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Santa Barbara

Graphic Documentaries: Drawing Reality in Hispanic Graphic Narrative

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

by

Radmila Stefkova

Committee in charge:

Sara Poot-Herrera, Chair

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September 2021

The dissertation of Radmila Stefkova is approved.

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September 2021

Graphic Documentaries: Drawing Reality in Hispanic Graphic Narrative

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by

Radmila Stefkova

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ABSTRACT

Graphic Documentaries: Drawing Reality in Hispanic Graphic Narrative

by

Radmila Stefkova

Graphic Documentaries is a study of nonfiction graphic narrative that documents complex social challenges across the Hispanic world. It explores how comics artists contend with their social and political contexts and use the comics medium to document and narrate some of the most critical problems of the 20th and 21st centuries. My dissertation establishes a cross-cultural dialogue between graphic works from Spain, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. The graphic narrative corpus I study captures challenging human conditions: migration, unemployment, gender and race discrimination, political suppression, and childhood trauma, among others. Using critical readings of seven graphic novels published between 2014 - 2017, I examine the documentary techniques that artists use to research, record, and narrate actual events and lives within their own countries. Through the lenses of comics studies, historiography, literary analysis, media studies, and memory studies, I characterize the unique esthetic and structural features of comics as a documentary medium.

The introduction and first chapter of the dissertation establish the historical development and theoretical conceptualization of graphic narrative as a documentary medium. The following three chapters explore subgenres of graphic documentaries: documenting comics journalism and ethnography, documenting family histories, and documentary autographies. Throughout the chapters, I provide critical readings of graphic narrative focusing on three fundamental notions: the construction of narrative subjectivity, the use of drawing as a process of bearing witness, and the re-framing of artifacts and media archives. My analysis relies on historical contextualization, and stylistics, and syntactical reading of comics.

My dissertation demonstrates that graphic documentaries can bring about ethical visual representation of disenfranchised communities and allow individuals to claim social visibility. Using attention to material details and active observation, these works expand testimonial discourse to public spaces and material information. Hence, I contend that graphic documentaries are an apt medium for representing political and economic circumstances surrounding testimonial subjects. Finally, due to their hybrid multimodal nature, graphic documentaries call attention to the interpretation of historic archives, allowing comics authors to re-frame and recontextualize their meaning.

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INTRODUCTION:

SOCIAL REALITY AND THE HISPANIC GRAPHIC TRADITION

In September of 1968, just three weeks before the Tlatelolco massacre in

Mexico City, the cartoonists Eduardo del Río – Rius and Ángel Boligán released their

special issue of the satirical comics strip *Los agachados*. The issue narrated the development of the Student Movement of the 68' in Mexico City – a social movement by a broad coalition of students that called for political freedom and an end to PRI's authoritarian government. By September of 68,' the government's response toward the movement had turned violent, as tanks and armed forces prevented student demonstrations. State-owned media rebuked the students, frequently reporting a biased perspective of the events. In response, the cartoonists spent weeks researching and interviewing students to prepare the special issue where they covered the development of the movement and took a stance against violent reactions and the falsification of information in public media. In the prologue of *Los agachados*, Rius and AB stated their social roles: "We cartoonists are also journalists." They state that to prepare the special issue they had to "document consciously, reading, interviewing the different sides of the conflict, getting ourselves where we weren't supposed to, analyzing documents, etc.", adding that while their account of the events was intended to be objective, they warn that if the perspective seems "heavily one-sided, it is because, after all, we are part of the people…"[1]

---

[1] The entire prologue reads:
"Being a part of – without wanting to – the Mexican press, "Los agachados" have been wanting to leave the classification which the people have given to the press they must put up with, sold press… We cartoonists are also journalists. Our mission is to find out what is happening and tell it in such a way that even an announcer understands it, laughs at it and can draw a conclusion… To prepare this issue we, we AB and Rius, had to document consciously, reading, interviewing the different sides of the conflict, getting ourselves where we weren't supposed to, analyzing documents, etc. (We ended up with a headache). The result is "this" which you are holding. Something that tries to be objective, clarify step by step and is easy to understand. If it seems heavily one-sided, it is because, after all, we are part of the people… Let it be of service, this is out wish."

All translations from Spanish to English are mine, unless otherwise stated.

The statement in this prologue is a type of a manifesto – a comics manifesto – where Rius and AB declare the commitment of cartoonists and comics creators as documentarists of social and political realities. Cartooning is akin to journalism that involves detailed research, collecting first-person accounts, and revising documents and records. Yet, unlike journalism, it does not guarantee an objective perspective, only perhaps an intention for one. Comic strips, as Rius and AB suggest, can take a stance against biased media, and offer an alternative account of events of national significance. Within the context of a tense political climate under the leadership of an authoritarian government, creating such comics carries the risk of retaliation. Indeed, a year later, Rius was kidnapped by the military due to his social activism, pro-communist stances, and graphic work. Rius was anything but discouraged in his efforts. He went on to become the father of contemporary Latin American comics, leaving behind a legacy of graphic narrative as social and political criticism.

Graphic Documentaries: Drawing Reality in Hispanic Graphic Narrative is a study of nonfiction graphic narrative that documents complex social concerns across the Hispanic world. It explores how comics artists contend with their social and political contexts and use the comics medium to document and narrate some of the most critical problems of the 21st century. What are the ethics and politics of visual documentation? How can comics represent individual and social traumas, both past and present? Can the visual/verbal incite new modes of identification, empathy, and ethics in narrative? How can graphic narrative recontextualize mediated versions of historical events? To address these questions, my dissertation establishes a cross-cultural dialogue between graphic works from

Spain, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. The graphic narrative corpus I study captures challenging human conditions: migration, unemployment, gender and race discrimination, political suppression, and childhood trauma, among others. Using critical readings of seven graphic novels published between 2014 - 2017, I examine the documentary techniques that artists use to research, record, and narrate actual events and lives within their own countries. Through the lenses of comics studies, historiography, literary analysis, media studies, and memory studies, I characterize the unique esthetic and structural features of comics as a documentary medium.

My research is structured around graphic narratives that share many of the principles outlined in Rius and AB's prologue of *Los agachados*. I examine contemporary graphic novels whose authors assume the role of journalists, ethnographers, family historians, or first-account witnesses of social and political crisis. They observe to bear witness; research to inform; and draw to inscribe circumstances that often escape the lens of the digital camera. I propose that contemporary Hispanic graphic narrative as a documentary medium deconstructs, and re-frames consensus discourses shaped by media bias and political suppression. Graphic documentaries, as multimodal forms, challenge the assumptions around what constitutes historical and testimonial discourse and how reality is recorded and narrated.

From Political Cartoons to Graphic Documentaries

Graphic documentaries are a relatively new genre of comics and graphic narrative whose global origin is generally associated with the experimental works of war

survivors and their children toward the end of the 20th century, such as Keiji Nakazawa's *I Saw It* (1972), Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980 – 1991), and W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants* (1992). The Pulitzer Price award for *Maus* in 1992 catapulted the genre and opened the door for comics as a serious medium: Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (1993) and *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009), Emmanuel Guibert's *The Photographer* (2003), and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000, 2004), to name a few. This graphic corpus has undoubtedly influenced the work of all authors included in my study both in terms of their ethical proposition and technical approach to creating their graphic documentaries.

In turn, this modern development stemmed from a growing adult audience of comics, primarily fostered by American creators such as Harvey Kurtzman, whose *MAD* magazine (established in 1952 as a comic book) turned to war politics and social inequality. Kurtzman's comics on the Korean war have been described by Spiegelman as "realistic, compulsively researched, well-told tales that often had an anti-war bias" (Commix: An Idiosyncratic 70-71). Kurtzman established the stage for the generation of *underground comix* championed by Robert Crumb and the San Francisco Bay Area cartoonist circle. Underground artist and their anti-establishment works formed an essential platform for a socially oriented adult audience across the US, Europe, and Latin America. As Jeff Adams explains, *underground comix* "were artworks rooted in the prevailing urban social-political culture with a specificity of place and character, recording social events with an insistence upon detailed information garnered from personal experience and observation" (19).

Socially and politically oriented comics are by no means an American invention, and multiple efforts throughout the Hispanic world were already setting the ground for a critical audience[2]. Namely, since the first couple of decades of the 20th century, the narratives of early comic strips revolved around satiric political criticism. Comics came of age in the mid-1950s with independent publishers, especially across the three main comics hubs, Mexico, Argentina, and Spain, a little later. Hector Germán Oesterheld's Editorial Frontera garnered artistic talent behind some of the most influential graphic works of the 20th century – Francisco Solano Lopez, Alberto Breccia, Hugo Pratt. Political tensions, both national and international, stood behind Oestherheld and Solano López's *The Eternaut* – the work Juan Caballero rightfully designates as "*the* comics, the alpha and omega of a national tradition" (Oestherheld and Solano López 353). However, social documentation and political criticism remained behind the pretext of fiction (mostly sci-fi) and humor until the late 70s and in some countries, not until the 90s. Humor and fiction were employed out of convention, but also for the sake of safety, as John Lent explains: "abrupt changes of power, totalitarian regimes, fascist ideologies of state and church, and augmented corporatization of mass media have made cartooning a difficult, even hazardous, profession" (16). This is hardly an exaggeration, especially with the police kidnapping Rius, the death threats against Breccia, and Oesterheld's murder at the hands of the military junta.

