body, he was also regarded as a “ñero,” “a street person,” a “cucbo” or old person, or a “zombie,” for his drug binges and trance-like meditations with La L’s occult forces.

Duván was known for his skills as a “chemist” or cook who could combine various merchandises to generate the most economically cheap to make, yet potent substance. The key for Duván was to combine the cocaine paste-base with just enough supplements that would add a
charming aroma without losing its potency or clear color. White and yellow was good, gray was not. Homero’s product became just that: an unforgettable aroma laced with a potent high. When arrested in 2013, a police agent asked Cesar why the name Homero. “The buzuco that I would sell was like The Simpsons, we all like it.”

According to Duván, with his help and two other older “chemists,” Cesar grew his line of work out of one bareque within the L-shaped street outside of America. By the mid-2000s Cesar became the biggest name in La L. “El chino Cesar would drive in the latest ‘spaceships’ [‘naves’], blasting music and handing out bichas to all the ñeros,” Duván tells me. Cesar initially wanted to expand his business in the residencies of America, but once Rigo and his Manguera network joined the scene, they fiercely pushed back. As mentioned, America was desirable for its hidden passageways to 10th street through the blanket factories outside of La L. But the proximity to Manguera, literally across the street, became too much to bear once the crossfires became routine.

During this earlier stage of La L, 15th Avenue B closer to 9th street wasn’t as populated. Historically, the flow of people had gravitated towards the L-shaped block where the residential houses of America and La Palomera were at. On this other, less populated side of La L, Cesar secured a house across from where Puerta Negra was located. A long lot still only half-built. The back end unpaved and still missing a roof. This lot, right next to the two recycling warehouses owned by Don S and Don M become home to Cesar and his Homero enterprise. Duván tells me that Homero began building up this lot, adding a permanent roof, cementing the floors, and optimizing the lot’s depth.

Homero first set up rockolas or jukebox lounges and then a billiard room within the lot. Makeshift shacks and tin roofs sheltered the bareque dispensers outside. Soon after, Homer Simpson baggies of buzuco took over La L. Homer Simpson muralled on the exterior and interior walls. As Cesar’s drug kingdom kept growing, he wasn’t satisfied with his remodeling of the pre-existing houses, and in the middle of the street, he built a dance club in La L annexed to his billiard lounge. The second-
floor dance club in the middle of the street barely stood out of place as the corrugated tin shacks occupied the space around its contours. These newly occupied spaces left nothing but a narrow passageway with multiple spiraling pathways to take into the different shacks, lounges, and paths ahead.

The wooden staircase leading to the club was thus cocooned by the outside lounges with sofas in the middle of the street. “Homero” graffitied in the tin walls just below the stairs. The narrow stairs opened up towards a yellow floor. The Simpson’s graffiti adorns the club from wall to wall. The club’s bar by the stairs carries a horizontal scene of Homer in a bar chair at Moe’s Tavern. The only images other than The Simpson’s is a pink and green Virgin Mary mural on the sidewall, and a cannabis leaf on the wall across, next to a Juan Valdes replica logo with Homer Simpson on the satchel of the horse. Neon lights, a disco ball, and large speakers mounted all over the walls. Duván tells me that Cesar had ordered the finest sound equipment from abroad. “He had the most expensive speakers in the country, I bet.”

Homero’s lounges and their overall narcoaesthetic became a brand and a movement. The site of *jouissance* (excessive pleasure and sensation)⁴ and consumption, quality merchandise, and the platform for the city’s underground world of Hip-Hop artists. La L in general, became one of the meccas of Hip-Hop in the city, a spot that had historically belonged to the neighborhood of Las Cruces just a few blocks from here. The most talented graffiti artists were summoned to adorn La L with graffiti tags and riveting portraits that took a social life of their own once painted. The group Todo Copas, comprised of Angel and Smith, would often frequent and perform in La L. In 2008, they began organizing the annual Street Art Festival inside La L that ran until 2016.⁵ Growing up in El Cartucho, Angel started a soup kitchen service for La L’s drug users in Homero’s territory.⁶ Smith from Todo Copas gained celebrity status as both an MC and graffiti artists throughout Colombia. His
A graffiti of Smith holding a spray can while morphed into the devil marks the entrance to Manguera’s territory from 9th street.

And then there was Crack Family. Arguably Colombia’s biggest Rap group. Comprised of Cejas Negras and Money (Manny), the group is known for its sharp adlibs and hooks to match their cinematic-like lyricism that reckons with life in the olla, drug use, and Bogotá’s violence. Cejas Negras had grown up in Cuidad Bolivar, where Cesar had also lived. Money grew up in New York City before being incarcerated and deported back to Colombia. Prior to Crack Family blowing up in the mid-2000s, the group consisted of a larger entourage of MC’s and friends known as Fondo Blanco. They had been receiving buzz in the underground world of Rap throughout the late 90s.

By 2013, the rumors had spread throughout Colombian and international media that Crack Family was linked to narcotrafficking and particularly linked to Homero. After Cesar was arrested in March of 2013 and exposed as the kingpin of Homero, he allegedly told reporters of the El Tiempo newspaper that he had been able to disguise himself to this point by moving through the worlds of the Rap industry. Exposure as disguise. “Many would see me on stage singing, and no one imagined that I had anything to do with Homero, I’ve always dreamt of being an artist.” In this same interview, Cesar explained his origins in Cuidad Bolivar and his partaking in the foundation of Fondo Blanco there.

Seven months after Cesar was arrested, in a radio show interview hosted in Paris in October of 2013, Cejas Negras directly addressed the rumors of Crack Family’s ties to La L’s crime bands. “We’re people from the barrio and so our friends are people from the barrio, so I don’t know what this person is up to, or that person is up to given that they are simply our friends…We’re not sponsored by any band; we’re our own band…Crack Family.”
That “gray zone” between organized crime and the Rap industry, between experience and lyricism, and between kinship and sponsorship, is one of both seamless connections and opaque mysteries that mutually constitute one another.10

Duván, Stella, and others from La L knew Crack Family’s entourage since they would often hang there. Duván, as mentioned, appeared in one of their music videos that was shot in Homero’s territory. Both Homero and Manguera hosted concerts in La L bringing the city’s most skilled MC’s and DJ’s to put on shows. A “Fondo Blanco” graffiti tag marked the walls of one Manguera’s houses. Later, a Crack Family logo adorned Homero’s territory.

“Crack Family” carries various connotations. Like other tales, it defies one particular meaning or story of origin, lending itself to the mythical and allegorical. In everyday slang, a “crack” is someone who excels; who rises to stardom above all challenges. A crack family is thus a kin group’s ascension against all odds. A noble sovereignty, we might say. Crack in its English meaning refers to the cocaine derived substance. And thus, Crack Family, to a family of those caught up in the drug game. Then there’s the local tale of the cracked family. The tearing and irreparable damages brought about to the kin’s social fabric. It is this third meaning and tale that also forged connections between Crack Family and La L in 2014.

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It was January 6th, the day of Los Reyes de Magos. Duván, as usual, Duván was hanging out in Homero’s billiard lounge. Like many others in La L, he was on a binge from the New Year’s festivities that carry on for another week or so. The sallas and campaneros on shift posted on their corners somewhere between leisure and work. Homero would have sallas outside of La L on 9th street and 15th B, as well as two sallas monitoring from a room on the top floor of the building across from Homero, Puerta Negra.
An Afro-Colombian *salla* known as Bomba was in charge of Puerta Negra, one of the smaller dispensers under the command of Homero. After being paid and guaranteed a position to work for Mosco, Bomba agreed to be in on the takeover of Homero. Busting through the door, Mosco’s people caught Homero’s *sallas* off guard on the top floor of Puerta Negra after Bomba had let them in.

Across the street from Puerta Negra and still in festive mode, Homero’s people were slumped in the *bareques* (dispenser slots) outside the billiard room while the other *sallas* were inside drinking. Once Mosco’s people received notice from the room across the street that the coast was clear, they rushed into Homero’s lounge and held all the *sallas* and people who worked for Homero hostage. They told all the “ñeros” or people living on the streets inside to leave. “The ñeros, taking advantage of the takeover, they robbed the bareques for a whole lot of mercachico on their way out,” Duván tells me. “We had a serious party with it afterward!” As he tried to exit with other drug users, Mosco’s men recognized him and told him to get down.

Mosco’s band rounded up all of Homero’s *sallas* and tied them up with ropes and handcuffs. “They had already killed four before they got to me, and El Pirata was already lying pierced next to me” Duván explains, “so I was already seeing death, talking out of fear and terror, so I spoke boldly, ‘Kill me if you want but I’m no snitch, you never seen me in your stores relaying messages or none of that shit.” After killing Homero’s main *salla*, they let Duván and a few other low-rank people from Homero go.

There had been multiple other shootouts and attempted takeovers between Homero and Mosco. Like another nighttime shootouts in 2012, that had the police losing ground unable to penetrate La L amid the crossfires. The rounds of bullets are heard from the outside between 9th street and Caracas Avenue during a news broadcasting of the shootout. Mosco, since 2013 had really begun to overpower Homero. However, this would be final takeover as from this day in 2014 forward,
the Homer Simpson images withered from La L. Big brother, Mosco, got the last word during La L’s sibling rivalry.

It was this splintering of kin relations in the quest for La L’s partial throne that became one La L’s most infamous tales. A cracked family ruptured by the drive towards political sovereignty and wealth. To become the partial sovereign, or to partially reign La L, was incompatible with co-existing with one’s own kin. A mother caught between the crossfires of her two sons’ bands, tip-toeing between the tumult as La L’s matriarch who ruled until its last day. In turn, in Los Mártires, rumor has it that Crack Family’s name, is homage to none other than Doña Berta and her kin.
Regimes of perception

For years, Esteban was one of the main campaneros of the 9th street entrance for the Mosco/Homero territory. He was in his mid-thirty’s and had lived downtown all of his life. Esteban grew up ten blocks north of La L in Barrio Santa Fé, known as the city’s red-light district—full of police owned brothels back-to-back to small ollas, disguised as dilapidated warehouses. His cousin was also a campanero for Homero, and Esteban gained entrance into La L’s crime bands through him. Esteban’s eyes, even outside the olla, always protruded in alertness—sending off a vibe of hypervigilance and paranoia. His jaw and teeth showed signs of duress and the mandibular strains left behind from drug-induced bruxism.

While working at the end of 9th street and 15th B Avenue as a campanero, he kept noticing that small flying objects would circle at night. He pleaded to the sallas that the tombos, or cops, must be surveilling with drones. “Keep smoking that bullshit,” they told him. Though deeply trusted and highly regarded for his record in catching infiltrados, undercover agents, Estaban’s pleas were taking as paranoiac and drug use hallucinations at the time. It wasn’t until a set of major police raids in 2012-2013, when high-ranked sallas went down, that La L’s bands began to take the state’s topographic surveillance seriously.

When I met Esteban in 2017, he had just finished doing a robbery bid before ending back on the streets and then being taken into rehab. In the center’s smoking area, he had overheard some of his former work colleagues from La L going for the ride through memory lane: the shootouts with other crime bands, the signals and lightbulb codes used to watch over their territory and communicate with one another from afar, and of course, the warfare triumphs against the special units during attempted drug raids in La L. When I showed him some of the audiovisual material I had developed from La L, the visual archive reminded him of the juridical archive that had been accumulated about
him and La L. As I scrolled through a number of images and clips on my camera, Estaban remarked: “This is how they would show me pictures of myself *campaneando!*”

Though both the 9th and 10th street entrances had cameras high up on the light posts, the *sallas* had tried to shoot the one on 9th street down and were told by their police collaborators that those cameras no longer worked after people’s many attempts at disconnecting them. By the end of 2013, La L had already obstructed vision into La L from without through gates, heaps of waste, and stacked tires. Soon after, the bands decided to leave their end of the year canopies up to deny a visual and topographic mastery to state entities over their side of La L. Files of festive, polychromatic canopies hung throughout La L. The canopies generated an eerie feel by adding more color while at the same time obstructing natural daylight to enter into the already cluttered and dark passageways.

The crime bands would often have people on the roofs watching over, but this all changed once word got out about the photographic captures from above. Morado and La Palomera were some of the tallest and most expansive houses in La L. They were also adjoined, and since they belonged to different *gancho* jurisdictions, a makeshift fence separated the connected rooftops. Manguera and Morado kept two of their men on each side, guarding their territory and looking over.

After the released images from drone and camera surveillance, the rooftops became vacated, dead spaces. When the *sallas* did go to the roofs, they did so with hoodies, low-brimmed hats, and their faces covered. Like when someone detained escaped *la casa de los sallas* and they had to go after him. In October 2015, a Dutch tourist had been kidnapped by the *sallas* in La L for running out of money during a binge. They had requested 20,000USD ransom from his family abroad. The tourist somehow escaped the cells and left through La L’s roofs jumping over into the military battalion’s rooftop.

The cameras from 9th street close in on a person trying to escape. Wearing a teal shirt and khaki pants, the escapee is trying to use the roof’s ledge to shield and hide. The camera then homes
in on the other side of the roof, which is part of La L. A salla wearing a baseball fitted cap, and dark sunglasses tries to calmly persuade him back into La L with slow hand gestures pulling towards his chest in embrace. Another man with a hoodie and face mask, perhaps less patient, tries to cross over into the Battalion’s tiled roof. A crowd is gathered below on 9th street. The Dutch tourist begins to panic and starts to hang off the ledge.

The cat and mouse game in La L’s and the battalion’s rooftop comes to an end when the firefighters and the police rescue the man through a ladder truck.3

On another occasion, the cameras from the 10th street entrance begin to close in on a dark-skinned man handcuffed and escorted by two police officers in broad daylight. The man detains appears nervous, his head moving around knowing all too well where he is being taken. The three are coming from the Plaza Mártires and Caracas Avenue and heading towards La L. They are met outside La L by two sallas. One of them, who is wearing a backwards white fitted cap grabs the man by his belt as the policeman releases the handcuffs from the man detained. Police custody transfers to salla custody.

The two sallas take the man into La L.

The cameras follow closely as they pass through the gates, heaps of tires, and files of bikes at the entrance. The footage shows all three becoming swallowed into the La L’s depths as multi-colored stringed canopies no longer allow us to see them. The sign where the canopy files begin, reads: “Feliz Navidad.” Merry Christmas.

Quests for territorial sovereignty were often tied to quests for visual dominance between various adversaries and collaborators. As to be seen, could quickly morph into being sought. The act of seeing penetrates the subject under scope with the potential to inaugurate a set of violent events. Ocular aggression precedes physical violence.4
As Allen Feldman writes, “Visual appropriation, because it is always pregnant with the potential for violence, has become a metonym for dominance over others: power lies in the totalizing engorged gaze over the politically prone body, and subjugation is encoded as exposure to this penetration.”

In other words, as sectors of the state and organized crime competed for sovereignty in La L, the sphere of what was made visible became one of the domains to control over. Heaps of tires partially obstructing standing eye-view were countered by drone surveillance and cameras, which were then countered by stringed canopies, tin roofs, maze-like passageways, and of course, underground tunnels.

To control what is seen and can be seen, relied on frameworks that cultivated a totalizing gaze. One associated with mastery and the potential to dominate those under view. In short, through surveillance tactics that heavily relied on certain forms of seeing, both the state and organized crime tried to turn hidden depths into exposed, visible data points.

These forms of gazing are part of a *scopic regime* where, as Allen Feldman argues writing about political violence, sensory organs “can be socially appropriated to channel and materialize normative power in everyday life.” The scopic regime through which the state and the crime bands operated, is part of an “urban way of seeing” that scholars have associated with realist aesthetics. A visual realism that presumes a posture of omniscience, a coherent and “story-shaped” world awaiting decipherability. Under such presumptions, the realist gaze attempts to carry out “the domination of space…the appropriation of bodies that move through space and…the recuperation of the “hidden” private lives borne by these bodies.”

Yet what Esteban and others have shown me rely on something broader than a scopic regime. As I have demonstrated above through the *campaneros* modes of synesthetic perception and surveillance beyond the strictly ocular, forms of surveillance by the crime bands in La L (and other
ollas) rely on much more than realist aesthetics and scopic regimes. They rely on cultivating sensibilities to the unseen but felt, to the affective and atmospheric that a certain person or circumstance summons with their arrival. Like Esteban, who just had a “feel” for undercovers despite their torn clothes, wayward stroll, unruly hair, and grim appearance in attempts at assimilation. There was something about them. Such perceptual openings unto the unseen rely on a place-based and culturally patterned sensorium that is always already synesthetic—it builds on multiple forms of sensing beyond ocular-centric realism—though the attempted aim is ultimately the same: mastery over the unknown.

To attend to the unseen in the quest for somatic and spatial domination relies on implementing a synesthetic regime of perception. One that demonstrates that visual realist logics of perception are not mutually exclusive with other forms of sensory apprehension. To foreground the intuitive over the strictly ocular, is what we could consider a form of “sensory gating” where we modulate our somatic modes of attention by augmenting our focus towards certain sense receptors. Such sensuous “gating” has been considered as relying, vaguely, on “cultural” forms of perception.

I want to foreground these cultural features in terms of actual lived circumstances, including the impacts of the phenomenal features of place on the sensorium, and our embodied perspectival and social positionality in these places.

In other words, where we are positioned and oriented towards, pre-reflexively activates certain synesthetic configurations, and in return, the lived world, its “dispersed surround of created things, surfaces, depths and densities…give back refractions of our own sensory biographies,” our sense of self, or place in the world. To be a campanero, for instance, is to be lucid; to be endowed with certain kinds of intuitive and perceptual prowess, and ultimately, to be placed in stances of power.

The synesthetic regime of campanero surveillance positions people in multiple stances that cover the grounds of La L (and its peripheries). For those near the jukebox stands, for example, they relied on attuning other senses while attempting to detune or become accustomed to the acoustic excess of
music endlessly blaring. The use of lightbulbs flicking and hand signals helped to relay messages to the next in line amid the acoustic commotion.

Stella had mentioned to me that she stopped *campaneando* once they developed the lightbulb system in La L, which was more nuanced than the yelling “Mario, Mario” and whistleblowing in El Cartucho. The number and duration of lightbulb flicks, or the hand signals (which were also used in El Cartucho) often made up the stock of surveillance signals.

The sensory and semiotic components of *campanear* required fine-grained sensibilities that prove too challenging for many. The sentient flesh, as a prosthesis to serve the workings of organized crime, relied on inhabiting the *olla* through states of alertness and intensity that made possible the complex arrangement of perception, cognition, and hermeneutic depth. Elements that were much needed to uphold the synchrony and communication among the different *campaneros* in real-time speed.

It always struck me that *campaneros* like Duván and Esteban kept high on *bazuco* throughout their shifts. As though the paranoiac side-effects of drug use prove useful for remaining alert and channeling intuition about potential *infiltrados* or intruders. *Bazuco*, in its controlled and moderated use seemed to be appropriated from the domain of jouissance (excessive pleasure) and non-utilitarianism, into the utilitarian world of labor.¹³ High-stakes wagering, since locally, people’s relationship with *bazuco* was one of being at the mercy of this potion. One tied to the devil, the dead, and becoming changed by sacred forces from without; to “losing oneself to another.”¹⁴ “Bazuco is the devil, one is always possessed,” Estaban used to say, echoing a common refrain often claimed by people on the streets.

To weaponize *bazuco* induced alertness and bodily experience in this case, was about working through limits of moderation and excess, in order to attend to the unseen; to intuitively decipher undercovers and “matter out of place;” to uphold La L’s limits through skills, partially granted by the substance.
In turn, there’s an awareness that the optic regimen betrays and that one must also rely on a set of “anti-realist” aesthetics of perception tied to the divinatory. As I will ethnographically explore in the next scene, such forms of perception are locally tied to understandings of the metamorphic power that lies in the occult. In our human capacities to encounter and activate the sacred. An awareness that the cultivation of extra-somatic perception depends as much on one’s senses, as it does on one’s relation to place, matter, and even the dead.

Though La L’s bands operated under the inherent logics of rationality, bureaucratic and vertical organization, and optical surveillance tactics (mimed from the police), there was also an awareness on the impacts of the unknowable, the sacred, the uncanny, the dead, and the hauntedness, amongst other domains that exceed the mastery of place in shaping their enterprises, and the everyday unfolding of events more broadly. Much like the thousands of people living on the streets they surveilled, they too were at the mercy of this place’s force and the non-human intensities that pulsed through its atmosphere.
The death-in-life

Not unlike the crime bands in El Cartucho who consulted with occult forces through rituals and objects, La L’s ganchos all worked alongside certain brujos who endowed their products with sacred force before distributing. The practices of witchcraft smuggled part-time into the domain of labor, were meant to protect the ganchos from one another, from the drug raids. To forge dependency on its customers with their brand so as to “sell all the merca!” as Stella once pleaded.

“Each band hired their own brujo for protection,” Duván remarked, “Right, Stella? Remember the fat lady from the soups that would do the rezas? And Don N, too.” For Mosco, these occult rituals were done in the casa de los sayas, by one of La L’s cooks, Duván explains.

The rezas, or “prayers” were known as the witchcraft rituals that the packaged bazuco underwent prior to distribution. The bichas or sacks would be spread on the ground and “cursed” by the brujo, Duván shares. Incantations, hand movements, the channeling of occult forces through the brujos body made up the repertoire for this dual aesthetic of gripping others while building up an apotropaic insularity against the other bands’ brujos.

The ganchos’ laws which forbid one to smoke another gancho’s merca on their premises, or to “mix” the merca from two ganchos, created certain allegiances with their regular customers based on these mandates. Though people like Aldo, who loved to risk, mixed the merca anyways. Outside of these laws, as people from La L often told me, it was in fact, the rezas that led one to pledge an allegiance to a certain gancho in the first place: to purchase and reside in their lounges only.

An allegiance sustained by being drawn and physically attached. “That’s why if you smoked bichas rezadas [bazuco that was bewitched] you would be left enganchado,” hooked, Daniel, who spent a number of years in both La L and 5 Huecos once told me. “Imagine yourself, only wanting to buy from a certain gancho, or waiting for hours for the taquilleria [dispenser slot] to open back up in the morning like I used to,” Daniel prompts, sharing how he would wait in 5 Huecos. Fixed to the curb,
tense, and impatient. Daniel’s term “enganchado,” as a double entendre: to be hooked, “addicted”; and to become entangled, affiliated, sworn into a relation with organized crime (the ganchos), is the most lucid offering for thinking through this phenomenon that I can think of.

During one of the first media briefings given after La L’s militarized takeover in May 2016, the city’s then Secretary of Security, Daniel Mejia, when mentioning what was found inside La L, the first thing he referenced was “casas de rezos satanicas,” satanic witchcraft houses. La L had by then developed the reputation as a place saturated with the satanic and evil, an infernal world mired with the unknown. Prior to the military and the CTT’s (special units) bombarding La L in the early hours of that Saturday morning on May 28th, they received a priest’s blessing and prayer at 2:15 AM. Perhaps an awareness that much like the crime bands, they too, needed sacred protection to inhabit its demonic grounds.

I once asked Duván if the hiring of brujos for protection was specific to the ollas like La L and El Cartucho. He responded laughing at my naiveté, reminding me of Colombia’s broader history of “narcos” having personal brujos: “This goes back to the cartels and even before them! Pablo [Escobar] and all those pirobos of the mafias had brujos protecting them.” Duván’s remarks bring to light the relation between narco-aesthetic mystique and the negative sacred; between protection and prosperity, with the satanic (and its associations with violence and evil).

Certain ganchos in La L were known for their substances to feel more bewitched than those of their competitors. A bewitchment often experienced somatically in pulses of contortion; spurts of loss of control, and self-awareness. This sort of temporary hijacking of bodily integrity and the nervous system often culminated in states of being adrift and partially vacated from consciousness. Experiences that seemingly take “the human body out of itself.” Such was the case with the gancho of Escalera, part of Manguera’s territory whose potent bazuco became infamous for subjecting one to its occult powers.
The heaps of garbage have formed disparate islands of waste near Manguera’s entrance to La L from 9th street. The bustling of the recycling warehouses and La L’s traffic meet the recycler as he crosses the entrance gates. He enters deeper, passing by some of Manguera’s residencies on the right side where open-air kitchen stands are positioned outside. Moving slow and waywardly, he makes a thudding sound here and there across the walls and metal doors with a long object on his hand. The recycler is heading towards where him and his partner live, near the Escalera residencies.

Escalera was a two-floor smaller lounge full of stands, speakers, and jukebox machines. A Marylin Monroe mural hangs on one of the walls of its second floor. A few doors down, Hector Lavoe, the Salsa legend, is muralled inside one of the second-floor walls to the Millos lounge, which also belongs to Manguera. A warning sign in Manguera’s territory reads: “No se haga pasar a la sala de masajes,” don’t let yourself be taken to the massage parlor.

Outside Escalera, his partner is waiting for him, and upon seeing him, she immediately scolds him in repulse: “What are you doing with that bone, stop being disgusting!” He tells her that the Escalera cooks need it and that they’ll be compensated. The recycler had been searching the piles of waste for muñecos or corpses, that would sometimes end up outside of 9th street, as the Escalera cooks were preparing a batch of bazuco. Hecho had been nearby, captivated, bearing witness to this scene between his recycler friend and his partner.

Hecho recounts that on another occasion, one of Escalera’s cooks, Contino, would saw the human bones into powder form. “I once went inside Escalera to sell some chocolates to Contino since they used to also work in the Transmilenios (the city’s buses) when they were all in there sawing bones into a white sheet.” The powdered bone turns into a yellow dust, Hecho explained, while gesticulating the grinding and sawing motions.
The yellow powder would then be mixed with the paste-base to both *rebajarlo*, a way to “stretch” or amplify the substance for mass distribution, and to endow it with the dead. Other ethnographic and media accounts of people’s experience in La L have also documented similar practices of human remains grinded into *bazuco*. A mixture of utilitarian and non-utilitarian ends, which we might say, temporarily loosen the boundaries between the profane and sacred. “I look back and think that all those skeletons scraped was what damaged our minds the most,” Hecho explains while massaging his temple region with both hands. In turn, for Hecho, it wasn’t the drug alone that led one astray, but the mutual consumption and embodiment between the dead and the alive through *bazuco*.

Through temporal spurts of intensity, the dead and the living “mutually becoming one another at their limits.”

The alive were consuming their dead; the dead heightened their vitality and presence by embodying the alive. He spoke of this process as “*endemoniar el cuerpo*” (demonizing the body), a transformation where demons, the dead, fleshly matter, and consciousness (or its suspension) become temporarily adjoined in alternate configurations of bodily being. Such states Hecho added, began with the “*nervios,*” the nerves, but “ended with the mind”—a takeover of one’s presumed integrity, temporarily dissolving one’s sense of self.

As demonstrated in “El Cartucho,” the *olla* is generally considered to be scaffolded by an atmosphere that is *tetrico*, haunted. A *tetrico* ambiance partially premised on the various coalitions of the dead or “disappeared” with those who remain attuned to their palpable presences and absences.

It is this “fluid immanence” of the dead’s fleeting returns and dissipations that unsettle dualist thought and the stability of categorical order: matter and spirit; subject and object; sacred and profane, and dead and alive. They do so by inhabiting a multiplicity of forms: bodies, “objects,” and what we may consider as “quasi-things,” or atmospheres where the dead become palpable, usually at the
register of the barely perceptible, or at “the murk of visceral experience, at times powerfully moving, at others fleetingly vague.”

To reckon with the dead, the capacity for their manifestation, and their metamorphic qualities that unsettle prominent forms of thinking, requires forging alternate sets of relations that foreground a multiplicity of entities that traverse and disrupt the subject/object distinction.

As Todd Ramón Ochoa reminds us, it requires a “foreign language within our own,” one that collapses these rigid binary divides. Such forms of thinking, “must have words for the volatile social potentials found in matter and terms to arrange what are normally considered dialectical exclusive classes, like “matter” and “spirit,” into mutually affirming couplings and assemblages, paradoxical though these may seem.”

I thus want to consider the intricacies between the *ganchos’* sacred substance, *bazuco,* with the alive, and the dead. Their mutually affirming and intermingling ways. *Bazuco* bears to potential to both mediate between realms of the living and dead, while also becoming the very manifestation of the dead themselves.

During these metamorphic exchanges, as people become “possessed,” their flesh can be the very “form of the dead, and the dead becoming material in momentary coagulations we recognize as bodies and objects.” The flesh as *endemonizado,* as Hecho would have it, or as possessed by *bazuco* and/as the dead, complicates notions of the bounded self, of autonomous consciousness, and experience as “existential givens.” What Hecho and others described, was the feeling that one was at a loss from oneself, and in turn, at the mercy of an experience that paradoxically robs one of experience.

One that oscillates from being vacated, only to return to consciousness with a sharper awareness and intuitive might of the otherworldly forces that populate their inhabited world:

That the dead are part of the social folds of the *olla.*
That the dead's metamorphic capacities can extend into various domains of lived experience, including the sentient flesh.

This Tétrico atmospherics that I've been describing thus far, unfolding between bodies, sacred objects, and place, resembles what Todd Ramón Ochoa has described as the ambient dead. Such notion might allow us to consider the dead not in opposition to “us” as living beings, nor to the materiality that textures our social worlds. As mentioned, it is the dead and haunting as a “fluid immanence” traversing various categories and planes of perception that is presented through this notion.

Ochoa writes,

“The ambient dead is a climate of transformation, complete with zones of woe and marvel, flashes of inspired intuition, and thunderclaps of astonishment that echo in the cavities of our bodies to wake us from our petrified thoughts. The ambient dead is as likely to seize us as an interiority or an exteriority; its influence is as likely to be discerned in our “subjectivity” as in the world of objects around us.”
The life-in-death

When I met Christian, his gaze seemed to brush against the world with a powerful extracting force. A stoic, upright posture held his body as he scanned the room inside one of the city’s rehab centers, registering everything in sight. Usually, an upright posture and such projectile gaze would feel threatening, but he never came off that way. His affect, in turn, reflected him as wise, laid back yet attentive to others.

He was one of a dozen participants summoned to take part in a set of “voluntary” workshops for La L’s inhabitants. A taller del duelo, or grief workshop, designed by the center’s director and hosted by a team of psychologists for those who underwent unimaginable violence inside La L. Despite explaining my role as a researcher on numerous occasions, for months, Christian remained skeptic as to what I was up to—not belonging to the professional staff with their light blue jackets, and not belonging to the worlds of those brought here from La L. It would be months until his stoic and skeptical disposition would open out towards sharing sustained meditations about his personal life and the way he had cultivated certain forms of apprehending the world guided by La L’s general ambiance, and its often ineffably occult domains.

Christian was in his 50’s and like many others here, he had gone through the vuelo de locos, the flight of the folly, as people on the streets called the set of mass displacements they had undergone downtown. From the rest of the city (and country) into El Cartucho, from El Cartucho to La Carrilera (the old railroad alleyway), from La Carrilera to El Matadero, an old butcher shop converted by the city into a temporary “humanitarian camp,” from El Matadero to La L and El Samber, and more recently, from La L and El Samber to the ditch on 30th Avenue and the rehab centers him and others currently find themselves in.

The experiential depth accrued in the city’s ollas and other improvised places by people on the streets, had led Christian to uphold a skeptical and vigilant disposition towards the world around him.
He had seen and felt too much not to know any better. It wasn’t just the interpersonal violence all around him that led to such vigilance, but the fact that all around the *olla*, signs, and revelations were unfolding for those who had the tools to come close to them. Alertness to the unseen became a way to carry forth in a world unhinged where things seemed to always turn on their head. A world of metamorphic flux that, to make do, required harnessing intuitive insight at the fringes of perception. It required an attention to the phantasmatic flows that course through us, a “phantasmographic” sensibility.

Christian was a cook for La L’s food stands located in Manguera’s territory. Manguera’s corner outside of La Palomera, and across from 5 Piso, was the primary area assigned for the food stands in La L. Dozens of stands lined up next to one another. “The robbing and the crime were never my line of work, mine’s was the food, feeding everyone, you see?” he said. “En la arte de la calle aprendí de comida y siendo generoso con la gente,” *In the art of street life, I learned about food and how to be generous with people.*

Christian was renowned for his *agua de panela* (a hot, brown-sugar beverage) and bread combo in La L. Like other cooks, he paid the *sallas* the daily work fee and for the stand, enduring 24-hour shifts followed by a full day of rest for years on end. “2mil’ for security and 20mil’ for the food stand” ($5.50USD total), he tells me. From his business, he even made the news once. I would later find the news footage where he is featured as a sort of food ambassador for La L. “Even the police, wanted to get me out” he said, “they told me that they’re going to try to find a way for me to find a real job.”

During the drug raids, the police never messed with the food stands. “They always left them intact!” Christian exclaimed.

Part of Christian’s longevity and prosperity as a cook in La L, he credited to the entanglements, the *enganchos* we might say, with the occult: namely, the worlds of the devil, the spirits, and the dead. His skills in harnessing intuitions and revelations, he tells me, go back to El Cartucho. There, his body
learned to presence certain place-based intensities he spoke of as “cargas fuertes,” heavy charges. “Since El Cartucho,” Christian adds, “I’ve always had this ability. I could rent a room and sense if it was loaded with heavy spirits.” A proliferation of images and sensations mediated by bazuco granted him certain connections with the occult domain. At other times, it was the material surround that broke open these connections. Revelations were coming from all angles of life, causing the matter and spirit dualities of conventional thought to run futile.

A refractive, channeling, and harnessing process where images, signs, and sensations would communicate him to this other domain that was invisibly or hiddenly layered in the here-and-now. Enganchado, he felt indebted to the devil—the ultimate mediator who would lend these images of foresight while securing prosperity.

_Bazuco_ was the exchange currency.

_El día que no consumía, no hacía ni un peso. Eso es el diablo, esos puestos estaban estan rezados._ “The day I wouldn’t get high, I wouldn’t make sales. _That’s_ the devil, those stands were cursed,” Christian emphasized.

In turn, much like the _vacuna’s_ or security fees, he paid forward to the _sallas_, Christian felt indebted to the otherworldly that was also _here_. Wished prosperity and the revelations for how to stay afloat and protected during his shift came to fruition whenever he smoked _bazuco_. Revelatory signs coursed through La L’s material surround and atmosphere which would inform him of what the day awaited.

While he was working in La L’s kitchens, he managed to establish a connection with his daughter who lived in the city’s peripheral settlements. His adolescent daughter who had heard he was interned in La L would come and visit him with her friends here and then. She had joined a female gang in the city’s southern region where she lived with her mother, who worked downtown overseeing brothels.
He noticed that his daughter eventually started coming with her friends to the rockolas and parties geared for adolescents more and more in La L. “Like the ones in Millos,” he said. Christian kept getting certain sensations throughout the day that would inform him that something wasn’t right. “Yo presentía, las cosas,” I would presencis things, he told me. “I would tell some of my customers to go keep an eye on her,” he said, “since she mostly hung out on the other side of La L in Mosco’s territory and I couldn’t leave my stand.”

After weeks of visiting, his daughter told him that she wanted to come live with him.

His daughter moved in with Christian, who lived in one of the pagadiarios, the pay-per-day motels, just outside La L near Caracas Avenue. “We would smoke weed together, but never bazuco,” he confided.

Soon after, she began dating a salla, and her drug use became visible. “I had these sensations all day long,” he told me, “I knew she had started smoking bazua and huffing glue.” He tried to steer his daughter away from the sallas who were notorious for getting with all of the young girls that entered La L. “I almost got killed, trying to find out about them with my daughter.” To sustain her drug habits, his daughter began robbing cell phones downtown and eventually faced legal trouble. The glue began to wear on her—literally and figuratively.

His daughter began engaging in the drug trade in the south of the city, making trips from La L and back on a constant basis. Christian presencis that she was in danger. During his days off, in his room, he would close himself from the world of La L. He was often given room thirteen, in Mamá Consuelo’s hotel, he tells me. “That room always was charged.” Christian had a distrust for mirrors. He placed them face down as they tended to amplify the rooms charged-ness.

In this room, alone, during his binges, he began to harness insights about the looming hazards his daughter faced. Like “dialectical images” surging in moments of danger. He kept seeing the faces of men who wanted to harm her.
Concerned about the images conjured and the overall sensation his bazuco meditations would leave him with, he kept trying to get ahold of his daughter. They spoke on the phone. She told him that she would like to see him soon; that he should come to the city’s south-side, as she wanted to tell him something in person.

Christian never got to visit his daughter. She was found dead, killed by a jibaro for drugs not paid.

“The newspapers claimed it was an accident, but everyone knew the real reason. She died with two in the head while holding a cigarette in her mouth.”

Despite Christian’s capacity to harness the atmos, to transduce “charges” into extra-somatic insights, he felt guilty for not being able to directly intervene in time. To relieve her from the dangers faced. “That’s what hurts the most, that I didn’t do anything,” Christian said, “se me salen rapido,” [the tears] they come out quick.

After his daughter’s death, Christian spiraled into depression. His binges led him to become insomniac as his daughter kept making her presence felt. She had joined the general ambiance of the dead he had been so attuned to. Staying awake was a way of keeping her close. During his shifts, the first bill he received each day, he marked and stored aside. In the bill, he would write her “little notes” daily, before exchanging with clients.

He felt that in the bill’s circulation through La L, his daily messages would also reach her.
Nonhuman flesh

La L’s “heavy charges” also traversed through non-human flesh where they also found lodging. When I prompted about the connections between discerning revelations, prosperity, and the devil, Christian referenced one of his common practices for communicating with the occult: La L’s rodents. Rats in particular.

Contrary to the general repulse and undesirability by which urban rats and other rodents are commonly regarded, some of the people I came to know who lived in the city’s ollas, including Christian, considered them as endowed with sacred force. When Christian began elaborating on La L’s rats in one of the grief workshops, another participant chimed in, interrupting Christian mid-sentence: “The rats have always been special in the olla, and in prison too.” When he was doing a bid in La Picota, one of the city’s prisons, the other participant mentioned how the bands in charge forbid anyone from killing the rats.

Carolina, who had been displaced from La Carrilera downtown, a long-secluded railroad alleyway, added to our discussion by recounting the personal visitations from the “coneitos,” the little bunnies to her tent. Coneitos is what she called the city’s rats to de-stigmatize and re-enchant their presence in urban space (a rat is also local slang for thief). “They understand, they sense, and have intuition,” Stella tells us in a serious tone, pleading for us to engage them critically. Their presence and “visits” bore the potential to bring good fortune, she stressed.

For Christian, the swarm of rats in La L were mediators from the beyond. Anchored behind his food stand, Christian tried to absorb the flux of it all—the traffic, the sounds, and general feel of the olla. Each day he remained attentive to the rats that moved across La L’s surround. From afar, at the juncture where gancho America’s sector morphs into Manguera’s La Palomera building, he would watch them moving slowly but effectively, tracing the paths chosen. From these contours and
kinesthetic flows, he would conjure revelatory images. The interior kinesis of Christian’s imagination and the deregulated kinesis of the rats became synchronized.¹

As they moved closer to him, where a dozen or so food stands were adjacent to one another, he waited to see which stands the rats would be drawn towards as this would be an indicator if prosperity were to come. Christian, like other cooks in La L, tried to have their stands rezadas, or protected by the brujos. Yet the ultimate sign to divine what the day had in store was if the rats visited your stand. For Christian, it never failed: if he didn’t smoke bazuco beforehand, the rats would pass right by his stand, as would the day’s clientele. “That’s the devil.”

There was a sense that the rats were endowed with the sacred given their capacity to navigate various worlds and thus to serve as “ambiguous mediators” from the infinite. Their capacity to navigate across strata, to ascend and descend the layered worlds of La L, and thus to make contact with the subterranean depths associated with the dead and the infernal, made their every move telling.

The rats became presences with “heavy charges.”

Not unlike Christian, Raul who stayed in America’s residencies began to reckon with the charged presence of other non-human bodies that inhabited La L. As I was once filming and hosting a discussion on La L with some of its former inhabitants, Raul spoke of one of America’s mysterious cats who would moil through the different rooms unbidden.

From the outside, a tiny front door and narrow hallway is quick to deceive one of America’s actual size. Once deeper into the inside space, one was met with a long hallway that magnified the house’s appearance with a shadowy illusory depth.