Thus, comics with explicit political and social commentary came only after the loosening of political pressure. It is not surprising that in 1975, right after Franco's

[2] See John Lent's "Latin American Comic: An Overview" and Ana Merino's *El cómic hispánico*.

death, Carlos Giménez began his autobiographical series *Paracuellos* detailing his experiences of growing up in a state-sponsored orphanage for children after the Civil War. Santiago García has rightfully called *Paracuellos* "our very own *A Contract with God*," drawing a comparison with Will Eisner's seminal work on the grounds of the harsh social realities the books narrate but also due to their publications as turning points in graphic narrative (*On the Graphic* 259). Shortly after, Giménez produced a comics series about the first years of democratic government in Spain, later collected in the albums España Una..., España Grande... and España Libre!. The 70s and 80s also saw the development of underground comics in Spain within the broader cultural context of *La movida*. Influenced by European and American comics, mostly Madrid-based artists used the exaggerated style of Crumb to create underdog characters and build narratives full of deviant personalities, rock, sex, and drugs[3]. Ana Merino points out that American underground comics remained a significant influence in Spain throughout the 90s, although some tendencies from the Franco-Belgian tradition were adopted as well (Merino 574). Mexico's already booming comics tradition gave way to political commentary with strong teeth – the generation led by Rius and Editorial Posada – Abel Quezada, Rogelio Naranjo, Helioflores, etc. The first full-length graphic novel in Mexico, Edgar Clément's seminal *Operation Bolívar* (1990), turned to noir to represent brutal border politics, drug trafficking, and corruption.

The current generation of authors was fundamentally inspired by American and European comics while maintaining elements from local graphic traditions. For

[3] See Pablo Dopico's *El cómic underground espanõl, 1970 – 1980* and "Esputos de papel. La historieta 'underground' española".

example, an interview with Joe Sacco appears in *Barcelona* (studied in chapter 2), along with the caricaturesque style of Spanish *underground* comics; Nacha Vollenweider did a study of *Perspepolis* to créate *Notas al pie* (chapter 3); while Luis Fernando's *Pirámide cuarteada* (chapter 4) makes direct references to Rius and Abel Quezada. As best-selling author Bef explains, currently, "there is no national identity within graphic narrative" across the Hispanic world, and the current comics production exists at the "crossroads of four very powerful traditions in graphic narrative," including South American, Northern American, European and more recently, Japanese. The works included in this dissertation represent a genre in the making, where authors experiment, break rules and discover new ways to comment on the world around them.

The In-Between Art

Narrating through comics often carries a cultural implication of establishing a popular address, which deceptively anyone can read, see, and understand. This assumption arises primarily due to the status of early comics as ephemeral art in a material sense – created within a day, cheap to purchase, and meant to be read within a day or two within their publication. As Anne Rubenstein summarizes, most Latin American comic strips were "cheaply made, yet durable enough to be passed from hand to hand, traded, and even resold" (28). Moreover, until recently, comics created throughout the Hispanic world shared the global stigma as a product of low artistic quality in which narratives are simple and somewhat juvenile. In that sense, comics have been historically misunderstood as a genre (typically humoristic) rather

than a medium. Such perspective has led to some interesting cases in comics' production, such as the literacy initiative launched by the Mexican government in the 1980s, which sponsored the production of a series of comic strips and illustrated novels. The primary objective of the series was stated as to "permit reading that [was] accessible, instructive, mild and capable of defining a national identity among children, young people and new readers of the country" (in Huska 75).

Similarly, the cheap and popular *tebeos* in Spain received little censure from the Francoist regime compared to other print literature. The message was clear: comics were not considered threatening enough of a medium for the authorities to show concern (see Dopico). As Spanish comics scholar Ana Merino concludes, comics are an in-between artic form; they "belong to industrial culture and, as such, construct modern narratives, although their legitimating capacity is in tension with lettered discourse," and adds that by being rejected by the lettered culture, comics "become marginal and from then on construct their own narratives" (11).

In recent decades, this trend has been reversed, both in the context of materiality and genre. Namely, with the decline of the mass comic strip industry, graphic artists tuned to individual artworks and the newly advertised commercial category of the graphic novel. Being sold as hardcopy books for a niche audience rather than cheap leaflets, the price of the graphic novel increased dramatically, yet so did its creative quality in terms of genre, style, and overall narrative experimentation. Simultaneously, many authors have found refuge in the virtual space, where webcomics allow a low-cost production and instant access to a broad audience, not limited to distribution channels or national borders. The authors

whose work I study belong to a generation of a transitional period for graphic narrative to a higher or lesser degree. Luis Fernando, who has been creating a wide range of graphic narratives for almost forty years, began his career drawing and coloring popular comics strips and caricature. Augusto Mora and Ana Penyas started their career as illustrators for magazines and gathered a significant audience through webcomics. In fact, despite its instant critical recognition, *Estamos todas bien* is Penyas' first full-length graphic work.

On the other hand, Sagar Forniés' approach to comics stems from his career as an art director, animator, and stage designer. As such, the creators come from a wide range of artistic experiences, often artists who have consumed and taken inspiration both from popular comic strips and other popular narratives as much as from niche graphic novels arriving from Europe and the United States. The resulting combination presents an advantageous approach. Authors use the assumed popular address of graphic narrative to present complex social and political subjects in an approachable manner. All the while, the narratives are far from simplistic storylines and almost always break the rules of the traditional comic, both stylistically and syntactically.

What are Comics?

Working with a comics corpus poses significant challenges due to the medium's ambiguity, not only for its status as an in-between art. The very terminology that surrounds this art form is often insufficient to capture the nature of the medium and its narrative genres, and it is often plainly misleading. I have already employed

several terms here, including comics, comic strips, graphic novels, graphic narrative, etc. In Spanish, this terminological crisis intensifies with the multitude of regional denominations, such as 'tebeo', 'historieta', 'monos', 'chistes', 'pepines' and the English adoptions such as 'cómics' and 'novela gráfica'. The plethora of terms in English and Spanish demonstrates three fundamental problems. For one, although most of these terms suggest humoristic storytelling, the works I deal with rarely employ comedy. Second, using the term 'graphic novel' to describe nonfiction narratives that document real lives and events can be seen as simply misleading in terms of both the genre and the intention behind these works. Similarly, 'tebeo' derives from the popular magazine TBO, aimed at children's humor, while 'historieta' means "short fable, story, or narrative of adventure or anecdote" (*On the Graphic* 26). Finally, 'graphic novel' is a term that has been utilized mainly for commercial purposes by publishing houses since the late eighties. Spanish comics historian Santiago García has been critical of the term due to its implication of 'graphic novels' as a higher art for educated audiences in comparison to the popular mass-produced 'comic.' As he concludes, the graphic novel is simply "a comic book by another name" (*On the Graphic* 27).

It is critical to note, then, that the term 'comics' has nothing to do with genre, format, or quality of the work, and everything to do with the medium of communication. Throughout this dissertation, I employ the term 'comics' (plural and singular) to refer to the medium and, by extension, the verbal/visual language that defines the works I examine. I also borrow Hillary Chute's term 'graphic narrative' to refer to "a book-length work composed in the medium of comics [...]"; her

explanation is simple, "the most riveting comics texts coming out right now [...] are not novels at all" (*Graphic Women* 3, emphasis in original). Hence, throughout the chapters, when I slip and use the term 'graphic novel' it is out of convention, mostly of habit, and always with the associated meaning of 'graphic narrative' that Hillary Chute outlines.

Fundamental Features of Comics

Since comics have become a focus of scholars and critics, there have been several definitions of the medium's fundamental characteristics. Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, one of the most widely cited works on comics theory, emphasizes sequence as its defining principle (9). Instead, scholars like Robert Harvey underscore the presence of both word and image as the defining feature of comics (Varnum and Gibbons 75-76). For my analysis, the definitions offered by McCloud and Harvey are not contradictory. I use the somewhat updated definition by Karen Kukkonen that combines these two perspectives. I refer to comics as a "multimodal medium [that combines] words and images, plus the panel arrangements that are used to imply temporal sequence" (Kukkonen 35).

Additionally, several key features distinguish comics from other media and are crucial to reading comics as documentaries. The most basic one is the technical composition of comics through fragmentation. Comics are essentially composed of frames or panels that are separated by empty spaces called gutters. Readers must mentally fill the gaps within the gutters and establish the sequence that links one panel to the next. While frames are essential to most media forms, the gutter in

comics is pronounced materially and becomes operational. Meaning on the comics page is formed from what is included within the panel and what is lost within the gutter. Fragmentation is an essential component for working with graphic documentaries, especially in examples that deal with observational drawings or drawing from memory. Cognitive scientist and comics theorist Neil Cohn explains this process:

> When we see the world, our vision takes in information from the whole visual array, but we only focus on the parts of that vision that fall within our "spotlight of attention." Panels serve a similar function for visual narratives, and thereby can simulate what our vision would be like if we were watching a scene in person. This creates a sensation that panels facilitate a "spotlight" that reveals only portions of a larger environment. In actuality, these glimpses create the whole view of the environment in the mind of a reader. These various panels represent parts of the scene, which allows us to inferentially *construct* a full understanding of the broader scene (Cohn 59, emphasis in original).

Hence, reality within comics is constructed by the bits and fragments of memory that the author translates graphically. This process of fragmentation to build the whole is essential to my analysis of subjective storytelling.

Furthermore, perhaps the most basic syntactical function of comics is to express time as space. Panes in comics are synonymous with pace and rhythm, and therefore determine the amount of time between one panel to the next. As Will Eisner summarizes, "The act of framing separates the scenes and acts as a punctuator" (28). Semiotician Barbara Postema explains: "As the panels are established as syntagms, which, following the temporal code convention, create images in time as they are represented on the space of the page, the panels also invoke a narrative code, as the portrayal of events taking place over time evokes

narration" (xvii). Representing time as space is one of the most compelling aspects of the medium, mainly because multiple temporal timeframes can exist on the same page. Functionally, panels representing memories, scenes of the present, and imagination of the future can be hosted on the very same page. Graphic documentaries make use of spatial organization to powerful effects by disturbing the logical sequence of panels to impose past and present moments together.

Finally, I pay attention to comics as a hybrid, multi-discursive form that can host various registers and media and employ them as graphic language. The graphic narratives I discuss here resemble collages where handwriting and hand drawing often surround media insertions, such as photographs, TV snippets, paper clippings, and reproductions. These elements are never read in isolation, and their meaning is established as a relationship. In his definition of comics, theoretician Thierry Groensteen argues for what he terms "iconic solidarity":

> I define this as interdependent images that, participating in a series, present the double characteristic of being separated—this specification dismisses unique enclosed images within a profusion of patterns or anecdotes—and which are plastically and semantically overdetermined by the fact of their coexistence *in praesentia*" (Heer and Worcester 128, emphasis in original).

The coexistence of images, drawn and inserted, is fundamental to analyzing how graphic documentaries interact with historical and media archives. One of the main questions that guide my study is how artists interact with private and public artifacts. As such, I dedicate plenty of space to the interaction between hand drawings and digital images.

Theoretical Approaches and Scholarly Contribution

This research will contribute to three fields of scholarship: 1) comics studies, 2) the study of contemporary documentary media, and 3) studies of memory, testimony, and historiography. In my dissertation, these three fields contribute to existing scholarship on arts and literature in the service of empathetic representation, activism, and diversity in narrative.

Hispanic comic studies is a rapidly growing field as comics, and graphic novels are increasingly accepted as cultural products capable of representing the cultural and political processes. Recent scholarship on comics in Spain and Latin America has focused on the history of comics art (Lent); comics as popular culture and artifacts of modernity (Foster; Merino); comics as agents in the construction of collective identity (Fernández L'Hoeste and Poblete; Dopico); and comics as technologies of memory (Catalá-Carrasco et al.). However, full-length studies of graphic narrative have mainly been focused on popular comic strips from the 20th century and often do not address the parallelisms within Hispanic and global contexts. The rise of the graphic novel industry and self-publishing have dramatically changed the scope of readership, artistic background, and narrative topics and techniques. Thus, the examples in my dissertation establish an intercultural dialogue among Hispanic artists and highlight the current status of graphic narrative as a mature art that speaks to national and international issues. Likewise, documentary graphic narrative has gained attention among scholars primarily through the work of North American, European, or Japanese authors (Adams; Chute; Mickwitz). My research draws attention to the production of Hispanic art and contributes to the

understanding of popular arts and literature as spaces for political, social, and cultural negotiation.

Recent scholarship on documentary arts and media has challenged the assumption that ties documentary expression to recording technologies as tools with scientific precision. Scholars have been concerned with the ethics of the subject/object dynamic and the consequent decision-making in collecting, selecting, and editing historical archives (Bruzzi; Gaines and Renov; Nichols). However, scholarship on Hispanic documentary media has been largely limited to documentary film and testimonial literature. My dissertation aims to expand the definition of documentary with a focus on human relationships and narrative reframing. Through the lenses of photography studies (Barthes; Hirsch; Sontag) and reflections on drawing (Berger; Causey; Taussig) I demonstrate how the graphic novel becomes a space where the archive is ever-changing and constantly reinterpreted. My examination offers insight into how reality is inscribed in graphic narrative as it engages drawing and writing in their essential roles as recording tools. The project participates in the reconceptualization of documentary art by scrutinizing the ethics behind ethnography, recording, and documenting vulnerable subjects and communities.

Intergenerational memory and trauma studies have received tremendous attention from scholars and artists alike in the Hispanic world. The troubled past of the region and its consequences have been defining aspects of Hispanic art for the past several decades. Concepts toward memory, such as Hirsch's "postmemory," Landsberg's "prosthetic memory," and Assman's "cultural memory" have been

influential in shifting the conversation on memory and history toward narratives of trauma. These approaches are fundamental to my understanding of subjectivity and marginality in graphic narrative, especially in graphic narratives documenting family history. Moreover, my dissertation redirects the conversation toward activism and political responsibility assumed by comic artists. I utilize Ann Rigney's exploration of the "memory-activism nexus" and José van Dijck's "mediated memory" to demonstrate how contemporary graphic narrative puts pressure on long-held assumptions toward memory in the region that have overemphasized memory as traumatic and debilitating. I suggest that the current generation of comics creators is moving away from the oppressor/oppressed binary by not only visualizing the 'invisible' aspects of society but, more importantly, creating space for envisioning the present and future. My project underlines graphic narrative as a technology for approaching the complexities of the past and the present while confronting the saturated focus on victimhood.

Methodology

I structure my analysis on critical reading of contemporary graphic narrative, tracing the similarities and distinctions between authors functioning within different national and temporal frames. My primary objective is to understand how different authors from the Hispanic world use graphic novels to comprehend, inform, and face personal, family, and collective experiences of sociopolitical crisis. Moreover, I am interested in the ways graphic novels can bring witnessing, memory, and collection of evidence through drawing into the spotlight of historical discourse. I analyze how

the graphic novel as a documentary medium puts in motion the recording capacity of hand-produced inscriptions and combines them with existing archives to re-establish a dialogue between the individual and the collective, the personal and the political. Although each chapter focuses on a different genre within graphic documentation, my analysis is ground on two fundamental notions: narrative subjectivity and the archive.

All works selected for this study are composed around the direct testimonies of individuals who have lived through or still live through the social processes the graphic novels document. One of the crucial criteria for selection was the presence of the testimonial voices in the works, either through the autobiographic mode or as interlocutors of the creators. Modern comics globally are frequently focused on exploring the less-mediated experiences of minorities and providing an alternative way of storytelling that captures lived realities to supplement or intervene against discourses surrounding marginalized subjects. Individual perspectives and remembrance frequently act as a crossing point with cultural and national memories. As Henri Lustiger Thaler argues, intersubjectivity as it is manifested in contemporary artistic production:

> Returns us to the centrality of the individual voice as a critical interpreter/interlocutor within an intersubjective/intergenerational field, and not as a mere proxy for the veteran or survivor [...] but as a separate field of ongoing meaning-making about the past in the present (915).

Thus, it is no surprise that graphic documentaries are autobiographical, to varying degrees, or structured around an ordinary person's voice. My analysis is concerned with the subjective lens of the documentarist and the way it is manifested in the

narrative. Throughout the chapters, I engage critically with the techniques authors use to establish documentary authority while communicating emotional and psychological authenticity.

The tension between objective and subjective truths is present both within my analysis and the very works that I study here. Working with a medium that functions primarily through hand-created drawings is particularly advantageous for approaching subjectivity in narrative. To that regard, Michael Chaney, a leading comics scholar on autobiography, points out that when the narrative 'I' of autobiography is explicitly stylized as a kind of cartoon, the result is a brazen departure from the 'seemingly substantial' effects of realism that traditional autobiographies presume (7). The more significant consequences of using drawings to tell stories of real lived experiences inevitably require a reconsideration of what it means to visualize identity, both individual and collective, and what this representation has to do with the given sociopolitical contexts.