It was a place frequented by many of La L’s inhabitants, since on its ground floor, they could access one of the only sources for drinking tap water. A sort of oasis lodged in this liminal space and invisible threshold between the Manguera and Mosco/Homero territories.
Raul would pay the daily room fee in America with peers and go on private binges. To maximize space, America’s administrators would split certain rooms with curtains and sheets, and instead of glass windows, some of the rooms were covered with hung fabrics. The cats would mingle and wander, making visitations throughout the different rooms. In America, Raul became drawn to a particular black cat.

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Sitting on a couch, Raul begins loading his pipe. The seemingly endless procedure of packing, re-packing, unpacking, and cleaning the pipe for the potent leftover resin takes course. The smoke hangs in the room as a black cat enters, breezing past the hung curtains. As soon as the cat sees Raul packing the papeleta or sack of buzaco into the pipe, he begins growling at him and clawing at the couch’s fabric. As Raul inflames the pipe and inhales, the cat grows more desperate. Raul bows his head face-to-face with the cat and then exhales. “No lo dejaba en paz si uno no le echaba el pipazo en la cara,” it wouldn’t leave one alone if you didn’t blow the smoke in their face.

“A cat-addict!” he exclaimed.

Drug use as possession seemed to carry over into non-human bodies as well. The “ambient dead” or tetrico atmosphere seemingly hovered and clung to everything in the olla. These ambiguous and shapeshifting forces yearned for bodies. For somebody to cling to.

Yet given their broader saturation in the olla, we might say that these forces did not “depend on an object or belong to a subject.” Thinking with my collaborators from La L and with these interspecies entanglements, I want to consider non-human flesh not only as symbolic of the dead and occult but as the very temporary enfleshments of these mutable forces.

Buzaco as the dead. The dead as the “cat-addict.”
For Christian and Raul, the olla’s living species harness sacred forces and are coursed by the olla’s ambient dead, or the devil. They are not only signs to discern but presences one must face. Ambiguous mediators whose mutability allows them to flit between sign and referent.

Yet these presences in the form of animals also bore the powers to heal. Such was the case with one of Mosco’s dogs brought here by a salla. Duván had been under physical duress for some weeks now. Years before his life in La L, he had severely injured both of his ankles while being chased during a drug raid in El Cartucho (See previous section). The veins running down his pale lanky legs were met with hues of purple and green by the ankles.

Scabs took shape as both of his legs became swollen from the infection. For weeks he remained outside of his cambuche, his makeshift tent, resting on the floor. Greased with dirt and fever-sweats, dehydrated, and with lymph nodes, he shifted in and out sleep. La L’s crowds moved past him like an endless parade of shadows across his soft and dreamy gaze.

A Labrador Retriever he called El Mono started to visit him as he laid on the ground, unable to move. El Mono began to sniff around Duván’s ankles as though the dog could sense his life forces waning. Duván lifted his jeans up to his knees, and El Mono began licking the wounds with significant pressure. El Mono would return to Duván’s side every few hours during those first days to press upon the wound and to accompany him. “Parecía ese perro un médico,” the dog was like a medic. As the days passed and El Mono continued to return to lick at his wounds, the scabs began to heal. “Each day, [the dog would lick] much slower.” Until the wounds became completely healed by El Mono.

For Duván, El Mono was a “guardian” sent.

The medic-dog, performing an aesthetic of care and healing, led Duván to become aware of his canine companion’s capacity to harness divine force. Like “contagious magic” where the coming in direct contact with an “object” has the potential to shapes the course of events, El Mono’s saliva bore healing powers. Nonhuman flesh appeared to become host to divine forces.
The coronel

It’s another night on the streets for Hecho. On the outskirts of La L, on 9th street, he is stretched out among his peers after a day’s work. The roaring sound of motorcycles amplifies as the police turn the corner, parking across from La L where Hecho and his *parebe*, his clique, pass the night. A police van arrives soon after, parking ahead of the motorcycles. The coronel steps out of the passenger side of the van, where Hecho and his peers are rested. “Tonight, I need y’all to sleep from that light post forward,” the bald-headed coronel yells at the crowd. Bodies begin to slowly pick up their belongings—cardboard boxes, blankets, plastic bags, matches, and pipes—and relocate a few feet away.

The coronal and his men enter La L. It’s payday. They were there to pick up the *vacuna*, or security fees from the different *ganchos*. “It would take them two to three hours,” Hecho explains, “They’d go to each *olla* in La L and come out with bags. We’d watch their bikes for them.”

The coronel was known in La L as “El Calvo,” for his bald head. Working in tandem with La L’s bands, El Calvo or coronel Gerardo Rivera, was also the head in charge of the police force for the municipality of Los Mártires until 2013.¹ As police investigations would later reveal, El Calvo would notify La L’s bands in advance when drug raids were being planned and provide inside information pertaining to the state’s pursuit of them.²

“El Calvo had ordered the *sallas* to shoot down the cameras outside La L,” Hecho recounts. The coronel was later told by his superiors that the cameras weren’t working and served more as decoys, when in fact, they were indeed still working. The retrieved footage from these cameras shows El Calvo being handed money by the *sallas*, and on various occasions coming out of La L with plastic bags, and even receiving a bag in the tavern on 9th street that one of the *ganchos* owned.³

On double payroll, he would also advise the bands on how to govern the *olla*. The same video footage captures him lecturing to a circle, in a didactic posture as the *sallas* listen to his instructions.⁴
Hecho shared similar stories about the coronel. How the coronel would often show the *campaneros* where to stand and how to surveil more effectively. “He would leave all the other *tombos* on the other side, and enter deeper by himself,” Hecho says, referring to the coronel’s strolls into Manguera.

When Manguera first took over its side of La L, near the kitchens, there used to be a space where the recyclers would keep their carts, which included a parking lot inside La L. Through these wooden carts, known as the *zorros*, Manguera trafficked things in and out of La L.

The coronel told the bands to remove most of the clutter from Manguera’s side which then led to the making of underground tunnels on this side of La L. Moving his finger across an image I took of Manguera’s territory, Hecho charts the tunnel’s hidden path for me, as I film.

“The coronel was implicated in the tunnels!” he adds.
The tunnel of time

Much like El Cartucho, La L was a place that also operated through the vertical plane. Thus far, we’ve spoken of this plane through topographic surveillance from drones, light posts, buildings, and towering campaneros standing on higher surfaces. In passing, we’ve also spoken about the subterranean world, the invisible city that hiddenly sustained the olla.

During 1919-1925, downtown Bogotá underwent a massive wave of urban renewal. Particularly between 6th street and 13th street, which La L falls within. As part of these projects, two of the city’s rivers, streaming down from the Monserrat mountains, were canalised. Like other urban spaces, downtown Bogotá was held together by an underground infrastructure, canals, pipes, tunnels, paths leading to nowhere, and cavities below the ground.

The Transmilenio bus station that would drop me off right outside of the Plaza Mártires, Avenida Jiménez, was itself a subterranean city. Once descended into the tunnels, the cavernous space felt overwhelming. A sea of bodies gushing forth, pushing you along through cluttered passageways as freelance musicians try to perform, and informal vendors offer on-the-go snacks. Only a few feet away from La L’s tunnels, the subterranean station’s length was a firm reminder of the hiddenly layered depths that saturate down below.

I had heard about La L’s tunnels from people in La L, before the Colombian military, like a group of cave expeditioners voyaged into their depths, filming this world that remained a mystery to most until May of 2016. After presenting my work to the city’s officials at their headquarters downtown in March of 2016, the person in charge of the city’s outreach services for people on the streets prompted me to think about the tunnels in La L. He mentioned that some of the bands had discovered the houses they had taken over, came with underground portals. Other bands, in dire need of passages to the outside, as Hecho and others would later make clear to me, hired people to design these tunnels.
Sometime around 2013 and 2014, Hecho recalls how the ganchos began drilling right in the middle of the street. “First, they took down Doña N’s kitchen and then began digging. Do you remember by the parking lot we spoke about?” Hecho asks me, referring to the Manguera’s parking lot, where one of the tunnels began. He presumes that they must have had two tunnels, one that leads towards 10th street, and another that must have led either towards 9th street or 16th Avenue.

As Homero’s partial kin, or “Los consentidos de Homero,” the spoiled ones of Homero, as Duván would often say, him and Stella would often be asked for certain jobs that they were deemed trustworthy of doing. Like Stella, who, as mentioned, would be called to clean up after certain murders. Similarly, after fading out of his job as a campanero, Duván was called to take on the task of watching over a certain stash spot in La L.

Homero’s people told him he needed to watch over a particular door in La L, 24/7, and that in return, they would build him a cambuche, a makeshift tent where he could live in front of the stash spot. The cambuche they built him, also served to disguise the hidden entrance into one of Homero’s stash spots. The cambuche was built with long wooden frames, tall enough to make the door behind disappear completely out of sight.

By the hour, one of the sallas on shift had to collect all of the money from the different dispenser slots Homero owned, and hide the money until it could be taken out of La L later at night. Or they had to enter the stash spot when more bichas were needed in one of the slots. Outside of his cambuche, located near Homero’s billiard lounge, Duván would hang, watching over.

He realized he could relieve himself of watching over all day, by placing a set of curtains on the front and sides of his cambuche. From the outside, the curtains would blend seamlessly into the cambuche and the neighboring frame that was part of a dispenser slot, leaving a side passage between them. The salla could enter the locked and hidden stash spot from this side passage. That way, Duván also didn’t need to have direct interaction with the salla each hour, granting him some privacy.
“I always told people I had over don’t fuck with the curtains or look past them. They would get scared when they heard the booming noise of the metal door opening!” Duván explains.

The stash spot was filled with caletás, the storage containers where they kept the money and bichas. It also led to an elsewhere Duván or Stella never could enter into, nor wanted to. “Sometimes, we would see or hear someone being take there by the tallás and never coming back out,” Duván tells me. The hidden door was the portal to some beyond.

The stash spot must have been one of Homero’s labyrinthine tunnels. The state’s footage of these tunnels shows them as filled with bags of clothes, sheets hanging from the ceiling, and other hoarded goods that occupy the entirety of the space, leaving only a multitude of maze-like paths to choose from into the darkness. Duván and Stella were the gatekeepers to the labyrinth. An impossible place they guarded daily, one that exceeded them. Like modern-day minotaurs guarding the labyrinth, except only from without.

Duván spoke of the hidden stash spot as “the tunnel of time.” Like a conduit towards the infinite plane, the stash pot made contact with various worlds. The site of disappearance and death. The site of passage towards some outside from which the money and drugs circulated. The material vessel that sustained the very workings of organized crime.

The tunnels as heterogeneous places, inform us of the very impossibility to ever have a full grasp on La L. Like Duván’s tunnel of time, which to enter and try to gain mastery, meant to never come back out of the labyrinth.

Even the bands who had access to the tunnels could never grasp La L in its totality since no band ever managed to rule both sides of the “L.” The panopticon was always limited to a particular territory. As such, seeing and knowing was always partial, myopic, caught up against the other side, the “zones of shade,” and the opaque. An anti-realist aesthetic of perception proved necessary.
I close this section on La L with the scene-image of Duván’s tunnel of time in its capacity to gesture towards the impossibility of this place. Duván's labyrinth is also good to think with for the existential paradox that is the *olla*; its heterogeneous and contradictory experiences of simultaneously being one of the only places in the city people on the streets felt *at home in*, and an uncanny world one could never master. The place of ecstatic flight, joviality and non-utilitarian existence, while also being the place of hierarchical governance, surveillance, and absolute terror that pulsed through the atmosphere. In both cases, quests for sovereignty ran futile.

This section has tried to consider this down below and infinite realm in relation to co-existing forms of sovereignty, perception, and sacred experience in the *olla*. How the down below unearths itself and rises to the fore. How it comes to, in part, dictate people’s experience of this place. Through ethnographic scene-images, I’ve tried to illustrate what it feels like to be at the mercy of unbidden forces—forces that could only be partially reckoned with.

In turn, centering on La L’s inhabitants’ synesthetic and “phantasmographic” regimes of perception, this section has performed how the down below, partially returns, mediated in the form of images, sensations, divinations, but also in the form of non-human companions, sentience, sacred substance, and the general ambiance. Thinking with the flux of things, with the immediacy of place as a lived experience, robs us of the surety of stable subjectivity, meaning, and categorical order.
Interlude: Plaza España

05/29/16. So much has happened in the last 24 hours. Since the takeover of La L or El Bronx, warfare is the felt tempos and norm in Los Mártires. Unrest and the feeling of militarized encroachment over personal boundaries saturate downtown, even more so, for people living on the streets.

The streets downtown are highly policed, certain corners feel like limit-zones of an unannounced apartheid. Military blockades, barriers, and frisk stations cover entire areas. From Avenida Jimenez (13th St.) to 6th St., and from Avenida Caracas (14th Ave.) to 30th Avenue a militarized bubble takes shape. I watch as people are turned away from entering this area from La Jimenez. The unspoken tactic is: if your appearance fits the profile of someone living on the streets, you will be denied entrance. Within this occupied space in the city, most of the tension is situated at its core: The Plaza España.

Only a few feet from El Bronx, Plaza España is the main site of commerce in Los Mártires where the licit and illicit economies not only blur but sustain one another. Where contraband markets and counterfeit goods are next door to state offices and municipal headquarters. Factory warehouses, clothing markets, the Liceo Nacional local school, and the San Jose Hospital surround the Plaza. The open-air plaza has always been a place to lounge for people on the streets. But after their displacement from El Bronx yesterday, mobility is hindered and closely surveilled. Over four-hundred people have been corralled in Plaza España, while their peers are restrained from entering the militarized bubble. Cambuches and rain-resistant sheets are solidified as people try to refuge and remain as a collective within the plaza.

There is anger from the physical violence underwent yesterday; from the existential violence of being uprooted from home. Anger from being corralled within narrow fences for hours as they were, one by one, coerced into mug shots, frisks, and digital fingerprints. Some taken into rehab.
Others interrogated and tortured in El Bronx. “I’ve seen them taking people into Morado [the torture rooms] as we were being expelled,” Duván would later share with me. The military state’s appropriation of urban warfare tactics from their organized crime rivals was taking place. The same torture chambers created by Morado, now being used by the state to get information about the crime bands. Others like Luz, who I would meet weeks after, were severely burned during El Bronx’s drug raid. Luz survives two others who were trapped with her as a line of stores were set ablaze. The mayor’s administration claims no one was injured or killed during the raid. That their plan worked to perfection. But the lives of those grieved, the wounds, and the looming crisis unfolding in Plaza España shows us otherwise.

As day turns to night, a circle of ninja turtles, or ESMAD swat-gear soldiers takes solid form, prohibiting people from exiting the plaza. They are cornered on all sides with nowhere to go. This encroachment at the plaza by the state is nothing short of provoking further violence and injury. A young woman tries to exit the plaza but is first denied by the barrier of soldiers. She keeps circling around them until she finds a crevice and breaks containment. She’s a messenger addressing the news reporters on behalf of El Bronx’s sallas: Me mandaron a decirle lo siguiente: no quieren cámaras, los sayayines, los duros de allá, no quieren cámaras. “I was sent to tell you the following: they don’t want cameras, the sayayines, the bosses of over there, they don’t want cameras.”1 Another person later shouts towards the reporters, “you only film what is convenient,”2 gesturing towards the elision of state violence the reporters are failing to document, centering instead on those within the plaza.

Chaos eventually unfolds as the armed units begin to target El Bronx’s former residents. A back-and-forth attack ensues until a screen of smoke covers the plaza and its inhabitants. Like baseball outfielders on the prowl, people rush towards the tear gas cans and launch them back at the Tortuga Ninjas. The rumbling sounds of warfare continue to ripple through the plaza as rubber bullets fly one way, while Molotov cocktails and excrement fly in opposite direction.
Within the plaza, the *sallas* from El Bronx were putting out hits for 2 Million Pesos ($666 USD) on any military police present. Contemplating the way people were surrounded on all fronts, Duván later tells me that no one took up the bid as “it was an impossible mission.” He had been standing next to the *sallas* from Mosco who had given him 40 bags to distribute to people. Many others trusted by the bands were also sent to give out sacks. A counterattack powered by *bazuco*. A drug-induced alertness carefully provided to each person serving as manpower during the current state of war.

The bands, captured in footage, can be seen disguised under blankets and masks orchestrating people who served as “human shields”3 in this quest to return home. As the night progresses, tensions reach an all-time high as people get the sense that this is their only chance to take El Bronx back. Ever. People are ordered by the *sallas* to take over the San Jose Hospital and they begin to try to barge into the hospital. The military police bombard people and manage to disrupt their takeover of the hospital. Patients and staff alike trapped inside, dangerously close to the turmoil. Only the general entrance section of the hospital was affected.4 The plaza is left in flames that slowly waned on their own.

As things were heating up near the hospital, other managed to evade the military cordon and began to try to break into one of the city’s house of passage, Bakatá, which is located between El Bronx and Plaza España. Inside the house of passage, workers had been trapped inside for 24 hours since the protests began in the wake of El Bronx’s raid. S., the director of Bakatá, tells me how he had to supervise his team to calm people within that were anxious about El Bronx’s takeover and what they could hear unfolding from without. The city’s white vans could not get themselves close enough to Bakatá for people to exit safely and for new staff to replace them. As the unrest continued, people tried to set Bakatá ablaze and began to target its top floor. S. told his staff to remove all of the toilet
paper and storage goods that were kept up top in case the fireballs would penetrate. It would be another day until people could make their way out safely.

After three days of warfare and heavy downpour, large trucks rented by the city’s social services enter the scene. Bodies are scattered throughout the plaza under plastic sheets. Soaked. Some managed to escape towards the canal on 30th Avenue, others nearby towards the streets of La Estanzuela’s neighborhood. People are cleared from the plaza and taken into the patios while the military police stand firm nearby.

The military police’s bubble, frisk stations, and omnipresence is the new norm. They form part of the “new” military urbanism of the city where the potential for war, by deliberately blurring the lines “between civilians and combatants,” is always a step away. A durative state of siege where every cavity of the city can become the next battlespace. The military state: always heavily armed, always prepared for the next episode of conflict in a seemingly boundless and perpetual war. Day after day, the suffocating and persistent flex of military might carries on.
Exit

The communal is the new wild, a place where the human ends and an inhuman or even an outhuman begins as a dream of ecstatic contact that we continue to seek out in life, in love, in dreams, in material objects, in the neutral, and in the skies.

Jack Halberstam, “In/Human-Out/Human.”
Fieldnotes

the image as the portal
the shelter “we” find in objects
reinverting value in the discarded
bruxism, contortion, the wanting out from oneself
loss and squandering
the violence of the norm; the human as a category
finding refuge in the monstrous
releasing oneself
the lived intensity of the instant
possessed in the voice, possessed by the voice
the worlds “we” shuttle between
the right to pleasure and to love
the errancy, the wandering
cotermous attachments
the abject as generative
the anti-project world of play
immersed in the tinkering, consumed by the hoarding
the affirmations towards life found in self-annihilation
stepping out of time
out-of-body-consciousness
the experiences we cannot fully experience

……..

……..

abandoning the project of civility

the impossibility of exiting
Hecho el Desecho AKA Hecho

Bazuco AKA Bazuca

Hulk, The Graffiti

Matchsticks

Duván

The Cloud-beings

Makeshift Pipes

Cartels, Guerrillas, and Paramilitaries

Solvent Inhalants

Breath

Doña C

Stella

The Voice’s Spectral Autonomy

Juanita

Juanita’s Parents

Maria

Juanita’s Daughter

The Altar

Daniel

Images

The Dead as Bazuco

Daniel’s Father
A Story of Bazuco

The War Against Drugs is actually funded by cocaine and is not against drugs at all. It is a War for Drugs.—Michael Taussig

The shredded coca leaves are spread across the floor. Cement lime powders the top layer until the hues of dark green are no more. Ammonia then gets sprayed throughout, re-animating the dark green into existence. Knee-high plastic boots repetitively stomp unto the leaves. Then, the leaves are transported into metal barrels where a whole lot of gasoline awaits them. The alchemical process requires time. For about two hours, gasoline and coca leaves are left to intermingle. Then they are stirred. Wooden paddles in circular motion forge a tide. More new, yellowish gasoline enters the barrel. Then, older, murkier gasoline adjoins the mixture. More stirring ensues. The liquid is then transported unto smaller barrels or buckets. More chemical companions join the mix. Potassium permanganate. Sulfuric acid. Ammonia. Soon enough, the transparent liquid morphs into a milky oil. More ammonia does the trick. The buckets are filtered, until all is left is a milky-yellowish base at the bottom. The yellow paste is cocaine base. The metamorphosis of decomposition.

All of this is to pulverize the leaves and excise their alkaloids, transforming coca leaves into cocaine sulfate. Later, the paste base undergoes another alchemical process that ends with cocaine hydrochloride. The powdery substance of global demand. In Colombia, global demand for cocaine left behind a whole lot of bloodshed and sulfate residue. Narco-wars were launched by cartels, and later by paramilitaries and guerrillas. For a while, the sulfate residue at the bottom of barrels would be discarded. An insignificant byproduct of powdered cocaine. The abject, disposable waste of late capitalist production.

Then, sometime in the 1970s, someone decided to re-insert value in the discarded. They figured they could sell this byproduct of cocaine production—this sulfate residue—to those who have also been abjected, discarded from the economic market. A discard for the discarded. Desechables, disposables, was the local derogatory term for the thousands forcibly displaced, unemployed, and
others living on the streets. When *bazuco*, the disposed waste of cocaine production, took over the streets, its short-term high potency bursts of euphoria followed by panic and alertness changed the tempos of life. The lived intensity of the *instant*, and securing more instants to come, alongside others, was what mattered most. Other substances needed to make do in the streets became secondary.

“*Bazuco*” as in *base*, the base matter for cocaine production. “*Bazuco*” as in *basura*, refuse, abject manufacturing waste. Others, interchangeably, use “*bazuca*,” for *bazuco*. “*Bazuka*,” as in *bazooka*, a rocket launcher that would catapult people into that other time of immanence and pleasure, into that other time of immersion with the world outside of servile existence. *Embalado*, people would call it. Elsewhere-bound, like the forceful trajectory of a *bala*, a bullet that casts one adrift.  

*Bazuco* was the social currency, the conduit, the alchemical potion that allowed people to temporarily exit themselves and become otherwise. Another kind of metamorphosis of decomposition. *Bazuco* became one way to let loose from oneself, while also becoming tethered to a forbidden history, to the *olla*, and to others. *Bazuco* held the space between self and world, and self and other, it was the common denominator. In the *olla*, shared transgression was the primary mode of sociality. Present, along with *bazuco*, there was also love and the erotic, solvent inhalants, games, gambling, ethanol alcohol, kinship, cannabis, violence, reverie, prescription pills, and the dead and the spirits. A set of seemingly ever-growing coterminous attachments opened to the porous self by this base matter, once discarded.

Transgressive substances “usher in a world of force and substantiality felt from within, a world that escapes from the time-based cause-and-effect reality we most of the time like to think we observe. This other world is the world of physics and chemistry, sex and silence, dreams and nightmares, and I call it the world of ‘immanence.’”  

*Bazuco* and people living on the streets, together, became doubly transgressive in their alliance, perceived as an imminent threat by the broader polity. An alliance of the discarded. Then, in the late
80s, came the limpiezas ("social cleansings"), the clandestine killings targeting people on the streets. The ollas, violent as they may be, became fortresses from the limpiezas. Outside of the ollas, people on the streets, in dissociated states—outside the conventional ways to orient oneself and to direct consciousness—were taken as an assault on the normative values of what being a “human” consisted of. “Base matter is external and foreign to ideal human aspirations, and it refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations.” The world of “superior” values and metaphysical ideals of the human, namely bounded individuality, future-oriented modes of consciousness, and servile forms of existence, stood no chance against these new alliances between people and things abjected.

Later, also came other metamorphic compositions and alchemical mixtures. Like the bazuco in the ollas downtown that was adjoined with more cement, and human remains. This was done, I was told by people in the ollas, to leave drug users hooked—to the product and to the olla. Bewitching and densifying, cursing and stretching the paste-base killed two birds with one stone. Sacred and profane. Taking the spirits of the dead along for the ride, the base matter accrues new companions, acting on the world, as much as other entities, like the dead and the spirits, act upon the world through it. A hodgepodge of things incessantly becoming other things, that some call the “metamorphic sublime.”

Bazuco as base matter brings us closer to a world where nothing is entirely stable. Where the order of things become muddled. Slippery. Evasive. Formless. Mutable. Alchemical. Base matter refuses categorical domestication as strictly “object” or “thing.” It leaves categorical thinking overwhelmed, exhausted. Bazuco prompts us to think in images, in stories, in allegory, where things can be held without being pinned down or resolved to fixed meaning or whole truths.

“Alchemy invites allegorical thinking. That is, thinking through material objects and the multiple, and ultimately unstable, compositions they can yield.”
Matchsticks

And there they were. Omnipresent. Scattered across the floors, underpasses, and medians. The boxes of matchsticks felt always a stone’s throw away from wherever you found yourself downtown. *El Rey, Bengala, Poker, El Indio.* And the other common brands that populated the floors. Some like *El Diablo,* became rare, vintage, endowed with the sacred. Scattered, these small rectangular boxes formed archipelagos. Discernable from afar by their hues of yellows, blues, and reds, the colors of the Colombian flag. Discernable by the icons of The Devil, The King, The Bengal Tiger, and other mystical beings. When left scattered, the boxes were evidence of nights passed together, of shared joviality and transgression, of life lived by slivers of instants that may not cohere to a larger whole.

Made of wood and a mixture of phosphorous, chlorate and sulfur, the matchsticks inside, teem with charge and wonder. They are indispensable for those living in the asphalt. The stuff that provides warmth and glimpses of light throughout the night. The stuff that upholds drug-use sociality and sustains rhythms of consumption. The boxes of matches are cared for, secured in plastic bags along with the *trabas,* the bags of *bausto,* because like Duván once told me, “I don’t care if I spend the night soaked, as long as my box of matches is dry!”

While still full, the matchstick boxes become extensions of one’s self. They are held dearly, caressed in the palm throughout the flight of fancy. Or later, gripped precariously in the hands of spasmodic bodies. In the pavement, there are entire ways to shake the boxes, to open them, to swing them, and to light the matches. Entire ways to wane the flame and discard them with the flick of the wrist. The matchstick boxes can morph into emblems of anticipatory pleasure. They precede the cherished instant. Or the dreadful moment. They break open the time of suspense that can catapult you into either violence or joy. Sometimes both. The boxes draw you in, lure you into the world of play. Entire games are borne out of them. Groups huddle following the boxes’ trails through the air, their acrobatic spins and nimble landings on the pavement. Playing *cajitas,* little boxes, they call it. The
rules are simple: you launch the box into the air with hopes that the long side lands vertically. The prize is more trahas, more euphoria, more immersion, more bodily energy in need of release through contortion and the grinding of the jaw. On and on you go. Until there’s no more to squander.
Glued (Here in the Elsewhere)

Air. It is an object that is shared, that is common, that is necessary for each movement, each act, each scene—whether of subjection or celebration. Air is an irreducible admixture of nitrogen, oxygen, other minute atmospheric gases and particulate matter that enters the flesh through the process of breathing. This process of breathing can be, certainly has been, is and will be, aestheticized, performed... To fill lungs with air is to displace the carbonite matter that was previously within. To write narratives of flight is to displace the common conceptions of the human, the subject, the object.—Ashon T. Crawley

I’m in the passenger side of my cousin’s car. We are heading eastward towards downtown on a Sunday afternoon. The Monserrate mountains protrude above us. I catch myself engulfed by the view during a red light, adrift, staring into space. I’m slowly pulled back into my immediate surroundings by the green light. I see a young man on the sidewalk gesturing melodramatically to no one in particular. His loose black shirt dangles as he moves his hands up and down. A small yellow plastic bottle of boxer glue is cupped to his hand, with a red top poking out from his grip.

The gestures and hand raises turn suddenly into swings. His body dodges and weaves, then strikes back with might. His closed fists, targeting phantoms, slice through the air and boomerang back to his chest. He is pulled a few steps into the street directly in front of my cousin’s vehicle. His body contorts as though his flesh is being impacted by whatever he is fighting, moving him further into the street. There’s no going around this scene of combat unfolding between the two lanes. The vehicles behind us and on the lane to the left of us blow their horns excessively.

The man’s face bears signs of immediate danger, raised eyebrows and a fierce gaze, he is reacting to invisible forces staking claims on him. He seems to be both here and elsewhere—reacting to the horns of frustrated drivers and to the strikes of foes. Multiple forms of the “real” fold upon one
another, layering his general experience, or so it seems. Yet it is the hallucinogenic and phantasmatic
that is of immediate concern. He appears engulfed by a “sea of imagery” powered by solvent
inhalants, by the oceanic depths outside of fully conscious experience.

After a few seconds, my cousin slithers past him, trying to zig-zag like the motorcycles who
cut in front of us. Through the rearview mirror, I watch as other vehicles pass by him. He continues
jabbing away.

Like many other fieldwork encounters, I’ve returned to this scene-image time and again. Its
force “presides” over my thinking. There’s a tendency for me to try to exhaust this image, to
extrapolate multiple currents of meaning from its seemingly infinite source: the layers of violence that
this person’s dire circumstance refracts; how for many Colombians, the omnipresence of such
circumstances develops a cultural anesthesia—a mechanism of indifference—towards the situations
of people struggling along in the streets, and so on.

This scene crystalizes the stakes in way too many similar encounters in downtown Bogotá
during fieldwork—some thoroughly elucidated in my fieldnotes, others unwritten, but that randomly
crawl back to memory. And way too many others that, by now, have receded altogether.

This scene-image for me points to the usual troubles in ethnographic knowledge; namely, the
obvious limits of “representation” and “interiority.” That is, how to represent the fleeting instant and
do justice to what exceeds you; how to stake claims on the images, the phantasmatic world of another
that gets couched under the realm of interiority. I found the following note to myself: I want to conjure
[the] felt intensity of this moment, the severity of the combat and impact left from an aggressor on this person’s body. An aggressor that I could not myself see. This wasn’t the ethnographic surreal converted to realist aesthetics “I
swear I saw this” moment, but an “I felt it,” type of moment.

Furthermore, what these types of scene-images often raise for me are the questions of
movement and orientation in relation to this elsewhere. An elsewhere that is also here. Where do people
go when they inhabit this elsewhere? How can one begin to move around these limits of representation and “interiority”? Perhaps one way of moving around this paradox is by dislodging conceits of an insular interiority altogether; by showing instead the fusion of self and world, flesh and image, that such scenes are testaments of.
Hulk

There are no bounded, neatly packaged forms of perception, no coherent selves to speak of. We are brought into a coarse, dense, intricate mosaic of sociality composed of an infinite dynamic patchwork of precepts and sensations within the image…Notice how the mind’s eye moves from scene to scene and takes in the many matters at hand. Consider how it’s easy to fall into a certain kind of reverie, one that takes a consciousness outside of itself, which dissolves into imaginative and empathic possibilities.—Robert Desjarlais

Duván’s lanky body erects towards the sky, arms open in embrace showing off his wingspan. His gaze softly scans then penetrates, connecting with various surfaces and their hidden depths. His body is deep in meditation.

In El Bronx or La L, each morning Duván would rise from the floor of his cambuche, or makeshift tent and make his way towards a graffiti a few steps away. The endless traffic of people in La L always stood between him and the image he cherished. Brushed over the graffiti that came before, for Duván, the image felt larger than life. It was comprised of a green bulging face, a piercing gaze that looked back at the beholder. The lines and contours that made up the face illustrated a muscular tension suspending a seemingly infinite rage into the image.

The graffiti was Hulk.

Duván shared how his morning visitations comprised of becoming entranced. First by Hulk, and then by the skies. “Hulk comes alive,” Duván warns me with a serious face, “and that green changes to a more intense, or a less intense color. As if it wanted to escape from the wall.” Color as alive, “as that which pulls the observer into the observed, which may even include being pulled into as in history.” In that space between reverie and cogitation, for Duván, colors, forms, and other seemingly static things that made up his material surround in La L were liable to change and connected to a larger cosmos.

He would always hang by the door of Doña C’s gambling spot, right across from Mosco’s billiard lounge that Hulk was the face of. “I would sit across, or sometimes would kneel paniqueado
(panicked) amid one of my drogadas (binges). And I would stare into Hulk and concentrate. And he would stare back, there would be a transmission of energy from him to me, and from me to him.” Hulk’s animating force carried the potential to deliver Duván from his experience of paranoia amid drug use and the persistent threat of violence. “I would feel that energy, an intense energy (aspera), a positive energy. I would forget that I was paniqueado…or forget about my lung problems (from bazuco use) and that I was barely breathing. All of that would go away when I communicated with Hulk. But I would have to stare directly into his eyes.” Hulk, at times, provided breath, life-force, spirit, in moments when this stock was depleting. But it could also throw Duván into further disorientation.

Duván returned to this point during another conversation, “Yo lo miro a los ojos y el hombre cobra vida, y yo cogo fuerza.” I look into his eyes, the man tolls life, and I gather [life-force. This mutual form of acknowledgement, this reciprocal form of haptic gazing where Hulk is animated by Duván, and in turn Duván is empowered, elicited the sacred. There’s a toll, a sacrifice, for being empowered by Hulk who is capable of charging for one’s life (cobrar vida). Hulk, an image of blinding rage and grotesque form provided the necessary means to harness the sacred, at times a life-affirming image that could empower Duván with extreme lucidity about potential happenings. At other times, Hulk could amplify bouts of paranoia and loss—the being caught adrift. This was an ambivalent and “incurable-image,” an image that throws one into struggle. The engagement with Hulk could lead down various paths, as the image was both vital and corrosive, healing and poisonous. But Hulk, was only part of the equation, a segue way that would ignite an intricate set of forces and connections with the larger surround that included the clouds above.

There is an intricate connection, a trifecta between Duván, Hulk, and the sky. The intensity and degree of light landing on Hulk’s graffiti along with the shapes and colors of clouds all matter. The slightest of changes is the difference that makes a difference. Learning to discern such seemingly minor differences is Duván’s craft. Here, in La L, clairvoyance is a skill developed to try to defer or
even evade injury. Clairvoyance is about becoming open, receptive to images that warn, even if such receptivity could make one travel down deleterious paths.

It is partially through this corporeal and psychic life of images that we can come to bear on how violence as the general “weather,” the “atmospheric state of things,” is somaticized and navigated by many on the streets. But as we will see, to somaticize images too much, to be led astray by Hulk or other images, has serious repercussions on one’s selfhood.

Divination, through images, is Duván’s way of becoming attuned to a foreseeable future, to what the day has in store amid the persistent violence that takes place in La L. Through these very practices, in the past, Duván has intuited drug raids, shoot-outs between the crime bands fighting for territory, and even the lethal splintering of social relations. Cada vez que se nos querían entrar los rayas, eso era fijo que yo los presentía…los anticipaba, “Every time the special task force units would try to raid us, it would be a given that I would presence them, anticipate them.” He had also foreseen the notorious shootouts between the Mosco and Manguera bands in La L, and when a close friend would turn on him.

The morning clouds that slowly coursed above La L gained familiarity for Duván. The clouds morphed into discernable shapes: faces gazing back as image interfaces from the beyond, or forces from an elsewhere (“las fuerzas de algo más allá.”). Each particular cloud had its own integrity, name, and face. These forces could be partially gathered through the elements like the degrees of light, the shapes of clouds, and their refraction into Hulk and the broader atmosphere.

I take up Duván’s “forces from an elsewhere,” and a beyond, to resonate with what Laura Marks describe as the “infinite.” This beyond or infinite could also be considered the depths of history and the cosmos—the inexhaustible which will always exceed us. As Marks writes, “We cannot perceive the infinite as such. It is a vast field of virtuality, the plane of immanence. But now and then, certain aspects of it unfold and become actual, as information or as image.”
Through his alert, vigilant sensorium extending towards the cosmos, Duván would try to attend to some beyond. Or at least its mediated shards through the image—refracted for him in La L daily. The beyond was tapped in the *here* through Duván’s immediate perceptions of his surrounding and his imaginative reach. This gathering of images and clairvoyant signs, this trying to make contact with a beyond, is perhaps a necessary *apophenia* to sustain life in La L, a place where nothing makes sense, yet somehow, it all appears to be connected.

Reenacting his daily ritual for me, Duván’s arms are raised. Eyes-closed, he tries to demonstrate a state of concentration in spite of the chaos, the traffic, and density of La L where this would take place. “At some point, I would say: ‘Morning my beings (meaning the clouds), morning viejo Hulk, here, all is good’ *[aquí, todo copas]*.” In counterclockwise movements, Duván massages his temple and forehead region while slowly tilting his head back, shifting his concentration from Hulk to the clouds until his mouth is vertically aligned with the skies. “Those thick white clouds, which for most, appear formless, I would find in them human images (faces).” Duván was a host, transducing currents of energy between Hulk and the cloud-beings.

More than the discerning of signs, this trifecta connection opened up, for Duván, a way to activate the sacred through the images he was working with and was being outworked—*exhausted*—by. Sustaining this immediate and sacred connection with Hulk and the clouds would often lead Duván unable to attend to those around him. He would drift into another mode of experience that would leave him beside himself, a mode that would converge images with the body of the beholder of such images. A coalescing of self and world, perhaps not unlike the notion of “*corpothetics*”—or the fusion of body and image. “They [his peers in La L] would say, damn this cucho (old man) has gone crazy.”

Through Hulk and the clouds, Duván’s haptic gaze connects the celestial (the skies) and the terrestrial (La L), the divine (the clouds) and the monstrous (Hulk), in leaps of meditational, temporary
exit. He forges connections between disparate domains by seeing and perceiving otherwise through, what conspiracists and philosophers alike, would call the “pineal eye.” The latter consider the pineal eye as the conduit for the reunion of the transcendental and the immanent, the sublime and the abject. A form of seeing and sensing that could lead one astray.

Through bodily attunements to atmosphere, to images, Duván was opened to certain forms of experience that would in turn lead to other kinds of images: a spiraling of images in the form of imaginative flight, intuition, and bodily sensation. This spiraling, this reeling of images that lead Duván astray, would eventually earn him the name “Zombie” in La L. The sallas or security forces of La L would often regard him as a zombie for his unapologetic offerings to Hulk and the clouds. But also, for his ability to withstand the unlivable amid routinized violence and injury. "Uno llega hacer un zombie, un muerto-viviente. Ya cuando mantenía en el hospital y no me moría…me decían zombie, entonces en vez de darme ira me daba risa y empecé a decir que yo era el zombie, un muerto-viviente, “One becomes a zombie, a living-dead. When I frequented the hospital and wouldn’t die…they would call me zombie. Instead of feeling rage it would bring me laughter and I began to say that I was Zombie, a living-dead.”

This laughter in the face of death, and exile from the human as a hailed “Zombie,” broke open for Duván a way to inhabit the world outside the constraints of the humanist project. Through this strategic embrace of his social relegation, Duván transforms his subjection into the space for becoming otherwise. This embrace of his negation, of the “outside” of the category of human, could be considered a form of “negative immanence” or becoming. This mode of negative becoming, as Lucas Bessire writes, “means embracing a self-conscious inhumanity, an intentional self-defacement, a moral desubjectification…to make madness indistinguishable from reason in a world already out of control.” The category of the human, with all of its norms and moral baggage, was an impossible form to uphold. There were other ways to be in this world.
Osea, yo era un zombie-pensante y me montaba en mis películas, “I was a thinking-zombie, I would embark in my own movies.”

To take flight into one’s own movie, to be led astray by a world of images, was Duván’s way to temporarily exit his circumstance, often in hopes to find healing or insight. These departures, however, were liable to different outcomes. They relied on relinquishing mastery over one’s self and over the images one was reeled by. They too, relied on a fractured and plural form of selfhood untethered from normative modes of consciousness. Both life-preservation and self-destruction were simultaneously carried forward by such modes.

In La L, to be torn from oneself, paradoxically, was one way to keep things together.
The Binge

For it is out of such straying on excluded ground that he draws his jouissance. The abject from which he does not cease separating is for him, in short, a land of oblivion that is constantly remembered...The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth.—Julia Kristeva

The makeshift pipe is made from a metal socket that is adjoined with a #2 Bic pen through the hole on its side. Tin foil yields, conforms, to the gaps between the pen and the metal socket providing adhesion. Inside the socket, layers of tin foil create a bowl, which are held together by rubber bands at the bottom of the socket. Next to the pipe, tucked safely inside the baggie, the bulging yellow rock adds volume to the Homer Simpson face imprinted on the outside. The yellow powdery base is split into smaller portions that are then sprinkled on the surface area between the thumb and the index finger. The powder is then carefully transferred into the makeshift pipe, caking its upper layer. In the pavement on 9th street, Hecho and his peers, together but separate, are undertaking this meticulous process.