Additionally, the works included in this dissertation are, without exception, hybrid forms where observational drawings, personal memories, artifacts, reproductions, and media snippets collaborate to construct a coherent narrative of political and social circumstances. My discussion is informed by Jorge Santos Jr.'s perspective on reframing history in comics in front of a consensus memory. In his *Graphic Memories*, a study of graphic novels surrounding the Civil Rights Movement, Santos Jr. asks a fundamental question that influenced my reading of graphic documentaries: why do graphic authors choose to draw images given the abundance of footage left from photographic and video cameras? To what end does a

graphic work aim to narrate an event already told? Hence, one of the principal notions that leads my critical reading is the interaction between hand-produced inscriptions (writing and drawing) and inserted archival records. With the preceding comments in mind, my dissertation responds to the following questions:

1. How do comics challenge the ethics of visual representation within the context of social, political, and economic inequality?
2. How do comics generate new forms of testimonial address, particularly for disenfranchised individuals and communities?
3. How do comics question long-held assumptions around what constitutes a documentary record and/or historical archive?

Overview of Chapters

The chapters that follow call for a dialogue among artists who share the documentary form of address in graphic novels. The graphic novels are not organized by geographical region, not the topic they treat, as I am not interested in perusing a historical nor political analysis of the events depicted in the graphic novel. Moreover, I have found significant shared elements among artists across the Hispanic world. Therefore, the chapters welcome a transnational dialogue, where the stylistic and technical similarities of the works can contribute to understanding how these works function as documentaries.

Chapter 1: "The Graphic Novel as a Documentary" establishes the theoretical parameters of reading graphic novels as documentaries, always keeping the ethics of seeing and visualizing testimonial subjects in the front lines. I highlight the narrative

capacity of drawing and writing as recording instruments in their capacity as inscriptions. Chapter 1 also explores the tensions around documentary authority, particularly around the indexical power of photographic and other digital images. I interrogate the relationship between drawings, photographs, film, and performance to expand the traditional definition of a documentary.

Chapter 2: "Documenting with Comics Journalism and Ethnography" deals with works that are written as graphic reports and assume the ethical principles of journalism and/or ethnography. The authors engage in on-site research involving interviews with community members, photographs, observational drawings, and archival research. I base my discussion on three recent graphic narratives. *Grito de Victoria* by Augusto Mora depicts the events surrounding the violent suppression of the student movements in Mexico. The narrative parallels the events during the Corpus Christi massacre in 1971 and the *Yo Soy 123* movement in 2012, although the book frequently references earlier violence at the Tlatelolco Student Massacre in 1968. *Caminos condenados* is the result of a collaboration between artists Camilo Aguirre, Henry Díaz and Pablo Guerra and researcher Diana Ojeda. The graphic novel is part of a series of graphic reports on the condition of displaced communities in Colombia after several decades of armed conflict. Finally, *Barcelona. Los vagabundos de la chatarra* by Jorge Carrión and Sagar Forinés is a story of the marginalized poor communities that collect recycles from the city streets for survival. The chapter deals with the techniques graphic storytelling employs to give visibility to groups with no access to a large media platform.

Chapter 3: "Documenting Family Histories" explores graphic novels that stand on the crossroads between research and biographical accounts. I interrogate two graphic novels whose authors belong to what Marianne Hirsch has termed as the generation of postmemory. Consequently, the works function simultaneously as autobiographies of the authors and biographies of their family members upon whose testimonials the narratives are constructed. *Notas al pie* by Nacha Vollenweider is the story of an Argentine-Swiss family who was deeply affected by the Dirty War and the disappearances of family members. The storyteller, who leaves Argentina for Europe, struggles to define her own identity as she is continuously drawn to her family's past. *Estamos todas bien* by Ana Penyas is the first graphic novel written by a woman to win the National Comics Award in Spain. The story details the life of the family's grandmothers during the Franco dictatorship in Spain and portrays the condition of women all through the transition to the present. Both graphic novels are a dialogue between the personal reflection of the authors/storytellers and their search for identity and inherited family history through the stories and testimonies of their grandmothers. The chapter interrogates the dynamics of gendered archives and the ways in which the graphic novel offers women a space of their own to narrate past and present through the lens of gender.

Chapter 4: "Documentary Autography" draws on examples from two autobiographical graphic novels or autographies. *La pirámide cuarteada, evocaciones del 68* is the first autobiographical work by Luis Fernando, relating his memories of the events surrounding the Tlatelolco student massacre in Mexico City in 1968. *Historias clandestinas* by Ariel and Sol Rojas Lizana is a graphic

collaboration between two siblings who relate their memories from the Pinochet years. Their narrative is a reconstruction of the years when the Rojas Lizana family secretly hosted the leader of an underground resistance group, transforming their family home into the base of operation for the Chilean resistance movement. The authors of both works reflect upon historical events which they have personally witnessed during their childhood years. I use José van Dijck's perspective on mediated memories to trace the dynamic between memory and personal and collective archives as they collaborate to produce a coherent sense of self.

CHAPTER 1 :

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL AS A DOCUMENTARY

Figure 1-1. Francisco Goya, "Yo lo vi." plate 44, *Los desastres de la guerra*, 1810s, published 1863. (Image courtesy of Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando)

My interest in drawing as a recording tool began years ago before I had considered pursuing the study of graphic narrative. During a brief volunteer service at a refugee camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I saw drawings circulating among the refugee community. The little graphics were created on paper, cigarette boxes, or found on walls, floors or wooden desks and chairs, pencil-drawn or carved by war survivors to mainly maintain remembrance of what their life was like before the Bosnian Civil War in the early nineties. These were drawings done by people living

from one refugee camp to another for more than a decade. They had very few belongings from their previous lives, and all of them had lost possession of their homes, and with it, the possession of most family memorabilia, including photos, videos, and mementos. The drawings I used to see, most frequently of their burned homes and villages, lost friends, family members, or even pets, often accompanied by minor descriptions and dates, are a sort of document of a now lost existence. They are the physical proof of what something once was and that someone still remembers it.

Returning years later to the act of drawing under precarious circumstances, I was both fascinated and appalled by Francisco Goya's *Los Desastres de la Guerra*, a series of 82 print plates created between 1810 and 1820. Goya's etchings have been interpreted as a visual protest the violence at the Dos de Mayo Uprising during the Peninsular War of 1808–1814. But more than anything, the plates serve as Goya's record of what he witnessed. Plate 44 of the series carries a simple annotation: "Yo lo vi. [I saw it.]" (Figure 1-1). I could not but notice a parallelism between Goya's drawings and the amateur sketches at the refugee camp in Bosnia. What intrigued me was the similar necessity of proving lived experiences using hand marking. "I saw it" carries a powerful implication of testimonial authority – of proving what was observed[1]. Pondering upon Goya's drawings, and more generally, visual expression, I asked myself, how do we prove the existence of something that is no longer

[1] Goya has become an important figure for theoretical approaches on the ethics and visuality of atrocity. His work has been studies within the context of war reporting extensively, particularly in Susan Sontag's history of images of atrocity *Regarding the Pain of Others*. What is more, comics artists like Crumb, Spiegelman, Nakazawa, and Sacco have openly acknowledged Goya's influence on their work. See Hillary Chute's *Disaster Drawn*.

physically present and there was no way to record it? How do we show, transmit, and even keep remembering something with no physical trace? More so, in the context of the digital age, if something was not photographed or video recorded, did it even exist? These questions have led me to think about contemporary art, and precisely graphic narrative, as a medium for writing real lives and experiences. I am interested in visual narrative as an artistic expression, that through hand-produced markings and inscriptions can serve as a form of documentary. The cases of drawings among war survivors and refugees are an impactful reminder of the primordial role of drawing as a method of inscription. It is not surprising that comics artist Art Spiegelman and creator of the groundbreaking *Maus* took inspiration from the amateur drawings of survivors to produce his own work. Coincidentally, Spiegleman collected and studied similar drawings he had encountered among the Holocaust survivor community: "Those drawings were a [...] return to the earlier function that drawing served before the camera— a kind of commemorating, witnessing, and recording of information" (*MetaMaus* 49). It is precisely these elements of bearing witness and recording information that motivates my reading of graphic novels that capture the very events that have defined contemporary sociopolitical contexts across the Hispanic world.

Graphic Narrative as Inscription

Inscriptions, be it drawn or textual, have served as physical proofs of experiences and thought long before the emergence of photographic technologies. The shared historical purpose between writing and drawing as inscriptions with a

similar meaning is evident from the linguistic equivalence between the words representing these notions. The stem word *grapho* (γράφω) in Ancient Greek denotes the action of marking, simultaneously referring to writing, drawing, painting, and carving, as well as its use for legal and logistical purposes, such as keeping accounts (Liddell & Scott). The original meaning of *grapho* would hold an equivalent meaning to 'to inscribe' or 'to mark', resulting in contemporary words bearing a similar sense, such as 'photography' (to mark with light) or 'biography' (to inscribe a life). This equivalence between writing and drawing is not exclusive to words of European origin. For example, in the Yucatec Maya language, the word *dzib* stands for the actions of drawing/painting and writing. It serves as a stem word for the nouns *ah dzib* (writer, painter), *ah dzib-up* (historian), *y-ah dzib-ul be* (chronicler), and *ah dzib huum* (clerk/scribe), among others (Álvarez 156). The cases of both languages suggest that keeping a record of the past is exercised through physical markings where writing and drawing appear to hold the same communicative purpose. Drawing was the first method of 'writing', as evidenced across linguistic systems.

Moreover, contrast to the artifice of written characters and alphabets, drawn images transmit thought more directly. This capacity of hand-produced inscriptions to document lives and events is at the core of my interest in the study of comics and graphic novels. My study stems from the capacity of graphic narrative to engage drawing and writing in their essential roles as recording tools. As I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, they often collaborate and rebel against more modern tools of inscription and documentation.

I am not alone in pointing out the recording capacity of graphic narrative and my study is informed by a growing scholarly effort to study contemporary comics and graphic novels as documentary media. In his *Documentary Graphic Novels and Social Realism* (2008), Jeff Adams makes a case for documentary graphic novels in relation to the politics of representation historically embedded in social realism. Adams studies visual approaches that communicate political and ideological stances surrounding ethnic discrimination, state oppression, and military occupation – topics common among the works I explore. Pascal Lefèvre's early discussion on graphic documentaries (2011) has used the comparison with documentary film to explain the different modes of documentary comics. Lefèvre relies on the six modes of documentary film established by film theorist Bill Nichols (poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive and performative). He excludes the reflexive, stating that "one can argue that all comics by their drawn and thus artificial nature are to a certain degree reflexive" (53). Lefèvre applies the rest of the five documentary modes, establishing comparative elements between film and comics. Recently, two foundational works have studied documentary comics, engaging in syntactical analysis that demonstrates the unique capacities of the medium as a documentary.

In her *Documentary Comics: Graphic Truth-Telling in a Skeptical Age*, Nina Mickwitz studies documentary comics in response to the broad skepticism toward the authenticity and objectivity of digital images. Mickwitz suggests that one of the merits of drawn documentaries (referring to both comics and digital animations) is in the way they challenge the assumptions that a documentary is dependent on

recording technologies and argues that a documentary address is not medium bound. More importantly, she highlights the apparent subjectivity in drawn media as an adequate response to a contemporary cultural shift due to which "assertions of universal truth, neutrality, and objectivity have become replaced by terminology marked by qualifications—negotiation, partial perspectives, and subjectivity" (Mickwitz 28). Within the context of the Hispanic world, where media skepticism has defined much of cultural production throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Mickwitz's arguments have been essential in my analysis of drawing as it stands in opposition to digitally produced media archives. Lastly, Hilary Chute's groundbreaking *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* explores the portrayal of violent disasters within nonfictional comics and graphic novels. Chute's work makes an argument for the ability of hand-drawn images to bear witness to violence and trauma and materialize first-account testimonies through the act of reproducing traumatic memories on paper. Her analysis draws on an extensive genealogy of newspaper and underground comics dating from 1830 to the present to demonstrate how comics can bear witness to images of human suffering.

My work builds upon existing scholarship, especially the work of Mickwitz and Chute. Mickwitz' perspectives on the multiplicity of subjectivities in an era of media skepticism are of crucial importance to discussing historical authenticity in the Hispanic world, where the official public discourse has been highly controlled through censorship, state-imposed limitation and problematic ownership of print and digital media throughout the 20th century, and in some cases, to this day. As I

will demonstrate, graphic narrative frequently lends itself as an alternative method of conveying historical information, challenging the narrative created by state-controlled media. Furthermore, my work assumes Chute's understanding of comics as a site for the visual reconstruction of witnessing: "Graphic narratives that bear witness to authors' own traumas or to those of others materially retrace inscriptional effacement; they repeat and reconstruct in order to counteract" (*Disaster Drawn* 4). This assumption helps me to understand how the graphic novels I study often function as media for counter-inscription of the past. Most of the works I engage with build their stories upon events that have previously been historicized and exist within the collective memory landscape to the point of saturation. Events like the Spanish Civil War, the Colombian Drug War and the numerous dictatorships throughout South America are surrounded by testimonial accounts and artistic renditions. They have been contextualized within an ever-growing media archive. As Joseph Witek comments, the graphic novel must deal with "an event that is 'already told,' already weighted with cultural significance" (cited in Cutter 2). As such, these works bear witness to personal experiences that attempt to retell the stories and reestablish a dialogue with history. In the context of the language of comics, as I shall demonstrate, this process is often literal, as re-framing of the historical narrative takes place within the frames that define a comics panel.

Additionally, all the works I treat here are built upon witness accounts and are structured around first-hand engagement with either the situations depicted or the persons whose testimonial accounts serve as the basis for the narrative. All the authors of the graphic novels I study are witnesses themselves, recounting from their

own memory or second-hand storytellers who have interviewed these witnesses (formally or informally). As such, the graphic novels involve autobiographical elements to various degrees. As my focus lies specifically on the process of direct transmission of first-account experiences, the selected works exclude comics biographies, historical fiction and other historical narratives drawn exclusively on secondary source materials or entirely fictional representations. Such works employ narrative techniques that are beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, they often do not satisfy the very definition of a documentary, which I will discuss in the following section.

Documentary Media and the Problem of Authenticity

The scholar credited with first using the term 'documentary', John Grierson, simply defined it as a "creative treatment of reality" (5). Even though Grierson worked with film, his definition gives no specification over the medium in which a documentary is created. The more contemporary definitions of 'documentary' have become more specific to closer resemble the notion of documentation, as in, the process of treatment of documents. The *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of the Spanish Language* offer almost identical definitions of the term[2]. As an adjective, the primary definition of 'documentary' is "of the nature of or consisting in documents". Its secondary definition as a noun limits the range as "a

[2] RAE's *Diccionario de la lengua española* offers a similar definition:
1. adj. Perteneciente o relativo a los documentos.
2. adj. Que se funda en documentos reales.
3. adj. Dicho de una película cinematográfica o de un programa televisivo: Que representa, con carácter informativo o didáctico, hechos, escenas, experimentos, etc., tomados de la realidad.

documentary film, broadcast, or literary work". Until recently, the term has seldom been used to refer to drawings, comics or any other medium that does not rely on photographic recording technologies. 'Documentary' broadly implies a nonfictional account, a direct relationship with the external world and attempts an objective and credible stance. A documentary approach is most associated with a technology-mediated view, seemingly free of human subjectivity, where the indexical nature of the camera supports the claim of nonfictionality. What we see in a photo or video is a slice of real life, materiality beyond the limitations of the documentary.

On the contrary, drawing, and by extension, the language of comics, at first glance, stands in opposition to documentary expression. Drawings are visibly subjective; they are always an interpretation, and their artistic imperfection prevents us from fully identifying them with the 'real' subject (something that photography and film do freely, and even realistic painting). The French semiotician Fresnault-Deruelle points out that comics as a medium is aware of its own artificiality and construction as an interpretation of reality (cited in Lefèvre 51). A drawing is rarely viewed as a replica of the real world, in the way that a photograph or even a painting would. The traces of human intervention, immediately noticeable in a hand-made drawing, contradict the supposed objectivity and truthfulness of a medium that should serve as an undisputable snippet of reality. As Nina Mickwitz points out, "the subjective qualities of drawing, and the overt display of their principle of construction, work as a rebuttal and caveat that to some degree preempt essentialist notions of both truth and transparency" (26).

This apparent subjectivity can result in an initial doubt of the nonfictional nature of a narrative created through the comics mediums. Perhaps this is best illustrated by the classification crisis surrounding Spiegelman's *Maus* when the book was included in the *New York Times Book Review* bestseller list. The work was placed under the category of hardcover fiction due to its visual representation of Jews and Nazis as mice and cats. The author complained in an open letter to the editor, stating: "It's just that I shudder to think how David Duke[3] -- if he could read -- would respond to seeing a carefully researched work based closely on my father's memories of life in Hitler's Europe and in the death, camps classified as fiction" (Spiegelman). Spiegelman spent thirteen years researching the book, not to mention that the plot and dialogues are primarily constructed upon the author's interviews with his father and other concentration camp survivors. The *New York Times* eventually moved the book to nonfiction. Still, as Hillary Chute points out, the debate illustrates "the discomfort that people have with the notion of drawing (and its attendant abstractions) as possibly 'true' or 'nonfictional'—as opposed to writing, a system of communication seen to be more transparently true or accurate" (*Disaster Drawn* 2).