Echo’s parche, his group, have returned to 9th street where they sleep. They’ve all came back with the grasa, the grease, as Hecho refers to money, and it is now time to feast. The bazueño binge is a feast. It is an impersonal pull towards existence outside of normative time, towards temporarily exiting oneself. The binge is the conduit for “stepping out of time.” An impossible situation to fully attain, but in attempts to make the world more livable, one that must be undertaken anyways. To step out of time, out of servility, first requires time and servility. The parche builds, collects, gathers for their gathering, so that together, later on, there can exists a mode of “consumption that is concerned only with the moment.”

Multiple temporalities and forms of labor can precede the binge. There is recycling time, panhandling time, or campanero-surveillance time—that other homogenous time of labor. There is also that sticking-up and robbing time, fueled by ethanol alcohol to suppress the fright of being outside the olla
during day time. And then there’s the gushing flow of existential dread and anxiety time, that unlivable, unbearable instant of withdrawal time.

The binge undoes the self; it dissolves the self from the previous temporalities it was tethered to.

The candles, the matches, the bags of bazuco, the makeshift pipes, the blankets, the warmth of companions, the cambuches (makeshift tents), the little battery radios, the fire pits to the side, all hold this world together. Hecho and his parche fire away.

Powders are smoked, ingested, and there’s often no telling where the line of flight can spiral you towards. Panic-land, erotic-land, demonic-possession-land, violence-land, ecstatic-land, or a heady-mix of all. For Hecho this often relied on the parche’s general ambiance (la vibra), as well as how embrujado, bewitched, the bazuco is. Yet as he would say, it didn’t matter what or who was in the product because, “at the end of the day, we just wanted to consume.” The binge was a pull towards an insatiable hunger.² A way to embrace an “openness, a vulnerability, and a willingness to ingest without necessarily choosing what one is taking in. This is not the desire born of subject wanting to possess object, but an embodied hunger that takes joy and pain in this gesture of radical openness toward otherness.”⁵

The binge was an attempt at exhausting the instatiable. It magnified the horrific intensity of living amid dire circumstance, along with the pleasures, the joys, and the excess sensations that some would call “jouissance.”⁶ The terrible and the horrific, the blissful and the ecstatic were mutually constituted, and thus inseparable. Abjection, paradoxically, was both incredibly opening towards possibilities of becoming and feeling, as it was deeply constraining and life-draining.

At the height of the binge, for Hecho this openness towards otherness, came in the form of loss and relinquishing of mastery over oneself. “If it [the bazuco] had too much bone [human remains], my body would twist,” Hecho tells me while reenacting how he would try to get up from the parche. “I would start walking like this,” he adds, while demonstrating how his legs would contort inwardly,
folding into one another until the tip of his feet were inches apart from one another. Bow-legged, Hecho strolls in spasmodic motion, performing the intensities reached during the binge.

*Que viejo, de norte a sur?* “What old man, from north to south?” Jokingly, this is what Hecho’s *parche* would tell him when the binge would lead him towards a frenetic “north to south” swaying amid bodily contortion and bruxism. Weaving back and forth, the mandibular musculature would take a life of its own. The binge would often lead to spasmodic rhythms and bruxism, that after years in and out of binges, led to dental loss, and in other cases that I saw, the coming together of the tip of the chin with the tip of the nose. This was the product of intensity imploding unto itself, of excess energy needing release, of the flesh, the self, wanting out from itself. A stepping out of time.

Later, when Hecho interned into the *patios*, he shared with me his autobiography where, as one of the many names for himself, he referred to himself as “Hecho el Desecho.” The phrase as he would later explain was a double entendre to reckon with the experience in the *olla* for over forty years. *Hecho el Desecho* would translate to *made-into-waste*, a way to unapologetically embrace his abjection, even retrospectively. Yet he also transfigured the word *desecho* into *des-echo*, to mean something close to un-made, a sort of self-annihilation that derived its force from waste and abjection. Abjection as self-creation, a seemingly perpetual doing and undoing of oneself. A shuttling between loss and revelation, unmade-to-be-made, made-to-be-unmade, *Hecho el des-echo*.

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The *parche* binge is a cypher, a gathering, a “collective temporal distortion” of normative time. It is a shared world not based on common identity, but on illegibility. The binge is the zone of opacity where legibility no longer matters, where other relational possibilities open up. The binge isn’t a nighttime-only activity, but the nocturnal seems to break open other kinds of possibilities, other kinds of attachments that the binge facilitates under the moon. Like orgies and erotic dissociation, like the enticing force of play, storytelling, and laughter, like the immersive zone of dice games, *cajitas*, and
other gambling practices. Or, like becoming engulfed, possessed, and “leaving one’s body,” as Stella would describe the binge.

Though situated in the plane of excess, the binge has many gradients. There’s the ordinary and nighttime binge that happens most frequently until the early hours of the morning. Then there’s the binge that teeters on the festive and carnivalesque, like when Duván and his peers after a feud between crime bands managed to steal a few bombas, or bundles of one-hundred bazuco pre-packaged bags, amid the chaos. Then the night spirals into day, then back into night, for a few more days in a row. During the long binge, Duván and Stella would stay up for multiple days, immersed and adrift, here and elsewhere, shuttling in-between amid a beclouded consciousness. Trying to fulfill another type of hunger, “Me and Stella would go five, six, days without eating or sleeping, llevada, adrift,” Duván shared with me in front of Stella as she blinked and nodded in agreement.

During the binge, the cambuches, like the parche’s cypher, too, became portals to temporarily exit the presumed stability of oneself. In both El Cartucho and La L, Duván had managed to secure spacious cambuches that could host friends during binges. The privacy of the cambuche in a place ever so surveilled, allowed people to lose themselves and attend to their erotic yearnings in private. The erotic too, was the plane of possession, of being seized. In fact, there was no separating bazuco and its “possessive” qualities from the erotic. Carnality and insatiable appetites went hand in hand.

When explaining the sociality of the binge and the cambuche, Duván exclaimed, “Uno enfarrado en esas orgias, todo poseído, por días, “One all partied-out in those orgies, all possessed for days.”” Sex and bazuco exchanges were coterminous attachments where reciprocal sharing and modes losing oneself on the other took form. To adhere to sexual desire, like bazuco, as a form of possession, gestures towards the sacred and spiritual features of the orgy where “sexual excitement and energy form a spiritual bridge where otherworldly contact happens.” This was the “ecstatic time,” where the lived intensity of the instant broke one temporarily free from linear time, from the “continuous, coherent
self.” Stepping out of time, meant finding refuge in the immediacy of the instant, in the overwhelming sensations that leave us outside from fully experiencing them. The flesh became a way out, an exit, however brief.
Unearthing

For many people in Bogotá with a family member gone missing, La L, El Bronx, was the last hope that they could indeed still be alive. Juanita’s parents, without years of seeing her, had tried to actively find her. They would search the streets of downtown with pictures of her in hand. They would also frequently visit Medicina Legal, the city’s morgue, in case her body would show up.

Her mother also figured that saying her name, speaking to her in the form of prayer would somehow keep her alive. Those were challenging years for Juanita’s parents.

Juanita had left her daughter with them, stepping out indefinitely. The neighbors rumored that Juanita had gone astray, that she “was a desechable.” A disposable, the common derogatory term for people living on the streets, and hence exiled from the human. Her father began drinking and would go on sprees looking for her downtown. He found himself at the gates of El Bronx multiple times.


His older, middle-class appearance was perceived as a red flag for both El Bronx’s look-outs and the police. On another occasion, the police guarding El Bronx’s front gates (containing people and weapons from spilling into other parts of the city would be more accurate) asked for his ID card. They told him to never come back, shoving his daughter’s portrait back into his chest.

“Juanita!” He would shout while being denied.

But the years would pass and still no word. No identifiable bodies matching Juanita’s at Medicina Legal. No phone calls met after leaving their phone number with Juanita’s portrait and the word “Disappeared” above on pages stamped all over downtown.

Eventually, Juanita’s parents declared her gone.

They built her an altar in a corner of their home. Candles in different sizes and other adornments filled the spaces between multiple portrait photographs of Juanita. “The portrait is a nothing that has become a something in the wake of an event.” The altar full of portraits, was another way of keeping
her alive. Juanita’s mother would light the candles every day, a daily ritual to hold her daughter close through these images; to keep her face lit—and grant her a visibility.

I met Maria, one of Juanita’s friends in a rehab workshop on mourning and grief designed for the people displaced from El Bronx. She shared how in El Bronx, Juanita was always the life of the party. She loved the rockolas, the jukebox bars, where she gambled, drank, and sang. Maria laughs while describing Juanita’s charming persona, sharing how they would have fun while looking out for each other’s backs in El Bronx. They worked shifts “trabajando los manes,” or turning tricks. Juanita would receive paper notes from the other girls who would threaten them for “stealing” clientele.

It was Maria who first introduced me to Juanita. For months, Juanita wasn’t interested in talking with me or anyone about El Bronx or her personal life. “What has happened, has happened,” she would say to the professionals. Whenever I would see her, she mostly kept an upright posture and her head high, as though embodying this forward-oriented perspective.

Juanita would later share with me how in El Bronx she began to feel the presence of her parents. She could hear their voices echoing inside her head, trying to make contact. A heightened “extrasomatic” sensibility that she developed but doesn’t know how. “Yo no se como, pero yo presentia que me estaban buscando,” “I don’t know how, but I would feel that they were looking for me,” Juanita told me. The force and repetition of prayer, of her mother saying her name would somehow reach her. Her father’s shouts at the gates, just a few feet away from where she was, were indeed heard through other means. These callings from Juanita’s kin left a lingering presence.

Juanita’s body stored these sensations, these callings, but felt unable to leave El Bronx. In there, space-time configurations seemed to unwind differently. “Uno se pierde allá,” one gets lost in there, Juanita would remind me. The years move at different frequencies when one is bound to El Bronx’s particular world, to a particular way of inhabiting time. Or so she felt.
Juanita was one of 2,000 people who stepped out of El Bronx in 2016 only because she was forced to leave, exiled from a way of life that this place had provided for so long. Like hundreds of others after El Bronx’s final drug raid, she followed the crime bands who would usher drug users towards particular sectors. The canal on 30th Avenue near El Bronx that became its own drug market overnight. After further displacement, she followed the crime bands and their product to other drug markets like El Trebol and La Fortaleza downtown. “I left because these places put too much bone in their product.” Meaning, human remains that were known to be added to the bazuco paste-base, to both densify it and bewitch it.⁴

Exhausted by the detours, the wayward exoduses, and constant relocations into other drug markets, Juanita found a partner and moved in with him for some time. A jibaro who drank too much. “He would leave me home with 150 bags and I would only smoke two! And I was a serious smoker (severa fumona).” Being at a remove from downtown and the stability of shelter had allowed her to drastically wane her drug use. Juanita, however, left one day when her partner wasn’t home and returned downtown where she eventually ran into some friends on the street.

The group of friends had told her that they had seen her picture and that there was a contact number. Juanita was one of many faces plastered all over the city. In walls, light posts, entrance doors—a sea of images for those disappeared was held in a “frozen temporality,”⁵ a limbo-zone between life and death.

Juanita rushed to find these pages downtown. She recognized her portrait in one of these pages feeling wounded by her photograph, by seeing the word “desaparecida” written across.

Juanita dialed the numbers on the page from a payphone. Her mother picked up. “Where are you right now,” Juanita’s mother asked in tears. “Plaza del Restrepo,” Juanita responded.

“Don’t move, we’ll be right there.”
As people went about their business in the plaza, Juanita’s mother saw her for the first time in years. She scanned Juanita’s body up and down, searching for any major injuries or scars. She closely examined each finger in her hands wondering if she was still in one piece. She was.

There were things I never asked Juanita. Things I knew not to ask. Like why she didn’t return to her parent’s home while in El Bronx, or much later, after leaving her partner’s place. The former, I figured had to do with the impersonal pull of El Bronx, this place’s wondrous capacity to leave you there, immersed, yet “lost.” The latter, I imagine had to with feeling ashamed and unable to show her face; the not wanting her daughter to see her not “clean.” But this all seemed to change when seeing herself amid the mosaic of the disappeared.

On the way home, her parents insisted that for years they were actively out looking for her. That they kept invoking her. Juanita told them that she already knew this, she told her parents about her extra-somatic intuitions in El Bronx and how she presenced (presentia) their callings.

When they arrived home, Juanita saw her altar. For her family, this was the site of a reparative labor indiscernible from the wounding; it was the site of keeping Juanita present when it was believed that she was permanently gone. Juanita stood before her own images under the candlelight. Mostly portrait photographs from a long way back, barely resembling Juanita now. These images too were held in a frozen temporality—they carried substrates of other times, and other layers of meaning bestowed upon them once they became part of the altar. These portrait images, “dropped like an anchor in time,” carried depths that were contingent, intensities lying dormant, some of whom were reactivated by Juanita’s very presence before the altar. For Juanita, the altar had altered everything.

Staring deep into her own altar, Juanita recognized the impossibility of this moment, the fact that she was never supposed to stand before it. Yo solo me miraba, y lloraba y lloraba, “I would look at myself [in the altar’s photographs] and just cry and cry.” Juanita became unsettled by what this all meant for her, for her daughter, and for her parents. Her aliveness felt forever bound to the status of
the remembered and grieved. She felt that not even her return in the flesh could repair the wounding that the altar was the embodiment of. These candles and photographs carried with them certain qualities that were aporetic, impossible to resolve.

Juanita had been burdened with the impossible task of undoing one’s declared death, of becoming unearthed from the world of the grieved, when in fact, she had herself felt that she hadn’t been fully alive for some time now. Her teenage daughter, too, would have to unlearn her mother’s death.

Relegated to the world of the dead, and exiled from the human, meant that a way back would be through the affirmation of others that she was indeed alive. But “alive” meant a lot of things. It meant breathing, having tact, being “viva” or socially agile. Being present. It also meant bearing the capacity to repair ties with her family, specifically with her daughter. “As someone living on the streets, I lost that moral authority as a mother to my daughter,” Juanita told me while restlessly fidgeting. For Juanita, being alive, was premised on being able to return to her role as a caregiver.

And so, in tandem with terrible withdrawal symptoms, “unbearable pains, tooth aches, and night sweats,” it was precisely the weight of the altar and this strange proximity with her daughter after being lost for so long that led Juanita to enter rehabilitation in the city’s services. Unlike her peers from the drug markets without kin or a home to integrate into after a life on the streets, Juanita was caught up against the challenge of having to integrate to a former life too fast. Juanita felt like an intruder, a trespasser in a world that had carried on. This other world had brought pieces of her along, but it somehow didn’t feel welcoming to her in the flesh. She felt the weight of this former world of hers in the gaps when conversation became exhausted, the having to blankly “star[e] into each other’s faces,” as Juanita put it. It was the too-much-ness of proximity in a small apartment after so long; the challenges of trying to carry on like nothing had happened that led her out the door again. This time into the patios where I would meet her. Juanita proved to be well aware that it would take time to grief
and undo her own death, to slowly return back to a new normal where she could consider herself alive, \textit{present}.

Juanita recognized that she needed to slowly re-thread the social fabric and be mindful of how others—who could not wish for her return to life even more—would need to slowly readjust to her actually being alive. It would take time to know exactly what to do with these portrait photographs after dismantling the altar.
Possession

We draw near to the void, but not in order to fall into it. We want to be intoxicated with vertigo, and the image of the fall suffices for this.—Georges Bataille

02/19/2017. I’m at my sister’s place for Sunday lunch. I get a phone call from an unidentified number. The phone call goes to voicemail. Soon after, I get another call from this same number. I excuse myself from the table and pick it up in my sister’s bedroom.

The words are coming at me fast. I close the bedroom door, sit on the bed, and hunch forward trying to tune out everything else. I can’t discern what is being said. I also can’t discern who is doing the speaking. I hear a “profe,” or so I think. From this, I can infer that it is someone I met in the streets or in the patios. Most likely in the patios. What I also can discern is that they’re in a state of severe distress and begin to wonder if the unrecognizability of the who that is speaking, is somehow disabling me from keeping up with the pace of what they are saying. There are gasps, traffic in the background, and other muffled noises that intersperse and accompany a voice that, at first, comes off as hyper-alert. The sounds plead crisis.

They go on for about 40 seconds or so after I say “hello,” and before I can ask who is calling. “Mamá,” “en la imunda,” “no he dormido,” “severo,” these are some of the words that I can gather as the duet of muffled sounds and someone speaking to me takes course. If they are anywhere near downtown, it is likely that it too is downpouring where they are. The pace is fast, the stream of thought hard to gain purchase on, but it is the roaring intensity of the voice more than anything that leaves me at a loss.

They are winded, so I ask them to breathe, to try to calm down. They stop talking and emerging out of a densely layered acoustic background, in a much softer tone, I hear: “Profe, a lo bien que no se que hacer, me vale mierda todo, soy yo, Daniel,” Profe, on the real, I don’t know what to do, I don’t give a fuck about anything. It’s me, Daniel.
I ask him where he is and what happened. “*Estoy muy mal, no se que hacer, fume mucho anoche,*” I’m really ill, I don’t know what to do, I smoked too much last night.

I hear traces of the voice that I associate with Daniel in this one. But it seems to still be overruled by other voices; by other textures and vocalizations. In particular, there’s a voicing whose quality is hoarse; mired with intensity and fierceness. There’s both rage and fright bundled into his calling.

I had met Daniel inside a house of passage downtown in the summer of 2016. A dark-skinned man in his early 30s who grew up in a working-poor neighborhood downtown and who eventually found shelter in “Manguera’s” ollas in El Bronx.

“*Tengo una ansiedad, no se que hacer.*” I have severe anxiety, I don’t know what to do.

He is going through serious withdrawal. I tell Daniel to slow down whenever I can’t follow along.² He is beyond torn.

I try to calm him. I know that acknowledging his situation in this moment is more important than any soothing response or words of encouragement. *Entiendo,* I understand, I recognize, is what I repeat over and over.

He feels guilty for the course of events that led him to light up *bazuco* after over six months.

“*Recaí… recaí…recaí,*” Daniel intensely repeats back to me. Which means to have “befallen,” or “relapsed.” With each repetition, he seems to further inflict injury and guilt. The experience of fall seems to take course through both a guilty conscience and sensations of angst and disorientation. It is a vertiginous type of fall that seems to characterize Daniel’s ongoing experience of withdrawal.

*Aqui estoy contigo,* “I’m right here with you,” I tell Daniel feeling unable to fully be present for him.
The narrative of his thoughts hopscotch between a now and last night, between an unbearable present and the binge-time that preceded today. Regret, fury, and withdrawal braid into one another. They form a lasting mood, a generalized state of being that makes this moment unlivable, “ansiedad.”

I find multiple voices in his, as though they’re tugging and pulling against one another, providing various angles on his circumstance. What remains consistent is that Daniel wants out from the right-now, the intolerable weight of existence that makes up this instant. Amid this urgent and unscripted theatre of voices looking for an exit, I gather phrases like:

“…estoy que me tiro,” I want to throw myself.

“Quiero que esto se me baje,” I want this [anxiety/withdrawal] to come down.

At times, Daniel’s words point towards contrasting horizons of where this could go for him. These are instances of intentionality, perspective, instances quick to recede amid the rushing tide of self-annihilation and loss.

Daniel’s comments are interspersed, coupled, with other noises and gasps that emerge from him, including, expressions of physical turmoil through the “shrieks that find their way into speech.” This shuttling between expressing noise and words further point to experiences of disorientation or loss, and a return—even if only temporarily so.

Trying to remain close to what is unfolding on the other end of the phone has somehow carried over to me. The digitalized voice has brought along with it its power to affect. This loss at the limits of what can be experienced and voiced by Daniel, to an extent, feel contagious. The intimacy of listening on the phone has brought along with it an acoustic contamination, shaping my alertness and imagination for what Daniel is going through. To be precise, it is the seemingly irreducibly different voices that emerge from his body that leave me spellbound, dull, slow to react. No longer tethered to a stable subjectivity, the voice felt animated by a “spectral autonomy.”
So much of anthropological reasoning places the voice as the “the innermost expression of an actor’s subjectivity, the established logocentric viewpoint that is also behind the widespread anthropological use of ‘voice’ as a trope for agency and subjectivity.” In contrast, the voice on the other end of the phone wasn’t anchored in an “unmistakable individuality,” that was in it of itself the “signature,” that secured Daniel’s singularity as a person. Instead, the voice was more like a portal, a site of convergence, that gave expression to the “relational multiplicities” that constitute the social world of drug use Daniel is part of.

“You ok?”

“Daniel, are you there?”

“Do you want me to come get you?” I ask.

I’m met with no response but I can hear noise from the background. Later, I hear him sighing and whispering in the background unable to understand what he is saying.

With the phone much closer to his mouth this time, he returns: “...I haven’t slept in two days.” His voice once again gathers a roaring intensity.

As the phone call continues, I begin to feel that more than speaking so as to talk to me, that this stream of voicing became a way to chart this coming and going of consciousness, of sensations. A way to provide a space for both the ineffable, as well as the overwhelmingly lucid thought-images that were coursing through him. “I see blood and violence,” Daniel, for instance, relays to me during another swarm of words before drifting into indiscernible noise again.

In that perpetual shuffling between being there, partially conscious, and elsewhere, Daniel was becoming a transducer of sensation, of currents passing through him. His voice is more like a conduit, than his to author. I gather that his vocal cords aren’t simply voicing inner experiences of turmoil but rather, that they are also envoicing, or providing vocal expression for the social world Daniel finds himself enmeshed in.
For Daniel (and others I met from the ollais), “addiction,” is an impersonal force that seizes you, that roams unbidden through every corner and cavity of your body. This he had explained months before, after another binge-withdrawal episode soon after we first met. I take up the envoicing I am listening to over the phone as glimpses of this social world of impersonal forces Daniel feels encumbered by.

As I’ve described in the previous scenes on El Bronx, drug use is locally experience by many people living on the streets as a form of bewitchment or possession. Possession by an array of impersonal forces, a cluster of coterminal attachments, including the dead, or the devil. Addiction-as-possession, in turn, is an always becoming state of being that allows for ontological plurality thus fracturing any sense of autonomous individuality. “El Bazuco es algo muy rezado. Con muchos demonios,” Bazuco is something bewitched, with many demons, Daniel would explain over and over, gesturing towards this becoming-other force that is mediated through bazuco.

After a year of continuous fieldwork in Bogotá, I was already somewhat familiar with people using hoarse sounds in their voice to resemble the sounds of demonic envoicing. Mostly in the rehab centers where people (mostly men) jokingly talk in this ronco, or demon-like hoarse voice. But also through Bogotá’s underground Hip-Hop scene where MC’s also draw on these aesthetic features for affectation. Despite being acquainted with these ronco affective-aesthetics, Daniel’s voice felt different. Unlike these other demonic-like envoicings I had heard, it didn’t necessarily feel pre-mediated or script-like. The oscillating animation and hoarseness of this voice felt more immediate, suggesting, to me at least, a coming and going of intensities passing through Daniel. The voice sounded like multiple entities staking claims on him; on his body, as though vocalization was one locus where possession can begin to be charted.

A cascading set of events has led Daniel to his current circumstance. I can recall him calling me months before from a rehab center in Ricaurte, Colombia—a much warmer town a few hours
from Bogotá, where Bogotá’s Social Integration services opened a new long-term center. He spoke of feeling like he had been hailed as a troublemaker by professionals and was on the verge of being kicked out on the streets. He watched, “without being able to do anything,” as his mother and brother were forcibly denuded and frisked by the staff who figured Daniel was bringing in drugs. Shortly after this humiliating event, Daniel was cornered into “pedir puerta,” asking for the door; asking for his release, which would disqualify him from receiving the city’s services for up to two years.

Daniel left on foot, wandering through the streets and eventually returning to the main highway road back to Bogotá. He found a payphone near the Ricaurte bus station and called his partner who came to pick him up.

Months later, after an ugly breakup with his partner, he asked to go live with his father who resided in Chia, just outside of Bogotá. Daniel’s father allowed him to come work for his bookstore doing pick-ups and other errands. His stay with his father would only last weeks. Two days ago, on a trip to pick up books in downtown Bogotá, he found himself on a binge, smoking. In two days, he purchased 850mil pesos worth of bazuco ($283 USD). Which would amount to at least 200 sacks (which he shared with others on the street over the two-day binge).

With no money left and nowhere to go, Daniel is calling me from an underpass. “I can’t go home, with what face?” feeling ashamed.

Like for others on the streets, Daniel invoked ansiedad—“anxiety,”—as the colloquial term for being occupied by the overwhelming state of withdrawal. But ansiedad also means something much broader and longitudinal than the immediate withdrawal period from drug use. As understood by people in the ollas of Bogotá, withdrawal as an unlivable bodily state returns in minor frequencies in the forms of angst, panic, or insatiable impulse. This temporal lag and return of the unlivable sensation is tied to the locally patterned understanding of addiction-as-possession mentioned, that in turn, permanently stays with the “self.”
Making this point more explicit, a former *bazuco* user undergoing rehab told me: “The only cure from this vice is death.” Whether “clean” or not, *bazuco-*use, at least for some people, is experienced as an irreversible act, a force that clings to the flesh. One is held by *bazuco,* or during abstinence, by its absence. The latter become clearer to me during Daniel’s call.

Ansiedad or withdrawal, appears to be a limbo state of being at the mercy of overwhelming sensations, it is the other side of addiction-as-possession. It is the feeling of being stuck at an impossible crossroad, of being occupied, while unable to retreat from oneself. “Physical suffering in all its degrees entails the impossibility of detaching oneself from the instant of existence.”

“I want to smoke really bad but trust me, I’m trying my hardest not to. I still have my shoes and my shirt,” Daniel emphasized.

Anxiously, he paused mid-sentence and added “…and this phone.”

This was a common tendency for others on the streets during a serious binge: to slowly sell all of one’s possessions until one is left roaming the streets wearing only a blanket. A material dispossession in the thrust of possession. In that, *impossibility to detach oneself from the instant of existence,* detaching oneself from one’s belongings became the last resort.

Months later, when Daniel called again from another number, I asked if he recalls dialing me from the underpass. I tried to explain what he sounded like, the *ronco* projections and noises, the voice that left both of us at a loss. *Me transformo y hago cosas que ni se…*, I transform and do things that I don’t even know…,” Daniel replied.

For Daniel, the binge was something beyond reason or calculated action, an act that slips one in and out of conscious experience. Becoming transformed, *possessed,* was both the price of admission for entering this time-space and its outcome.
Part Two: *Los Patios*

We teach cleanliness but expect filth. We teach life as the ultimate value but expect death.

Lisa Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself*
Fieldnotes

lungs that itch
the fall
gestures of warmth and care
the violence of water
forced captivity framed as salvation
forced expulsion framed as noncompliance
the tempos of the banal
the shelter “we” find in others
the hues of yellow that color faces
the forcibly displaced stuffed by the truckload
daydreaming images, the private theatre for reverie
the histories of the flesh, the memory of the skin
the refusal to unlearn what is at the same time self-destructive and life-preserving
bodies asleep, indiscernible from the waste that shelters them
the embrace of abjection
the affect of architecture, the infrastructure of affect
the nocturnal and its offerings
the impersonal pull that gifts oneself astray
the counter-pull that follows
the violence of liberal humanism
the performance of compliance
the synchrony of lived time and institutional time
enduring withdrawal as a virtue
the multiple realities “we” are thrown in

...
The Blue Angels AKA Outreach Workers

The Ninja Turtles and the Police

The Militant

Hecho el Desecho AKA Hecho

Daniel

The Salla

The Promotores (floor staff)

The Gatekeeper

The Nurse

The Psychosocial Professionals

Ines, The Psychologist

Maritza, The Social Worker

The Solidarios (interned participants)

Willy

The haunted Solidario

Carlitos, The Psychologist

Christian

Evelyn, The Social Worker

Guillermo

The AUC Paramilitaries

Guillermo’s Mother

Mateo

The FARC Guerrillas

Mayor Peñalosa

Esteban

Doña T
Blue Angels

On May 28th, 2016, militarized raids dismantled the drug markets in downtown Bogotá, including El Bronx which hosted 2,000 people living on the street. A few hundred people living on the streets of El Bronx were taken to rehab centers on the day of the military’s intervention in El Bronx. Others fled elsewhere.

The city felt turbulent as the general public feared that, without El Bronx, people on the streets would “trespass” unto other parts of the city. Protests from business owners and classist headlines in the news with derogatory connotations toward El Bronx’s inhabitants set the tone and political climate of the latter half of 2016 in Bogotá. Documentaries, novelas, and journalistic reports, and viral media on El Bronx would follow.

As a response to this general fear of people from El Bronx dispersing throughout Bogotá, the city developed certain outreach units. They called these outreach units the “geo-referencing” teams, in charge of tracking the nomadic flows of people in the street post-El Bronx (though similar units had been assembled in the past). During the summer of 2016, white minivans and the light blue jackets outreach workers wore felt ubiquitous throughout the city. An army of three hundred and fifty outreach workers roamed day and night.

I was beginning my fieldwork with the state’s services and had been advised to stay away from Los Mártires, the municipality downtown where El Bronx was located and where the city’s main cluster of drug markets and organized crime reside. The lead director of Bogotá’s Secretary of Social Integration had arranged for me to meet with all the project directors in charge of the city’s various services for people living in the streets: houses of passage, “transitional-phase” centers, long-term rehab centers, and outreach services.

They gave me permission to first to conduct ethnographic work with the city’s outreach services in other areas outside of downtown where the outreach team figured people on the streets
would go after being forced to leave El Bronx. The city’s outreach services were tasked with retrieving personal information of people living on the streets for the city’s database system (SIRBE), as well as with trying to “invite” people to go into rehabilitation.

On my first official day of fieldwork, we rode off into the city’s peripheries in one of the ubiquitous white minivans.

I’m in the back of the minivan as three outreach workers sit in the main row near the sliding door. They seem alert, hunched forward ready for action. The driver slowly cruises as the outreach workers scan a patchy grass field adjacent to the street.

“Look, there’s one right there!” the more senior outreach worker yells to his team.

“No, it’s just piles…” the driver responds after getting closer. A heap of black plastic bags and a tilted sofa cushion becomes discernible to us upon proximity.

We continue driving until the team spots a cambuche, a makeshift tent burgeoning out of the hilly grass field that sits between opposing side streets. We park and, with clipboards in hand, the three outreach workers exit the vehicle.

“Good morning, how are you all doing today?,“ the young outreach worker yells while shaking the tent’s top exterior fabric. “We’re from the Secretary of Social Integration and came to pay y’all a visit.”

We hear and see movement happening within the enclosed world a cambuche provides. “Morning…” a muffled voice from within the tent responds shortly after. The barely discernible and sleepy responses slowly turn into full sentences and the person within the tent and the outreach team enter into an exchange that both parties seem to know well. A back-and-forth rhythm is maintained as information is quickly retrieved: Citizen ID number, full name, date of birth, how long they lived on the street, where were they born, where have they been staying and where have they been coming and going to daily.
Another pre-meditated exchange seems to occur once the clipboard is put away. “We’d like to extend the invitation to attend our rehabilitation services. Today can be the day you start another path! Besides you know the police have been cutting down and you’ll probably have to move from here anyways...”

Politely, the person responds by saying that they have an appointment to see a family member later today. “Come back later this week,” he adds. They agree to come pay him another visit later this week. We never see the person’s face.

Unlike downtown where people living on the street are more densely populated, doing outreach work in more peripheral areas requires a fine-grained attention to the barely visible. Underpasses, canals, backfields, sewer systems, cavernous spaces all seem to hide worlds within. One outreach worker later likened this mini-van searching approach to a “safari hunt,” adding, however, that the van can only get you so far.⁴

You cruise, you wait, you reach out. Other times you go on terrestrial excursions (drug markets are off-limits after an outreach worker was murdered in 2013). You track personal details and whereabouts and hope to persuade the person into institutionalization. I understood Social Integration as the “soft” power of the state, the differently coercive (though equally problematic) form of securing or militarizing the city. Outreach work was a form of captivity work.

As I will describe below, these connections between outreach and militarization became clearer and more overt. I began to see the thresholds by which interventions towards people on the streets operated; I began to pay attention to the minor frequencies of coercion and captivity in tandem with the broader warfare unfurling downtown.

As the van continues cruising looking for cambuches and people living on the streets, we get a phone call from the director of the outreach unit. We are told to return downtown as they need help with today’s “contingency,” and to report to “La PJ” immediately.
We head back downtown a little past noon. I remain clueless as to where we are going, and I get the sense that others don’t know exactly what we will be doing next or are hesitant about disclosing details just yet. In the van, I learn that “contingency” is code for drug raid.

Upon arrival to La PJ, we are greeted with the blaring sounds of *Vallenato* music played by a band of police officers sporting their dark green apparel. They perform on a stage platform swinging side to side. The mood feels celebratory as people wearing jackets from the various sectors of the city’s administration socialize.

As we enter the brick building, we walk through a metal detector out of service. A green sheet hangs, covering unfinished construction work. The narrow corridor opens out to a set of jail cells on both sides. Inside the open cells, there’s a group of trans hair stylists giving people makeovers. Small mirrors, magazine pages as posters, and bright lights cover the cells.

At the end of the corridor, the pathway caves left and leads into a metal door. We open the door, entering into an enclosed open-air courtyard hosting people detained. There are about 20 bodies drooped, sitting on a long bench that covers the whole left side of the courtyard. Some are asleep on the floor, while others pace laps around the courtyard frenetically. This one courtyard space alone could host over 100 people. Every thirty minutes or so, groups of around 20 people enter the metal door. La PJ feels really dense.

I go back outside, and the music is still playing. More police are outside than before. They seem to be awaiting more trucks to arrive. They call these trucks the *aulas de pajaro*, the bird’s cage. Through the bars in the back of a truck you can see a number of bodies compressed; hands clinging to bars. People shout and whistle to the police here and there. Others closer to the right side of the truck yell to a passing vendor who sells snacks to them as they wait in captivity.

They’ve all been brought here from El Samber, one of the drug markets downtown adjacent to El Bronx. Later I would watch footage of the militarized encroachment to El Samber that brought
them here. An image after the raid of a bulldozer jabbing its claw into a dilapidated baroque house, transforming it into rubble, replayed in the news.

La PJ’s patio seemed to replicate the social space of the drug market as it appeared that people were slowly creating clusters with kin and sticking to certain areas of the patio together. As these other truckloads of people would be thrown into the courtyard and to La PJ more broadly, the social order would once again be temporarily shaken, until the incoming detainees found where to park themselves. The general mood of the courtyard would oscillate drastically. A heady mix of confusion, boredom, and sleepiness scaffolded the social atmosphere at times. In other moments, a sense of angst, commotion, and uncertainty coursed through the room.

The invisible boundaries that separated people into groups felt rather palpable and disabled me from talking directly with people detained. I stood mostly with the outreach workers by a wall near the metal door, feeling socially bound to this area.

A new group is rushed into the courtyard. The room feels yet again charged, loud and full of anticipation. They are mostly adolescents and young men in their 20s. The whistles and commotion continue and by the time I look up again, a scuffle breaks between two detainees. They both carry long butcher knives. They dodge each other’s knife blows, showing a sense of expertise to their craft. The taller long-haired man eventually pierces his shorter, darker-skinned opponent in the chest. It is other people detained that break them up. The police eventually intervene, confiscating one knife. The other knife disappears into the crowd.

The police take away one of the groups and they leave behind the darker-skinned man on the courtyard. They put him aside and corral him as he takes his shirt off while standing on a bench yelling at no one in particular. We see the small non-lethal cuts to his pectoral region. He seems still high on *bazuco* (cocaine paste-base), and eventually zones out by the bench.
Shortly after the fight, a Christian rap group comprised of young female MCs was brought in to perform on the courtyard. The blaring beats seemed to neutralize the courtyard’s mood as people stared at the MCs, unable to communicate with one another. As people were high on *buzuco*, or perhaps going through withdrawal, the loudspeakers conveying messages of beating “addiction” through Christ and self-empowerment seemed to be too overwhelming. Disturbingly loud at the very least. There were also B-boys break dancing and mimes moving to the music. The prison courtyard felt quite carnivalesque and the course of staged events by the police teetered into buffoonery.

The press eventually made its way into La PJ and into the back-end courtyard. Police escorted some news reporters who interviewed a few of those detained. As the day’s set of events unfolded it became clearer that their detainment was framed not in terms of captivity but of salvation; as being miraculously rescued from the jaws of “vice.” Or perhaps in theological terms, captivity was salvation. Salvation from the drug markets and the crime bands whose codes of conduct people had to abide by; salvation from drug use. 

I would later learn that the blue-jacket-wearing outreach workers would also be referred by the Bogotá mayor’s administration as the “Blue Angels.” The Blue Angels were positioned as fundamental for the mayor’s administration and the city’s plans for urban development downtown after dismantling the core drug market areas. The Blue Angels were tasked with ushering in new histories of (forcible) relocation and militarization. I would also later that these approaches towards benevolently packaged forcible relocation, included the development of a phone software app called “Blue Angels: Saving Lives,” [Ángeles Azules: Salvando Vidas]. The app, drawing on the liberal discourses of participative democracy, encouraged citizens to file reports and complaints about people living on the streets. Outsourcing vigilance patterns to the general public and turning them into actors of “complicit surveillance,” the Blue Angels were provided fixed coordinates where people living on the streets were residing.
The Blue Angels ushered people into institutions—even if temporarily so—while downtown drug markets like El Bronx and El Samber, spaces with co-existing forms of sovereignty, were secured by the city. In turn, urban development and renovation thrived on ideas of salvation, social integration, and rehabilitation. Urban development thrived on los patios, or the rehab centers.

After the set of events at La PJ had come to an end (and El Samber had been secured by the state), the outreach workers began to offer the rehab services to those detained. They offered this alternative as a way to get out of detention at La PJ. It remained unclear how long people would be detained for and the outreach team made use of this uncertainty. With El Samber gone and frisk stations all over downtown, los patios were pitched by the outreach workers as the sound alternative to an indefinite detention. Still, out of the dozens of people offered, only a few decided to be shepherded into the patios by the Blue Angels, opting for legal detention instead.

In the streets, everything from houses of passages (hogares de paso), transitory-phase centers (centros de atención transitoria), to long-term rehabilitation centers (centros de comunidad de vida) by the city are known as the patios. Though in theory people brought in from the streets are meant to ascend progressively through these three types of centers, this is often not the case. The houses of passage, as their name suggests are liminal places where people pass through, places somewhere between “shelters,” and rehab centers.

The houses of passage are meant to be the first step towards temporary shelter that the city provides where people come and go, and where those who want to intern themselves must ascend to the next center within the course of a month. Yet some stay over six months within the houses of passage, the usual time the state provides assistance in transitory-phase centers and long-term centers.

It is also hard to discern the differences between transitory-phase centers and long-term rehab centers since some people are considered “successful” cases to return back to the world during their transitory-phase interment, while others are taken directly to long-term rehab centers directly from
the ollas without ever stepping foot in houses of passage or transitory-phase centers. Both are designed for people to be interned for around six months.

These inconsistencies in both the functions and designed trajectories for people undergoing rehabilitation, at least from 2016 to 2017, have to do with how overwhelmed the patios became during the drug-raids and the mass displacement of people from the ollas into the patios executed by the city. In a moment’s notice, the patio’s staff would sometimes be informed that seventy new participants were on the way. The patios at times felt like revolving doors where the goal seemed not to be “integration,” “rehabilitation,” or even people’s long-term retention, but instead, meeting quotas that were close to proportionate with the amount of people known to live in the ollas. For instance, during the first six months of 2017, the retention rate in one of the city’s rehab centers that was hosting over 400 people was 42%, yet the center was always at full capacity, meaning new interns were constantly brought in only to be expelled or let go, often as quick as they came.8

It was the Blue Angels who were appointed to bringing them in, after that, it was up to psychosocial professionals and the patio’s floor staff’s to “save lives.” In the months that followed, new rounds of drug-raids would ensue. New participants would be brought into the patios by the Blue Angels. The Blue Angels kept hard at work for the militarized state, masterfully enacting the craft of persuasion and intervention while tiptoeing the lines between care and violence.
The Doors

There are many ways you can voluntarily enter rehab in the city’s patios or rehab centers in Bogotá. You can be taken in by the hundreds of “Blue Angels,” the city’s outreach workers that survey the city. You can walk to the industrial zone’s house of passage on 35th street where they still allow “walk-ins.” You can also be picked up in certain “hot spots” by the city’s white vans. Hot spots like Plaza España, or Barrio Santa Fé, for instance, where large numbers of people on the streets congregate.