Graphic novels like *Maus*, which are based on real sociopolitical contexts, have become a part of the literary canon in Europe and Northern America. Yet, similar works in Latin America rarely enjoy such status. The exception would perhaps be *The Eternaut* by Oesterheld and Solano López, however, the book still uses a fictional setting to represent the political situation of Argentina at the time. In

[3] David Duke was a former Louisiana State Representative and a Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan who openly supported Nazi ideology and denied the Holocaust.

Spain, Giménez's *Paracuellos* has gained significant critical attention, although the memoir continues to be read mostly as a metaphorical account of childhood under Franco. Graphic novels in the Spanish language still struggle to gain appreciation as 'serious literature' and nonfictional works that treat sociopolitical reality with the same rigor as documentary novels or film. The reversal of this perspective has gained momentum only within the last decade, most successfully in Spain.

More importantly, Hispanic documentary literature has almost exclusively been studied through written accounts. Latin American 20th-century cultural production championed what is now designated as testimonial literature or *testimonio*. Many of the now-canonical writers of 20th-century Latin American literature turned to the documentary novel and the chronicle to bear witness to the social unrest and human rights violations that have troubled many countries since the sixties. Events like Pinochet's violent overtaking of the Chilean government or the Tlatelolco Massacre in Mexico City are but a couple of examples of the watershed events that defined a generation of writers who revolutionized the literary world. The international recognition of Latin American *testimonio* boomed in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly after Rigoberta Menchú's account of the Guatemalan Civil War became a global bestseller. Despite the legacy of testimonial literature, it is imperative to point out that traditionally textual expression has presented itself as problematic, especially in the cases of many subaltern groups. Namely, *testimonio* has encountered narrative challenges from its very beginning. The work that stands as a precursor to contemporary testimonial literature, written by the freed Cuban slave Juan Francisco Manzano, *Autobiography of a Slave*

(written in 1839, published in Spanish in 1927), had to be heavily edited due to the author's poor written skills in Spanish and a lack of formal education. It stands as a classic example where the testimony is mediated, interrupted, and somewhat stripped of authenticity.

The problem of transferring an oral account to its textual equivalent has not ceased to pose a challenge even in more contemporary examples of *testimonio*, particularly concerning the removal of the subjects from the environment in which the account is given (the loss of materiality surrounding the oral account) and the necessary appropriation of the subject as a literary narrator[4]. Georg Gugelberger and Michael Kearney point out the contradictions of conveying largely oral stories through writing: "This marginal ambiguity of testimonial literature is reflected in this oxymoronic term which attempts to contain the contradiction inherent in a kind of writing that is generically a spoken form" (10). This tension becomes more evident when the testimonial subject is illiterate, unable to communicate in the dominant language, or simply is not a professional writer. This holds true in several of the works I study here, where documentation includes testimonies by foreign immigrants (in *Barcelona*), illiterate agricultural workers (in *Caminos*), or an older adult with dementia (in *Estamos todas bien*), to name a few examples. Therefore, adopting a written system as a medium for an oral testimony often means attempting to function within a borrowed genre and language. In this regard, I argue that graphic narrative is an appropriate medium for the rendition of testimonial accounts where the verbo-visual expression allows for the negotiation of meaning

[4] For more on this discussion, see Gugelberger's edited volume *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*.

through multiple expressive modalities, filling the gaps of a written account alone as it reconciles the narrative voice with the physical body of the speaker, their material surrounding, and most importantly, giving way to elements which are expressed through embodiment.

Regarding visual documentaries, scholarship on this subject has focused primarily on film, photography, and, more recently, theatrical performance. Documentary expression is still mainly linked to photographic recording tools as it strives to provide evidence of the subjects and events it treats. Documentary truth claims and tensions between subjectivity and objectivity remain relevant theoretical debates surround documentary expression. Contemporary criticism has demystified the notion of the camera as a tool for an unadulterated copy of reality, yet the camera's indexical power remains a challenge. Documentary historian Brian Winston points out that regardless of the modern acceptance of photography as an art, the camera still maintains a status of a "scientific instrument" (Renov 37). Thus, camera-produced images are accepted as scientific evidence, deceptively free of human intervention, as opposed to what one experiences when looking at a drawing. Winston comments on the historical understanding of documentary as a scientific inscription:

> As the *Encyclopédie française* puts it: 'The photographic plate does not interpret. It records. Its precision and fidelity cannot be questioned.' However false this might be in practice, the *Encyclopedie*, without question, accurately sums up the nature of photographic authority, as it is popularly understood. The centrality of this scientific connection to documentary is the most potent (and sole) legitimation for its evidentiary pretentions. Thus, documentarists cannot readily avoid the scientific and evidential because those contexts are 'built-in' to the cinematographic apparatus (Renov 41).

The photographic authority Winston describes arises time and again as a crucial element of media archives, much present within contemporary graphic narrative. Drawing and photography compete to establish a relationship with reality outside of the graphic novel, challenging the assumption of visual reproduction. As Barthes revealed in his foundational *Camera Lucida,* the incapacity to distinguish the real from the photographed subject makes it difficult to maintain consciousness of its presence as an artistic rendition: "Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see" (6). Sontag best summarizes the assumed role of photography as visual evidence:

> Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it. In one version of its utility, the camera record incriminates. [...] In another version of its utility, the camera record justifies. A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture (3).

The photographed image indeed is proof of existence, and for that very reason, it often becomes part of the multimodal puzzle that constructs graphic narrative. Authors often use archival photographs or photographs they have produced themselves to supplement their drawings and create a dynamic reading experience where the photograph is always read against other visual elements. On the other hand, the camera record becomes problematic in cases where the testimonial subject may be legally compromised. When interviewing undocumented migrants for *Barcelona*, the authors observed tension among their interviewees when the camera was present: "Sagar and I saw during our investigation that the photographic camera is seen as violent, as invasive, where the sketchbook was not"

(Carrión). As such, drawing becomes a more ethical tool of furnishing evidence, allowing for a nonintrusive way of recording without sacrificing visual representation.

What is more, historical examples involving digital images as evidence of critical national events have shown that the raw record cannot function alone to establish 'truth'. An image alone cannot ensure meaning, as documentary theorist Michael Renov argues in his foundational *Theorizing Documentary*. Renov draws on the example of the video footage surrounding the case of police brutality against black worker Rodney G. King. A civilian witness filmed King's beating by police officers, but the footage failed to support Rodney's case and the officers were acquitted when presented at court. The footage could not provide an accepted version of the story; questioning that image by itself can provide an agreed understanding of the truth. Renov comments on the case: "No longer ought we as a culture to assume that the preservation and subsequent representation of historical events on film or tape serve to stabilize or ensure meaning" (8). The example shows that multiple narratives can be built around the same record and that external interpretations always surround the archive.

The works I study here are often narratively structured around events that have been heavily documented and televised. As an example, the bombing of the presidential palace and Allende's supposed suicide is the kick starter event for the story in *Historias Clandestinas*. From its very beginning, the graphic novel must confront an event that has been televised globally and create meaning around previously narrated archives. The visual evidence, of course, did not ensure a

consensus meaning of the violent political transition in Chile, nor did it lead to legal consequences for many years. Regarding televised coverage of public events of violence, media scholar Philip Rosen points out the fact that "[…] the image emerges as insufficient in itself. It must immediately be explained, sense must be made, the very shape of the image requires verbal explication and pinpointing" (Renov 62). In other words, live footage, or any archival record itself is not necessarily an interpretation.

The documentary assembles images as visual evidence, as pieces of the past, where meaning is constantly negotiated. Rosen elaborates: "[processed and arranged] media generally presupposes a temporal disjunction between the referential events producing them and audience apprehension of them, so that their representations become fixed as preservations from a past" (Renov 60). As such, the distance of time inevitably transforms the documentary into a historiographic medium, even if what we 'see' may seem as alive as the present. Rosen concludes that "such a 'well-formed' sequence is justified precisely as History; sense can be made because the event is over" (Renov 60). A documentary always implies a process of curation, where every step of selection, sequencing, and presentation of visual evidence confronts the necessity to communicate an ideological stance.

These observations point to several assumptions surrounding the concept of a documentary which are imperative to understanding how graphic novels can function as a nonfiction medium. First, within a documentary expression, images are necessarily surrounded by interpretation from an explicit or implicit narrator whose ethical and ideological positionality affects narrative decisions. Secondly,

documentary images are not a copy of reality, regardless of their indexical authority, but instead a detour from the real, determined by choices that shape visual presentation. The most prominent elements of choice are the audio-visual signifiers, including language, lens, proximity, and sound environment. Thus, in terms of representation of reality, graphic novels function just like any other documentary medium, where reality is passed through the filter of artistic tools. In the case of comics, choices are also made regarding language (both textual and visual), proximity, perspective, positioning, style, color, etc. Finally, creativity and artistic invention do not hinder historical authenticity. As Renov argues: "That a work undertaking some manner of historical documentation renders that representation in a challenging or innovative manner should in no way disqualify it as nonfiction because the question of expressivity is, in all events, a matter of degree" (35).