These pick-up zones were designed since Bakatá, a former factory-turned-house of passage that stands between El Bronx and Plaza España, prohibits people from waiting outside the rehab doors. This is mostly due to two separate homicide incidents that occurred as people awaited entry. So now, people living in the streets of Los Mártires wait in Plaza España, ride in the van for fifteen seconds, and then are let in to Bakatá.

To enter the patios you must have no pending infractions, or expulsion time with the city’s services. In the inside entrance window, you must provide the staff your citizen ID number or your code (SIRBE number) if you have entered the city’s services before. You must also fit the profile of someone living on the streets and struggling with drug use: tarnished clothes, dental decay, oily skin, unruly hair, and grim appearance are some of these qualifiers. Technically, you must be able to demonstrate that you’ve been living on the streets for more than thirty days. But it is one’s appearance, not one’s words, for the patio’s gatekeepers that demonstrates the passage of time.

Take for instance how an Afro-Colombian man, whom I would see frequently at the Third Millennium Park, resting his head on his bookbag, tried to enter the patios one day.
When he arrived at the door, one of the floor staff members looked him up and down and said, “you don’t appear to be a street inhabitant, you have more the appearance of a displaced person” [usted tiene más pinta de desplazado]. The man pleaded that he’d been living downtown for months now and had nowhere to go. The Bakatá floor staff told him that he needs to look for resources for those forcibly displaced, that this was a house of passage for people who live on the streets. Staring down at his bookbag and fidgeting with his hands, the man looked perplexed, and then left with no response.

I was standing near the gatekeeper whom I saw in passing but had never spoken to before today. I told the him that I’d seen the man before sleeping on the streets, but the gatekeeper stuck to his script. His script was one where living on the streets and being forcibly displaced were opposing categories. The former was presumed to be tied to the deteriorating rhythms of drug use in the city, the latter category was associated with the long trek of exile in the quest for a new urban beginning.

In an ongoing context of racialization and xenophobia, this was a gatekeeping script that generally read the Afro-descendant body as not from the city. As someone displaced and thus undeserving of the city’s services for those who live in its streets. It would take the signs of severe drug use, namely physical deterioration, to prove this transition from displaced to living on the streets, signs that this person living on the streets did not embody.

Encounters premised on racial profiling like this one would only grow as the refugee crisis of Venezuelans in Colombia felt more dire by 2017.2 Xenophobic and racist discourses began to circulate downtown regarding the presence of racialized others, also living in the streets of Bogotá.

Even among people on the streets, there were fears that the resources the state invests on their rehabilitation would instead be given to refugees. There were also rumors circulating inside the patios that the ollas like El Samber and those in Barrio Santa Fé were now run by Venezuelan migrants.
Sometimes it seemed that the easiest way into the *patios* was being directly ejected from the *ollas*, and that inhabiting the *olla* was enough evidence that you needed rehabilitation. Or, put otherwise, that you most needed rehabilitation when the city needed to redevelop the place you found refuge in. Although the clinical-institutional care in the *patios* is informed by laws geared towards the “social inclusion” for people living on the streets, it was drug use and life in the *ollas* that seem to be at the core of their criteria for prioritizing entrance into their centers.

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Throughout the day, the *patios’* entrance doors rippled constantly with the sounds of keys locking and unlocking, metal slamming and screws squealing. Their thick and long metal frames resonated with carceral acoustics. The doors were gates, thresholds oversaw by gatekeepers, where someone was usually on the outside looking in. During the day, bodies lurked by the entrance: family members looking for missing kin, people trying to inquire if they could be forgiven, re-admitted, or have their infraction ban lowered, or others living on the streets who weren’t interested in rehab, but who were framed as making a living out of extorting those who entered and exited the *patios*.

Not unlike the *ollas’* entrances, the *patios’* entrances were guarded places where the potential for violence hovered. This was especially true in the aftermath of El Bronx’s raid, where it felt like downtown had been shaken up and rivaling groups were finding themselves clustered in various rehab centers. The temporary distortion of the social wrought by the raid had many hunted down through the city.

In August of 2016, I accompanied Daniel to his medical appointment from the house of passage he’d been interned at. As we were walking back, we saw someone he recognized coming toward us, a frail young man who appeared to be in his early twenties. *Ese es un salle de Manguera,* “That one is a *salla* from Manguera [in El Bronx],” Daniel managed to whisper before he got closer. The *salla*, or former security who oversaw El Bronx, greeted Daniel firmly. Daniel then tried to introduce
me as his “profe,” a professional or educator from the patios, but the salla’s gaze remained tense, fixed on Daniel instead.

The salla was well groomed, with headphones on, dressed in clean retro Jordan sneakers and large blue jeans and a long black tee. His hair was cleanly gelled and combed to back. He spoke assertively. His words pithy, measured, with an air of intimidating confidence. I wondered if I would have felt such pervasive power emanating from him had I not known that he was a salla. I kept quiet and more to the side as Daniel and the salla caught up and queried about the whereabouts of mutual acquaintances from El Bronx. Their conversation began to center on a particular woman who the salla was looking for.

Daniel and I both knew the person he was asking about. She resided on the other side of the patios’s wall. Daniel said he hadn’t seen her as of late. The salla who must’ve had been lingering by the patios’s entrance door before we ran into him, suddenly turned towards me for the first time. “Déjeme entrar con usted que no pasa nada,” Let me come in with you, it’s all good.” His passive-aggressive phrasing carried the structure of an order and threat. I told him there’s no way they’ll let him enter but he seemed to know that already. He kept insisting, until realizing I would be of no help to him.

“Tell her we need to talk,” he told Daniel, before heading towards La Jimenez Avenue.

In the aftermath of El Bronx’s raid, tensions ran high about the patios becoming interrogation centers or places filled with potential informants who could jeopardize the crime bands. There was even word that some of the sallas and their allies had gone undercover and interned themselves in the patios to keep an eye on possible informants or to find those who owed substantial debts to the bands. When people interned appeared younger and less physically deteriorated, or less “calle” [street], professionals would rumor that they were jibaros [dealers] and would gesture towards their potential ties to crime bands as infiltrators. It became a common fact that, much like the police would send
undercovers to infiltrate the *ollas*, the crime bands would send their allies to infiltrate the *patios*—a reverse mimesis and appropriation of tactics to enter the other’s territory constantly at play.

The doors were charged with dense histories of violence: zones of payback where interpersonal conflict arose, and zones where some on the streets made a living, allegedly, through extortion and robbing those who come in and out the *patios*. Bakatá’s entrance, for instance, was a place charged with tension. Adjacent to El Bronx, Bakatá’s outside space was a site of social gathering despite norms that people shouldn’t congregate outside. Based on its location downtown adjacent to the *ollas*, a social worker described Bakatá as an “island,” adding that this was ultimately “their territory,” meaning people from the streets and their ambiguous relation to organized crime.

Liberia, one of the city’s food shelters which used to operate across Bakatá and El Bronx, was also a place where contention coursed through the ambiance. Its former director shared with me how the *sallas* of El Bronx would sometimes walk into Liberia, cutting the line, placing their gun on the table, demanding to be served.

Bakatá’s gates full of small see-through holes and iron bars gave this space a distinctive look, somewhere between a military fortress in a zone of war and a jail space disconnected from the outside world. On two different occasions, as I stood outside waiting for the door to open, knives were pulled, both times due to people’s frustration of not being allowed in for a warm meal. On another occasion, when a person was denied entrance, the man propped up a concealed wooden board on the floor near Bakatá’s door and pulled out a machete before walking away.

The doors were murky limit-zones where the entire project of “rehabilitation” and “integration” was challenged, where the rigid boundary between “inside-outside” on which much of rehabilitation is premised remained on the verge of collapse. “Social integration,” first required isolation from the outside world.

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The doors to the house of passage on 35th street were also charged, though differently. The streets were less cluttered, suggesting a remove from the rest of downtown, as if stuck on another kind of island, this one between factory warehouses where the smell of various chemicals and the sounds of industrial labor never quite receded into one’s perceptual background. Some people found shelter on the floor near the doors as they waited for paperwork, or to meet with staff, often at the mercy of others on the street who made a living off the patio’s doors and the endless coming and going of people.

I was inside, standing near one the house of passage’s doors with one of the promotores (floor’s staff) during a sunny October day in 2016. The mobile clinic was already stationed inside, visiting. A nurse and a physician enter weekly in the van to conduct general health checks on people who passed through the patios.

As one of the staff members exited the staff’s door, a man who is living on the streets approaches the door. As the doorman was closing the door, the man living on the streets places his foot on the bottom ledge of the door frame, catching the door.

The man’s face had morphed into a canvas of mixed yellows—from his pale and jaundice complexion to the darker and golden yellows on his mustache and beard from solvent inhalants. Glancing at the doorman and then back at me, the promotor continues talking to me about the mobile clinic. Meanwhile, I figure the man living on the streets was looking to talk to a professional outside which is quite common. But then the rehab’s doorman in a calm and soft tone calls me over. Me dice que necesita entrar, le da ingreso? “He tells me he needs to enter, do you grant him entry?” His question struck me as strange since the doorman knew I was not a professional nor a promotor. That is, that I didn’t have the authority to grant access. Not to mention that this isn’t the door participants are allowed in from. As I get closer to the door, I realize this was the doorman’s subtle call for help. He needed to outsource the duty of saying no to whoever was nearby.
The man’s foot is still anchored to the ledge, his eyes wide, teeming with intensity as he spews insults about the patio’s staff. His blue jeans have a slit on the side that runs from his side pocket all the way below the side of his knee. A long machete stored below the jeans is only slightly protruding until he opens his jeans’ slit while staring at us. In a sudden change of pace and attention, the man tilts his head upwards, lifts his foot from the ledge, and sprints towards La Jimenez Avenue.

I turn around and the promotor is still in the same spot near the mobile clinic, oblivious to what had happened. As the doorman locks the door, he begins talking to me with a sense of camaraderie. With the type of trust and overshar ing that people showcase after undergoing something unexpected together. He tells me he is aburrido, bored, which colloquially means that he is exhausted. Exhausted of what awaits him daily on the other side of the door he guards. “I wish there was an entity I could join to disappear these shameless people [sinvergüenzas],” he tells me with a sense of anger and repulsion. Now, looking at the mobile clinic before us, he adds, “They should have this van in La Guajira, these people are irreparable.”

He continues by explaining the levels of insecurity that pervade the patios and their immediate outsides. Especially, the doorman continues sharing, as promotores and other staff had begun to be threatened by those that live outside the center. After multiple threats, partially fueled the revolts after El Bronx’s raid, and partially fueled by contentions between the staff and people living on the streets, the city began to hire vans to escort the staff safely from the centers to the rapid transit bus stations.

His loosely threaded chain of arguments, as I somewhat anticipated, eventually brings him to “The Militant,” arguably one of the most feared persons living on the streets of Bogotá. “…and that’s why we got to keep our eyes open for The Militant.” The Militant had become an iconic figure, the notorious type of street legend whose reputation preceded their presence. The Militant, or so the story goes, was banned from most of the ollas downtown. And so even prior to El Bronx’s destruction, he had set up outside the 35th street house of passage. He is often described as making a living off
extortion and delivering paybacks to former rivals to who try to enter rehab. With his parche, or group, The Militant hangs on the corner of the street, keeping an eye on those who enter and exit the center. Hiding and returning when less expected.

Within the house of passage, it is rumored by participants that The Militant moves in and out of the center with impunity. “They don’t even frisk him at the doors,” or “He never waits in line when he wants to eat,” other participants often commented when critiquing the house of passage. I never actually saw The Militant inside the patios. Our exchanges were often mediated by professionals who he would approach when we stepped out in route to the city’s other patios. He was often offered being interned but always stopped people short, expressing his disinterest in any mode of rehabilitation. He saw the centers as shelters, which they were—as places where others go to refuge, and “play hide and seek” for a little, as he told one professional outside [“para los que juegan escondidas.”].

Everyone from the mayor’s office that oversees the city’s social services, to the promotores, had either heard or come across The Militant once. He was hailed as extremely aggressive, as someone with an enticing and manipulative personality, and was often blamed for everything between drug smuggling into the centers, to hitman-style targeting towards those who frequent the patios. Participants like Daniel and others deeply feared stepping out the patio because of The Militant and his parche, or group. Daniel, for instance, shared with me how he eventually asked to be transferred to a patio outside of the city in Ricaurte, Colombia, in fear things would continue escalating with The Militant and his group.

In December of 2016 people rumored that, as they were waiting at the doors to the house of passage, that it was The Militant who entered the waiting area and pierced a participant’s heart before disappearing. This was a kind of public secret as there were no investigations or accusations, yet everyone in the patio knew who was responsible. The event was another act of violence that would be
partially forgotten as other acts of violence continued to densify the spatial histories of the patio and its outsides.

I had heard The Militant’s name be discussed during the board meetings (mesas de referenciacion) where high-ranking officials and the leaders of the various patios meet and discuss where people should be sent to and other issues happening at the city’s patios. He was figured as a problem-case that would outright refuse rehabilitation. Someone who instead saw the centers as places that, from without, would keep him afloat on the streets, mostly by extorting people. No one in the room knew exactly what to do with The Militant and his parche.

It wasn’t until I met with one of the house of passage’s nurses that I learned that some of the professionals were trying to be present for The Militant, in ways not premised on confinement.

As we sat in her office with the door semi-shut, the nurse began to explain to me how complicated it is to manage the comorbidity of participants who are often not only struggling with drug use but other chronic illnesses like HIV and Hepatitis B. As an aside and example to the many challenges to managing comorbidity in the centers, she mentioned how since the centers are run by the Secretary of Social Integration, and not the Secretary of Health, they are technically not allowed to prescribe participants, only administer the drugs given to the participants outside the centers.

Leaning closer, in a much softer tone, the nurse told me: “By law, we are not authorized to give participants shots, but behind closed doors, I give them shots.” With her head now downwardly tilted to stare at me from above her glasses, she added: “People like The Militant, for instance.”

As I continued nodding, she shared how the nursing staff keeps in stock 25mg doses of Pipotiazine, a phenothiazine derivative often used to treat schizophrenia, in case patients have severe psychotic breakdowns. “I give The Militant his dose monthly, it usually kicks in after three days,” she tells me matter-of-factly. “A escondidas,” In clandestine, she then emphasized. The shots behind closed doors were perhaps a sort of violence prevention and public health measure for the patio and its
outside. But they seemed to also be a gesture of care for someone often depicted as irreparable—whose persistent acts of violence relegated him outside of the human. In the murky world of rumors, half-truths, and tales, the nurse was one of the only people who I heard speak fondly of The Militant.

“Ese es un amor, complicado y todo pero nos entendemos,” That one is lovely, complicated and all, but we understand one another, she told me with a warm and receptive stare. El no es de internarse, o de bañarse, ni nada de eso, toca estar es pendiente por el hay, “He is not for being interned, or showering, or none of that, one has to be attentive for him [out] there,” the nurse added while gesturing towards outside the patio.

She seemed to suspend the usual categories of recognition afforded to The Militant—"murderer," “thief,” “monster,” and instead acknowledged his existence, more than his subject-position. A mode of address and presence that dislodges one’s tendency to listen to others “as criminal or as victim of discrimination.” The nurse appeared not interested in rescuing The Militant from his actions, nor to condemn him as others often did. She cut corners and spoke with him in ways that demonstrated genuine presence.

More than a limit-figure, the nurse acknowledged The Militant as a person. For most people in the patios, The Militant had instead become a shadowy presence, a fixture of the other side of the doors, invisibly lurking, emerging out of nowhere. For those around him, he had become a phantom, a trace that stood for everything that must be kept out of the patios. The reason for doors, the reason for gatekeepers.
The Frisk Station

As soon as you get passed all of the front doors, pass the lines and the waiting around, the waiting area door in the house of passage leads to a room full of staff. Like an assembly line, the different promotores or floor staff are aligned adjacent to one another. The assembly line arrangement is part of the linear and ritualistic process of entering the patios—of moving across a space aimed to progressively demarcate the differences between outside and inside.

The promotores are geared in either thick overalls or hazmat-like suits and gloves and masks. Their coverings, like the doors, are the barriers that keep them separated from the world brought in by those living on the streets. A world perceived as generative of sensory overload: pungent smells of putrefaction, abject matter and open wounds, weapons, and drug paraphernalia.

The room full of staff is known as the frisk station, though a storage room and pre-evaluation rooms also occupy this same space. If the participant has never entered the city’s services before, they call a professional from the offices to conduct a pre-evaluation, create an institutional file, and provide them a code number to access the services, before they can enter.

A row of three small metal frisk box stations standing five feet tall are in the middle of this space near the far end wall. The doors to these frisk stations hang precariously shut by small, rusty, horizontal locks. The metal doors provide some sort of privacy.

A large poster billboard from the Secretary of Social Integration greets those who enter. The billboard foregrounds the portrait of a person formerly living on the streets holding a sheet that prompts: “¿Como empezar otra vez?” “How to start over, again?” On the right side of the portrait, in the blue and white letters and font style of mayor Peñalosa’s, “Bogotá Mejor Para Todos” (Bogotá Better for All of Us) administration campaign, the subject’s staged question is answered: *To begin again, is all of our responsibility.*
Across from the frisk stations, one can see through a window, a long and narrow space where the belongings of participants are stored. The storage room has a windowed desk station on the other side of the narrow space for participants to pick up their belongings on their way out. The storage room, in turn, separates the entrance pathway, from the exit pathway that lies on the other side.

The frisk station is considered, for some of the promotores, one of the worst sections to be assigned a shift in. This is because they deem it as a site of contagion. A site where bed bugs and lice can leap onto other hosts. And so, in a space where forced proximity and tactility reign, it is as much the potential for violence during the frisk encounter, as it is Cimex Lectularius and kindred species seeping through protective coverings that the floor staff fear. As I stood in this space, observing the assembly line style arrangement, I watched as promotores straddled from rigid postures of authority and assertiveness to those of restless moving and psychosomatic itching.

The air in the frisk station is thick, saturated with a mixture of body odors and stale garments that penetrate and linger afterwards in a room with almost no ventilation. The silver metal door is propped open. A promotor in a grey overall, surgical gloves, and a N95 face mask lets in two male participants into the frisk station, before closing the door. Another promotor in a white hazmat suit ushers them to different frisk boxes. The participants look worn, hunched with multiple layers of clothing. One of them has a bookbag which is placed outside the frisk box. The other carries no items and appears much more physically worn. The promotores ask them to remove all of their clothing standing a few feet from the frisk box doors which remain open. The five-foot stations obstruct the vision of others, preventing all but the promotor doing the frisking from watching the participant disrobe.
Perhaps out of the discomfort of disrobing in silence and without any refusal, one of the participants initially complains before slowly removing jackets, hoodies, and t-shirts all in one piece. Like the mixture of apparel has now become a singular, layered garment. His hair and beard are oily but stiff, and his appearance, in comparison to his counterpart, looks radically grimmer. This leads the promotor to ask how long it has been since he last stepped into the centers. “Years,” he mumbles while continuing to remove his clothes. He peels his upper wear from one side of his body, then the next, as if carefully peeling away a scab partially still tethered to its wound. I could feel all of the attention in the room centered on him and away from the other participant who is also slowly removing his clothes before a promotor.

The bearded participant is asked to raise his hands, then to spread his legs and bend over. His back is pale and his raised elbows are patchy with encrusted dirt spots. The promotor then continues checking his clothes on the floor, searching for drugs and weapons. As he shakes the jeans upside down, bottle caps, matches, and other patches of dirt make their way onto the tile floor. As soon as he is told to stand back up, the participant hunches his body and wraps his arms around his chest.

More than being exposed, denuded, it was perhaps the breach of coldness that appeared most troubling to the participant. The layers of clothing had over the years been mounted to the skin, they had become part of the body’s integrity, like aggregate layers of skin and the sensorium. Denuding is not only a moral debasement due to exposed genitalia, but a kind chafing or amputation to forms of selfhood and embodiment where one’s exterior layers begin not with skin but with fabrics. An uprooting of selfhood through the uprooting of fabrics, that for years, had grown seamless with the body.
As the participant began shivering and huddling to try to shield his exposed skin, I began to understand disrobing as a literal tearing at the seams of the self. An excision of garments and fabric membranes that were as constitutive to forms of selfhood and embodiment as one’s voice or gaze. To remove the clothes from the skin, allowing coldness to penetrate, was a kind of ritualistic wounding in the process of inaugurating a new self through rehabilitation—one that I argue is just as desubjectifying, as being frisked while denuded.

The frisk station also exposes the rehab and carceral logics of entering institutional life as one and the same—both operating under the guise of correcting wayward forms of being human. Though just as coercive as carceral logics of forced disrobing and frisking, in the patios, such protocol is packaged more benevolently through the new uniform and appearance that is framed as an incentive that awaits the person.

The promotor brings the participant a towel which he uses it to cover his back and upper body while huddling. “Don’t worry you will get new clothes soon enough and you’re going to shower and get a haircut in the next room!” The participant looks down at his clothes perhaps wondering if they would be stored for him or salvageable. I could tell the promotores had already declared his clothing unwashable since they left them on the floor while escorting him out of the frisk box.

Meanwhile, the other participant is already dressed in the same clothes he entered at the window station. He receives a storage number card while being scolded for not being allowed to keep bazuco pipes in his bookbag. The makeshift pipe made out of a Bic #2 pen, tin foil, and a metal cap is swung in his face before being thrown in the garbage. The bookbag, along with a hoodie, is placed on a gray sack and taken into a storage slot by the storage room promotor in a hazmat overall.

“They’ll take your clothes to wash and in the shower and give you your sweatsuit,” the promotor tells him while ushering him into the shower room.
The Shower¹

The skin is a variety of contingency: in it, through it, with it, the world and my body touch each other, the feeling and the felt, it defines their common edge...I mix with the world which mixes with me. Skin intervenes between several things in the world and makes them mingle.—Michel Serres²

After leaving the frisk station and cutting the corner into the shower room, you are instantly met with private bathroom stalls and urinals. The type of thin stainless-steel toilets and urinals which you could also find across US prisons. Towards the back, rows of open showers can be seen dispersed throughout the long hallway. Upon entrance, the smell of soap coupled with must and stale odors greets one in the men’s communal shower space.

Word has got around that after “a very long time,” “Hecho el Desecho” has decided to enter the patios. “Decided,” is not entirely accurate since after the destruction of El Bronx, and tired of wandering astray, there are not too many places left for him to go. He finds himself in the shower room. Hecho is someone often depicted as “calle, calle,” [street, street], the colloquial phrase for someone whose appearance undeniably affirms the deteriorating rhythms of a life in the streets. His face, elbows, and hands are covered with a murky sheen, not unlike the type you find across the skin of car mechanics.

His personality, too, is depicted as “complicated,” opaque some might say. Some of the promotores, the patio’s floor staff recognize him from their outreach duties as he was notorious for critiquing the project of rehabilitation and declining their offers at being interned. Through violent responses, at times. “They would call me Odio, [hate], because I would always respond to the profes with hateful spews. I hated the patios, I hated eating, and more than anything, I hated water [showers],” Hecho would share with me some six months later.

One of the promotores tells him to stand before the white wall that will serve as the background for his “before” portrait. “Look up, straight,” the promotor tells him in a soft tone as Hecho stares back
uncomfortably. Wearing nothing but a towel, his long salt and pepper beard comes down to his chest. He is semi-bald, and his receding hairline curving up to his crown makes his forehead protrude. His eyebrows are always curved, as if he is permanently alert and uncomfortable.

After his portrait snapshot is taken, he is asked by another promotor how long it has been since he’s showered or entered the patios. “Like, five years,” Hecho mumbles in a low frequency tone while tilting and scratching his head. Two of the psychosocial professionals came down from the offices to welcome him and witness his “transformation.” In the shower room, a white plastic chair is placed by one of the showers. A pair of clippers already plugged to a nearby outlet and scissors stands atop. A barbershop cape hangs from the chair. Another plastic chair stands adjacent to it with a towel, foot powder, and clothes for him. One of the nurses also brings in a grooming kit with nail clippers and other accessories.

The nurse, wearing a face mask and gloves, leads Hecho towards the back of the shower room to shower behind a semi-shut curtain. He shuffles slowly, reluctant yet compliant, perhaps feeling the pressure of the patio’s staff present in the front of the shower room. The nurse, holding on to his wrist begins to turn on the water which begins to ricochet onto the floor. Hecho stalls, feeling threatened by the water pressure and temperature which is mostly cold, lukewarm at best.

*Poquito por poquita se va metiendo,* little by little you start entering,” she tells him, as the rest of the staff and I remain gathered at the front of the shower room.

Hecho finds himself in a space of no return. His body, the accrued layers of dirt and memory on the body’s surface, destined to break contact with water. With only a towel left to remove, all the way down the deep end of the shower room, it is almost a matter of when, and not if.

*Ayyy, espere, espere.* “Ahh, wait, wait,” Hecho tells her while staring at the water’s downpour.

The nurse tries to console him, by telling him not to worry, that he has to enter calm and with patience.

With the towel still on, Hecho tries a stab at dipping part of his foot into the stream. Upon contact, his leg retorts back immediately, as he shouts that it’s too cold.

The nurse, now with less patience, tells him that the water will feel warmer the more he lets himself enter the downpour. More fumbled exchanges leading in circles continue between Hecho and the nurse, until, out of nowhere, he decides to get closer to the water. The water breaks contact with his knee.

Shortly after, Hecho removes his towel and enters the stream. Sounds, somewhere between words and noise, keep pouring from him as if to keep his mind off the coldness and breaching of water chafing against his body.

The nurse, somewhat repelled by the colors and odors reactivated by water’s touch, takes a step back. She tells him that he can’t just pace around below the water, that he has to scrub and clean.

_Eso, eso!, “that’s it, that’s it!”_ she tells him as he begins scrubbing his forearms.

His beard is still somewhat knotty and stiff as water cascades directly from it. A stream of murky liquids courses through the floor though Hecho’s body is still darkened with clusters of crud. The nurse tells him to brush “much harder,” as if she finds the soap he’s using to scrub deeply challenged by the clusters of dirt that have grown adhesive to the body. Clusters of accrued matter tethered to the body’s surface which, throughout the years, have accumulated strata of their own.

The entire process is severely painful for Hecho as water was bringing to the fore the many openings, rashes, and unhealed wounds that laid dormant. As the protective strata that he had gathered in the streets was becoming undone, the vulnerability of Hecho’s flesh was once again exposed for him—mostly through the stings and irritations that water and touch were inciting. As he was scrubbing, Hecho was reminded of an open knife cut by his rib cage and some minor bruises all over his legs.
Duván shared similar stories regarding “the first shower,” in the patios. He reminded me of his broken ankles from running away during the El Cartucho drug raids, by lifting up his pants legs and exposing the scars and purple skin. He also reminded me how throughout the years, they never quite healed, but just scabbed and stopped hurting as much. How the accrued dirt buried the scabbed wounds into partial oblivion. During his first shower in over four years, Duván recalls the stinging sensations water produced when penetrating fortresses of grime. “I was scared of showers. When I first showered and blood started flowing down my legs from veins popped, I got weaker just staring at the water.”

Much like Duván’s “first shower,” Hecho appeared frightened and torn by the experience, like parts of him were shedding, becoming undone before him, while unattended injuries were being brought to the fore. Becoming witness to the streams of blood and grime placed Hecho in a situation of intense panic, as if suddenly realizing what he had accrued over the years. As if upon staring at what was being flushed away from him, he was no longer able to discern the boundaries between him and the world since he was shedding away a material assemblage comprised of both.  

It is this fictive separation between self and world that the act of showering tries to maintain by shedding away the abject matter of the body and the world that congregates and intermingles on the skin and its many folds. If disrobing at the frisk station is the initial step that begins tearing at seams of the self; the shower tries to completely undo those seams and bring forth the new appearance that (re)inaugurates the subject back into the socially affirmed “human.” It is abject appearance, and the non-normative forms of existing in time that they imply, after all, that declares people outside the folds of civil society, and which justify the need of intervention by the state. The streams of accumulated filth flowing down shower drains are thus some of the material evidence that the person entering the patios is in need of intervention—a hygienic intervention in accordance with projects of civility and regulation.
In turn, the spectacle of witnessing the “first shower,” is in many ways, a necessary event to re-affirm the need for intervention and to remind the staff that rehabilitation is about expelling and policing things from the flesh. It was those who had gone multiple years without showering, like Duván and Hecho, that appeared to be the most interesting cases, worthy of visual documentation.

Much like the compulsory frisk, the “first shower” as rite of passage into the inside of the patios was a lacerating step for many. The sting of water breaking contact with open wounds, the friction of soap and one’s touch across the many crevices and extremities of the body are stark reminders of the violence inscribed on the body out in the streets. Memories, like partially recalled stab wounds or bruises from scuffles, are excavated, re-animated into the realm of sensation.

Expelling encrusted grime and being forced to reckon with one’s physical deterioration is also related to the therapeutic idea of transparency by way of trying to uphold a less opaque and hygienic body that is made self-aware of its need for self-care and recovery.\(^7\)

As Hecho kept scrubbing away dirt, the nurse continued to orient him on how to scrub, how to do away with the opacities that had clung to the body in this quest towards a more transparent and hygienic subjectivity.

“Close your mouth and clean in circles,” the nurse told Hecho as he began scrubbing his face and beard. A set of seemingly involuntary movements and steps for many accustomed to showering, were being carefully choreographed for Hecho to enact. During workshops in the patios, participants would comment how “easy it is to forget” to do the most mundane of grooming acts, and as one participant put it, the “phobias,” one begins to develop towards shower water brushing against the skin during the hiatuses of living in the streets.\(^8\)

As Hecho began shivering while scrubbing, the nurse tells him “That’s it for today. We have to do little by little until you get super clean,” making reference to the oily blemishes and stains that were still vaguely visible across parts of his arms and hands. She turns off the water for him and hands
him his towel. The professionals then bring Hecho a blue sweatsuit uniform, a pair of underwear, socks, and some croc sandals towards the back of the shower room. They place the clothes on the same plastic chair for him to change before returning to the front where the rest of us are still standing. Somewhere between repulsion and compassion, low-frequency commentary among the staff ensued—from the amount of dirt he carried, to how different he’s starting to appear.

The nurse continues guiding him as he lifts his feet one by one on the chair to dry them. Once Hecho is dressed and standing, the professionals begin to congratulate him but are met with only a small smirk in return. As he steps towards the front of the room, one of the promotores, wearing plastic gloves and a face mask awaits him behind the other plastic chair with clippers in hand. “You’re going to end up like a galán,” a handsome fellow, the nurse tells him.

As Hecho sits, the promotor places the barbershop’s cape over his sweatshirt. “But don’t cut my hair too short,” Hecho tells him while looking back at him.

Hecho begins to squint his eyes, appearing somewhat paranoid as the clippers begin buzzing. The promotor goes directly for the beard, beginning close to the ears. He grabs parts of the beard with his other hand, feeling its unruly thickness, before trying to pass the clippers through it, then passing through the same region multiple times. The first large chunk of hair slowly freefalls into the cape and down into the floor. As the balls of hair start to accumulate on the floor one of the professionals tries to joke with Hecho saying that we can finally see his face. Hecho’s gaze remains fixed on the ground.

As the promotor begins to trim Hecho’s hair, little salt and pepper hairs begin to spike across the crown of his head. A mixture of dandruff and flaky dried skin spots run across his head and lower face. The promotor staves off the remaining bits of hair in Hecho’s face, cleaning up his face with a towel and a powdered brush.

As the cape straps are removed from the back of Hecho’s neck, he tries to get up prematurely, perhaps restless and exhausted by the amount of attention granted to him. “Hold on, hold on, we’re
not done yet,” The promotor tells him while grooming his neck area. Hecho sighs in frustration. The nurse reminds him that they’re almost done, and this will leave him “feeling transformed.”

As Hecho gets up, the staff present congratulate him and try to cheer him on. The promotor hands him a mirror but Hecho seems unable to look at himself for long, quickly nodding before returning the mirror. One of the professionals then tells him that it’s time for his portrait, in a warm voice trying to sound overly excited. Hecho stands before the white wall as his snapshot is taken from a smartphone. His gaze stiff, his face still stoic.

As is common, the “before” and “after” images will be collaged or shared in tandem across the staff’s Whatsapp groups, making their way to the patio’s director, and then re-shared with higher-ranked officials. These images are also archived in digital files, held in suspension, to later assess further “progress,” during the person’s rehabilitation.

Often without the consent of participants, some of the “before” and “after” images are also widely disseminated through the city’s services social media accounts with captions that try to assert their impact in addressing the thousands of people who live in the streets of Bogotá. These transformation images dispersed through social media are the bread and butter of how to assert, to a national audience, that what the city’s services are doing is “saving lives.” The radical transformation of physical appearance as captured by the collaged images are often meant to index the alleged ontological transformation that the subject undergoes—one where they are corralled back into the realms of the human and civil society.

Hecho appears cognizant of not only how his decision to enter the patios as someone who is “calle calle” is spectacularized, but also how the images interpellate him, fixate him, into a tokenized status. Into a symbolic currency that he has no control over.

As the staff gets through with Hecho’s photographs, the nurse gives him some more grooming advice regarding his dried skin and the dirt blemishes still clinging to parts of his skin. Some more
small talking ensues until Hecho’s reserved posture and flat affect becomes hard to engage by the professionals. One of the professionals tells him warmly that he can now enter, pointing towards the white metal door that leads to the open-air court. Pointing to one of the promotores, she says, “my colleague here, will show you the different areas, and where you’ll be staying.”

Though perhaps overwhelmed by the number of faces before him, Hecho remains measured, somewhat unphased and skeptical of the staff’s welcoming embrace. In his fresh new uniform, he heads out into the patio, the courtyard, which is teeming with sun light and the chatter of multiple groups dispersed throughout.
Synchrony

The use of “patio,” meaning the courtyard, by people living on the streets carries carceral connotations. As in, “the prison’s courtyard.” *Los Patios*, as the colloquial term for rehab, thus aptly combines surveillance and coercion with rehabilitation and discipline. To speak of both prisons and rehab centers as *patios* points to how similarly they are experienced by people in the streets—both as disciplinary and surveilled spaces that attempt to synchro*nize* people into certain codes of conduct and values, mostly through the rhythms of institutional life. And so for those that tried to stick to the *patios* regimen long-term, rehabilitation was often pitched to them through the reconfiguration of their temporal horizons that would recalibrate them into “chronormativity,” or the normative ways of being in time, by following a strict schedule.

Before 2016, the houses of passage would operate mostly from 7am to 4pm. People would come take a shower, grab a warm meal, attend some workshops, and head back out into the streets for the night. Only a very selective few (about a dozen) would actually live in the houses of passage. But this changed in the wake of El Bronx’s intervention and the mass displacements downtown as the houses of passage were ordered by the city to host a larger number of people, 24/7.

Nowadays, the houses of passage are really dense as they host both people brought in from the drug raids and the more general population of people living on the street. One of the houses of passage is annexed to a transitional-phase rehab center in downtown Bogotá’s industrial zone. The house of passage has a small open-air courtyard in the inside with a *mini-futbol* concrete court, three community spaces for workshops, two different office spaces, a large kitchen and dining area, and two bathroom areas, both with men’s and women’s bathrooms.

At the entrance, there’s a small waiting room area with white plastic chairs and a small reception and database window where people are verified as eligible or not eligible to enter. Near the
houses’ entrance, there’s a frisk station consisting of a storage room, another small office, and a set of pat-down or frisk boxes.

Each day, this house of passage serves around three hundred and fifty people living on the street, plus forty-five people who live here temporarily. Those who enter the patios in passing, must first line up outside the doors or in the waiting room, before entering through the routine and compulsory frisks and showers. They usually enter between 8AM and noon and the number allowed in depends on the number of lunches the patios can provide. Three hundred and seventy lunches was the most lunches I’ve watched this patio deliver on a single day.

Those that live here temporarily are known as solidarios, those in solidarity—mutually bounded to one another and to the patio in the path towards rehabilitation.¹ They sport dark blue or jade green sweatsuit uniforms, mostly with croc sandals. The solidarios are in charge of helping clean the house of passage and taking care of people with severe disorders or disabilities.

To become a solidario you must show up to the patios for fifteen days, arriving each morning in order to receive lunch and attend the workshops either right before or after lunch. People interested in interning themselves are given a white sheet, where the professionals have to sign off their attendance sheet until they reach fifteen signatures.

The solidarios follow a fixed schedule starting at 6AM until 7:30PM with the exception of certain breaks after lunch, between workshops, the smoke breaks they carve out throughout the day, and Sunday’s which are designed for rest and visitations from friends and family.
Solidario’s daily schedule (except for Sundays)

6-7:30AM Wake up, clean bedspace, shower
8AM-9AM Breakfast
9AM-10AM Recreational Sports/Activities [futbol, dance, volleyball, etc.]
10AM-12-30 Workshops
12:30PM Lunch
2PM-3PM Workshops
3PM-4PM Break
4PM-6PM Workshops
6PM Dinner
7:30PM Dormitory doors are re-opened.

The day usually starts when the promotores enter the separated sleeping dormitories that divide men and women. The women’s dorms are often disproportionately smaller in size since at times, approximately two-thirds of those interned in all of the patios across the city are men.² The promotores wake up the participants who are expected to do their beds and enter the showers immediately. The mist of Bogotá’s cold hangs in the tall metal doors each morning. Once the doors are propped open, the brisk wind from outside begins to penetrate—enforcing the promotores’ disciplinary regimen for them.

After showering and cleaning their bedspace, the solidarios line up to enter the cafeteria for breakfast. Once inside, they give their signature for the city’s record-keeping purposes. The sounds of stainless-steel trays and bowls, along with the chatter from people socializing, echoes throughout the tall and open two-story cafeteria room. The promotores try to rush those who’ve eaten out of the cafeteria as it is often common for people to stick around and playfully plead for “repitis,” or to repeat the meal with any leftover plates. Those that strategically time their entry, arriving a little late and carefully calculating their stay and when to plead to the promotor in charge, often get the leftover meals.

Around 9AM, as the sun starts to warm up Bogotá’s usually cold weather for a few hours, people are out in the courtyard playing sports (mostly futbol), engaging in other recreational activities
(dance or cardiovascular exercise), or lounging to the side. The patio always feels the most vibrant around this time as people living in the streets start to enter. For those somehow bound to the worlds of the ollas and the streets of Bogotá more broadly, word gets around fast due to the courtyard. The courtyard is the site of congregation, play, and exchange, where under the gaze of the promotores, the norm enforcers, solidarios intermingle with those passing through for the day.

The patios are where people rekindle with others, where one can find out where everyone has been going recently; what ollas are (re)emerging and which bands have the most potent bazuco in the city, or where one can find a new partner to move through the ollas and the rest of the city with.

Some of the solidarios try to distance themselves from the daily newcomers, claiming that the house of passage is too risky since there are seemingly endless possibilities to return with those that come and go. Though everyone must go through the process of disrobing and being frisked to enter the courtyard, bazuco and other substances enter the patios daily. The patio, “is like an olla with all the dealing,” a solidario once told me. If the courtyard is the initial site of exchange, the bathrooms are the places where these exchanges follow—where surveillance optics are temporarily evaded. The bathrooms are the zones of shade where the disciplinary gaze and its configuration of the spatiotemporal regimens that govern the patio are temporarily suspended. If rehabilitation is about the synchrony between institutional norms and person’s habits of conduct, it relies on disciplinary optics to enforce such norms of conduct. The bathrooms then are places to get lost from the patios’ chrononormativity.
“The patio is like an olla”

As I was sitting in the cubicle office spaces with Maritza, one of the social workers, a solidario in his forty’s with thick black hair walked in wanting to talk to her. With bags under his eyes and a look of exhaustion, his face bore signs of distress. He was somewhat timid, and worried that he had interrupted us.

“No, no, come, please sit,” Maritza told him in her usual soothing voice. The solidario, still somewhat nervous, awkwardly pulled the chair from under the table making a loud screeching noise which appeared to make him even more nervous.

“How are you adjusting to the house? Everything alright?” Maritza asked.

“Well, doctora. It’s just that I’ve been really anxious lately. I’ve been feeling craving [using the English word] lately and I feel that I’m on the verge, my lungs have been itching [me pican los pulmones],” the participant shared with us through a shaky voice on the verge of breakdown.

“Lung itch,” is the colloquial phrase associated with “giving in” or yielding to bazuco, or to the intense craving during withdrawal or abstinence. Usually, this phrase is used in the aftermath of drug-use after a period of abstinence, as in “I itched myself” [me pique], to refer to a return to bazuco and a life in the streets. But his words were proactive, an attempt to restrain oneself amid a fastidiously intolerable and insatiable itch.

With kindness and understanding, Maritza nodded slowly then provided an almost “autopilot” or pre-mediated response about managing one’s anxiety and allowing the body to take its “natural” course of withdrawal. “With time, everything passes. Focus on your process,” she concluded.

The solidario looked down, sighed, and took longer breaths, before raising his head back to us. “It’s just that last night something happened.” He paused for a second before continuing while looking at Maritza and giving out a look of vulnerability.
“I’ve been having nightmares lately. They started around the time that I interned myself. In the dream, I somehow always end up in the olla. No matter where the dream begins, it ends there. I walk to do errands. I ride a bike. But I’m led there [pero me guían allá].”

Maritza continued nodding slowly, while writing down comments in her yellow notepad.

“Who leads you there?” she prompts.

“I don’t know, but something takes me there,” he responds, frustrated by the repeating dream and the common impersonal pull that guides him back to the olla each time.

“These kinds of nightmares are common. You are going through detoxification right now and your body isn’t used to it,” Maritza responds to the solidario, attempting to recognize his distress.

“It’s just that when the nightmares happen and I wake up in sweats, I usually run to the bathroom to drink and put water in my face. But last night, as I walked into the bathroom, there were two people smoking bazuca near the toilets. They saw me so I ran out. I was panicking all night.”

In that dreamy space of partial wakefulness, still basked by overwhelming dream-images, the solidario’s experience of the patio bled seamlessly with the nightmare that had awakened him.

The nocturnal was a time full of crevices and errant loopholes outside the firm grasp of imposed institutional time. The time assigned for rest for some like the solidario struggling with withdrawal became the time of restlessness. For others, the nocturnal was the time of shade, the time of euphoria and release that made following the strict regimen of the patio more bearable.

During the day, promotores would guard the bathroom doors to prevent drug use and sex, but participants often found other zones of shade, like unattended storage rooms, workshop spaces, or staircases. At nighttime, the promotores visited the bathrooms annexed to the dormitory spaces with less frequency. So some people waited for the night’s offerings to arrive.
The bathrooms at night became portals that ruptured the unit-based linearity of institutional time. Within them, people carved zones of shade to temporarily step “out” of time, amid the stranglehold of imposed norms and regulated conduct.

Planning these departures from institutional time required smuggling or purchasing, careful planning and execution. It required concerted efforts to master the “cat and mouse” game against the promotores. Learning the nocturnal staff’s level of wit, their walkthrough surveillance patterns, as well as making sure other participants wouldn’t know or tell, were all part of the minoritarian tactics to secure these breaks during the night.

Back in the cubicles, as Maritza and I sat with the solidario, she tried to calm him down by reiterating that “we’re all here on an individual process, you have to focus on your process, and your process only.”

But the solidario was doubly troubled. The dream-space and the patio had become one and the same. Haunted by the vertiginous images of “befalling” [recaer] back into the olla, the patio was no longer a place to distance oneself from the olla, but its hazy refraction.

His panic attack seemed to be triggered by “bazuca,” as well the feelings of paranoia and the potential for violence at the hands of those he saw smoking.

“I couldn’t shake the smell [of bazuco] from me. That’s when I felt itched. It was better I stayed up, they saw my face.” The solidario expressed how his fears for “itching,” or smoking again, and his fears of violence were seemingly inseparable. “Trust me, I don’t want to go back,” he pleaded to Maritza.

She insisted that he can’t control others, that he could only “take action” for his life. Maritza then returned to the nightmares, attempting to reassure the solidario that little by little, they will disappear. Finally, she reminded him that in no time, he will be transferred to a long-term center. “Think of yourself first, don’t let yourself go,” she added, while smiling gently.
Still timid and nervous, the *solidario* rose from the table thanking us for our time, before walking away with his head down.

Despite Maritza’s warmth and general sense of care, as the *solidario* walked away, I was left with the sense that through this request to not “let” himself go, the *solidario* left perhaps more troubled than when he entered. The “natural” course and time of withdrawal, nightmares, sweats, and so on, were figured as internal battles; the “fervent combat” against desires, from which the cultivation of self can emerge. On the brink of collapse, he had sought out for some sort of help. But when the *patio* becomes like an *olla*, it is the mastery over oneself that people are taught.

Though the cubicles were only a few feet away from the *patio’s* frisk station entrance, this scene where personal responsibility and resilience were demanded, felt like a long way from the “*To begin again, is all of our responsibility,*” billboard that greets people as they enter rehabilitation.
“I need something to pass the time”

I see Willy standing on top of concrete bench on the courtyard. His hands are cupping his mouth, as he projects a loud raspy voice perhaps trying to overcompensate for his 5’2 tall and 130 pounds frame. “Who’s got a mandarin!” he shouts while hawking from above across the patio. He is playful but not to be messed with.

During one of my first days in this house of passage, sensing my disorientation in the courtyard, he broke conversation as he sat with three other solidarios near the professionals’ office cubicles. “Are you a new profe?” He asked. Before I could respond, he added “Be careful because you know after four [PM], ‘The Militant’ starts robbing profes outside.” His solidario crew broke out laughing. Like most jokes, this one too, stemmed from partial truth.

I asked Willy and his group how they felt interned as solidarios. “The patios only serve to get fat,” Willy responded. His friend pulled up his blue sweatshirt, while showing his soft belly. “Look profe, I’m getting fat.” Forging a parche, a common ground with others, you got the sense provided Willy and the other solidarios some sort of refuge to pass the time. In a context that glorified individuality, people often found shelter in others.

In the patios, getting fat was read as a sign of abstinence from bazuco. People often entered the patios with frail and skinny frames from the streets, and so both the professionals and their peers, would complement people who managed to put on weight as a sign of a good “process.” Getting fat, together, was one way to pass the time.

Willy continued, “Here, you only get fat and doodle little drawings [dibujitos]. I’m tired of the workshops and being locked up [estar encerrado]. That’s why I need something to pass the time,” as he dallanged an unlit cigarette cupped between the side of his lips.

Food and cigarettes are often ways to counter “ansiedad,” or the immediate withdrawal period from bazuco. Refrigerios or snack combos, often consisting of a single serving of fruit, packaged cookies,
and a small milk, are given around 10AM and 3PM in the patios. Willy’s parche became professionals at securing refrigerios and cigarettes for the unbearable instants yet to come. Cigarettes, along with snacks and other meals are exchanged within the patios, often re-inserted into a more subtle economy that makes the grueling monotony of institutional time amid withdrawal a little less unbearable. Their consumption allows people to immerse in something, to ingest something. To mitigate this “informal” economy, people were allowed to have only ten loose cigarettes within the patio. But participants often found ways to smuggle entire packs.

The solidarios along with their counterparts who come and go, are often undergoing serious withdrawal episodes. Much to the point that withdrawal as an unsettling experience, becomes almost a hallmark rite of passage in the house of passage. Much like showers and the frisks, undergoing withdrawal and detoxification are seen as institutional rituals of excision, a way to do away with bodily impurity. Therefore, enduring withdrawal was taken up in the patios as a commitment to one’s rehabilitation process.

From the perspective of professionals, like Maritza, withdrawal was both the “natural course” of the intern’s detoxification and rehabilitation process, and a didactic device for building people’s character and personal integrity. The “self” was re-made through its undoing; stable subjectivity was forged from returning from unbearable limit-experiences that one wouldn’t ever want to be given over to again. But people were indeed seized by these experiences over and over. In turn, during critical moments, it was how well one managed the unbearable somatic and psychic afflictions that determined people’s deservingness of long-term rehabilitation. Since, manifesting too much ansiedad, that is, not adequately enduring the hardships of withdrawal was one way people could have their rehabilitation process prematurely terminated due to “unacceptable conduct” within the patio.

“He was too charged, he wanted the door” a psychologist explained after a feud with a participant that culminated with the participant’s release from the patio.
When I expressed concerns to the professionals regarding people having severe withdrawal symptoms like nausea, cold shivers, and heart palpitations, a psychologist responded in a calm soft voice “Oh that’s normal, they have to defend themselves and control their abstinences by instead focusing on their process.” Her answer resonated with similar answers I would hear over and over, answers that equated mental toughness with alleviating psychic and somatic distress. Anxiety, withdrawal, or the impossibility to detach oneself from the intensity of the lived instant, were viewed as things to overcome by broadening one’s temporal horizon and focusing on the process.

A process that through suffering builds character and, once over, allows for a clean slate. A perceived foundational clean slate by the staff that allows the intern’s body to be re-integrated into the patio’s regimen of abstract, unit-based, disciplinary time. To focus on their “process,” to allow for the work of time to ensue, people often chain-smoked and paced frenetically, or ate as much as they could. Some became entrepreneurs that provided the goods that made the time more passable. This too, was the work of care.
**Hurdling through documents**

It’s the summer of 2017 and the *patios* or rehab centers oscillate from states of commotion to banality and back. The streets of downtown are still rampant with militarization. People from La 16 and other *ollas* downtown with nowhere to go continue to find themselves stuffed by the truckload and taken to the *patios*.

I’m inside one of the largest *patios* in the city, a transitory-phase center situated in downtown Bogotá’s industrial zone which can host over 400 people. It’s a Sunday, a day usually reserved for visitations. But today, visitations are cut short as the *patio’s* staff gets word that today the “dynamic” will be different, or so I’m told shortly after they receive news via the *patio’s* Whatsapp group.

“70 are on the way, all professionals head to the entrance zone [ingreso],” the text by the *patio’s* leader reads.

As we congregate in one of the offices, the staff feels tense, some comment that after the recent *contingencias* [“contingencies”], or drug-raids, and mass sweeps of people living on the streets, today will be for sure be longer than expected. I head to the entrance zone with Carlitos, a seasoned psychologist who is in charge of the *patio* for the day. A much more slow and relaxed ambiance awaits us outside of the offices. As we cross the main courtyard space towards the entrance, people are lounging, playing, and laughing amongst one another, dispersed in little islands throughout the *patio*. Some carefully curate the ambiance by playing music off YouTube in the *patio’s* large four-foot speaker, Hip-Hop and Reggaeton mostly, while others clean the floors and contribute to the *patio’s* upkeep. Carlitos gets stopped and greeted a few times before we can get to the entrance zone.

Carlitos taps his keys on the steel door towards the entrance zone. A *promotor* asks who it is, then, after Carlitos answers, we hear the long horizontal lock being pulled to let us in. The entrance zone, on all fronts is completely gated from the rest of the *patio*. The door to the entrance zone gives way to an open private courtyard space for visitations, a private set of offices, a storage room, frisk
station, and large labyrinthine-like white tile shower spaces. The entrance zone is where all participants must enter through. The staff have a different door.

We walk past the open-air court and into the hallway where the storage room is located. The hallway has been converted into a documentation station, as it is now occupied with two white plastic tables, both with four chairs each. I peek my head deeper and see that the two private offices have their doors open with nurses from the other patios. The seventy participants are coming from the houses of passage but Carlitos and others fear that because they’ve recently been picked up directly from the ollas, the professionals in the houses of passage most likely had not filled out their documentation.

The psychosocial professionals are understaffed. There are only four on duty and quite a lot of steps for those entering to be allowed on to the other side of the patio with the rest of those interned.

After they go through the round of frisks and storage by the promotores, those entering must have their general information, or SIRBE sheet filled, their informed consent and contract agreement letter signed, and other documentation that will be useful for their evaluation and individual plan of rehabilitation (PAI) down the road.

The usual logics of institutions serving as sites to “warehouse” people had at times been replaced with meeting quota logics and their documentation. The patios’ professionals (psychologists, social workers, employment counselors, psychosocial pedagogues, etc.) often complained how they were no longer able to do interventions or provide personal counseling since, as an employment counselor told me, “those from above only want us to send in photos, fill out number reports and, forms all day.”

Documentation by the professionals occurred through an excessive number of official documents as well as sending files to their superiors for new media production distributed through social networks. The general objective, “from above,” appeared to be showing numbers of people
attended, stories and images of transformation, and narratives that countered the widespread critique regarding the mass displacement of people into other parts of the city during the militarized drug-raids.¹

Short video clips, media billboards, and collaged images became part and parcel of the city’s tactics to justify their interventions, and thus to position themselves as managers of crises through both militarized and rehabilitation approaches.

To enter the “longer-term” patios one must also have a psychiatric letter of approval, which states that the person being interned is capable of living amongst others [“aptó para vivir en comunidad”]. This last step, considering the “contingencies” of today, will most likely be sidestepped for a couple weeks until the one psychiatrist that comes to the patio twice a week can get around to everyone. The norms, protocols, and even objectives in the patios seem to always bend, or drastically change.

Though I usually stand to the side as an ethnographer, based on the professionals being understaffed, I had a feeling that Carlitos would ask if I can help getting people to the other side of the entrance zone. I had seen these informed consent sheets dozens of times before and was well aware how they aimed to make participant’s cognizant of what would be expected of them amid institutional life.

Some of the participants that have arrived have hurdled through the frisk stage and are ready for the documentation process. They’re told by Carlitos to wait in the courtyard. Some lean against the concrete wall, smoking cigarettes, catching the sun, while they wait and then wait some more.

Ines, another psychologist sits me in one of the white tables adjacent to hers, and then guides me on how to have them sign the forms and then store them in the individual tan folders where all of people’s personal records go. In fact, the majority of these participants already have these folders, some are thick with documents from previous periods of institutionalization in the patios dating back a decade.
The professionals gather around the white tables, conjuring a line of assembly that will rotate each participant from the private offices, to the white tables outside, then out to the courtyard to be lectured by Carlitos.

Those in the private offices will gather personal details for the SIRBE database system, while the nurses will exchange any known medical information and provide any medicine they may have received while in the other patios before being transferred (insulin, retrovirals, controlled substances, mostly). The participants will then be brought over to Ines and I in the white tables where we will read the informed consent sheet to each participant individually. Lastly, we will send them over to Carlitos in the courtyard who will lecture about the patios norms once ten or so have their documents ready, before opening the door and letting a promotor show them the patio while reiterating these very norms.

The SIRBE entrance sheets obtain general personal information mostly centered on identifying the subject’s position through the domains of vulnerability and victimhood. Domains that are within the frame of “social inclusion” for “vulnerable populations,” that the Secretary of Social Integration aims to address. Additionally, as the first documentation step in psychosocial-based rehabilitation, the SIRBE sheet also aims to obtain information about the subject’s ableness and capacity to be “integrated” in the labor market; their relation to kin, institutions and other potential caregivers whom they could be “socially re-integrated” with; and lastly, their histories of drug use and life on the streets.
General SIRBE Entrance Sheet Data Points

- Name, Date of Birth, Citizen ID Number, Institutional Code (to access the city’s services)
- Place of Birth, Primary Caregiver, Educational Level, Labor Activity and Average Income (if any)
- Health Insurance (if any), Locality of Residence, Type of Disabilities (physical, cognitive, if any), Type of Trade or Vocation
- Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, Victim Registration Code, Armed Conflict Victim Status/Internally Displaced Status
- Reason for beginning to live on the streets; Psychoactive substances consumed; Frequency of consumption
- Length of time living on the streets; Reason participant remained on the streets; Source of income in the streets
- Neighborhood and locality where participant was found; Any drug-abuse; Length of drug-use
- How the participant learned about the city’s services
- Primary psychiatric diagnosis; Any other health diagnostic
- Institutional history; length of institutionalization

The two-page document has multiple choice answers to standardize most of the information obtained, followed by a short qualitative description of what the professional considers to be the primary problem. One account from the SIRBE Sheet states the following:

**Description of Problem:**

“Citizen of 51 years of age, 27 of those, have been lived on the streets. Begins living on the streets at 24 years of age due to multiple violemces and family problems. Long-term permanence in the streets. The citizen is a poly[drug]-user.”
Back in patio’s entrance zone, some of the participants hurdled through the protocol steps, perhaps used to these types of exchanges and general questions thrown their way. There was something strange about the banality of it all. How the weight of lives was disclosed matter-of-factly, in passing. Twenty plus years on the streets and counting, check. Homicide bid as a juvenile, check. Subject to domestic abuse as a child, check. Both parties knew that this wasn’t the place to sit with the weight of events. The stuff of life, here, became data points later to be meshed with the lives of others into grids of population vulnerability and social assistance.³

Disclosure as forced intimacy simply happened. Then you abruptly rotated to someone else and told your story all over again. This was the only way forward and out into the gates, where more disclosure as the token of admission awaits.

As I sat at the white table, one of the professionals handed a participant his folder before tilting her head down and pointing towards me. The participant grabs a seat and hands me the folder. I’m supposed to verify that his information matches his identity before I read the informed consent form. As I greet the participant, a tan-skinned skinny man with a mullet haircut and a leather jacket, he appears in a rush, alert, anxious, unreceptive to small talk. And to slow reading.

As I begin to read the informed consent form to him, I feel pressured by his stare. I begin to read faster, accenting the most important information while staring back, hoping to get a nod back, at each turn. He nodded with indifference, to each point, losing interest, focusing instead on what was happening in the courtyard outside. He signed the document and before I can tell him anything, he is on his way outside, ready to light a cigarette. The other participants that passed by the desk, would move similarly, hurdling through steps, perhaps eager to return to the unbearable yet familiar pace of indefinite waithood.
Informed Consent Form

I ________, identified with citizen ID number _______ manifest that I voluntarily wish to receive psychosocial care in the Transitory-Phase Center, aware that this center offers institutional care 24 hours a day, and is regulated by the manual of coexistence which is enforced in all of the spaces that provide integral care for citizens living on the streets. The mode of care has a duration of up to 5 months or depending on the individual progress of each participant.

Therefore, in a responsible and conscious manner, I promise to:

1) Develop the [rehabilitation] process in a voluntary manner.
2) Respect and assume responsibility for the manual of coexistence’s norms.
3) Assume responsibility for completing the daily routine tasks and respect those who enforce the norms.
4) Acknowledge that the possible causes of exiting the center are:
   - Transfer to another center
   - Abandon process due to an unjustifiable absence
   - Failure to uphold the manual of coexistence due to a severe infraction
   - Failure to meet the expected goals of the Individual Plan of Rehabilitation (PAI)
   - Complete process successfully
5) Respect and take care of the center, aware that the Transitory-Phase Center is not a space designed for the consumption of psychoactive substances.
6) Respect the common protocol for the solution of problems and the filing of requests.
7) Abstain from sexual relations within the institution.
8) In the event of withdrawing from the process, your belongings will be saved for a maximum of five days after the date of departure. Afterwards, belongings will be given to citizen who need them.

You commit to theses norms in Bogotá D.C., the day __ month__ year____

_________________________  ________________________
Participant’s signature     Professional’s signature
The talk

A group of participants returned to their initial stances. Slumped against the wall, puffing on cigarettes. Waiting. A few minutes later when Carlitos was ready to talk to the final cohort, he gathered them around him. He pulled out the clipboard full of instruction sheets tucked under the arms of his blue fleece jacket. His thick voice and laser-sharp gaze made his every command sound hyper-assertive. With an upright posture, vocal tempos synchronized to hand movements, Carlitos performed the assertiveness and mannerism that so much of rehabilitation and its presumed efficacies found to be ideal forms of personal expression.

“Alright, good morning,” Carlitos said, projecting his voice and breaking the silence, “as you all know, this center is a 24/7 institution where you will undergo a process for the next five months. During those five months you will receive the tools to address all of your problems [problematicas]. There are three phases to your process, which are called moments [momentos].”

People stared alert, wide-eyed, trying to get a feel for Carlito’s level of authority.

“The first step you begin today is known as adherence. What is adherence? It is the process of interiorizing the norms of the center in order to do away with those street habits,” Carlitos prompted persuasively, continuing to emphasize those words that were part of the elemental parlance of rehabilitation.

“During the first “moment,” you will not be allowed to leave the center, only for medical reasons,” Carlitos made clear.

“The first part of adherence is called initiation. For the first fifteen days, you will be sensitized [sensibilizado] towards how the center operates and its daily schedule [diario vivir]. The second is adaptation, where for the following fifteen days, your team of professionals will develop your individual plan of rehabilitation [PAI], which is your personal map towards rehabilitation. We will work on
managing emotions, your hygiene, and developing a *culture of legality*, discarding all those *mañas* [trickeries].”

The group continued staring, some began to look down, feeling scolded, as when an elder raised their voice at you.

“After this first month your assigned team of professionals will evaluate your progress and decide if you are apt to *ascend* to the second *moment: Transformation.*”

“During the first *two* months of *moment two*, you will be *looking inwards*, reflecting, identifying the *risk factors* that have kept you as drug-consumers [consumidores de SPA] living on the streets. This first part is called *recognizing self and being* [reconocimiento del ser y estar].”

Carlitos’ performance of ideal conduct and assertiveness only grew stronger with each point, a cumulative growth where he seemed to thrive off of speech acts that furthered empowered his following statements. Until eventually, his momentum became exhausted and people lost focus.

“The third month of *moment two*, *strengthening* [fortalecimiento], is about strengthening your self-regulation [autorregulación] by applying what you learned about yourself. It is about the *managing* of emotions, hygiene [autocuidado], and learning how to do your own errands [autogestión].” Carlitos’ sentences carried a rhythmic cadence, emphasizing *auto* or “self,” autonomous, actions every other sentence. Stable, conscious selfhood, and the personal responsibilities that come with it, were vocally pitched as the core tenets of rehabilitation and “social integration.”

“Lastly,” Carlitos continued, “if your team decides you are ready, you will enter *moment three: Projection* [Proyección].”

“This is about, *actualizing* your goals, seeing how you see yourself in the outside world with family, or with a *labor pathway* [ruta laboral],” Carlitos articulated in high-pitches, perhaps feeling people’s loss of interest and distraction. “This last month you will *apply your autonomy* and begin *detaching* [desprenderse] yourself from the center.”
Full of clear-sounding, articulated, bullet-point goals, Carlitos was a walking Powerpoint presentation.

Information kept coming at the participants who from their first day, were expected to keep up and become acquainted with the jargon of psycho-social rehabilitation. *Adherence, Sensitizing, Transformation, Autonomy, Self-Regulation, Emotion management, Projection*. And so on. And many participants I came across indeed already were, and often deployed such terms accordingly. This wasn’t the first “talk” they had received. Their long institutional life had made such lexicon familiar, even redundant. Whether in the course of being interned, they did indeed *internalize* such discourses; whether they did become “referentially invested” in the terms they invoked is something altogether different.

People entered the talk engaged but began drifting, nodding to words emphasized like scholarly audiences in academic conferences. Unable to smoke cigarettes or talk amongst one another, the cohort began to look restless, exhausted by the barrage of words addressing them.

Carlitos flipped to another page on his clipboard which had the center’s daily schedule.

> “Finally, I will briefly go over the *diario vivir* [daily schedule] of the center. But don’t worry, you won’t need to memorize this as soon enough, your bodies will. With routine, you will know where you need to be at all times,” Carlitos said matter-of-factly.

> “With the exception of Sunday’s, you will be woken up at 5AM. You will enter the shower space soon after, groom, and clean up the living space after,” Carlitos told the cohort.

A set of times followed, spoken in a quick, but assertive tone:

> “Breakfast will be served at 7AM.”
> “You will enter the morning, motivational meeting at 8AM.”
> “Depending on the day and time assigned, at 9AM some of you will be allowed to take and receive clothes in the laundry room.”
> “At 945AM, you will enter the first workshop of the day [*actividad pedagogica*].”
> “11AM *creative spaces* [vocational, sports, or recreational workshop spaces].”
> “1230PM lunch is served.”
“2PM You will enter the second workshop of the day.”
“4PM those assigned will enter the laundry room.”
“5PM you will enter the close-out motivational meeting [cierre de casa].”
“6PM dinner will be served.”
“8PM living dormitories will be re-opened.”

People didn’t ask questions, nor were given the space to ask them. “There will be more time for you to meet with the other professionals, for now, welcome. The team of promotores will show you the different spaces and assigned beds,” Carlitos said in closing while opening the entrance zone’s metal door. One by one, people crossed over to the inside of the patio where two male promotores and a female promotora were waiting.
**Profe**

Within the centers, *profe* can be both the *promotores* who enforce the norms and the psychosocial intervention professionals: psychologists, psycho-social therapists, labor employment counselors, social workers, physical and recreational teachers, and pedagogues.

Stemming from North American therapeutic ethos, “psycho-social” treatment is the city’s services primary approach to addressing the lives of the people living on the streets and struggling with drug use. Often eliding the political, historical, impersonal, and structural forces that shape people’s lives, this approach, focusing on linguistic and inner references of distress, understands unprocessed, injurious events to be the main issue and thus living on the streets and severe drug use are rendered as mere symptoms of psychologically dysfunctional lives.

Psychosocial intervention is often spoken about as a “holistic” or integral therapeutic approach that centers on recovering the subject from traumatic experiences by “re-signifying” their existential and temporal horizon.

Many of the professionals considered the general malaise that courses through participants was one of time, that is, of being *out of joint* with the world. “Addiction” was considered an *illness of time*: the person is outpaced by a world that has carried on without them. “Think of how much your siblings and parents have had to change since the last time you all saw them,” a psychosocial pedagogue prompted to a room full of sleepy participants during a workshop.

While at the same time that people were figured as outpaced, they were also scolded for being too impatient, for moving *too fast, too impulsively* in the world, and letting their passions speed their way towards self-destruction. Under this framework of asynchrony, synchronization *was* rehabilitation, a form of repair where the disoriented and disjointed body developed the personal skills to keep up with the “normative” pace of society.
The psychosocial approach is multi-faceted: from confessional technologies that teeter into forced disclosure; the close measuring and assessing of physical and cognitive capacities; physical exercise; vocational training; to a close policing of physical appearance, hygiene, conduct, posture, and speech. These disciplinary techniques operate in tandem with the strict imposition of the center’s schedule which aims to synchronize the *lived time* of the person with the abstract, unit-based, linearity of *institutional time*.

Each participant is assigned a group of professionals that will assess the participant’s “progress” through each of the three rehab center’s phases, or “moments.” The psychosocial therapists and psychologists draw on group-based talk-therapy, personal interventions centered on “logotherapy,” and other confessional practices that aim to identify unresolved traumas and alter the meaning people grant to these events, and in turn, themselves. As one of the psycho-social therapists would often reiterate to participants during the workshops, “it is the lack of self-esteem,” that hinders people from overcoming their social problems.

Through transparency and disclosure, unresolved trauma was supposed to be excised in order for self-esteem and personal integrity to be allowed to flourish. Trauma, in sum, created a fragmented and disjointed self that needed to be targeted.

Gaining self-esteem through measured conduct and self-transformation would lead to a bounded, autonomous mode of selfhood no longer out-of-joint with the world. Psychosocial rehabilitation worked through a set of associative inferences and a cluster of related concepts aimed at constructing a coherent and self-actualizing mode of subjectivity. One that scholars would regard as related to “enlightenment subjectivity.”

Social workers also center on subjective trauma but approach this problem mainly through the social register of kinship. Their primary goal is to try to “reintegrate,” the person with their family and kin (if any), often after kin ties are deeply lacerated. Facebook searches and on-person searches of
family members’ houses within city limits become the means for “reintegration.” If possible, after repairing these wounded ties, the ultimate goal for social workers is to have the family commit to supporting the participant and eventually allow them to live with them or support them when they exit the center.

Social workers also aim to “re-integrate” participants by helping them obtain their legal documents, medical insurance, and other errands that bind them to the state as “rights-bearing citizens.” Inculcating a sense of autonomy by making participants be up to date with their legal documents and errands is what professionals spoke to as self-reliance, auto-gestión in a quest towards affirmation of their existence by the state through legal personhood (background search reports, identification cards, victim or vulnerable population certificates, among others).

The physical and recreational professionals aim to transform the physically deteriorated and “addicted” body into a functional and employable body. These professionals conduct all sort of physical exams on participants, which measure the strength of different body parts, and their kinesthetic abilities and physical endurance. They do so to assess bodies, to ascribe value, and to decide which bodies ought to be repaired. That is, which bodies are worth being integrated into the labor market—and which bodies are not. For those deemed unfit, whether physically, psychologically, or both, they are assigned into a “special” group with specialized care and personalized physical activities that attempt to cater to their capacities. Each morning, the different groups and “moments,” in different spaces, engage in physical activity to “sweat out addiction,” as one of the physical and recreational professionals put it. These professionals also host salsa, yoga, and Hip-Hop classes, as well as host futbol tournaments where participants play teams from the city’s other patios.

The pedagogues in the patios are tasked with the process of “re-education,” which implies an unlearning of ways of being on the street, initially, by adopting the normative discourses of “civic education.” The hidden premise is that as people crossover into the process of “social integration,”
they abandon their subject-position outside of the human by becoming citizens with rights and responsibilities. In turn, much like other professionals, their job is to indoctrinate people into normative and socially accepted ways of being human, often by deploying the discourses of citizenship, rights, democracy, and the larger arsenal of liberal humanism. Discourses that aim to be instilled within the bodies of participants by cultivating the habits of conduct of the ideal citizen.

Lastly, the labor and employment councilors focus on the participants’ “exteriors,” their hygiene and personal appearance as a councilor explained once. They aim to cultivate the virtues of honesty and the ethos of hard-work by fostering a postural and, in turn a moral, “uprightness” for those that would potentially employ them. “Hide your hunch!” one of the councilors scolded a participant who was slouching near the courtyard. How one dresses, how one walks, sits, stands, how one addresses figures of authority are some of the interventions councilors aimed to have on participants.

Punctuality, financial saving skills, and a utilitarian, productivity, and future oriented horizon are some of the core tenets that councilors aim to instill when disciplining participants. By doing away with yearnings for living in the moment; for useless expenditure and profligacy, and replacing these tendencies with a culture of austerity and conservation is how employment councilors try to sculpt people into enlightened subjects.

Through a combination of these approaches, a “psycho-social” based rehabilitation design gets regimented. One that aims to instill the values of personal responsibility as newly reinaugurated humans who affirm their humanity by upholding their duties as citizens.
Promotores

The promotores are those that are meant to “promote,” to facilitate rehabilitation, those that watch over and enforce the norms of the patios. Participants at times have contentious relations with the promotores who they view as the “wardens” or the “campaneros” of the patios, as a group of participants told me as we stood out in the courtyard being watched by a group of promotores.

There are about fifty promotores in a given patio, substantially outnumbering any other line of staff. Though in the patio’s hierarchy of staff, they are among the lowest (and are paid significantly less than professionals), their strategic positions as watchmen who surveil participants often place them in situations of control over the general ambiance of the patio.

The promotores often come from working-class communities, a few are “rehabilitated” people from the ollas who care deeply for those interned, and others deal with issues of dire poverty and drug-use in their own communities.

In the patios, there is also often contention between the promotores and the professionals since the promotores view the professionals as armchair staff who are in their offices “doing paperwork all day,” as one promotor exclaimed during an argument with a professional, while they have to enforce the norms and address the conduct of the participants day in and day out.

The promotores are strategically positioned in all parts of the patio. They regulate the movements and whereabouts of participants through an intricate horizontal alignment across the center. From the doors, the waiting room, the frisk zone, the workshop spaces, the hallways, to every corner of the courtyard, the promotores stand with vigilance, communicating amongst one another through gestural cues and Whatsapp groups. From “hunting” those deemed troublemakers to providing care to those who are sick or struggling with disabilities, the promotores are the floor staff that monitor the patios’ participants.
Two male *promotores* in their mid-20s, became notorious for “hunting” [*cazar*] down participants in the center who were smuggling drugs, or getting high inside the *patios*’ bathrooms. These contentions, in one particular occasion, led to them to being “hunted back” out in the streets once they completed their shifts by those they had gotten expelled. Word got out that even “The Militant,” who makes a living off the *patios* from the outside, had a hit out on them and thus the city began getting drivers to enter the *patios* and escort people safely to the closest transit stations.

It is thus quite fitting that some of the participants regarded the law enforcers in the *patios* with the same words for law enforcers in the city’s prisons and *ollas*: “wardens,” and “*campaneros.*” Not only because many participants did indeed straddle between prisons, drug markets, and rehab centers. But also, because, not unlike the *campaneros* in El Cartucho or El Bronx, the *promotores* in the *patios* operated similarly through sensory attunements meant to decipher intentions from appearances and exteriors, as they surveyed the ongoing traffic of bodies with cultivated alertness (See “The collective sensorium”).¹ The *promotores* began identifying which participants *belonged* to which group, or “moment” to enforce where they were supposed to be at all times.

The progressive and linear design of the different “moments” or phases manifested spatially as different groups were separated throughout most of the day. “Franklin, *you are* moment one! go back to your workshop, you are not allowed to be here,” a *promotor* shouted to a participant peeping through a window looking for his partner. The temporal “process” of rehabilitation was spatially designed, providing fixed coordinates of orientation for people figured as lost and out of joint with the world. Correcting people’s wayward ways of being—their perceived errant desires, thoughts, and movements in the world—consisted on enforcing a model. A straight and narrow path model towards rehabilitation—one that was as physical, as much as it was moral. The *promotores* were the watchmen who tried to shepherd participants through this path across the *patios*. 
**Departure**

Following the straight and narrow path “is the idealized mode of comportment for those invested in enlightened subjectivity and signifies a kind of transparent, morally upright, law-abiding movement.” Cultivating routines, habits of conduct, and ways to orient oneself through the *patios* schedule was believed by the psychosocial professionals to carry over into moral dispositions of righteousness and straightness.

“*Firme!*” [firm!] Carlitos (and other professionals) would often say to participants, somewhere between friendly motivation and an enforced order. To walk the straight path, to sit up upright, and to follow firmly the linear course ascending through the different phases or “moments,” were all bundled within this colloquial calling.

Yet there were so many participants who didn’t share these horizons of ascension, nor were necessarily invested on the project of rehabilitation, or the “enlightened” modes of subjectivity—comprised of “inner coherence and rational clarity” that psychosocial treatment and its professionals tried to cultivate. Most were here because they didn’t have nowhere else to go. To defer their entry back into the streets, participants went through the motions, performed compliance as much as they could, all the while knowing that they would eventually have to face the same world they left behind before being interned.

On a number of occasions, participants challenged the psychosocial focus on interiority while highlighting how irrelevant these practices were with the worlds that await them on the outside. For instance, during the morning workshop for “moment” three, with a tone of frustration, a participant prompted to the pedagogue in charge: *Si listo, que maneje mis emociones, que sea honesto con mi mismo, pero a caso eso como me ayudar afuera cuando no tenga pa’ donde coger?* “Yea ok, so I manage my emotions, I become honest with myself. But how is that going to help me on the outside when I have nowhere to go?”
Others, like Hecho, moved less confrontationally throughout the *patios* while remaining critically distant from ideas that rehabilitation, or ascending in the straight path, will somehow be applicable to the worlds people could access outside the *patio*. They did so mostly by becoming experts on talking the psychosocial jargon and performing good conduct.

While walking downtown with Hecho, he shared how one has to engage the professionals, “you simply tell them how much you’ve been learning and use the words that they do!” “*sí, profe, si señora,*” [yes, *profe, yes ma’am*] Hecho uttered in a clear tone while carrying his body upright and folding his hands onto one another softly. He then broke out laughing. “That’s why I’m the spoiled one!” [*el consentido*] he added, referring to how fond his group of professionals are of him.

For Hecho and many others, there was no re-habilitation since in most cases there was nothing to return to other than the streets. Ascending, “firm,” on the straight path was incommensurate with the wayfaring and errancy that often awaited many. After being lauded for his physical transformation, for embodying the ideals of psychosocial rehabilitation, Hecho returned to the streets. He had such a “good process” Carlitos and other professionals from his group lamented when finding out he left out of nowhere. Hecho never told no one he was leaving, he left the *patio* on a job-hunting permit and never came back. “He’s probably back living as a *caminante*” (a person who wanders through the countryside), his close friend, Fernanda, told me while shrugging.

In contrast to the synchrony model that so much of the *patio*’s rehabilitation design was centered around, people’s experiences of rehab were not about linear ascension but instead, about hibernation, deferral, and waiting for something else to arrive. And for Hecho, perhaps, that something else had arrived.
Anxiety

Christian, was a *solidario* in his mid-twenties. The long sleeves on his sweatsuit never make it near his wrists. He is pale-skinned, thin, around 6-foot tall with a curvy unibrow. We met in 2016 in the house of passage’s *patio* where everyone socializes right after lunch and before the workshops that begin at 2:00PM. I would join in on the *mini-fútbol* matches that him and others would play in here and there.

He had recently interned himself and was closing in on his first week. His face looked less worn than others in the center and his appearance didn’t fit the prototypical profile of someone living on the streets for long periods of time. And he hadn’t. He had spent the last five years or so first working as a *jibaro* or dealer, and later, as his drug-use heightened, he was relegated to *campanero* or look-out in the drug markets of *La 16* and *La Favorita* downtown. These drug markets are part of the city’s red-light district in Barrio Santa Fé, where retired police and organize crime control the drug and brothel industries.

Like other *campaneros* I met, Christian spoke in short sentences and kept vigilant. Yet he was kind and attentive to others. Perhaps based on his younger and abled-bodied appearance, he had been assigned duties to look after a person of age that the house of passage has been sheltering for an exceptionally longer period of time. When I asked why he decided to intern himself, he told me because of the *tombos*, meaning the police. The drug-raids and the militarization of downtown have left many like Christian with nowhere to go. Perhaps he lacked the improvisational, nomadic and, recycling skills that the more seasoned people living on the streets come to develop. His world was much more shrunken as he found a form of life and subsistence strictly within the drug market economy. But now, with the police, the gates and stop and frisks, the high-pressure water tanks, Christian and other younger populations living amid housing instability find themselves within the city’s services.
During his first week, Christian watched over a man appearing in his mid 60s people called “Popeye”—as his cheeks, like the cartoon’s—protruded excessively. The older man was deaf, did not speak, and no one knew his real name or age. He was excused from following the houses schedule and would wander in the patio doing laps, picking up bottle tops and other scraps. Watching over his older peer gave Christian some sort of responsibility and something to focus on to pass the time.

“Los días aquí son imposibles,” the days here are impossible, Christian said to me one morning. He constantly looked restless, uncontrollably jittery. Perhaps the burden of trying to train his body to the regimen of linear or unit-based time that rehabilitation is premised on was starting to weigh in on him. Waking up cold, making his bed at 6AM. Then, waiting in line to use the bathroom, to shower and brush his teeth. Attend workshops. Obtain the mandatory evaluation documentation. Look after “Popeye,” and so on.

Though a fixed routine and being “Popeye’s” caregiver provided Christian with some type of orientation and structure to follow, it also grew unbearable and overwhelming as a temporal experience amid inner turmoil. Like others, he spoke of this inner turmoil as ansiedad, anxiety. Yet what people referred to as ansiedad in rehabilitation centers like this one, might otherwise be considered “withdrawal,” from drug use.

One afternoon, after being inside Evelyn’s (social worker) cubicle all morning shadowing her evaluations, I stepped out into the patio for some air. The patio was mostly empty as the workshops had resumed. I spotted Christian pacing by himself, his long neck curved as he moved waywardly staring at the floor. “Profes, I don’t know what is happening to me.” His face bore signs of freight. A vein sloped down from his forehead. He looked nauseous but managed to hold conversation. Barely.

His condition seemed to worsen with each second. I tried to get Christian to sit with me in a wooden bench and breathe deeply. He kept moving instead, re-orienting his path every few steps while gasping in distress. He fumbled some words towards my direction. “Severa ansiedad, que rollo es esto,” I’m
really anxious, what “reel” this is. I took up his expression as bearing multiple meanings. Rollo as a cinematic reel he was thrown into as main protagonist, a horrific experience; rollo as in being pulled, drawn, reeled in by a seemingly undetermined force.