These assumptions do not imply that there is no difference between fiction and nonfiction, even though theoreticians have agreed that both modes of address share many elements, and every nonfictional narrative contains fictive elements to a certain degree (Renov 3; Nichols xi). Bill Nichols, the founder of the contemporary study of documentary film, explains that documentaries differentiate themselves from other genres primarily through the assumptions surrounding their production, including the purpose of the product, the relationship between the author and the subject, as well as the audience's expectation (xi). Through paratextual elements in combination with the selection of content and artistic techniques, documentaries aim at establishing their relationship with reality. A documentary mode of address provokes the audience to hold higher expectations of historical authenticity and

remain attentive to the documentation and the record of what appears on the screen, stage, or page, respective of the documentary medium. The inclusion of visual documents and human subjects convince the audience of a relationship with reality because of historical relationships outside of the documentary. As Nichols defines, a documentary "*re*-presents the historical world by making an indexical record of it; *represents* the historical world by shaping this record from a distinct perspective or point of view. The evidence of the *re*presentation supports the argument or perspective of the *representation*" (36, emphasis in original).

As such, documentaries not only rely on historical archives and other records to establish a connection to the past, but they must make decisions on the selection, arrangement, and interpretation of evidence to convey a particular perspective toward the past. A documentary engages inscription with ideological consequences. Interpreting the past in visual documentaries functions by contextualizing visual elements, mainly through textual elements. Nichols comments that "speech fleshes out our sense of the world. An event recounted becomes history reclaimed" (Nichols 30-31). Speech in the graphic novel appears as multiple levels of textual narration. As the subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the written segment (including narration, dialogues and borrowed text from external archive) exercise power over the sequencing of images and their interpretation. A documentary has to do more with an intent and a narrative mode than the medium through which it is created. The documentary intent is always a performative act.

The observations presented by theoreticians of documentary film in many aspects apply to other documentary media, regardless of the technologies that stand

behind their production. As such, the term ‘documentary’ must be understood as a mode of address that carries assumptions and techniques that are non-medium specific. Simply understood as a re-inscription and re-contextualization of the historical past, a documentary does not imply hierarchies among the different types of communication. Contemporary documentary media are increasingly welcoming multimodality for treating the historical past, resulting in expanding the definition of documentary. For example, this definition has been extended to include performative arts that have turned to nonfictional stories to perform reality on the stage. Theatre of the Real, as defined by Carol Martin, is theatre based upon actual events, persons and spaces. It includes many styles and methods, including documentary theatre, verbatim theatre, reality-based theatre, theatre-of-fact, theatre of witness, tribunal theatre, nonfiction theatre, war and battle reenactments, and autobiographical theatre (5). Theatre of the Real is conceptually comparable to documentary graphic narrative because both mediums are self-aware of their status as artistic recreations. Regardless of its nonfictional nature, a staged play is as susceptible to disbelief from spectators as is a hand-drawn image in a graphic novel. More importantly, both the documentary stage and the comics page have incorporated documents and other media as records that are manipulated within the narrative. While written and photographic archives are often cooperating with the narrative to offer historical authenticity, the narratives in both theater and graphic narrative can aim to provide contrasting information: “A documentary can serve as a way to juxtapose the real, which has been mediatized, a documentary can serve as resistance to the media of the real such as television and newspapers” (in Forsyth

and Megson 80-81). This is especially evident with the repurposing of photography in the graphic novel, particularly within political contexts where violent state regimes have abused photographic evidence.

The graphic novels I study share two crucial elements with documentary theatre. For one, in both cases, the documentary rarely aims to communicate an unaltered version of reality and frequently functions to complicate the notions of authenticity by providing a shared space (stage or page) for multiple truth claims. Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson propose that "the once trenchant requirement that the documentary form should necessarily be equivalent to an unimpeachable and objective witness to public events has been challenged in order to situate historical truth as an *embattled site of contestation*" (3, my emphasis). Moreover, both the stage and the physical page of comics can serve as sites where past, present, and future can occupy the same space to negotiate memory and identity. Esthetically, both theater and graphic narrative allow us to witness multiple narratives, dialogues, and time frames simultaneously. The spectator can control the pace of the narrative they follow, focusing on different fragments of the stage or page. Through its capacity to fill in the gaps of the archival record and offer a recreated sequence of the past, both theater, and graphic narrative allow us to revisit the sites of narratives situated in the past physically. We can experience history repeatedly, 'seeing' the past recreated within the present stage. As Derek Paget concludes, "I want to call the preparatory phase (which might include taping, transcribing, editing, rehearsing) the Recording of Witness. Performance in this account becomes Bearing Witness" (in Forsyth and Megson 236). The process of becoming a witness is consequently

experienced by the spectator/reader who assumes the role of an eyewitness of the performed or illustrated scenes.

Graphic Documentaries

The previous section has demonstrated many conceptual and technical similarities between graphic narrative and other documentary media, such as film, photography, and theater. However, graphic novels differ significantly from all the mentioned mediums, particularly in how they are structured and produced. The following discussion will outline the unique characteristics of comics as a documentary medium, given that these are shared aspects among the works I will be analyzing: 1) the syntactical principles of comics; 2) multimodality within graphic narrative; and 3) the relationship between drawing, memory, and witnessing.

1. Graphic Syntax

The structural organization of comics allows the medium a unique way of treating documentary stories. The segmentation and arrangement within the narrative physically demonstrate how the documentary sequence is developed. Many technical elements, such as perspective and framing that happen 'behind the scenes' in film and photography, are apparent on the comics page. The reader gains insight into how visual elements are manipulated, incorporated, and stylized. Therefore, much of my analytical work on graphic novels focuses on technical aspects as I look at the arrangement and shape of panels, the use of color, the purposeful variation of style (ranging from traditional exaggerated caricature to hyper-realistic drawings), the

presence of details in texture, or lack thereof. I am interested in the materiality of comics and the way documentary evidence is translated on the page. Comics is primarily a spatial medium, where positioning and order on the page determine how a story is read. At their core, comics tell stories through compartmentalized segments called panels or vignettes (often but not always in little boxes), which can be composed of any combination of images (drawn, photographed, or collaged) and text (narration boxes, speech bubbles, onomatopoeic phrases). The segmentation of panels allows the authors to organize information, segmenting bits of information and establishing a narrative sequence through ordering. Cognitive scientist Neil Cohn has studied the way this translation of reality functions in panels extensively:

> When we see the world, our vision takes in information from the whole visual array, but we only focus on the parts of that vision that fall within our "spotlight of attention." Panels serve a similar function for visual narratives, and thereby can simulate what our vision would be like if we were watching a scene in person. This creates a sensation that panels facilitate a "spotlight" that reveals only portions of a larger environment. In actuality, these glimpses create the whole view of the environment in the mind of a reader. These various panels represent parts of the scene, which allows us to inferentially *construct* a full understanding of the broader scene. (Cohn 59, emphasis in original)

In this way, the panels within a comics function as snippets of reality, drawing our focus to the most crucial elements that the author wanted to transmit. Representation of reality, as Cohn suggests, works much like construction, where blocks of evidence are assembled to make sense of the narrative whole. Josep Catala has also pointed out that vignettes function as a direct translation of an observation, where "contrary to the literary exercise, the drawings directly express mental images from memory rather than proceed to describe them in words" (Catala 7). This visual transfer of a mental image is particularly effective when the images are employed as

a drawn record by a witness. Many of the examples I present include panels drawn from a first-person perspective, allowing us to access the way the author/character has retained memory. We can observe this clearly in the following set of panels from Luis Fernando's *La pirámide cuarteada*. The switch of perspective from third to first-person draws our attention to the character's emotional reaction (figure 1-2). The author transmits the feeling of shock the character feels as his daily routine becomes interrupted, and he comes face to face with a massive protest. Sarah McNicol has compared such visual fragments that makeup panels to "shards of memory", as they resemble the fragmentary nature of memory (282).

Figure 1-2. Panel from *La pirámide cuarteada. Evocaciones del 68*. The adolescent witnesses a protest organized by the student movement in Mexico City.

Unlike photographed images, however, comics panels are never read in isolation, and peripheral vision always influences the way readers navigate the graphic space. Elements within the panel and the entire page are codependent to construct a complete image and function through what Thierry Groensteen defines as "iconic solidarity". He explains that this dynamic is established by "interdependent images that, participating in a series, present the double characteristic of being separated—this specification dismisses unique enclosed images within a profusion of patterns or anecdotes—and which are plastically and semantically overdetermined by the fact of their coexistence *in praesentia*" (in Heer and Worcester 128, emphasis in original). In other words, every element in a graphic novel can be read/seen as a separate entity while also being understood as part of a cooperative sequence. As such, comics as an expression has a unique advantage to draw our attention to an isolated instance (such as a facial expression or a signaled object), while simultaneously creating a bigger picture of its context. No other medium can so liberally and neatly position multiple narratives in the same space and time.