His eyes lunged out of their sockets. I became really worried. I told him I’m going to get him some water and look for a professional. He told me instead to bring him some sugar pockets signaling with his nose towards the professionals’ coffee station. I grabbed as many sugar packets as I could fist and stepped out. He cupped them in his uniform’s sweatshirt by folding the fabric inwardly making a pouch and began tearing a few packets a time, tilting his head upwards and shoving them down his throat. I went back inside the offices and came back with a paper cone full of drinking water.

Christian chugged the cone, then turned it into a stress ball.

After a few minutes, his pacing was less intense, and he seemed to return to more stable grounds. He thanked me, before disappearing into an alleyway in the patio that leads to one of the workshop rooms.

When I later told Evelyn, a social worker, about Christian’s episode, she shrugged it off saying there isn’t much they can do. “If their anxiety attack becomes uncontrollable, we call an ambulance which can take some time and then try to have them sent to Santa Clara. But for the most part, they have to try to bear through their abstinence.” Santa Clara is a hospital downtown. It is one of the only places with a psychiatric ward that treats people living on the streets and others with severe psychiatric disorders and substance abuse issues. The ward can only host about a couple dozen patients at once, and during my time conducting fieldwork from 2016-2017 I knew of only one case that was admitted for a hospital stay where they would receive pharmacotherapy.

Treatment for people living on the streets and struggling with drug use, like many others, is centered on talk therapy, on the inner management of sensations, feelings, memories, episodes and events. The goals of talk therapy include cultivating certain virtues of honesty, order, and personal
autonomy, and synchronizing one’s affective states to the center’s forms of discourse and norms of disclosure and conduct.

Therapeutic quests that center on bolstering personal autonomy and integrity as a way to overcome “addiction” run counter to the very experience of people in the streets of Bogotá. For many of the people I got to know in the centers and on the streets, *being addicted* is understood as *being possessed* by impersonal forces from without—a set of coterminous attachments one becomes entangled with that exceed *bazuco.* Such culturally patterned forms of experience for people on the streets seems to signal the impossibility of personal autonomy since these impersonal entities have serious impacts on one’s sense of “self.” They seem to take one out of one’s body, undoing any attempt at “integrity.” The world of things in incessant metamorphosis, of spirits, and transgressive socialities was antithetical to rehab. They were incommensurate with the personal autonomy and individualism that the *patios* lauded.

The next morning when I saw Christian in the patio, he seemed to be doing better. I sensed he was somewhat embarrassed and seemed to struggle to describe what he had experienced the day before. “*profe,* It’s like you feel like it’s not you, but it is you…like you can’t do nothing but you’re there.” He then kept circling around the feeling of being completely seized by troubling sensations. Hoping it would help, I brought up how in the course of the experience he spoke of it as a “reel” [*rollo*], which is a common refrain. He replied, nodding in agreement, saying “*uy sí, que video era eso,*” what a movie that was.

To be *seized by something* seemed to be the most common articulation I came across regarding the experience of withdrawal from *bazuco* for people living in the streets of Bogotá. In turn, withdrawal as an experience also created certain challenges in providing a coherent narrative. One was beside oneself, like watching a scene unfold about oneself, “you can’t really do nothing, but you’re *there.*” The
phenomenology of withdrawal Christian was trying to sketch out required trying to indirectly approximate this being *there* while also partially vacated from oneself.

Such indeterminacy about the very nature of withdrawal led to me reconsider why people—interns and professionals alike—spoke of these experiences as *ansiedad*. At first, I thought this linguistic slippage between withdrawal and anxiety had to do with the specific nomenclature introduced by professionals which happened to couch withdrawal with other overwhelming experiences. But through Christian and the experiences of others undergoing withdrawal, I came to see that hard-to-locate indeterminate quality that characterizes withdrawal, as an experience, resonates with how anxiety has been generally understood. Namely, anxiety is hard to localize precisely because it both “lacks a determinate object of concern” and it undoes the subjects’ integrity. In turn, much like anxiety, withdrawal becomes a generalized state that seems to turn the entire body into an unbearable sensation and situation.

“I don’t know what is happening to me.”
**Lending oneself astray**

Guillermo, now in his late 30’s, had been living on the streets since he was eleven. Shortly after his mother passed away, his father kicked him out of their house in Bucaramanga, Colombia. Since an adolescent Guillermo has passed through a plethora of institutions. First, juvenile detention on two occasions: homicide bid, and later robbery. Then, as part of Colombia’s mandatory military service, he was plunged into combat during a two-year service period. As an adult, he has found himself in Bogotá’s drug rehabilitation services (for buzuco, cocaine paste-base) a handful of times since December 2014. Always in short spurts of time. We first met in a house of passage in 2016.

Cross-cutting his life in institutions and in and out of centers, Guillermo appeared tangled in the broader webs of the Colombian armed conflict: whether as a combatant in the countryside, or in Bogotá’s drug markets.

The ollas or drug markets are spaces downtown cordoned by organized crime: *El Cartucho, La 16, El Samber, and El Bronx* were some of the places he lived in. He made do in the markets mostly as a “look out” (*campanero*).

In 2005, after months of living in the streets of *El Bronx*, he was offered to go “work in the countryside” by one of the crime bands. Upon acceptance, he was taken into a van where he recognized other “chirretes” (people living on the street) aboard. No one seemed to know where they were heading or what the work entailed, he told me.

The van transported them to San Martin, Meta, about 3.5 hours south of Bogotá. Upon arrival, they were met by generals from San Martin’s AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia), Colombia’s largest paramilitary army at the time. “They were recruiting *chirretes* in El Bronx because they needed manpower!” Guillermo once told me, adding that, “The first two weeks, we underwent
serious physical conditioning…Many of the chirretes were killed unable to endure the physical hardships of training amid drug withdrawal.”

After a couple of years, Guillermo became a commander, taking part in some of the AUC’s massacres and hidden common graves that ravaged Colombia. During one of the workshops in the patio, he was overwhelmed by the visitations from a female-spirit who suffocated him the previous night, a former victim of his. He told us that he has been living with her perpetual returns for some time.

After six years of steering clear from bazuco-use in the AUC, one day in 2011, he fled his unit and made his way back to the drug markets in Bogotá, only to later trade living on the streets for the armed conflict yet again. He appeared to find temporary refuge from waging violence (and its aftermath) in his drug use, and a refuge from his drug use in the war. In another rehab center where we reconnected in August of 2017, Guillermo would try to reflect on this paradox: the being caught up in multiple injurious temporalities, where a radical exit from one embarks him into the other. That is, this seemingly perpetual shuttling between combat and the drug markets. And even the hibernation rest stops in rehab centers between the two.

Guillermo often spoke of “lending” or “gifting” his life to others, to the war, to his “addiction.”

*Le presto mi vida al conflicto. I lend my life to the conflict.*

*Le regalo la vida a cualquiera…por eso me meto en el vicio, pa’ no pensar en mi mamá. I’ll gift my life to whomever…that’s why I enter the vice, to not think about my mother.*

The premature death of his mother was the point of no return for Guillermo. Self-dissolution by gifting his life, by lending himself astray, by going adrift is the only course of action he feels impelled by in the wake of loss. He seemed to always be asking of himself: when will the shuttling end? when will this act of “giving” deplete its resource base?
“I think good people die first. I basically ask to get my life taken and somehow, I outlive everything.”
Nowhere to integrate

No way out, and I mean that when I say that/
Running ‘round from place to place, like a stray cat.
—Stic from Dead Prez

Mateo had seen it all. He had lived through “multiple realities,” as he would frame the many worlds he’s moved through. A skinny, dark-skinned man who prided himself on his always impeccable clothing and appearance, despite having lived in and out Bogotá’s ollas over the last decade. We had met in the transitory-phase center in 2017. His life-history felt dense, capacious enough to capture Colombia’s recent history all in one stroke. But he mostly kept quiet, deeply skeptical of “talk therapy,” and more than anything, of group-based talk therapy. He often sought me out in the patio to ask for fare money, to vent about medical insurance issues, and here and there, to talk in private about his personal life.

Sometimes when he spoke, in between long breaths, each sentence felt like a sustained meditation on everything wrong with the world. His voice was always winded, and his words struggled to make their way out.

As a right-wing paramilitary AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) member, his body had absorbed eleven 150-grain bullets, during a counterinsurgency attack on the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) leftist guerrillas in the Colombian Amazon.² “They were as big as my fingers.” One of them struck way too close to a neck vein affecting his breathing and talking.

During the late eighties, he grew up in Santa Cruz de Loria in Cordoba, a northern region in Colombia. At ten, entering his home one day, a group of armed men knocked him down from behind, and struck him in the back of the head. Both of his parents had been killed.
The armed men belong to the ELN (National Liberation Army), a leftist guerrilla army who had been taking over the region. Soon after, he fled north to La Guajira to live with his grandparents. “They would always beat me, so I left.”

At fifteen, Mateo then headed to the city of Monteria. In Monteria, roaming the streets, he eventually got connected to some AUC members. “I joined because I had too much hate.” The AUC leaders were skeptical of him joining their ranks as a child but Mateo pleaded that he sought to avenge for his father’s death.

“They [the ELN] took what I wanted more in life, my family,” Mateo told the AUC leaders of Monteria’s unit.

Months after joining the AUC, he was taken into the countryside for counterinsurgency training as part of a cohort of two-hundred trainees. “We were trained by some foreigner who was looking for mass training but was denied by military. Mancuso [the Monteria AUC leader] hired him.”

Unlike the military, whose counterinsurgency strategies hinge on circling their adversaries by writhing and moving close to the ground, Mateo tells me, “we were trained to close in and fight by encroaching while standing up.” “I became the puntero” [the person who leads the group], Mateo adds, “That’s how I ended with eleven bullets in the Amazon. Some Indigenous people found me and took out the bullets. Except for the one on my neck.”

Later, Mateo was taken to Brazil to get operated. He stayed there for three months before returning to the AUC. “When I came back, they were still killing each other.” Throughout the late 90s and early 2000s, Mateo moved throughout Colombia seizing towns and waging massacres on civilians. “One had to do it,” he tells me while looking down.

In 2001, he was diagnosed with HIV. “I must’ve had gotten it in the one of those brothels we use to enter whenever we raided a town.” Mateo continued, “Half would be allowed to party in the
brothels and the other half would stay behind guarding the fortress. We took turns.” Living with HIV spiraled Mateo into deep depression.

“I wanted to shoot myself. I started consuming *perico* [cocaïne].”

Three years after his diagnosis, in 2004, Mateo fled his unit in the Sierra Nevada and then trekked south to the Cordoba region where he turned himself in one of the military battalion units.

“They took my fingerprints and mug shot. I gave them two shotguns, two handguns, and five grenades.”

Mateo was then transferred to Bogotá where he was interned on a special program for demobilized ex-combatants who struggled with psychic distress and drug use. “Mostly pills and psychiatrists,” he told me regarding the treatment there. “I like it here [in the patio] better because, there’s too much conflict there. People from the left and the right are both there.” Though as he would share with me often, even inside this patio, he often felt persecuted for his affiliations with the AUC. “To hide my tattoo, I’m the first one to wake up and shower.” Turning his torso while stretching his shirt from the back of the collar, Mateo showed me parts of the AUC tattoo in box letters that ran across his back.

*Quedé marcado por vida, “I’m marked for life,”* he emphasized.

After his demobilization, Mateo’s life-history became murkier and harder to trace. In the first center for demobilized ex-combatants, Mateo tells me, he met his partner who was a FARC ex-combatant. They had a daughter in 2005. During a previous exchange, he had shared that he had stayed with his partner for six years. But he also has told me multiple times that he had begun frequenting the *ollas* sometime shortly after entering the rehab program in 2005 and then gradually began living on the streets.

Around this same time, he had gotten into some problems with other former ex-combatants as the conflict, kept “pursuing him,” as he put it [*el conflicto me persigue*]. As his drug use heightened and
he began to smoke bazuco downtown, he shortly interned himself in the ollas of Barrio Santa Fé—the red-light district. When I asked how he ended up in the ollas, he gave a set of answers all at once, before quickly switching gears:

“I left my daughter and wife behind. They [ex-paramilitaries] tried to kill me in Bogotá. I worried about my illness.”

Given how fast he switched gears, I knew better to prompt further and was left to infer on my own. Were these three statements, spoken in the same breath, interrelated? Did he leave his wife and daughter behind to protect them from those who were trying to kill him? Was he worried he had contaminated his wife with his illness? Or worried that he may get worse in front of her and his daughter?

What was certain was that the olla was the place he found long-term refuge in, a place of life-preservation for Mateo, despite being generally regarded as the place where people wither. “I can’t remember how many years I stayed, but I never took medications (antiretrovirals). I’m still here. [aquí ando].”

From the city’s institutional records, I was later able to gather that he was brought to the patios on 2013 (a year of mass raids in the ollas). In the summer of 2013, he was brought to the same center where we would meet in 2017. He has been in Bogotá, moving between the ollas, and the various rehab centers for ex-combatants and people living on the streets between 2005 and 2017.

Mateo presented his life after combat as a blur, as a set of instants that don’t cohere. “I can’t remember how many years.” The olla and life on the streets more generally can sometimes morph the experience of time into something fuzzy and ephemeral. Days, weeks, and years are replaced by absences, traces, instants, episodes, and vague events.

Instead of calendric dates, Mateo recalled certain events. Like when I asked why his stay in the patios was cut short in 2013, he told me: “It was the Colombia VS. Chile game.” He was referring to
the World Cup qualifying match in October 2013 that clinched Colombia’s ticket to the 2014 World Cup.

“Recal.” “I relapsed,” he adds.

In the patio, Mateo would always keep to himself. He seemed to not trust other participants and certain professionals. He began sharing bits and pieces of his life with me in private after six months of seeing him almost daily. We started hanging out more frequently, as I had been working with his social worker on expediting the transfer from medical insurance agencies [EPS] that was delaying his access to retrovirals.

In the summer of 2017, when the patio’s psychologists were told by their leader that they would launch a new set of group therapy workshops on grief for those who were displaced from El Bronx (and other ollas), the professionals had to choose a group of fifteen participants who they felt were the most “critical cases.” Meaning those who they felt, based on their assessment, were people who had undergone severe traumatic events.

As we sat in the meeting in the director’s office, though it felt like the selection for this “trial” group on grief was somewhat arbitrary considering that so many of those interned in the patios had undergone “severe traumatic events,” Mateo’s name was instantly summoned. The names of Stella, Duván, and others I came to know from El Bronx also followed.

Weeks later, when the first group therapy on grief was scheduled to meet, we set up the chairs in the room on a circle. All but one were filled, as Mateo never came. As we were introducing ourselves, I saw Mateo peep his head through the door’s glass before heading downstairs again. When I saw him in the courtyard later, he told me, what I already suspected: “I don’t want to share my life with everyone. I’m not good for that [yo no sirvo para eso].”

A few days later, perhaps frustrated by Mateo’s unwillingness to attend the grief group therapies, his absence was read as misconduct by the patio’s leader. As we were sitting on one of the
professional groups’ office, the director entered, asking one of the social workers what Mateo’s “status” was. “We need to get people out or else we will implode,” the director told the group of professionals. The social worker told the leader that things with Mateo are “complicated” since he is currently without medical insurance and “due to his situation,” meaning his affiliation with the AUC, he cannot go back home.

Days later, on July 11, Mateo is brought into the office and told by his group of professionals that he has until the end of the month to stay in the patio. His time to live in the patios had run short.

After they had broken the news to Mateo, different professionals began to scold him, telling him that he had enough time to find job opportunities. One of the psychologists told me in private that because of Mateo’s status as a certified demobilized ex-combatant, that he always had the best employment networks due to the growing “post-conflict” integration programs by the state. But Mateo could never secure a job during his time in the patios. His time was occupied running errands and filing paperwork to get access to medical insurance. This is after all, what his group had prioritized for him to do, granting him permits to exit the patio quite often.

Back in the office, Mateo pleaded that he had nowhere to go, no family that would receive him, and still no medical insurance. “And you know that I can’t go back home because they will kill me,” Mateo added while breaking down.

Like the majority of people I came across in the patios, for Mateo there was nowhere to go once the patios metal doors were propped open. He had managed to remain “clean” for over six months and had tried his hardest to follow the linear path towards rehabilitation that the patio had promised him. A path comprised of injurious steps, like having to disclose things that must be kept guarded from others in the patio for his own survival. Rehabilitation for Mateo had been mostly about following orders, about running errands, and finding ways to score money for transportation and food
During long commutes. And he did as he was told for the most part. But he still came up short, and was back to square one where only the olla will take him in.

Months later, as I was returning home through La Caracas Avenue in an Uber taxi, I saw Mateo from afar. He was back in Barrio Santa Fé. His jeans had by now accrued a darker hue. He sat on the floor slumped, his head leaning on a metal door near the corner of 24th street and Caracas, right where the brothel zone begins.

There was nowhere to “socially integrate” to, except returning to one of his former “realities” in the olla. Stubborn realities that felt for many as those that could only be deferred. The type of realities that patiently await many that exit the patios.
Epilogue (Graduation Day)

I’m in the front seat of a white van with one of the patio’s psychologists and the driver. Behind us, well-groomed and dressed in their best, participants are packed across the three rows and the empty space by the door. It is graduation day for many taking long-term vocational training in La Academia, a part of the system of patios and the Secretary of Social Integration. We are heading to the Plaza Bolivar Square, where the presidential palace and the mayor’s office is located. As we drive, the linear file of white vans loses form amid the traffic of La Jimenez.

Slow cruising through La Jimenez, excitement and anticipation for today courses through the van. People rap along, listening to music played on a tiny Bluetooth speaker. Others yell, greeting people ambulating through the streets they recognize from their time downtown. “Las buenas!” a common salutary expression, someone yells. A few blocks later, “Dios lo bendiga, papá!” God bless you, daddy! Someone else yells to another person living on the streets while sticking the thumbs up through the window in salutation.

As we get closer to 16th Avenue, we are met with a sea of bodies. People on the streets appear physically worn. No longer looking to the right and into the street, people inside the van instead look left, into the median of La Jimenez where groups of people are dispersed. Some are playing cajitas with boxes of matchsticks under the scorching sun. Others are asleep next to their recycling carts, or heaps of waste.

Trying to shelter from the unrelenting sun, we see a young, dark-skinned woman who is cross-legged in the lotus position. Her oversized black fleece jacket is held down by both knees, her actual arms tucked inside, while the fleece’s arms are drooped, vacated. The fleece’s hoodie sits atop. We can only see eyes as the neck of her fleece is held in place by her nose. Finding shelter from the sun, from the hundreds who pass by in cars and public transit Transmi buses, she stares back in the direction of those travelling east like us.
The image is arresting, drawing people in the van to her opaque and protected gaze. She had found a partial zone of shade, a mode of sousveillance\(^2\) to counter the thousands of gazes from passing onlookers, free to visually roam and survey her vulnerability.

Within the van, this scene elicits a set of responses, which comes in the form of sighs, affective deflation, and silence. The song playing, takes on another tonality. I wondered if her singularity, in the backdrop of a sea of bodies, led people to imagine what was in the horizon after graduation. I also wondered, dreadfully, if the excitement for graduation also elicited fears that, for many, the deferral from the streets was coming to an end.

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As we get closer to the Plaza Bolivar Square, we get dropped off on 10\(^{th}\) Avenue at the corner of the Third Millennium Park. Crossing 10\(^{th}\) Avenue into the more upscale La Candelaria municipality always feels like one is crossing an invisible threshold. From 10\(^{th}\) Avenue, we see crowds gathered in a brick and cobblestone alleyway. They are standing outside the side door of the Liévano Palace, where the mayor’s office based, and which is part of the Plaza Bolivar Square. In the alleyway outside the palace, it is mostly city officials and staff from the Secretary of Social Integration, other participants from the different patios, and some of their friends and kin.

As I get closer to where people are gathered, I recognize a lot of faces. Faces I’ve come to know in the streets and inside the patios. I then recognize Esteban, who is smoking a cigarette and is dressed in an oversized white button-up shirt neatly tucked under light blue jeans and a tie. He approaches me with a smile on his face. “Profesor, this is my mom!” Esteban tells me while his mother follows behind. I greet Esteban’s mother, Doña T, as we exchange smiles. “She can’t stay for the whole thing, she has to work in the afternoon, but she wanted to see me graduate,” Esteban, tells me excitedly. Once a week, during his stay in the patios, he had taken some vocational training in carpentry. Today, the city mayor and other officials would grant him his certificate.
Before walking away with Esteban, Doña T, looking at him while addressing me says, “I’m really glad that he will graduate.”

From working with Esteban over the past months, I had known that his relationship with his mother had been severely torn after he interned himself in El Cartucho and later in El Bronx for so many years. This was the first major step at trying to rebuild a relation with Doña T and regain her trust. He wants her to be proud of him, to see him dressed up, to invite her to the nation’s core, headquarters of power.

Esteban entered rehab barely by choice, since after serving time, the El Bronx that he left to sell stolen phones in La Jimenez one morning, was no longer there when he was released from prison. Moving through the city’s ollas and the carceral system, Esteban finally interned himself in the patios, knowing he couldn’t show up at his mother’s place, or go anywhere else for that matter.

As we were let in to the Liévano Palace, we passed through the metal detector which then opens out to a hallway with elegant paintings and fine art. The hallways reek of affluence and senseless expenditure. We then pass through the mayor’s private gym, full of state-of-the-art fitness equipment. Before being ushered into the auditorium, we get a glimpse of the expansive interior courtyard of the Liévano Palace characteristic of La Candelaria’s baroque architectural aesthetics.

As I find an empty seat, I realize that the auditorium is pretty full, that there were others waiting on other side doors be let in. In the stage, I see the director of the Secretary of Social Integration sitting on a table amongst other officials I don’t recognize. To the left of the stage, a giant screen is above a wooden podium, while a large screen sits above those on the table. The baby blue logo of the mayor’s administration and the Secretary of Social Integration lights up on both screens. The Colombian and the Bogotá flags adorn the background of the stage.

The event commences through the formal welcoming by a city official who expresses his joy in being able to graduate people in the auditorium. The city official then tells us that we are ready to
introduce the city mayor, Enrique Peñalosa, who then enters the stage. People clap as Peñalosa comes out waving, his towering frame magnified in the giant screen. The camera then zeros in on his face, foregrounding his white hair and beard, as he takes the podium.

A collage of images enters the screens before him. There are grim, black and white images of El Bronx. People contorted, gripping window rails, spitting. These images of El Bronx are followed by colorful images inside the patios’ courtyards where greenspace and the soft colors of the painted walls play the background for foregrounded subjects figured as rehabilitated. I recognize many in the portraits and others in the auditorium do too, as they whistle and shout when someone they know channels through the screen.

“Our lives may have crossed before,” Peñalosa tells the audience, before pausing. “Maybe in El Bronx, La Estanzuela, El Samber, El Caño or 5 Huecos,” he continues, making reference to some of the ollas downtown where his administration has intervened. “But today, I'm honored to say that our lives cross again as you graduate.”

People clap and respond in excitement.

Peñalosa’s discourse then shifts from the people graduating with whom he once “crossed paths” in the ollas, to the “Blue Angels” who have shepherded, reintegrated, people back into so-called civil society. A video clip starts rolling on both screens, which along with the surround sound speakers, tries to cultivate a certain affective mood on those present. The sounds of soft strings and carefully curated scenes garner a sentimental tone across the auditorium. The footage shows people slumped on the floor, buried beneath thick blankets approached, and later, they are shown entering white vans—scenes that re-enact the “saviorhood” of the Blue Angels.

Some people who are in the audience are shown interviewed about “being saved” inside vocational workshops. Whistling, their friends in the audience cheer them on. Many of those shown in the footage express gratitude to the Blue Angels for being “found.” The entire staging of Peñalosa’s
speech, framed in terms of salvation, made clear how what is being celebrated is not only their graduation but the destruction of El Bronx and the other ollas they had been “saved from.” Doing so, allows the city mayor to try to reconcile for their forcible displacement.

Later, the Blue Angels usher participants outside of the rows and organize them accordingly so that they can receive their certificate and cross the stage when their name is called. Once everyone receives their certificate, many of the participants are told to stick around to take a photo with the mayor. Photographers flash cameras that capture Mayor Peñalosa in the center, towering over the participants who showcase their certificates.

After the ceremony, people are escorted to the interior courtyard of the Liévano Palace where tents are set up and lunch awaits the participants. The interior courtyard, coined “The garden of yellow butterflies,” is an ode to writer Gábriel García Márquez. In the courtyard I run into J, who upon seeing my camera hanging off my chest, asks if I can take his portrait photograph. J’s short and thin frame is positioned before the sculpture of a yellow hummingbird. Tilting his head just a little, he smiles while holding up his certificate. J, in his mid-60s, was one of the oldest residents of El Bronx who had resided there since the 90s’ when it was still called La 15. After being displaced from El Bronx and into the patios, his family in the Risaralda region where he is from initially accepted the calls from his social worker. Once discussions about the possibility of having them visit J or for J to visit them were raised, his family stopped responding the calls. As he held on into his certificate in Márquez’s garden, I could not, would not, ask what was next for him.

In García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude (1973), the yellow butterflies flutter into the life of a character to signal a turning point, a forthcoming event. The garden of yellow butterflies for those who underwent rehab from the ollas, too, was signaling a crossroad soon to come.

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As the ceremony was coming to an end, outside the doors, I see Esteban smoking cigarettes with two other participants. Though I was originally heading the opposite direction, after saying his goodbyes to his peers, I start walking with him towards the end of the alleyway that leads back to 10th Avenue. “I have a permit until five [PM] to try to look for a job,” Esteban tells me. He plans to use the opportunity of being dressed for graduation to also seek employment afterwards.

As we are walking, Esteban says, “Profe, I forgot to tell you, I finally saw Las Tetas de mi Madre!” referencing the name of the 2015 film I had mentioned some time ago. Months earlier when he had shared how he began selling bazuco as an adolescent downtown in Barrio Santa Fé, where he was born, I had asked if he had seen the film—since it tells the story of two children who peddle bazuco in the ollas of Barrio Santa Fé.

“Severo [intense], one of the kids reminded me of me,” Esteban tells me while we take in the cacophony and traffic passing through 10th Avenue.

“Sometimes, I see me in my son, and I fear for him,” Esteban says while looking pensive, staring at the floor then back up at me, as though in the child character of the film he identifies with, he also identifies with his son.

Earlier, Esteban had shared how his adolescent son who lives with his mother’s grandparents in the city’s periphery, had joined a small gang and was rumored to be smoking bazuco. He wanted something better for himself and for his son than the material conditions of possibility that were available to them both. Based on his experiences growing up in the ollas, Esteban tried to explain the constraints of life imposed by the worlds his son was also now thrown in. Through his own life histories, he tried to explain how fast one gets swooned into certain ways of living, how effortlessly one gets socialized into violence and drug use. For Esteban, and many others I came to know, these were the facts, the conditions of possibility that scaffolded the worlds they inhabited.
Interlacing the film with his own life, Esteban tells me (switching to a more assertive tone), “That’s why in La L [El Bronx], as a campanero [lookout], I would always be hard on kids entering and would take away their pipes.” After sighing in distress, Esteban adds, “The sallas (armed forces) would give me problems and tell me to mind my business, but I didn’t care—it bothered me!”

Trying to hold on to the weight of his words, his images, I nod in acknowledgment.

Looking across the other side of 10th avenue where the world of the ollas lies, strangely close to Plaza Bolivar Square we had just left, Esteban then confides how vulnerable he feels at the crossroad of graduation.

Tengo miedo de recaer, unaaa ves y otraaa vez, en esta cuidad. “I fear falling [relapsing], over and over again, in this city.”

No hay pa’ donde coger, no hay pa’ donde escaparse, la tentación esta en toda esquina. “There’s nowhere to go, no place to escape, there’s temptation in every corner.”

Por ese es que extraño La L, no importa la hora que era, hay siempre me recibian. “That’s why I miss La L (El Bronx), no matter what time it was, there, I was always welcomed.”

Spoken subsequently, these three statements show the paradoxes that Esteban finds himself, how his world appears without an exit. Like J, Fernanda, and many of his peers from the ollas, he had done everything he had been told to in the patios, he is one of the hundreds from El Bronx who will be chalked up as making “satisfactory process” (proceso satisfactorio) under the city’s archives and data grids. Yet the patios’ inherent logics of ascension that have brought him to this crossroad, for Esteban, have turn the grounds in which he stands, more and more precipitous.

The apex is also a cliff.

Estranged from the world of employment that is never readily available. Estranged from the world of the streets he has been trying to skew. Estranged from the El Bronx that no longer remains as it once was. Esteban is at a loss.
When the pedestrian stoplight turns green, we say goodbye before he crosses the road. Heading south towards the Third Millennium Park [El Cartucho] where it all began for him, Esteban joins the crowds.
Conclusion

Any anthropology of images—or of life more vastly—needs to attend to the close imbrication, the haunting entanglement, of the phenomenal and the phantasmal. Robert Desjarlais,

*The Blind Man*
6/10/19. Shortly after the three-year anniversary of El Bronx’s siege by the Colombian state, what remains of El Bronx was opened to the public. A strange mix of security guards, military officials, Blue Angels, police officers, exhibit curators, and people interned in the patios awaited one inside. On the outside looking in, a large wooden box with black garments served as the bowels into El Bronx, a rite of passage demarcating outside and inside, much like the sallas, the police, the heaps of waste, and steel gates once served to mark this very threshold. Adjacent to the entry box, two large letterboard murals were positioned, one with a white background frame and black font, the other with a black background and white font.

The first one reads:

Bronx Three Years of Life

The history of the former Bronx of Bogotá was a history of terror. Until May 28, 2016, this was a prohibited street for its citizens. El Bronx hid a criminal industry charged with drug addiction, torture, extortion, sexual abuse, and other unnamable abuses that for many years terminated hundreds of lives.
The interventions realized by the Mayor’s Office on May 28, 2016 did not only save the lives of thousands of people, but also exposed a hidden space that many Bogotanos had not seen. Hundreds of lives were saved and this space is transformed, to revive through the creativity and culture, with a project that aims to return Bogotá its pride. A territory with a dark past is converted into the heart of the creative industries of the city and the country. This exhibit invites its citizens to reflect, to be conscious of what occurred here. It aims to generate change in the perceptions we have of street inhabitants; to demonstrate that second opportunities exist and generate hope to change and transform this space through art and culture—re-signifying the darkest of scenarios.

The Mayor’s Office of Bogotá invites you to commemorate the third year of the intervention in the former Bronx of Bogotá, and to honor those who were part of this history, those who lost their lives, those who La L took away their loved ones, and those others who today, have a second opportunity to tell their story and move onward with a new life, hoping that never again in our city, what was lived in this place, will repeat itself.

Mayor’s Office of Bogotá.

The second letterboard reads:

**Solitude.** Amid the hundreds of people, this was the sentiment that encumbered La L’s inhabitants. Sounds that many don’t forget rupture the silence. The pain of screams in the thick of night; tortures; death. This is the resume of many testimoniales obtained from ex-street inhabitants who told their story. Solitude was the common denominator. The most palpable sentiment amid the terror that was lived here.

Mayor’s Office of Bogotá.

As soon as you enter the black box you get swirled into the ghostly, the tetrico [haunted] atmospheres, but in their simulacrum version. The box is pitched black and muffled sounds of indiscernible noises are interspersed as you move through the labyrinthine imitation. As mentioned previously, since its intervention, other paranormal shows and novelas have tried to capture, re-enact,
and capitalize on El Bronx’s ghostly intensities and atmospheric violence. And now the state has
followed suit by implanting simulacrums unto the original. Somewhere between haunted house joyride
and art exhibition gallery, El Bronx™, now run by the state had opened its doors. Statecraft as
curatorial.

During his first term as mayor (1998-2001), Enrique Peñalosa’s administration destroyed El
Cartucho through urban demolition and state-administered historical elision of the olla’s narrative.
During his second term (2016-2019), the approach had shifted to urban demolition and staking claims
and maintaining the dominant narrative that is told about El Bronx for the purposes of urban
development. The attempt to commodify abjection by those in power that I wrote about on “El
Cartucho,” had reached a new peak.

Shortly after the state’s intervention in El Bronx, and after the 2016 signing of the peace
process that culminated the Colombian armed conflict (the war ensues through other means1), the
Colombian state had turned El Bronx and the military battalion next door into the new home for the
so-called “orange economies,” or the creative and cultural industries. The creative and culture
industries aimed to converge the “reconstruction of the social fabric” with “urban revitalization” into
the same project.2 Deciding to keep the name of the olla, the headquarters for the “creative economies”
was coined by the state as the “Bronx Creative District.” Models with sleek architectural designs that
combined the old with the new, open-air space with indoor buildings, were introduced as plans for
urban development where El Bronx is at.3

Inside El Bronx, where Nacional’s jukebox bar once stood, the olla’s lounges were
reconstructed. Dimmed neon lights and tables with beer bottles provided the ambiance. The
jukeboxes where Juanita, Stella, and others had spent so much time, had become multi-modal
testimonials shared by people in the patios. Pressing “play” in the jukeboxes now launched videos,
accompanied by a life-histories in the genre of resilience, saviorhood, and overcoming terror. The
confessional technologies of psychosocial rehabilitation, too, had been appropriated as a source of cultural currency for the creative industries.

Most of El Bronx was cleared. Morado, Mosco, Homero, America, Manguera, and other major venues were all demolished.

As the police and military stood to the side, unmenacing, and slouched as they rested on some gates, I watched as the Blue Angles shepherded people in blue sweatsuits from the patios across El Bronx. In the corner store across where Hecho used to hang out and gamble, the windows and doors had been torn and instead stood an open exhibit space full of TVs and headphones playing clips of testimonios from people from the patios on feedback loops. Other TVs relayed the story of the May 28, 2016 militarized takeover of El Bronx known by the military as “Operation Nemesis.” The clip begins with the opening of a juridical archive folder. The title reads: “Bronx: The Official History.” Black and white moving images of drone surveillance survey El Bronx. As the reeling of images continues, showcasing the drug-raid, the narrator states that, “In a humanitarian operation unprecedented, and without a single gun fired, the inferno of El Bronx comes to an end.”

I can only think of those who were burned, tortured, and taken away to never be seen again on that day, and whom many of my interlocutors witnessed being taken away; those who they continue to mourn.

In the rooms next door, where the stolen goods used to be lined up, one of the rooms had been converted into another exhibit. As soon as you walk in you are met with 50,000 paper sacks across the walls meant to stand for the amount of bazuco bichas that were processed here. On the top of the wall, in black font, a sign reads: “Close to 120,000 dosages were sold on a weekend.”

On the wall adjacent to the sign, another piece states in black font: “We were able to save lives.” A line mimicking a vital sign heart monitor morphs from steady horizontal to up and down. Below this line it reads “Out of the 2,503 inhabitants that left [El Bronx] 618 completed their
rehabilitation successfully. 1,000 more continue their process in the centers of attention for street inhabitants by the Secretary of Social Integration."

As I film the exhibit and question the validity of these numbers, I also can’t help but to think of Esteban, Fernanda, and so many others who were chalked up as “successful cases,” only to return to the streets once their time was up. As I continue surveying the room, a group of three white men and a white woman, enter with a Colombian woman who is playing some type of ambassador role. They are all dressed up in business wardrobes. My mind wonders further about what has brought them to El Bronx. Perhaps they are part of a security or urban development firm, like other firms that came through El Bronx including Bloomberg’s Associates. Perhaps they are from some NGO or cultural district in Europe spearheading the “cultural industries” in Latin America.

Moving to an adjacent room, the wall is filled with photographic images of injured flesh. The wounds, aestheticized by augmented framing, take center stage. Knife wounds, bullet wounds, and other lacerations on the skin create a mosaic of injury. “And the wounds,” one of the men ask the Colombian woman in English. “They used to punish people who didn’t pay or who stole or wanted to escape….and so the scars,” she responds. “Serious shit…” he comments back.

When I exit the wound-room, I see that more people have entered the exhibit, and that a solidario from the patios, standing on his blue sweatsuit before the crowd, was becoming another kind of exhibit—a cultural relic from El Bronx. People gathered to ask questions about the infamous dogs, crocodiles, and other curiosities that became common knowledge in the media about El Bronx. It struck me that despite the density of people living on the streets just outside, no actual people living on the streets were invited in. Only those deemed saved and corralled back into the human through the patios were present.
The price of admission in the *patios* appeared to no longer be just compliance and performing the dissolution of self to mold into normativity. For some, the price was also in transforming the state’s acts of militarization and demolition into personal narratives of being saved.

El Bronx™ had become an open-air market of humanitarian affect.

No longer through historical elision, the state appeared instead invested in hiding its violence in plain sight by becoming the self-appointed curator of El Bronx’s “Official History.”

El Bronx™ currently stands as a securitized enclosure where meditation sessions, fashion shows, concerts, and other cultural events cater to the “creative” and middle-class populations in the name of inclusion and integration. A hub of the “orange economies” encircled by those living on the streets and by the smaller *ollas* that continue to pop up in adjacent places like El Samber, 5 Huecos, and La Estanzuela.
La Olla y Los Patios charts the lives of people who shuttle between the drug markets and the rehab centers. Through various scenes, I question the liberal assumptions that an invitation back to the category of the human is something all people in the ollas actually want or desire. Or that inclusion into the categories of the human and into the project of liberal humanism is something all people on the streets strive towards. Humanization for some wasn’t experienced as a reprieve from violence but as its very amplification by other means.

I have also demonstrated how, in refusing to be interned in the patios and refusing the violence of humanization by remaining indifferent to the ideals of humanism, there are other generative modes of becoming. In strategically embracing their social relegation as a way to forge other modes of existence and sociality, people become partially untethered from the category of the human.

Much of what I have also shown through scenes is how people are tasked with impossible circumstances. People interned themselves in the ollas in order to protect themselves from the “social cleansings” or death-squads that forcibly disappear people at night. The ollas become a way to defer premature death, while also exposing one to extreme violence within it. People like Hecho and Stella try to “step out of time” through drug use binges and other coterminous attachments but cannot completely exit themselves or their circumstance. People like Daniel and Guillermo often secured moments that were life-affirmative, paradoxically, in moments that were also life-destructive. People enter the patios and are told to learn entire ways to carry themselves, to become normative and abled bodies, only to realize they will still be abjected from the economic market and the domestic sphere.

Through the scenes in this dissertation, there are other layers, other folds, where I’ve also demonstrated how the patios are often not experienced as an exit towards the straight and narrow path of rehabilitation, towards the project of citizenship or social inclusion, or towards the idealized ways of being a human. The patios, despite the state’s desired aims of “social integration” for people living on the streets, are often a rest stop from the world of the streets that continues to await their return.
I have documented how people secure intermissions, or instances of rest from the streets by abiding to the norms or performing compliance. Waithood in these instances cannot only be defined as passivity, since people actively and creatively stretch temporality as much as they can, trying to postpone the seemingly inevitable world of the streets. Yet, as I have also shown, the *patios* as rest stops are but one of a number of places people traverse in this perpetual movement towards some elsewhere in a world unhinged. Where in the horizon, there is nowhere to go; nowhere to integrate. Nowhere except, perhaps back into the “community of those who have no community,” where other ways of existing, other ways of inhabiting time, are being carved out.

Together but separate, people are shuttled by the state from place to place in this “flight of the folly”—this trip to an elsewhere—where forcible displacement by the state, coercion by organized crime, violence by paramilitary death squads, lacerated kin ties, humanitarian intervention, political economy and structural violence, all play their part in impelling both errancy and forcibly ushered relocation.

As I’ve shown, alongside the *ollas* and the *patios*, there are also other segue ways into the broader streets and the broader armed conflict; into other institutions and carceral geographies. Like Mateo and Guillermo who shuttle between armed groups who hire them, drug-markets, and rehab centers. Like Hecho who wanders the countryside and back, perhaps vigilantly watching over Colombia in this moment of “post-conflict” indeterminacy.

I have also demonstrated how there is an impersonal pull towards errancy and places where one becomes lost to oneself, and how such a pull is often met by a set of counterpulls towards rest stops and temporary hiatuses from the streets. The depth of institutional archives, for some, demonstrated these counterpulls into rehab and institutional life; the short spurts of voluntary or coerced detainment within the *patios*, before the page goes blank again. The life histories of people like
Stella, Guillermo, Hecho, Christian, and Fernanda, to name a few, all share these restless yearnings to flee oneself, to lend oneself astray, that they cannot seem to understand.

People’s lived existence appeared encumbered by an array of impersonal forces that shaped their course of action, that shaped their trajectory, and ways of being. Intentionality, effort of attention, and will,⁸ were not the only features that guided people’s lives. But how best to attend or even try to take stock of such impersonal forces? And how might we engage them in relation to the discourses of “agency” and the volitional subject—that is, the prominent frameworks from which people come to understand the processual nature of both history and selfhood?

By engaging the vitality of place, the doing and undoing of selfhood, and the convoluted and protracted qualities of violence in the ollas and patios of Bogotá, this dissertation has tried to reckon with these impersonal forces and their elliptical returns. In this project, the spectral and haunted, the world of the dead that intermingles with people’s visceral experiences, and other ineffable impersonal forces that come to affect modes of being and sociality for my interlocutors have been prioritized. These forces have summoned the phantasmographic as anthropological method and genre—the inscription of the phantasmatic and the phenomenal as intermingled,⁹ and how these forces contour the mutual becomings of self and place.

Another way I have tried to take up these impersonal forces is through an attention to the atmospheric, or the general ambiance and affective intensities that constitute people-place relations. In the first part of this dissertation, I spoke of these atmospheres, drawing from interlocutors, as tetrco [haunted], given how violence disorients and disrupts the linear progression of time.

Much of how violence is taken up in anthropology is through an event/aftermath dyad which has invited many of us to be mindful of how disastrous events get folded into life thereafter.¹⁰ Yet this convoluted matrix of violence that I’ve described through an attention to the lived world of the olla, where structural, interpersonal, and impersonal modes of violence intermingle, have required a
different engagement with violence outside the event/aftermath dyad, and the presumption that one can always discern the origins (the event) from other modes of violence, and from their spectral returns (their aftermaths).

The worlds of the *ollas* I have described are environments where violence is the general atmospheric state of things. To engage violence not as event but as the general atmosphere that encumbers you, required considering the seemingly perpetual shuttling between disorientation and beclouded consciousness that such an ambiance produces. That is, the modes of loss (at times desired) that my interlocutors have been describing and whose images I curate through this dissertation. The being caught adrift, the *embralado* (elsewhere-bound) trajectory, the lending oneself astray, the demonic possession, the binge and the erotic, the being “held in the vestibule,” somewhere between the vitality that manifests itself through the dead and the way that death is always already found in life. In short, the limit-experiences that forcefully leave us beside ourselves in contexts of persistent violence.

If loss and vertigo are some of the existential grounds for being in a world of perpetual violence, can we continue to stake claims on selfhood as something stable and continuous? Or can we truly posit that orientation, intentionality, and consciousness are the primary conduits for how the self continues to relate to such worlds?

I engage such questions through a negative or mad phenomenology, or perhaps more vastly, a mad methodology where after bracketing the primacy of the stable subject as the point of departure for inquiry, we can instead attempt to zero in on the limits of experience, consciousness, and reason, while also trying to follow where disorientation can take us. As an ethnographer, throughout the course of fieldwork and writing, I too, was becoming undone. I too had felt seized by the impersonal. Similarly, trying to describe the *ollas*, the worlds where the question *who or what is doing what to whom*, could never fully be answered, has required a mode of un-knowing that takes up
contradiction, opacity, and incommensurability not as that which to analytically resolve, but as the very grounds for inquiry.

As an “experience-book,” La Olla y Los Patios has tried to import the vitality of encounters into the readers, to carry “beings of one world into another.” It has also attempted to provide an alternative mode and grammar for engaging the lives of people on the streets who struggle with drug use. The scenes are at times written in the subjunctive to both leave space for the opacity and irreducible particularities of people’s actions and characters, as much as to gesture towards what a world felt like for others and for me outside of the surety of knowing.

In these scenes, I have also attempted to suspend the moral didacticism that takes the ethnographic as a case for instruction and the ethnographer as the person who knows how others ought to live their lives, and what values and existential horizons people ought to hold dear. Engaging limit-experiences at the fringes of dissociation and consciousness, I have also attempted to suspend psychiatric and biomedical reasoning as the primary means from which to engage such lived experiences. Similarly, the aim at a larger scale has been to engage ungovernability and non-normative ways of being, outside the sociological gaze of deviance.

If the mode is subjunctive, the structure of this project has been elliptical. By which I mean that I have presented polemics, have shifted focus, only to later to return to some of these unresolved polemics under a different angle or through a different constellation—allowing us to see the problem through another frame. I owe this approach to what the late Lauren Berlant called a mode of “elliptical thinking,” that “both tracks concepts and allows for unfinishedness, inducing itself to become misshapen in the hope that by the time you return to the point of departure, so many things will have come into contact that the contours of the concept and the forms associated with its movement will have changed.” Writing non-linear historiographies of place and digressive scene-images, the elliptical as structure also resonated with the many of ideas this work has tried to express. I hope that
this elliptical mode can allow us as readers to return to these scenes-images that have attempted to “express without formulating.”18 I hope that we can insert the new of what the world has taught us since the previous read into this elliptical engagement; to re-learn or unlearn what these scenes gesture towards, with each return.

When I have presented or shared parts of this work in various academic and other settings, people have asked me about the whereabouts of certain interlocutors like Hecho, Duván, and Fernanda, and if I believed that those who refuse the category of the human are “doing better,” on this outside of the human. I gathered that people wanted stories in the genre of hope and that “doing better” would mean abandoning a life on the streets. That despite the violence of humanization and inclusion that I would elucidate, that it was the only way for doing better, or so I imagined being the premise undergirding these prompts. Often, I could not but read these questions alongside the rising discourses of “resilience” in both anthropology and in common parlance, which well-intentioned as though they may be, can often elide the structural forces and the broader order of things that places a stranglehold on tenuous existence on the first place. Despite many of us knowing the sheer weight of structural violence, we tend retort back to the individual; to this impetus on the subject—their will, endurance, and volition. The hovering force of the impersonal, too, seem too often to be evacuated from these concerns on the conditions of improvement.

Furthermore, much of these well-intended questions operate with the inherent premise of “agency” as something topographical that is oriented towards upward mobility, where doing better, would equate to transcending a certain way of life or overcoming the challenging circumstances that they face once and for all. And though I’m ambivalent of “agency” as an analytic, since it can presume a discernible locus of origin where any given action or course of event can be traced back to, if I were to engage about what “doing better” might mean, it would certainly be along the lines of what Berlant has called “lateral agency.” This laterality, as Berlant has described, is not necessarily about future-
oriented horizons, but about sustenance and trying to coast through one’s immediate world in that opaque zone of being “where life building and the attrition of human life are indistinguishable.”

Where tenuous grips towards futurity; where the reaching-towards for pockets of sustenance, are attempted to be seized in the now-time—amid stifled possibility and the disastrous that carries on.

Perhaps “doing better” is securing breaks, finding crevices of air from the weight of the world, seizing the little deaths and joys, stretching temporality, and gathering the life-forces to keep the going, going, amid continual threat.
NOTES

1 Jackson, The Other Shore, 3.

1. Introduction
1 Hartman, Scenes of Subjection, 5.
2 Warren, Ontological Terror, 23.
3 Here, I am guided by Eugene Raikhel who has demonstrated how reckoning with “crisis” requires an understanding of the types of political, institutional, and ethical responses that the declaration of crisis enables. See Raikhel, Governing Habits, 26-7. In this case, “crisis” justified nocturnal surveillance, as well as militarization, and the institutionalization of people who “trespassed” their way into other parts of the city, thus claims of “crisis” were not only countered but reappropriated to beget others claims to crisis.
4 Moten, A Poetics of the Undercommons, 12.
5 Ibid., 20-1.
6 My thinking around “exit” is deeply influenced by Georges Bataille. His work has helped to inform many of problems this project poses. In particular, Bataille led me to take up the problems of wanting out from oneself, which are not particular to racialized relegation, drug use, or to subjection, but to questions of existence more broadly. Here I am also drawing on Bataillean scholar Jeremy Biles who argues that for Bataille, Being was the labyrinth where the subject was encumbered by contradiction and mired with impossible circumstance. See Bataille, Theory of Religion; Biles, Ecce Monstrum.
7 I borrow the term “exit” from Stefanos Geroulanos. See Geroulanos, “The Anthropology of Exit.”
8 See for instance, Garcia, The Pastoral Clinic, 20-1.
9 Biles, Ecce Monstrum, 83..
10 Levinas, On Escape, 55.
11 Ibid., 54.
12 Burroway, “Remembering to Forget,” 477, 484.
13 Here I follow Jeremey Biles when he writes, “Life thus understood bears the stigma of death within it; the burgeoning seed is always the mortal germ that promises not just a return to death, but the uncanny and unshakable presence of death, even in life.” See Biles, Ecce Monstrum, 87. What interests me throughout is the vitality and generativity people find in abjection and at the limits of experience.
14 Biles, “A Story of Rats,” 115. Following Bataille, for Biles, this form of regulatory abjection is what upholds the order of things. That is to say abjection is necessary to uphold “homogenous” and normative society.
15 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 3.
16 Ibid., 3. See also Musser, Sensual Excess, 14.
17 Desjarlais, Shelter Blues, 4.
19 Secretaría de Integración Social, El Cartucho, 24.
20 El DABS Camino a la Inclusión Social, 182.
22 My thinking throughout this dissertation around wandering, fugitivity and the relationship between movement and life “ungovernable,” is deeply indebted to Fred Moten. For Moten, fugitivity are moments that secure a break outside of the law and the ruling society, they are instances of “stolen life.” Moten writes, “What's at stake is fugitive movement in and out of the frame, bar, or whatever externally imposed social logic—a movement of escape, the stealth of the stolen that can be said, since it inheres in every closed circle, to break every enclosure. This fugitive movement is stolen life, and its relation to law is reducible neither to simple interdiction nor bare transgression.” See Moten, “The Case of Blackness,” 179.
23 Ibid., 183.
24 Perea Restrepo, Limpieza Social, 50.
25 See Povinelli, Economics of Abandonment.
26 In Colombia, this discursive turn towards democratic inclusion and acceptance of social difference is often understood as taking a turning point after the implementation of the 1991 Colombian Constitution. See Colombia’s 1991 Constitution.
“Souls of Hell” was the name of the French photographer Stanislas Guigui’s gallery of the people of El Cartucho.

See Testigo Directo, “El cementerio de los muertos vivos.”

For an expansive overview of the “anti-humanist” tradition see Geroulanos, An Atheism that is not Humanist Emerges in French Thought. See also Weheliye, Habeas Viscus.

Sharpe, In the Wake, 4.

See Warren, Ontological Terror; Jackson, Becoming Human; Hartman, Scenes of Subjection; and Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,”

Jackson, Becoming Human, 46.

Ibid., 46.

Weheliye, Habeas Viscus, 4. Here, I am drawing on Weheliye’s frame that posits how through the category of the human as a heuristic, Black Studies has been able to demonstrate the sociopolitically imposed hierarchies of being he describes as the “racializing assemblages.”

Following Weheliye, my engagement with racialization as a sociopolitical process of hierarchy and relegations extends outside of phenotype and ethnicity. As a process, racialization can thus also inscribe inferiority into other groups including trans communities, drug users, and people living on the street.

I borrow the phrase “possibility of impossibility” from Frantz Fanon, who in somewhat of a Heideggener vein, was alluding to death through this phrase. See Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 193.

Ibid., 4. As David Marriott has demonstrated the epidermal racialhistorical schema for Fanon consisted on first a racialization of the flesh, or an inscription of (inferior) value unto the flesh, which was followed by a psychic and motor absorption of such inferiority, that would then get refracted as an embodied or enfleshed way of being for racialized subjects—a sociogeny or socially produced racialization and inferiority. Furthermore, in this dissertation I am interested in how within this racialized schema that relegates one outside the human, people come to embrace subject-positions that try exit to this schema, precisely, by embracing abjection, discarding desires for recognition, and/or abandoning the morality and liberal values of normative society.

Here I am fleshing out what I believe Fanon would have also included under this hierarchical schema. As Calvin Warren reminds us, Blackened, racialized flesh, for Fanon, has always been already associated with dirt, filth, and impurity. See Warren, Ontological Terror, 146.

Jackson, Becoming Human, 46.

Ibid., 18. I borrow the phrase the “violence of humanization” from Zakiyyah Jackson. I also follow Jackson’s conviction that the humanization and dehumanization binary is not sufficient for understanding racialization, since inclusion into the human can be just as deleterious.

See Hartman, Scenes of Subjection; Warren, Ontological Terror; Jackson, Becoming Human.

Sharpe, In the Wake, 14.

Ibid., 1.

USAID, “Property Rights and Resource Governance, Colombia,” 6; Uribe-Kessler, “Guest View: Colombia’s Struggle Against Poverty.”

Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, “Colombia.”

Ibid.


Rueda Bedoya, “El desplazamiento forzado y la pacificación del país,” 4; Secretaría de Integración Social, Política Pública Distrital para el Fenómeno de Habitabilidad en Calle, 15.
59 See also Corbin, *The Foul and The Fragrant* and; Gandolfo, *The City at its Limits*.
61 Ibid., 2.
63 Ibid., 37; Morris, *En Un Lugar Llamado El Cartucho*, 34.
64 De Nicoló et al., *Musarañas*, 88.
69 Ibid., 396.
71 Ibid., 17.
72 Baxstrom and Meyers, “Authors’ Response.” Here, I echo Richard Baxstrom and Todd Meyers’ critical interrogation of those who presume an outside or an immunity from violence.
73 On a 2011 census for people living on the streets of Bogotá conducted by the Secretary of Social Integration, there was a reported 8.28% (688 total) of people who identified as women from a total survey 8,312 people. See SDIS, “Dirección Poblacional Plan de Desarrollo Distrital Bogotá Mejor Para Todos 2016-2020.” Based on my experiences moving across the streets of Bogotá, I would argue that though there are certainly more males than females on the street, the number of females on the street is not reflected in these demographics.
74 Trans populations in Bogotá face extreme housing insecurity alongside paramilitary violence. Though the *olla* and the brothel areas were places many of the trans communities of downtown Bogotá frequented and resided in, they were rarely ever deliberately included in the outreach programs by the city during my fieldwork tenure.
75 Ibid. In addition, only eight people out of 11,897 surveyed, identified as “intersexual” or trans.
77 Betcher, “Becoming Flesh of my Flesh,” 108.
78 Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, 34.
79 Desjarlais, “Movement, Stillness,” 370.
81 For a broader discussion on the anthropology of the image see Romero, “Image as Method.”
83 Here I am grateful for Daniella Gandolfo who commented on an earlier proposition I was making about my dissertation project through the Society for Cultural Anthropology workshop “Ethnographic Excess,” and who reminded me that embracing the incommensurate is also about “arresting negation,” and this yearning towards resolution found across modes of dialectical reasoning.
84 Taussig, *Palma Africana*, 202. I borrow the term “thought-images” from Michael Taussig who writes: “Together with the animals and plant I find I write with images or, more specifically, in ‘thought-images’ that flip over between being a picture and being an idea and back again, and again. There’s barely any stopping once you get started because the thought-image is restless, certainly animated, literal yet abstract, story and idea in
one, close to what Benjamin calls a “dialectical image,” an image that holds still, for the moment, the past in
the present.”
86 See also McLean, *Fictionalizing Anthropology*.
87 Desjarlais, *The Blind Man*, ix.
88 Martínez, *Haunting Without Ghosts*, 26. Here I am drawing on Juliana Martínez who writes about Colombia’s
violence in film where defiled space and its spectrality unmoor the stability of spatial coordinates.
89 See McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*.
90 Ibid., xxiv-xxv. Throughout this project, I come to bear on the vitality of place through the notion
of atmosphere or a general ambiance that can affect its inhabitants. Much of conventional discourses of “agency”
preserve a discernible locus of origin, a pre-given subject that acts upon the world. In a context where normative
categorical dyads falter, including self and world and the dead and the alive, in contrast, I am interested in
exploring the concatenation of self and world, the dead and the alive, person and place. Through these
hybridizations, we get a more convoluted image of “agency.” Intermingled forces that make up this atmosphere
pulsate in various frequencies so that place, the dead, impersonal relations, and other things seemingly perceived
to be bereft of agency, exert palpable pressure. Thinking with McKittrick’s insights of geographies that exude
mastery and are saturated with occult forces has heavily informed how I take up place and its capacity to affect.
91 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 23.
92 See also Taussig, *Palma Africana*, 78.

2. La Olla
2 The base of this map stems from Secretaria de Integración Social, *El Cartucho*, 122-3.

1 Kilroy-Marac, *An Impossible Inheritance*, 24. Kilroy-Marac’s work at the intersections of remembrance,
imagination, and history deeply inform my approach in this section. The non-linear modes of history that appear
in this section, very much resemble Kilroy-Marac’s insights that trouble linear time as master narrative and
possibility.
4 The illuminating works of Maria Teresa Salcedo and Ingrid Morris Rincón on El Cartucho and the sensory
experiences of life on the streets of Bogotá are exemptions. See Salcedo, “Escritura y Territorialidad en la
Cultura de la Calle.”; See Morris Rincón, *En Un Lugar Llamado El Cartucho*. This work has also found
interlocutors in the performance and filmic work of Rolph and Heidi Abderhalden on memory and El
Cartucho. See Mapa Teatro, *Prometeo*; See also Rolph “Witness to the Ruins.”
5 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 23. Here I am drawing on Michel Foucault’s notion of “heterotopia.”
6 Ibid., 23.

Sensory history
1 See Robledo Gómez and Rodríguez Santana, *Emergencia del Sujeto Excluido*, 173.
2 Rivas Gamboa, *Gorgeous Monster*, 74. While these numbers are alarming, given the various modes of
disappearing corpses in El Cartucho, my interlocutors often argued that the majority of murders went
unreported. Ingrid Morris Rincón also makes note of these discrepancies. See Morris Rincón, *En Un Lugar
Llamado El Cartucho*, 38.
3 Ingrid Morris has argued that the formation of “El Cartucho” from the neighborhood of Santa Ines is
intricately tied to mass displacement in the countryside due to the Colombian armed conflict and the amounts
of people landing in El Cartucho’s bus station seeking refuge since the mid-1950’s. See Morris Rincón, *En Un
Lugar Llamado El Cartucho*, 10.
The 1998 census conducted by DABS calculated that approximately 12,000 people lived on the street in El Cartucho. See Secretaria de Integracion Social, El Cartucho, 40. The 12,000 did not include people living in temporary residences in El Cartucho.

The Third Millennium Park is still considered a hub of violence and insecurity not only because of its past, but because it is adjacent to other drug markets downtown.

Consultations

1. The routinized violence that took place in “Malandro’s” olla were also chronicled in the existing literature on El Cartucho. See Morris Rincón, En un Lugar Llamado El Cartucho.

2. For other examples of mythical smoking muñecos used in practices of divination see Van de Port, The Possibility of Spirits, 71 min.

3. Similarly, Georges Bataille commenting on sacrificial death rites once wrote: “The victim dies and the spectators share in what his death reveals. This is what religious historians call the sacramental element. This sacramental element is the revelation of continuity through the death of a discontinuous being to those who watch it as a solemn rite. A violent death disrupts the creature's discontinuity: what remains, what the tense onlookers experience in the succeeding silence, is the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one.” See Bataille, Eroticism, 82.

Limit-experiences

1. Other accounts of El Cartucho also make reference to El Container as the place where those murdered would end up. See Morris Rincón, En Un Lugar Llamado El Cartucho; Ritterbusch, A Youth Vision of the City.

2. Ingrid Morris Rincón also makes note of how an entire economy for people on the street was opened up by the killings of other Cartucho dwellers. Not only through dumping corpses into El Container as I elucidate here, but also through expediting processes for families at the city’s morgue, and by remaining watchful of the traffic of corpses brought to the morgue. See Morris Rincón, Un Lugar Llamado El Cartucho, 59.

3. See Secretaria de Integracion Social, El Cartucho, 108. Various research interlocutors also confirmed that bichas were priced at 200 Colombian pesos in the 1990’s, often expressing a sense of nostalgia for El Cartucho and its olla’s cheap prices for bazuco. The current price as of 2019, starts at 2,000 pesos.

4. My engagement with sound-images and frequencies is owed to Lista Stevenson and Tina Campt. See Stevenson, Life Beside Itself; Campt, Listening to Images.

5. Heidegger, Basic Writings, 443.

The collective sensorium

1. Pine, The Art of Making Do, 17. In Jason Pine’s ethnography of life amid social insecurity in contexts of organized crime in Naples, Italy, he illustrates how organized crime works in quite unorganized ways—not only through coercive violence but also through fostering uncertainty and a certain tempo of life that is palpably felt for those in the contact affective-aesthetic zone. Thus, inhabitants come to reproduce such imposed tempos through performative, affective and aestheticized ways that somehow come with the territory. See Pine, The Art of Making Do in Naples, 13-18.

2. See Taussig, Africana Palma, 69.

The ninja turtles

1. As part of the US Cold War’s agenda to prevent the “communist threat” presumed to emerge out of the “shantytowns” of the so-called undeveloped world, through the John F. Kennedy administration, the US provided housing projects for many cities in Latin America. The municipality of Kennedy, now home to 1 million people, was named after President John F. Kennedy, shortly after his visit to Colombia in 1961, to commemorate his advocacy for housing in the municipality through the Alliance for Progress project. See Davis, Planet of the Slums, 200.

2. While bazuco emerged out of the remains of cocaine production as leftover paste base, bazuco was also sometimes cooked from cocaine in similar fashion to the making of crack-cocaine in the US.
3 Gancho Amarillo “original” refers to the most popular olla in El Cartucho. They were wiped out during the violent clashes with other bands from opposing avenues in El Cartucho in the 1990s. Years later, a second set of leaders emerged reclaiming the name Gancho Amarillo and thus the distinction between the “original” and its counterpart.


**Violence and domesticity**


**Lusting for abjection**

1 *Cambuches* are improvised shacks whose materiality varies; from plastic bags anchored into sticks as frames to the more articulate and durable *cambuches* which I allude to here. The *cambuche* as a pseudo-domestic and intimate place troubles current understandings of the street as public and perhaps even, the fraught category of “homeless.”

2 Taussig, *The Nervous System*, 25. I contrast the criminal “underworld” as a social imaginary fostered by the ruling classes that Taussig is critiquing here, with the material subterranean world of the city that Walter Benjamin and others have written about. In this section and the next section on El Bronx, I demonstrate how the subterranean comes to be experienced and tapped into by people in the olla. The underworld as a social imaginary from without and the lived experience of the subterranean use of the city should not be conflated. See also Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 82.

3 Georges Bataille’s offerings on eroticism as an inner quest to temporarily lose oneself from the “I” and into the other—as a quest to establish immanence and retrieve lost continuity that delivers one from existential isolation, allowed to me think through these encounters of alterity and more broadly, the pursuit of limit-experiences that try to unsettle the grounds of subjectivity. See Bataille, *Eroticism*, 32.

4 Following Julia Kristeva, I’m interested in thinking of the transformative reckonings of experiences of abjection. How such experiences simultaneously “pulversize and beseech” the subject. That is, how they unsettle our pre-existing understandings of self and in this process, they alter our forms of being. Kristeva writes: “I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself.” See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3-5. I borrow the phrase to be “torn from oneself” from Robert Desjarlais who draws upon an interview of Michel Foucault for the phrase. See Desjarlais, *The Blind Man*, 20-1.

**Contrapuntal histories in the flesh**

1 Colombia’s long history of violence predating to its formation as a nation-state has led to an extensive amount of memory-work among its citizenry. The term *memoricidio* is commonly used to illustrate state attempts to suppress its violent doings and foster an atmosphere of “cultural amnesia.” During an interview with an official who worked in the locality of Puente Aranda and who oversaw the thousands of people who were displaced to this municipality during El Cartucho’s demolition, the official deployed the term regarding El Cartucho and the historical elision of state narratives regarding its demolition.

2 Western metaphysics have long misrecognized “space” as preceding place thus treating place as some sort of aftermath filler. From Descartes to contemporary urban planning such modes of understanding presume place could be effaced and returned to an abstract geometrical plane—the *tabula rasa*. For a history of philosophical understandings of place and space see Casey, *A Fate of Place*. As Federico Perez has noted, the neighborhood of Santa Ines and the broader downtown area had been attempted to be modified through *tabula rasa* models by the likes of Le Corbusier and others. See Perez, *Urbanism as Warfare*, 38. More recently consulting firms founded on Rudy Giuliani and William Bratton’s city governance techniques, and later Bloomsberg Associates were hired to outsource urban planning and security models to downtown Bogotá thus continuing this legacy of models premised on “homogenous space” which undermine place and its sociocultural, historical and, heterogeneous features.

"Combinado" is what most people on the olla lived off. A hand scoop of whatever food is being offered wrapped in piece of newspaper. Sometimes rice and grains, others a handful of bread crumbs. Recycled food is brought in by trash recyclers who then re-sell it to the olla’s cooks.

I borrow the phrase “deregulated kinesis” from Sarah Jane Cervenak whose work on wandering, movement, and imagination has been formative. See Cervenak, A Black Gathering, 8.


San Victorino neighbors with El Cartucho and it is known for informal markets where all kinds of clothing and merchandise are sold. Parts of San Victorino were considered to be El Cartucho, thus between 10th Avenue and 14th avenue with 10th Street, El Cartucho and San Victorino begin to morph. For a detailed account of “El Madrugón,” see also Prieto Ruiz, El Madrugón en San Victorino.

El Loco Calderón was a prominent figure in El Cartucho. He was known to be a major crime leader but also known to be an advocate for the rulos and the recyclers of El Cartucho. Once El Cartucho was in the process of being demolished, him and other major crime leaders in El Cartucho sat in on the negotiating tables with state and hired private-sector officials. He became resistant during these negotiations and shortly after was shot down in El Cartucho on March 3rd, 2001. See Morris Rincón, En un Lugar Llamado El Cartucho, 110. For his own accounts of life in El Cartucho, see Calderon, La Vida de Ercial en El Cartucho.

See Secretaria de Integración Social, El Cartucho, 25, 37. The San Francisco river became La Jimenez (13th street), and the San Agustin river became 6th street as both were canalized between 1919-1925 (See Secretaria de Integracion Social 2010: 35). These projects would thus segregate the Santa Ines/El Cartucho neighborhood from other neighborhoods. Such segregation through urban development would be further completed when La Caracas avenue would be built in the 1940’s and 10th avenue would be built in 1957. A geographic “asphyxiation” (p.37) of the neighborhood would thus lead to its segregation from other parts of the city, harnessing a secluded territory for the formations of organized crime and the olla place-world.

The history of armed conflict in Colombia has long been troubled by the use of rivers as the medium for forcible disappearance and violence; the canaled waterways of El Cartucho manifested as the urbanization of such practices.

Padre Javier De Nicolo’s impact on El Cartucho and street children across the city deserves a more detailed account than I could provide here. For his pedagogical approach to “street children” and the implementation of services throughout the city see De Nicolo et. al Musarañas.

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Smith, Afro-Paradise, 156. Here, I am greatly influenced by the work Christen Smith who demonstrates the way racialized violence is continuously performed over time, and where a certain locus becomes a “palimpsestic” space for these acts to recur. I take up downtown Bogotá to be such type of place. Violence as inscribed, as performed, repeatedly unto the flesh is thus a form of “palimpsestic embodiment” (p. 165) that this section has also tried to articulate—both through ongoing acts of violence people were subject to and the felt returns from an immemorial past whom they didn’t initially live through yet, were implicated through its spectral return.

Ibid., 24.

For other accounts on the disappearance and violence towards socially marginalized populations in Colombia see Perea Restrepo, Limpieza Social; and, Taussig, Diary of a Limpieza.

See Ritterbusch, A Youth Vision of the City for an ethnographic account of limpieza social killings aimed at trans sex-worker leaders in downtown Bogotá.

See Secretaria de Integración Social, El Cartucho, 47.

In 2009, refugees internally displaced were quarantined by the state amid an “epidemiological barrier” as they sheltered in tents anchored to the Third Millennium Park as the fear of the swine flu spreading took the city by storm. It is as though there is something magnetizing and atmospheric that makes this place be constantly used for the confinement of socially marginalized groups of people. See Zeiderman, The Endangered City, 150-3.

Here I am thinking with Aidan Seale-Feldman who, writing about the phenomenon of mass hysteria in Nepal, engages with the haunted outside of the metaphoric. She showcases instead how as a visceral experience, the haunting is a form of shared relationality. Here, I take up the haunted not as a metaphor but as the minor frequencies from which the dead intermingle with the alive across time and space. See Seale-Feldman, “Relational Affliction,” 314-315.
20 See Federico Perez, *Urbanism as Warfare* for an insightful comparison of urbanist development interventions in El Cartucho/Santa Ines starting from the 1950s when 10th Avenue was expanded, and later through the razing of El Cartucho in 2000s.
21 The Third Millenium park as a cemetery was also expressed by former inhabitants of El Cartucho in Amy Ritterbusch’s ethnography. See Ritterbusch, *A Youth Vision of the City*, 176.
22 “Maton” means big time murderer. Los Bayona were known for on the spot killings in El Cartucho and the shooting at crowds of people living on the streets during drunken tantrums. For another account of Los Bayonas see *En un Lugar Llamado El Cartucho*, 45.
24 Ibid., 11.
25 I borrow the phrase “contrapuntal histories” from Allen Feldman who tries to work through the retrieval of history through the senses. Feldman writes: “Contrapuntal sensory histories can be located in the scattered wreckage of the inadmissible: lost biographies, memories, words, pains and faces which cohere in a *vast secret museum of historical and sensory absence*.” (emphasis original). See Feldman “From Dessert Storm to Rodney King Via Ex-Yugoslavia.”
27 McLean, *The Event and Its Terrors*, 128. Mclean is drawing from a rich tradition of thinkers influenced by Walter Benjamin’s “dialectical image,” a condensed image that springs forth from the past with the potential to shape the course of history.
28 I am indebted to Avery Gordon’s insight that to be gripped by these dialectical images or “profane illuminations” (another term from Walter Benjamin) is to already be pre-disposed to involvement (even if involvement is deferred, I would add); one has already been implicated by the image—an implication that elicits response. The image is thus a calling. See Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 205-6.
29 See Feldman. *Formations of Violence* 66-8. Writing about interpersonal violence in Belfast, Ireland Feldman is describing local understandings of violence and extraordinary deaths in excess as generative of ghostly apparitions since sites of violence become defiled by accrued death that exceed normative limits. Such accounts resonate with how El Cartucho’s violence came to be understood by its former inhabitants.
31 McLean, *The Event and Its Terrors*, 191. On an explanatory footnote to Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, McLean writes: “Derrida argues that an analytic of spectrality should take as its starting point not the assumed knowability of society’s material base, but a moment prior to the institution of any conceptual distinction between substance and phantasm, or between life-as-such and death-as-such.”
32 Thinking with Fernanda and others, I liken their approach and sensibility towards a sentient and felt history to resonate with Jacques Derrida’s analytic of spectrality or Stuart McLean’s historiography. We could perhaps consider these perceptual approaches towards the ghostly and barely perceptible to what Robert Desjarlais has called a *phanomenology*, a way to attend to the strange perceptions and apparitions that show themselves from time to time. See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 48; McLean, *The Event and Its Terrors* 10-11. Desjarlais, *The Blind Man*, 158.
33 To consider how people forge a relation with place and history that was not directly experienced, I draw on Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of an “immemorial past,” one that “regards me” despite having never lived through it—an anonymous past that becomes “my” responsibility for the Other. See Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 111-12.

**El Matadero**

1 Ariza, “Yo Tumbé el Cartucho con la ayuda de mi Dios y una pistola.” In this biographical account written in Spanish, the original quote which I translated says: “El polvo de las demoliciones parecía ser más sicolélico que el basuco, porque tenía locos a los señores de la droga.” Cf. Morris, *En Un Lugar Llamado El Cartucho*, 106.
2 See for example footage from the film “Infierno O Paraíso” (2014), where warfare breaks loose as residents of El Cartucho are encroached by the military police (18:45).
3 Tortuga Ninjas or the Ninja Turtles is what El Cartucho’s former residents call the swat-gear military police which are formally known as ESMAD. See “The Ninja Turtles” section.

4 “Hecho el Desecho” is the name an interlocutor gave to himself for this project, though it was one of his many aliases for himself. Hecho el Desecho is a clever turn of phrase that literally translates to being made into waste—a form of debasement that connotes the structural, historical, and material processes by which people become de-subjectified. Elsewhere, I have written about this strategic appropriation of people’s status as socially relegated to embrace other forms of being untethered to normative forms of selfhood (See “Hulk” and “The Binge”).

5 El Cartucho has also been home to efforts of political organization by recyclers, people living on the streets, and other activists advocating for both the right to the formalization of their labor practices, as well as the rights towards non-utilitarian modes of existence. People like “El Loco Calderon” and the Afro-Colombian activist and spokesperson for people living on the streets Komanche, for instance, were some of El Cartucho’s most known political figures. See Calderon, La Vida de Ercal en El Cartucho; Herrea, Comanche.

6 For a broader analysis on Plan Centro, see Pérez, “Laboratorios de Reconstrucción Urbana,” 71.


8 The “Bogotazo” riots of 1948, are often considered the tipping point for the Colombian armed conflict. The riots were a response to the murder in downtown Bogotá of leftist and land-reform advocate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. The riots led many of the upper-classes to flee to the northside of the city, similar to the “white flight” phenomenon in US mid-20th century history. As an anthropologist who once secured a private meeting with Peñalosa told me, this plan to take downtown back, was what Peñalosa’s family had always envisioned.

9 See Harvey, “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction, 28.” For David Harvey, across the globe, neoliberal and developmental projects have been about the restoration of class dominance by the upper classes. Peñalosa’s attempt to “take back” downtown aligns with these broader patterns.

10 Morris, En Un Lugar Llamado El Cartucho, 108. As one of Morris’ interlocutor’s recounts, three police trucks filled with people from El Cartucho left to never be seen again. The people I encountered from El Cartucho shared similar concerns about their peers who were abducted and never seen after their violent expulsion from El Cartucho. Similar forms of disappearance were happening throughout Colombia adjacent to these events through the “social cleansing” paramilitary sweeps targeting people on the streets, and the “false positive” cases of working-poor civilians being framed as guerilla insurgents in order for military soldiers to receive monetary incentives for the corpses by the state.

11 When I spoke with G, a mid-tier state official from Bienestar Social (now SDIS), he mentioned how he witnessed one of the auto-shop business leaders from Los Mártires give the police at their station headquarters (located on 6th street across from El Cartucho), private-owned dump trucks. G. shared how dozens of people from El Cartucho were coercively “dumped” into the dump trucks.

12 Ibid., 108.

13 People working for the city’s social services during El Cartucho’s expulsion shared how multiple private-sector stakeholders saw the presence of people from El Cartucho as devaluing this “elite” and affluent part of downtown where the San Pedro Claver hospital, known today as Hospital Méderi is located. A large shopping mall, Mallplaza NQS would also be built in this area and open its doors in 2011.

14 See Perea Restrepo, Limpieza Social.

15 When conducting interviews in the city’s rehab services for instance, many people upon recollecting their life-histories, would use the phrase el vuelo de los locos, to talk about their constant relocations in the post-El Cartucho years. El vuelo de los locos, I find telling in that it gestures towards a flight into an unknown elsewhere converging psycho-geographies of drug use with their constant forcible displacements. Displacement and a partial exit from conscious experience thus converge into a single state of endless contradiction somewhere self-exile and ushered relocation.

16 See “Biblioteca Ramón D’Luyz Nieto.”

17 See video, “Sede Aduanilla de Aduanilla de Paiba Biblioteca Ramón Eduardo D’Luyz Nieto.” El Matadero would be purchased by the Universidad Distrital Francisco Jose de Caldas in 2008. The lot would be turned into the university’s library which opened in 2013.
Carlos Arturo Reina references certain histories of this place, where people were brought in the same trucks as cattle and burned in El Matadero’s incinerator. See video, “La historia detrás de ‘Aduanilla de Paiba, el antiguo matadero de Bogotá.” (4:40).

Canguilhem, Knowledge of Life, 132. See also Meyers, “A Living Room,” where thinking with Canguilhem’s notion of the shrunk milieu he invokes people’s capacity to pull their environment towards them, that is, how the milieu can also conform, or yield towards the person. He writes, “The organism does not simply reside there; it draws everything toward itself, wrapping the milieu around itself, as its center.” I take up El Matadero and other *ollas* as places that yield towards the shared forms of life people generate on the streets.

**El Bronx**

1 Taussig, *I Swear I Saw This*, 91.
3 Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road*, 162.

6 After El Bronx’s destruction in 2016, the state had tried to provide an “Official History” of El Bronx and to position itself as the self-appointed curators of this place’s cultural history through media campaigns, exhibitions, and other audio-visual material (See Conclusion). These campaigns through reconstruction and narrative, tried to include some of El Bronx’s heterogenous elements into their administrative history in a way that attempted to ultimately contain these elements or reduce them. The state’s narrative while focusing on the violence people were subjected by organized crime in El Bronx, elided the various modes of violence by the state that produced and maintained El Bronx as a place. Through curation and staking claims as the “official” historians of El Bronx, statecraft began to tried to contain violence, transgression and other heterogenous elements into their staged narratives.

7 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 23.

**La 15 was La L**

1 The name El Bronx was given due to this place’s dilapidated surround, resembling the New York City borough.
2 See Video “Gigantesco Operativo en el "Bronx" Permitió Desmantelar a Tres Bandas de Narcotráfico.”

**Territorializing**

1 See Video “Bertha González, la Mujer más Poderosa del ‘Bronx.’”
2 See news briefing from Colombian Newspaper El Espectador “Alias "Mosco", señalado de ser capo del Bronx, libre tras purgar una pena por homicidio.”
3 Ibid. See same newspaper article “Alias "Mosco", señalado de ser capo del Bronx, libre tras purgar una pena por homicidio.” Óscar Alcántara González was captured in Ecuador where he was trying to expand his drug business.
4 See Testigo Directo television special “Gancho a los Capos del Bronx” (Segunda Parte). Trained under the notorious AUC paramilitary leader and drug dealer Carlos “Macaco” Jiménez, Rigo joins another military band known as La Cordillera after the 2005 AUC demobilization. As he rose in the ranks of La Cordillera he kills a few of important members and split this band to form the Los Rolos band. Los Rolos comprised of a hundred members first took over the drug trade in the Risaralda region before taking over Bogotá through La L’s markets in 2008.
5 Ibid. In the same video, Bogotá police general Luis Martínez who had put out a roughly 40,000USD reward for Rigo’s capture in 2013, is interviewed and explains how Rigo and the Manguera band took over La L through crossfires and attacks on the Mosco and Homero bands. According to Martínez, the bands met and reached an agreement of co-existing so that the violence would cede and the police wouldn’t further interfere and close down La L.
6 See the description on the Saiyan on the Fandom gaming website. The Saiyan-Jin is translated as a “wildman” whose primary form of relation is warfare and violence. See also El Tiempo, “¿Quiénes son los temibles 'sayayines' del 'Bronx' y otras 'ollas'? ” where a similar description of the origins of *sayayines* is given.
For other accounts that explore the relation between extortion and territoriality, see Fontes, Mortal Doubt, 153. Writing about extortive practices from transnational gangs and organized crime networks in Guatemala, Fontes, writes: “extortion has become far more than simply a means of making money; it has become a signature facet of their claim to power which, like most forms of governance, is hooked to territorial control.” See also Fattal, Guerrilla Marketing, 163-4.

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See also Fattal, Guerrilla Marketing, 163-4.

Writing about organized crime in Naples, Italy, Pine illustrates how organized crime dominates through an affective-aesthetic realm. “Crime clans create the atmosphere that they dominate, territorializing residents in an affective-aesthetic world suffused with fear, seduction, and ‘epistem murk.’ In this sense, ‘the Camorra’ is not a circumscribable thing but a part of everything, the atmospheric state of things. In fact, crime clan affiliates and associates do not use the term camorra. Instead, they refer to sistemi (systems. People find themselves in the atmosphere of a system are alert to its indeterminacies and unruly forces.”

Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 314.

The sacred

1. Granados, Historia de Colombia La Independencia y la República, 296-297.
4. See “Parroquia del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús Basílica Menor Voto Nacional.”
5. See also his website for galleries on people living in the alla’s downtown.
11. Ibid., 114.
13. Bataille, Visions of Excess, 142. For Georges Bataille, heterogeneity is associated with the incommensurate and irreducibly different features of the social that refuse to become domesticated into the profane. The left and right hand sacred are thus the excesses the profane world generates, incapable of mastering incommensurability. He writes: “Beyond the properly sacred things that constitute the common realm of religion or magic, the heterogeneous world includes everything resulting from unproductive expenditures (sacred things themselves form part of this whole). This consists of everything rejected by homogeneous society as waste or as superior transcendent value. Included are the waste products of the human body and certain analogous matter (trash, vermin, etc.); the parts of the body; persons, words, or acts having a suggestive erotic value; the various unconscious processes such as dreams or neuroses; the numerous elements or social forms that homogeneous society is powerless to assimilate: mobs, the warrior, aristocratic and impoverished classes, different types of violent individuals or at least those who refuse the rule (madmen, leaders, poets, etc.).”

The tipping point

1. The Secretary of Social Integration (SDIS) is the Bogotá Mayor’s department that centers on providing services for “poor and vulnerable” communities. The city’s rehab centers, where part of this research was conducted, belonged to SDIS. See https://www.integracionsocial.gov.co/
2. See video of Gustavo Petro’s CAMAD inaugural speech of CAMAD in La L.
3. See the newspaper El Espectador’s post “Óscar Javier Molina: Una Muerte en el Olvido.”

Cunning design

2. Schull, Addiction as Design, 44. In Schull’s incisive ethnography about the casino industry in the US, she demonstrates how the very architectural layout of casinos entices people into certain walkways based on visual obstruction of paths ahead and the construction of certain sensory ambiances that rivet players into their
gambling machines. In turn, Schüll guides our analytic attention into how the modulation of certain affects by way of architecture, is known to elicit certain forms of conduct which can “design” addictive dispositions.

In the zone
1 El Tiempo, “Las Maquinitas del 'Bronx' y el Millonario Negocio de una Adicción.”
2 Schüll, Addiction as Design, 49. Natasha Schüll’s work in the casino and gambling industry has been fundamental. Her phenomenological approach, that engages with the immersive experiences of the gambling “zone” are on par with El Bronx’s machine stores.
3 Ibid., 49.
4 See video “Así era por dentro El Bronx de Bogotá: Secuestros, Tortura y Satanismo | Noticias Caracol.”
5 El Tiempo, “Así operaba el negocio de los ‘sayayines’.”

Houses of dismemberment
1 See video from Canal RCN “La Puerta del Infierno I.” The experience of the dead’s presence by many of La L’s inhabitants based on a “defilement” of place and excess killings was registered both discursively and somatically as I argue here. After La L’s takeover in 2016 by the state, a documentary on La L’s ‘paranormal activity’ was filmed in cliched attempts to reproduce the uncanny and haunted through ghost-tracing technologies.
2 See video “Exhumanciones Bronx Video Fiscalía.”
3 See video “Hallan fosa común en una casa del Bronx.”
4 See video “Fiscalio halló tres casas de tortura en el Bronx.”

Crack-ed family
1 El Tiempo, “Así operaba el negocio de los ‘sayayines.’” Though media writings have said that both Óscar and Cesar learned about the drug trade in El Cartucho, many research interlocutors mentioned that Cesar wasn’t involved in organized crime in El Cartucho like his older brother Óscar.
2 As discussed in the “El Cartucho,” section the different crime bands and their vicinities often used different colors and logos to distinguish themselves. Gris (gray) here, is a continuation of such practices from El Cartucho. In La L, the doors and exterior walls would often go according to the different bands colors, or based on the other logos like Colombian national soccer teams (America [red], Nacional [green], Millonarios [blue], and Santa Fé [red]).
3 Ibid.
5 See Pacifista!, “Del Cartucho al rap: La Historia de Ángel, de Todo Copas.” See also ‘Todo Copas’ music video for “Los Matices del Pantano,” which was partially filmed inside Manguera’s territory in La L.
6 Ibid.
7 Actualidad y Gente, “‘Homero’, el Jefe del ‘Bronx’ que se Ocultaba en un Grupo de Rap.” The original El Tiempo article by this same title, has either been deleted and cannot be currently accessed from their archives.
8 Ibid.
9 See video, “Radio Terremoto HipHop Latino (Paris,Fr) // Special Crack Family Capitulo 8 -10.06.2013.”
10 See Pine, Making Do, 62. Here I am thinking with Jason Pine who demonstrates the gray zones between the music industry and organized crime in another context. Writing about the music scene in Naples where organize crime sponsors artists, he writes, “The neomelodica scene is a practical field cohabited by making do and entrepreneurial excess, two regions of potential that are not distinct from one another, but joined at dynamic thresholds.”
11 See video, “Balacera en El Bronx.” In this news video from El Espectador, an inhabitant from La L explains that the shootout began as a retaliation towards Mosco after one of Homero’s man had been killed.
12 Ibid.

Regimes of perception
1 See video, “Secuestro de Extranjeros, Otra Revelación Tras Intervención en el Bronx.”
The death-in-life

This scene is deeply indebted to Todd Ramón Ochoa, particularly his notion of the “ambient dead,” which deeply resonated with how people in the *ollas* came to engage the dead as palpably present in a myriad of forms, and in turn, allowed me to fully engage the death-in-life and the life-in-death as they circle back onto another, and as they become widely diffused and the very atmospheres of a place.

2 See Cable Noticias video, “Desenmbozan Túnel Usado Para Tráfico de Drogas y Armas en el Bronx.”

3 See Cable Noticias video, “Entramos en el Bronx Tras la Mirada de Quien fue su Huésped.”

4 Feldman, “Violence and Vision,” 52. Allen Feldman’s writings on vision and violence have been foundational to my thinking around the perceptual work of *campanear*. In this section, I extend his analysis of the “scopic regime,” to include a synesthetic understanding of surveillance.

5 Ibid., 29.

6 Ibid., 33.

7 See Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, 147. Cf. Feldman, “Violence and Vision,” 43. See also Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*. Visual realism and realist aesthetics more broadly, are associated by this line of scholarship as premised on a detached omniscient observer who exerts its visual power unto its subjects and extracts hidden depths and interiority through these scopic power regimes. Vision is turned into a prosthetic device in the quest to extract from and dominate whatever is under its purview.


10 Geurts, *Culture and the Senses*, 234.

11 Ibid., 193, 234. Geurts argues that human “cultural variation” (234) has a lot to do with the sensory gating. Thinking through Vodu and the sensorium, she sees these perceptual practices as a “culturally patterned way of manipulating sensory engagements” (193). I’m interested in illustrating the lived realm of “culture” through specific places and the atmospheric tensions they elicit.

12 Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*, 129. Cf. Desjarlais, *Shelter Blues*, 228. I draw on this line of scholarship which demonstrates how, exactly, places have the potential to shape our sense of self. Here, I am particularly interested arguing how the olla heightens certain forms of perception by demanding a certain postural perspective or positionality from the campaneros. Such situated positions in turn shape our sensorium and our sense of self. See also Desjarlais, *Shelter Blues*, 226-228, for a broader discussion on the relationship between place and sensory orientation.

13 The sacred has been considered radically apart from the profane. The ethnographic examples I’ve been conveying resonate with similar observations made by Michael Leiris and Michael Taussig. See Taussig, *The Corn Wolf*, 171. He writes: “Leiris concluded that the sacred was not restricted to formal situations such as rituals of the church but existed as living force in everyday life, the mark of which was danger, ambiguity, mystery, and the unexpected surprise or shock we might associate with the Surreal. This account differs remarkably from the notion of the sacred set forth in 1912 by Emile Durkheim in his famous work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* in which the sacred was designated as a feeling of awe, reverence, and fear associated with something set firmly apart from the everyday which he designated as the profane, a confusing word that means both mundane or ordinary as well as the negative sacred. Leiris challenged or seemed to challenge this distinction of sacred and profane by locating the sacred in the profane, granting the sacred a light and playful character…” See also Leiris, “The Sacred in Everyday Life,” and section above “The sacred.”


stories surrounding the mixture of *bazuco* and human remains. She writes, “One such tale is that the dead, from overdose, failure to pay a debt or a dispute with a jivaro (drug dealer), are cut up and their bones ground to powder to mix with the *bazuco* sold in la ‘L.’” (164).

8 Ochoa, “Versions of the Dead,” 484
9 Ochoa, *Society of the Dead*, 34.
10 Griffero, *Atmospheres*, 120. I take up atmospheres as often based on the elusive and affective intensity that permeates a place. It is not a projectivist psychic state unto the world, nor could it be strictly defined as an object. As prepersonal and transpersonal intensity, the atmospheric immediately informs how we feel and relate to a particular place or circumstance, at a pre-reflexive level or prior to us fully apprehending what exactly is affecting us. See also Trigg, “The Role of Atmosphere,” 2, where he writes: “[W]e find ourselves in the midst of an affective atmosphere, and thereby caught up within a series of meanings which are not of our own making, before the atmosphere is localised as belonging to specific objects and situations.”
11 Ochoa, “Versions of the Dead,” 482.
12 Ochoa, “Versions of the Dead,” 481.
13 Ibid., 481.
14 Ibid., 484.
17 Ibid., 37.

The life-in-death
2 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 473. “The dialectical image is an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast-as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability. The rescue that is carried out by these means-and only by these-can operate solely for the sake of what in the next moment is already irretrievably lost.” See Also Taussig, *Walter Benjamin's Grave*, 29.

Nonhuman flesh
1 My thinking around the relation between movement and the imagination or the “inner kinesis” that defies full legibility is influenced by Sarah Jane Cervenak. See Cervenak, *Wandering*, 3-4; Cervenak, *Black Gathering* 2.

The coronel
1 See Noticias Caracol video, *¿Dónde está el coronel Rivera? Nuevos Videos de la 'Podredumbre' Policial en el Bronx.*
2 Ibid. This news broadcasting shows footage on Coronel Rivera receiving bags and corresponding with the sallas, very much on par with what Hecho el Desecho and other research interlocutors had witnessed prior to the release of this footage which remained confidential during La L’s existence.
3 Ibid., 4:10.
4 Ibid., 2:40.

The tunnel of time
1 See Secretaria de Integración Social, *El Cartucho*, 35.
2 Ibid., 25, 37.
3 See Video “*Exclusivo: Así se Planeó y Ejecutó el Operativo de la Toma del Bronx*,” 0:54.

Interlude: Plaza España
1 See video, “*Los 'sayayines' siguen mandando en el Bronx.*” 1:00.
2 Ibid., 1:24.
3 “*Alertan presencia de 'Sayayines', sicarios del Bronx, cerca a la Plaza España,*” *Caracol Radio.*
3. Exit
1 Halberstam, ‘In/Human—Out/Human, 241.

A Story of Bazuco
1 Taussig, My Cocaine Museum, 18.
2 This scene of paste-base production is reconstructed based on secondary sources including YouTube videos and historical accounts. See for instance, the video from La Opinión Cúcuta, “Así se procesa la base de coca en Norte de Santander.” See also Gootenberg, Andean Cocaine, 299-300. The steps or specific ingredients may vary, but the process that I describe below is relatively similar across the Andean region. These methods of leaf pulverization and alkaloid extraction began in the late 19th century when European chemists created these methods to improve the logistics of commodity chains, that would leave the leaves behind. These methods of creating cocaine sulfate were known as the “Bignon-Kits” methods. Ibid., 111.
3 Much like the notion of “base matter” that evades any firm purchase or neat categorization, the history of bazuco refuses historiographic mastery. Some accounts argue that it was born in Peru, while others argue that it came into being in Colombia. See Secretaría de Integración Social, El Cartucho, 78.
4 See also “El Bronx,” for another discussion on the embaladazo zone of drug-use and gambling.
5 Taussig, My Cocaine Museum, 314.
6 Botting and Wilson, The Bataille Reader, 18.
7 See “The death-in-life” where I first introduce these practices in the olla. For other ethnographic accounts on the use of human remains added to the bazuco, see Morris Rincón, En un Lugar Llamado El Cartucho, 52.
8 See “El Bronx,” where I demonstrate how people understood their allegiance to a certain olla based on being enganchado, or hooked, bewitched by the product they bought there.
9 Taussig, Mastery of Non-Mastery, 38.
10 Pine, The Alchemy of Meth, xvii.

Glued (Here in the Elsewhere)
1 Crawley, Blackpentecostal Breath, 36-7.
2 Desjarlais, The Blind Man, 20.
3 Stevenson, Life Beside Itself, 42.
4 See Taussig, I Swear I Saw This.

Hulk
1 Desjarlais, The Blind Man, 17-20. My thinking around the dissolution of selfhood through images is deeply informed by Robert Desjarlais’ work.
2 Taussig, What Color is the Sacred?, 142.
3 Elhaik, The Incurable Image, 12.
4 Ibid., 12. Elhaik considers “incurable-image[s]” as an unsettling “species of images that throws us into clinical, ethical and pedagogical struggle.”
5 See Warburg, Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians in North America; Pandolfo, Knots of the Soul. These ambivalent and incurable-images, resonate with other images in anthropology, including the famous serpent rituals of Aby Warburg and in Stefania Pandolfo’s work on the convergence of images and the experience of madness.
6 These practices of discernment were part of a broader array of culturally patterned and sensorially mediated divinations I was able to document for people living in the olla. Practices part of a broader assemblage of divination that following Nadia Seremetakis, we may call a “divinatory complex.” See Sensing the Everyday.
7 Sharpe, In the Wake, 104.
8 Pine, The Art of Making Do, 14-5.
Like other accounts on ‘occult’ practices in anthropology, Duván’s recollections were saturated with a certain opacity and incompleteness where one is left to infer by linking associate digressions in the numerous stories he shared regarding such practices. In turn, what I write here is a partial understanding, based not so much on a linear narrative documentation, but on a retrieval of shards from Duván’s many meditations.

11 Pinney, ‘Photos of the Gods,’ 194. Pinney writes: “If ‘aesthetics’ is about the separation between image and the beholder, and a ‘disinterested’ evaluation of images, ‘corpothetics’ entails a desire to fuse image and beholder…”

12 Levinas, On Escape, 53. Here I take up temporary exit as the fracturing of enlightenment subjectivity through the marvelous. Levinas writes: “Escaping is the quest for the marvelous, which is liable to break up the somnolence of our bourgeois existence.”


14 Muñoz, Cruising the Utopia, 185. In this section, I am drawing on Jose Esteban Muñoz’s notion of stepping out of time as a “collective temporal distortion,” of the stranglehold of straight and normative time. Though for Muñoz this distortion is meant to open to other kinds of horizons of futurity, I am interested in the immediacy of the instant, as a way to carve out an alternative in the time being.

15 Ibid., 191.

16 Desjarlais, The Blind Man, 19. Here I am once again drawing on Robert Desjarlais’ negative phenomenology that thinks through situations of impossibility and intensity. Through these “limit-experiences,” the subject is de-subjectified or torn from itself. Thinking with and directly quoting Michel Foucault, Desjarlais writes: Classical phenomenology tends to affirm the status and stability of selfhood by attending to the significance of everyday experiences of perception, language, and body. What draws Foucault to thinkers like Nietzsche, Blanchot, and Bataille is that they engage in a kind of negative phenomenology in which they explore situations of intensity, impossibility, and limit which have the effect of undermining the self, dissolving or annihilating the subject, more or less ‘tearing’ or ‘wrenching’ the subject from itself. ‘Can’t there be experiences,’ Foucault asks, ‘in the course of which the subject is no longer posited, in its constitutive relations, as what makes it identical with itself? Might there not be experiences in which the subject might be able to dissociate from itself, sever the relation with itself, lose its identity?’” See also Foucault, ‘How an ‘Experience-Book’ is Born,” 29-32.

The Binge

1 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 9-10.

2 Muñoz, Cruising the Utopia, 185. In this section, I am drawing on Jose Esteban Muñoz’s notion of stepping out of time as a “collective temporal distortion,” of the stranglehold of straight and normative time. Though for Muñoz this distortion is meant to open to other kinds of horizons of futurity, I am interested in the immediacy of the instant, as a way to carve out an alternative in the time being.

3 Bataille, Theory of Religion, 49.

4 Similarly, adolescents struggling with bazuco in Bogotá working with Daniel Lende also articulated drug use as an impersonal hunger towards “‘more and more,”’ and as a viaje, a flight. See Lende, “Addiction and Neuroanthropology,” 347, 354.

5 Musser, Sensual Excess, 5.

6 Ibid., 13. I engage with the Lacanian notion of “jouissance,” as a mode of excess sensation or pleasure that cannot be fully experienced as its intensity draws us out of ourselves. Here, I am drawing on Amber Musser’s engagement with Lacanian jouissance as a mode of “excess sensation,” that goes beyond pleasure.

7 Muñoz, Cruising the Utopia, 185.

8 See also Horton-Stallings, Funk the Erotic, 171-2. Here, I am influenced by the work of Lamonda Horton-Stallings who engages the erotic through the realms the sacred and the non-human presences that can manifest through carnal pleasure. Divesting the non-human presences and specters that manifest through the erotic from the idioms of haunting, trauma, and pain, Horton-Stallings grapples with the ancestors and spiritual presences through the more jovial register of “parody and pleasure.” Here, I take the coterminous attachments of sex, kinship, play, and the erotic to activate modes of yielding to possessive forces that are both haunting and ecstatic.

9 Ibid, 172.

Unearthing
1 Meyers, “Trespass.”
2 As I’ve demonstrated in previous scenes, many people on the streets cope with extreme social insecurity by cultivating divinatory practices that allow them to remain vigilant towards potential dangers. Juanita’s presenting her parent’s callings could be considered as part of these techniques of extra-somatic perception.
3 Juanita’s remark regarding the experience of time in El Bronx resonated with the experience of many others from El Bronx who shared being completely oblivious to the linear organization of calendar time. In most of my interviews and fieldnotes in addition, there is rarely any mention of concrete dates other than Christmas (el 24), New Year’s, or when Colombia’s soccer team played in the World Cup or other matches.
4 See “El Bronx” for other accounts of the bewitching rituals of bazuco.
5 Desjarlais, [Romero] “Image as Method, Conversations in Anthropology Through the Image.” I take cues from Robert Desjarlais that when reflecting on street and graffiti art, spoke of some of the surfaces of the city as bearing their own temporality. Desjarlais comments: “They are almost frozen in a temporality that is distinct from everyday life, and also distinct from the time when they were inscribed on the walls.” I take up Juanita’s portrait photographs as another example of how certain images can become anchored in “frozen” temporalities.
6 Meyers, “Trespass.” My thinking around Juanita’s altar has been widely influenced by Todd Meyers’s reckoning with portrait photographs, their intolerable too-much-ness in the wake of an event.
7 The word “vivo,” whose literal translation is alive, is the colloquial term for being socially agile and a hustler against all odds. It connotes an ethos of perseverance that links one’s status as a person as dependent on one’s ability to supersede the challenges of everyday life.

Possession
2 Like others grappling with visceral experience, here and in other scenes that follow where I take up the experience of withdrawal, there is a serious challenge to place into narrative the intensity of such experiences. As ethnographer, Todd Meyers writes, we are often reminded of the “the impossibility of ‘telling’ certain forms of experience, of the limits of narrative to reproduce (represent) bodily experience.” See Meyers, The Clinic and Elsewhere, 51.
3 Desjarlais, Sensory Biographies, 3.
5 Eisenlohr, Sounding Islam, 80.
6 Ibid., 80.
7 Ibid., 80.
8 Ochoa Gautier, Anrality, 64.
9 Ibid., 62.
10 For other ethnographic accounts that document how drug use as a social practice is embedded with other intoxicating experiences, see also Varma, “Love in the Time of Occupation,” 51.
11 For an example of these “ronco” vocalizations in Colombian underground Hip-Hop, listen to this rap performance by “Zebra” from the downtown Bogotá group, La Etnia. “Noicanicula,” by La Etnia.
13 Levinas, Time & the Other, 69.

Los Patios
1 Stevenson, Life Beside Itself, 82.

Blue Angels
1 See “Ante protestas, habitantes de calle fueron desalojados de la calle sexta, centro de Bogotá” where residents from neighboring sectors protested in fear of people from El Bronx after their displacement.
2 See the “El Bronx” novela online page; “Las Huellas del Infierno” [The Traces of the Inferno] a paranormal activity documentary on the ghosts of El Bronx after its raid; See news special with former mayor Peñalosa on the militarized takeover of El Bronx. See also “Creee inseguridad en la glorieta de la Calle Sexta con Carrera 30.
en Bogotá,” where people displaced from El Bronx are accused of “robbing” and “causing disorder” in nearby sectors.

3 See Integracion Social, “¿Quiénes son los Ángeles Azules?”

4 Though the city’s outreach services were framed in much more benevolent terms of “saving lives” and salvation, this outreach members description of outreach work as a type of “safari hunt” resonates with other coercive practices of captivity towards drug users that I encountered by NGOs in Colombia. Similar forms of captivity have been documented in other parts of Latin America. See O’neill, Hunted; Garcia, “Serenity: Violence, Inequality, and Recovery on the Edge of Mexico City”

5 The state’s approach of treating captivity as salvation and the Blue Angels as “saving lives,” resonate deeply with the Pentocostal “theotherapy” approaches for drug users that Kevin Lewis O’Neill has documented in Guatemala City. See O’Neill Hunted See also O’Neill and Fogarty-Valenzuela The Art of Captivity/Arte del Cautiverio. For a broader historical analysis on the relation between captivity and confinement as the civil equivalent of religious forces see also Foucault, History of Sexuality Vol. 3., who demonstrates how confinement “conceals both a metaphysics of government and a politics of religion.” He adds: “The house of confinement in the classical age constitutes the densest symbol of that “police” which conceived itself as the civil equivalent of religion for the edification of a perfect city…” (146).

6 The Aranda software company, sponsored by the CAT franchise, developed the phone application for the city’s Blue Angels where you can file a report, provide geographic coordinates, and check the status of your complaint. See video, “Proyecto Ángelez Azules Secretaría Distrital Integración Social de Bogotá.”

7 Newman, Landscaping Discontent, 139. Here I am drawing on what Andrew Newman calls “vigilant citizenship,” or the sociopolitical trend to outsource the duties of upholding “security,” to citizens. He writes, “Through the promise of local autonomy and in keeping with an ethos of grassroots activism, vigilant citizenship delegates the managerial responsibility of creating and overseeing a “successful” public space to residents, even though actual political power remains with the state.”

8 These statistics were provided by one the patio’s leaders while he lectured to a room full of psychosocial professionals and floor staff. The leader scolded his team as he wanted to improve the patio’s retention rate, reminding them that every person who leaves prematurely is “at the hands of narcotraffickers” in the ollas.

The Doors

1 Bakatá a factory turned house of passage adjacent to El Bronx was part of the leftist former city mayor (2012-16) Gustavo Petro’s “Cuidadela Humana” [Humanity Fortress] project that centered on brining care to the El Bronx as opposed to abruptly displacing people. As one of the city’s officials once explained, Petro, influenced by drug policy approaches in Vancouver, was interested in trying to shift the approach towards “risk mitigation” when dealing with people who live on the streets. Cuidadela Humana, was a project that tried to create “rings” of care around El Bronx by providing health mobile clinics, children daycares, food shelters and houses of passage like Bakatá that would service the 3,000 people living in El Bronx See Integracion Social, Desechable No Mas, 51-8. During former Enrique Peñalosa’s campaign (2016-20), much of the risk mitigation and progressive approaches to dealing with people from El Bronx were replaced with the militarization of this area and the tough-on-crime interventions that resulted in El Bronx’s destruction and the displacement of its inhabitants that I chart out here.

2 Due to severe socioeconomic fallout in Venezuela, mass waves of Venezuelan citizens left their country. According to the NGO ACAPS, it is estimated that between 2015 and January 2021, “the Venezuelan migrant and refugee population in Colombia rose from less than 39,000 to 1.72 million.” During my fieldwork period between 2016 to 2017, a large influx of Venezuelans sought refuge in Bogotá and were subject to extreme levels of racism and xenophobia. See “Colombia, Venezuelan Refugees” overview by ACAPS.

3 Much like other parts of Latin America, in the 1990s, Colombia through the implementation of the constitution of 1991, began to foreground the fundamental rights of all of its citizens and called for more socially inclusive and democratic forms of governance towards its population. See Colombian Constitution of 1991. Shortly after, in 1995, and stemming from these calls towards social inclusion, under the decree 897, the city founded the district program of social assistance towards people living on the streets [Programa Distrital de Atención al Habitante de Calle] with the aim of “reduce the procedures of social exclusion.” See Integración Social, Desechable No Mas, 29.
The Frisk Station
4 La Guajira is Colombia’s most northernmost region often associated with the state’s socioeconomic abandonment of Indigenous communities who, as in this case, are often depicted as those living in abject poverty and dire need.
5 Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself*, 165. Here, I am deeply influenced by what Lisa Stevenson calls “song,” a form of acknowledgment and presence that is unhinged from the tendency to fixate the person before us within certain categories of recognition—often in search of apprehension over them.
6 Ibid., 167.

The Shower
1 This scene is a composite of multiple scenes I witnessed across the *patios* on the “shower and transformation” process people are subject to undergo to enter rehabilitation, though I draw mostly on Hecho’s actual transformation scene.
3 For similar accounts of forced showering, see Byers, *Come Join Our Disease*.
5 It is worth mentioning the role disciplinary institutions have had historically, in developing the norms of personal hygiene. As Alain Corbin makes reference, even before the ruling classes had adopted daily regimens of personal hygiene in Europe, as early as 1820, prisons were the “laboratories” for cultivating conducts of personal hygiene. Corbin, *The Foul and Fragrant*, 180-1.
7 In 2012, when I conducted preliminary fieldwork in downtown Bogotá with an NGO working with people living on the streets, similarly, the director would have people look themselves in the mirror, forcing them to reckon with their physical deterioration as the first step in recovery.
8 Though many participants spoke of the “first shower” as deeply disturbing, there were many people who lived on the streets and continued showering daily. For instance, Stella shared how she and other people living in El Bronx would learn loopholes on how to shower daily and get access to water (See “El Bronx” section).
9 See also O’Neill, “Caught on Camera,” where, similarly, photography becomes a technology for assessing the transformations of those interned in drug rehabilitation.

Synchrony
1 For another account on how drug rehabilitation provides war labels for those “fighting addiction” see Hansen, *Addicted to Christ*, 104.
2 Other demographics show there to be less number of females attending the city’s *patios* (12.37% female) though based on my experience, the presence of women appeared to be much higher. See Secretaría de Integración Social, “Dirección Poblacional: Plan de Desarrollo Distrital Bogotá Mejor Para Todos 2016-2020.” The *patios* as masculine spaces require more attention than I could grant to here. Other census demographics also have documented that the vast majority of people on the streets identified as male. For instance, the 2014 census conducted by the Secretary of Social Integration showed that out of the 3,531 people living on the streets surveyed, 3,254 or 92.5% were men. See Integración Social, *Política Publica para el fenomeno de habitabilidad en calle*, 34.
3 What I describe as modes of disciplinary synchronization, is similar to what others have referred to as “entrainment” which similarly tries to describe the relation between bodily rhythms syncing up with external cues. Eisentsein writes “…the concept of entrainment refers to the syncing up of internal bodily rhythms with external temporal cues...” See Eisentesein, “On Waiting Willfully in Urban Uganda,” 459.

“The patio is like an olla”
1 *Doctora*, or “Doctor,” is often used to refer to certain professionals and high-ranked officials. More than academic training credentials, “doctor” connotes a position of power and authority. Within the *patios*, it is often used interchangeably by participants to refer to the psychosocial professionals, as in this case.
Dreams of being pulled, “thrown,” or arriving unbidden at the *olla* were quite common for people interned in the *patios*. The world of the *olla* as a seemingly inexhaustible place with no finality carried over into the dreamspace.

Muñoz, *Cruising the Utopia*, 31-2. Here, I am thinking with José Esteban Muñoz’s queer temporalities and particularly his notion of “ecstatic time” as a counter to the “straight” time of normativity. As Muñoz illustrates, “To see queerness as horizon is to perceive it as a modality of ecstatic time in which the temporal stranglehold that I describe as straight time is interrupted or stepped out of.” I take up these zones of shade and moments of euphoric release in the *patio’s* bathroom as instants of “stepping out” of normative time.


See next section, “Ansiedad,” for instance.

**Hurdlng through documents**

After El Bronx’s takedown in 2016, the city was framed as in a state of crisis. Property owners and business owners began to protest, pleading that the state corral those who were interned in El Bronx. See “Comercialistas de San Andrésito bloquearon la Carrera 30.” Where the El Tiempo newspapers reported that in August of 2016, nearly five hundred people took to the streets to protest about concerns for insecurity in the city after El Bronx’s raid.

Since the foundation of implementation of the decree 897 in 1995, from which the city founded the district program of social assistance towards people living on the streets [*Programa Distrital de Atención al Habitante de Calle*] a focal point has been the reduction of “social exclusion.” The category of vulnerability, has also been implemented in order to assess the various scales of vulnerability people are subject to by living on the streets.

In this case, through the SIRBE database and record-keeping, the city aims to understand the length of living on the streets through “gradients of vulnerability” [*grado de vulnerabilidad*]. See . See Integración Social, *Pública para el fenómeno de habitabilidad en calle*, 38.

The city’s database system SIRBE under designed metrics of vulnerability, justified who could benefit from the city’s services based on being at risk of housing insecurity or already living with housing insecurity. Yet, as I demonstrate in “The Doors,” such modes of assessing vulnerability play out differently since the *patios* prioritize entry to those who look physically deteriorated, independent of housing instability.

**The talk**


**Profe**

As other scholars have described “psychosocial” interventions stem from North American therapeutic ethos and from the field of social psychology. See Pupavac, “Therapeutic Governance: Psycho-social Intervention and Trauma Risk Management,” 358; Abramowitz, *Searching for Normal in the Wake of the Liberian War*, 92.

“Psycho-social intervention,” as Abramowitz demonstrates throughout her ethnography of treatment in post-conflict Liberia, is a strategically ambiguous form of practice that consists of a range of methods from exercise, to group therapy, to individual assessment of trauma. This approach became outsourced from North America, mostly to contexts of disaster and war, See Pupavac, “Therapeutic Governance: Psycho-social Intervention and Trauma Risk Management,” 358. As Abramowitz argues, in the 1960s: “The concept of the psychosocial was picked up in mental health, education, social policy, and international development contexts, and it filled in a space for “soft interventions” meant to shape the substance of personhood to fit within the desired expectations of society.” (93).

See Pupavac “Pathologizing Populations and Colonizing Minds: International Psychosocial Programs in Kosovo,” 490. Writing on psychosocial programs, Pupavac writes, “The international therapeutic model may be summarized as follows: traumatic experiences cause trauma symptoms producing low self-esteem and dysfunctionalism leading to abuse/violence, requiring external intervention to break the cycle of trauma and violence.” In the case of psychosocial intervention in Bogota’s *patios*, much of the same line of assumptions about fostering self-esteem by first overcoming trauma were at play, where fostering psychological integrity in large populations deemed dysfunctional is viewed as a violence prevention measure for the broader public. For
another ethnographic account on how drug rehabilitation becomes a form of “soft security,” and violence prevention, See O’Neill Securing the Soul.

3 Quests for transparency in psychosocial intervention and other therapeutic aims resonate with broader Western ideals of mastery and the reductive flattening of heterogeneity for the purpose of domesticating people, objects, and phenomena into the systematic order of things. Here, I’m reminded of Édouard Glissant who writes: “If we examine the process of ‘understanding’ people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidarity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce…I admit you to existence, within my system. I create you afresh. –But perhaps we need to bring an end to the very notion of a scale. Displace all reduction.” See Glissant, Poetics of a Relation, 189-190.

4 Cervenak, Wandering, 64. Enlightened subjectivity, as Cervenak describes drawing on others, includes aspects of “rational transparency, self-directedness, and passionless.” Much like these Enlightenment values, psychosocial rehabilitation, centers on modes of subject-formation where personal transparency and managing the passions lead to a bounded and rationality-driven individual who can overcome its challenges.

5 The approach of psychosocial pedagogues also finds lineages with a turn towards “civic education,” that took place in Bogotá during the late 90s during the tenure of former mayor Antanas Mockus. Mockus’ “citizenship culture,” aimed to change to conduct of its citizens by instilling civic virtues and responsibility for the city and for others. As Mockus writes, “The term "citizenship culture" reflects our efforts to strengthen and harmonize the three regulatory systems of human behavior: law, morality and culture. This means reducing moral and cultural justifications for illegal behavior and increasing moral and cultural support for the law. These systems derive their power largely from the emotions they provoke or threaten to provoke: fear of legal sanctions, fear of guilt and fear of shame, but also admiration for the law and satisfaction with adhering to personal principles and achieving social recognition. Within these three systems, we are subject to norms, but we value them for holding others accountable, thereby enforcing our expectations and our rights. The more we submit to norms in a voluntary and conscious manner, the more valuable they will prove to be.” See Mockus, “Building Citizenship Culture” in Bogotá,” 145.

6 The inherent logic in liberal humanism is that by designing an ideal mode of being human, one centered on self-actualization, this mode justifies the racialization and dispossession of those who deviate from it. And so despite liberal values calling for democracy, freedom, and autonomy, they end up reproducing and enforcing the social hierarchies and inequalities of the ‘modern’ world. As Chuh writes describing liberal humanism, “this reigning humanism advances the notion that goodness, prosperity, and freedom follow from humanity’s constitution by discrete and self-conscious individuals in possession of the capacity to transcend subjective experience by sheer will tethered to the faculty of reason. Liberal humanism posits the sovereignty and autochthony of the human even as—or precisely because—it justifies the conquest and dispossession, enslavement and eradication that constitute the course of liberalism in its intimate partnership with capitalism.” See Chuh, The Difference Aesthetics Makes, 3. See also Weheliye, Habeas Viscus.

7 I take up these liberal discourses of citizenship, democracy, and rights as part of a “racializing assemblage” that dictates who gets to be absorbed into the category human or not. Rehabilitation as indoctrination into the human, is measured by people’s abilities to adopt the virtues and conduct of these discourses during the course of rehab. As Weheliye writes, the idea of a racializing assemblage “construes race not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans.” See Weheliye, Habeas Viscus, 4.

Promotores

1 In “El Cartucho,” I demonstrate how the horizontal alignment of campaneros or lookouts is premised on the cultivating certain modes of vigilances that draw on the senses and intuition. People often had a “feel” for people’s intentions in the olla based on their appearance and composure. Here I liken such sensorial attunements to how the promotores or floor staff, monitor and discern the intentions of those interns.

1 Cervenak, Wandering, 26.

2 Haraway, “Ecce Homo, Ain’t (Ar’nt) I a Woman, and Inappropriate /d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape,” 87. See also Cervenak, Wandering.
2 See Bronx Distrito Creativo, “¿Qué es el Bronx Distrito Creativo?”
3 Ibid., See Bronx Distrito Creativo’s webpage for pictures of their urban development design.
4 During my fieldwork, city officials from the Secretary of Social Integration mentioned having to host representatives from Bloomberg Associates who came to visit El Bronx and downtown Bogotà.
5 Ibid., For a recount of the urban development projects, the multi-media and social memory projects on El Bronx, and for the range of activities that this place now hosts, see Bronx Distrito Creativo website.
6 See also Eisenstein, “On Waiting Willfully in Urban Uganda.”
7 Bataille, Inner Experience, 281.
8 See Povinelli, “The Will to Be Otherwise/Effort of Endurance.”
9 Desjarlais, The Blind Man, 19.
10 See Das, Life and Words; Chatterji and Mehta, Living With Violence; Das et. al. Remaking a World.
11 Crawley, “Held in the Vestibule.” I am borrowing the phrase “held in the vestibule,” from Ashon Crawley to describe the between, the modes of being that channel forces at the interstices of life and death.
12 Desjarlais, The Blind Man, 19.
14 Bruce, How to go Mad Without Losing Your Mind, 9.
15 By sharing how engaging worlds of violence and becoming undone, I am not claiming a kind of experiential knowledge to the types of disorientation and loss that my interlocutors felt, since such experiences are culturally specific, not universal. I am instead trying to posit how this larger atmosphere had the capacity to affect even those who weren’t fully encumbered by it. For a longer discussion on the problems of conflating the experiences of dissociation between what the ethnographer and their interlocutors feel, see Desjarlais, Body and Emotion, 145.
16 Pandian and McLean, Crumpled Paper Boat, 1.
18 Stevenson, Life Beside Itself, 12.
19 Berlant, Cruel Optimism, 96.
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ABSTRACT

LA OLLA Y LOS PATIOS: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF PLACE, SELFHOOD, VIOLENCE, AND REHABILITATION IN BOGOTA

by

ANDRES ROMERO

May 2022

ADVISORS: Dr. Todd Meyers and Dr. Andrew Newman

MAJOR: Anthropology

DEGREE: Doctor of Philosophy

In the early hours of May 28, 2016, the mayor of Bogotá, along with the Colombian military and Special Forces, seized the biggest *olla* or open-air drug market in Colombia at the time. The *olla* known as “El Bronx” was a three-block area in downtown Bogotá and where over 2,000 people found shelter under the authority of paramilitary affiliated crime bands controlling the city’s drug trade. Widely depicted by the media and the broader polity as an “inferno,” El Bronx was regarded as a space where those socially relegated outside of the human were encumbered by seemingly endless transgression and drug use. What ensued was a mass expulsion of people who lived on the streets, many who were taken into the city’s *patios*, or rehabilitation centers.

Set in the aftermath of rampant militarization and humanitarian intervention, “La Olla y Los Patios: An Ethnography of Place, Selfhood, Violence, and Rehabilitation in Bogotá,” reckons with the category of the human while showcasing other ways of being, other ways of inhabiting time and place partially untethered from the constraints of liberal humanism. Moving across time and place, between the city’s rehabilitation centers and the streets for the people formerly living in El Bronx, the dissertation retrieves state-administered historical elisions of other similarly destroyed *ollas* in the city, from which people had also been uprooted, as well as charts how historical memory comes to be inhabited, felt, and shared by people from the *ollas*. This work is informed by preliminary fieldwork in downtown
Bogotá between the summer months of 2012-2015, and 24 months of consecutive fieldwork in 2016-2017. The majority of this fieldwork takes place in the Bogotá municipalities downtown of Santa Fé, Los Mártires, and Puente Aranda. Written through a narrative-oriented mode, *La Olla y Los Patios* is a constellation of ethnographic scenes that attempt to change the terms of engagement for how we can begin to acknowledge the many challenging circumstances for people living on the streets, caught up between the state and organized crime.

The writing that I take up is centered on sensuous storytelling, as well as allegorical and pictorial modes of thinking that garner an imagistic anthropology. Drawing from others in anthropology, I take up images as vital for anthropology in their capacity to hold incommensurate aspects of a scene within the same frame. Thinking with and through images can conjure a world without drowning it with explanation or proposing a one-dimensional way to think through any given polemic. This dissertation engages contradiction, opacity, and situations of impossibility not as things to analytically resolve, but rather at times, as the very grounds for engaging the worlds my interlocutors inhabit. Through the capaciousness of images to host contradiction within the same frame, this work conjures a set of scenes and ethnographic images. *La Olla y Los Patios* can be thus be understood as a mosaic of scene-images. Each scene is meant to stand on its own, and home in on a particular sliver of people’s lived experiences as they shuttle between the ollas, the drug markets, and the patios, the rehab centers.
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I am a first-generation scholar and Colombian anthropologist broadly interested in how people come to build worlds outside of normative values and morality. I am also an ethnographer committed to understanding how the particularities and cultural poetics of place can withstand urban demolition and historical erasure. I draw on the literary and imagistic force of ethnographic writing to convey the complicated and contradictory worlds I study and, to invite readers to come to bear on these paradoxical worlds through scenes and stories. My engagement with images and nontextual modes of knowledge and expression have also led me to co-curate the Screening Room film series of the Society for Cultural Anthropology’s Fieldsights. I also was the section editor from 2019-2021 of Fieldsights’ Visual and New Media Review. My work has received institutional support from ICANH—The Institute of Colombian Anthropology and History and the Bogotá Mayor’s Secretary of Social Integration. My dissertation has benefitted from funding by the Department of Anthropology at Wayne State University; the 2018-2019 Predoctoral Fellowship at the Center for Society, Health, and Medicine at NYU Shanghai; and the 2020-2021 Dissertation Fellowship Prize from the Humanities Center at Wayne State University.