Authors frequently take advantage of segmentation to portray scenes like puzzles, where different perspectives capture many details that define the narrative action. In the following example from Augusto Mora's *Grito de Victoria*, we can observe the way in which numerous panels that show detailed individual actions function together to frame the bigger picture of an observed event (figure 1-3). Mora often uses this kind of segmentation to organize his impressions of chaotic scenes that involve many actors, such as protests or police violence. This fragmentation presents a panorama of the broader set without losing the details pertinent to each actor's

story. The diversity of perspectives, in this case, demonstrates how a single event is comprised of multiple sub-events, which narratively can result in many different ‘truths’ and variations of what had occurred.

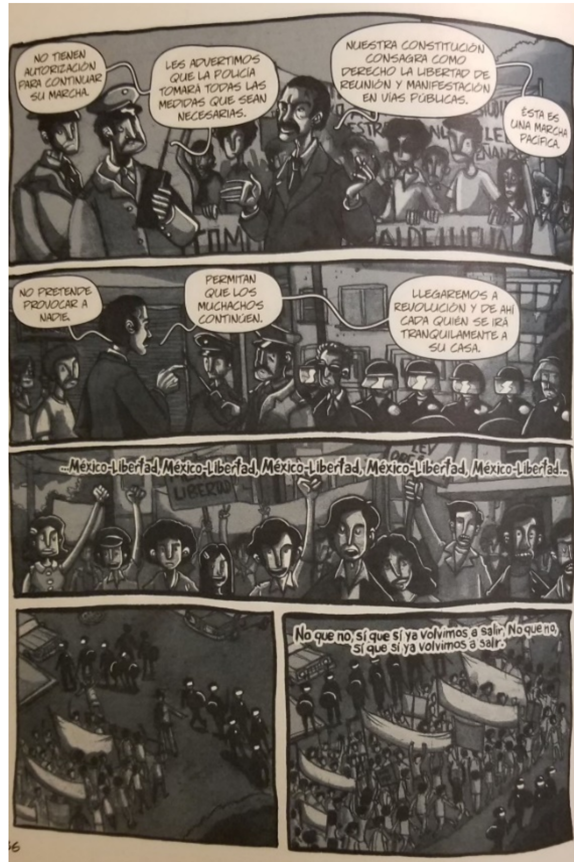

Figure 1-3. Panel from *Grito de Victoria*. Scene of a student protest in Mexico City.

Finally, the positioning of panels in the graphic novel is a technique that determines the passage of time. Being a static medium, time in comics is expressed through space. The space between each panel, the gutter, serves as a pacer in graphic narrative. Will Eisner explains that “the act of paneling or boxing the action not only defines its perimeters but establishes the position of the reader in relation to the scene and indicates the duration of the event [...] The act of framing separates the

scenes and acts as a punctuator" (28). In this way, multiple timeframes can appear simultaneously on the page. In contrast to film, where time is dictated with each passing frame, the comics page can contain multiple instances of time in the same space.

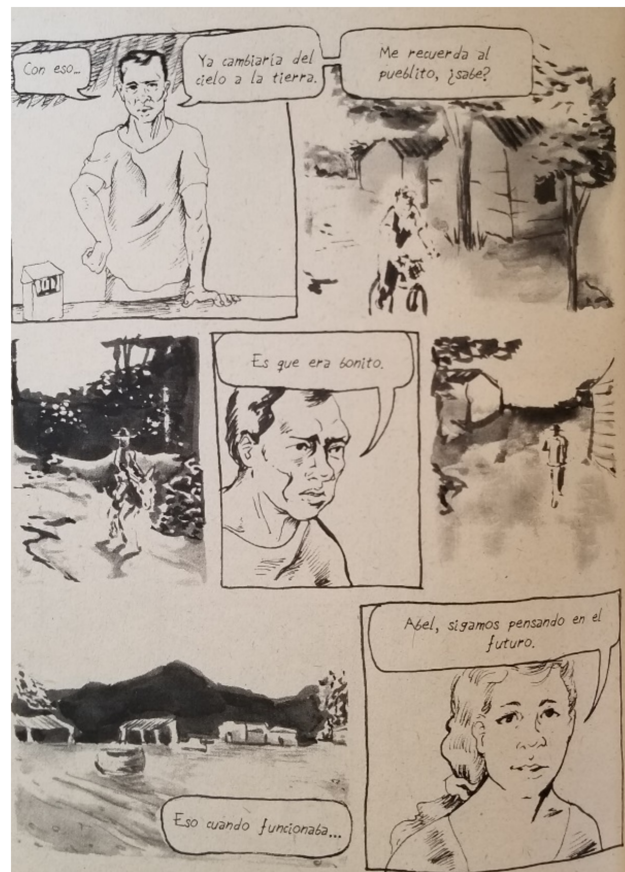

Figure 1-4. Panel from *Caminos condenados*. A scene where an interview in the present is represented parallel to remembered instances.

In an example from the graphic ethnography *Caminos condenados* we observe the story of a displaced person who recounts his memories of life before their relocation (figure 1-4). Each drawn panel alternates between actions in the present (where the testimony is given) and the past (illustrating memories), represented by variation in

the drawing style. What is supposed to be a linear sequence between one panel and the next is disjointed by a constant return to actions in the past. The testimony is constantly interrupted by remembrance to the point where the interviewed subject often forgets the concerns of the present. As evident in this example, the time-space syntax of graphic narrative can "place pressure on traditional notions of chronology, linearity, and causality—as well as on the idea that "history" can ever be a closed discourse, or a simply progressive one" (*Disaster Drawn* 4).

2. Multimodality

Like all other documentary media, documentary comics often establish indexical references to the past using a dialogue between the historical record and the present observations of the documentarist, in this case, a comics artist. As Karin Kukkonen has explained, contemporary comics is a multimodal medium that uses several communication systems to convey a message beyond the traditional word and drawn image. I am interested in this aspect to understand how documentary graphic novels can be built upon an intertextual dialogue, combining hand-produced art (text and drawings) with integrated media (photography, film stills, inserts of documents and newspapers, maps, etc.). The relationship between technology-mediated and drawn images in the works I study is complex and can vary within a single graphic novel. In some instances, the narrative is supported by the evidentiary authority of the digital photograph to show historical validity and authenticity. This technique is quite common in works that function as comics reportages, where photography is fully incorporated into the scene.

The drawings become an amplification of the photographed moment, where they complete the narrative of what happened before and after the moment was captured on camera. The author, as a comics journalist, relies on the fact that a photograph functions as a "certificate of presence" (Barthes 87). In such cases, the camera and the drawings cooperate to tell a complete story and provide a sequence that maps the moment we observe in the photograph. In autobiographical works, drawings often appropriate private records, such as family memorabilia and documents found within the household, as they become a tool for the storyteller to connect with their own family history. Family albums, maps, and household objects are frequently redrawn instead of collaged within the page. This domestic archive serves to supplement, and sometimes even replace, the memory of events and people long ago – documentation steps in to fill the gaps of time.

However, in other cases, drawing and incorporated media stand at odds with each other on the graphic page. The drawing acts as a counter-narrative of what has previously been mediated. This is common within narratives that attempt to retell a story, offering a personal experience as a contrasting image to a state-controlled interpretation of historical events. These cases are most common in works with an autobiographic mode, where life writing stands in opposition to an established consensus memory. Through this montage, the photograph is re-contextualized in the graphic novel to destabilize and renegotiate historical interpretation. Comics scholars Martha J. Cutter and Cathy J. Schlund-Vials argue that offering a contrasting story to a widely accepted explanation of a record, such as a photograph, is a necessary tool to change fixed imaginary. They conclude that in these cases, the

graphic novel establishes a "dialogue between what constitutes official "authentic" history (as manifest in speeches, written journalistic accounts, and photographs) and what is silenced or unspoken because it does not fit neatly within a dominant chronicle as shaped by human interlocutors, writers, journalists, and politicians" (Cutter 7). Official mediated accounts, then, are positioned side-by-side with often contrasting testimonial accounts on the page of the graphic novel in order to be cross-examined and re-interpreted. The page becomes a space for historical contestation, where drawings, textual narration and historical records serve as competing evidence. As Hillary Chute contends, comics allow the reader to access the process of "unfolding of evidence in the movement of its basic grammar, by aggregating and accumulating frames of information" (*Disaster Drawn* 4). By framing and reframing, graphic novels show how evidence is gathered, processed, and presented.

3. Drawing, memory, and bearing witness

The graphic novel is a suitable medium for documenting lives and experiences because of the intrinsic relationship between visual imagery and memory. Drawing something from the real world means, above all, being able to truly see it. English art critic John Berger comments: "It is the actual act of drawing that forces the artist to look at the object in front of him, to dissect it in his mind's eye and put it together again; or if he's drawing from memory, that forces him to dredge his own mind, to discover the content of his own store of past observations" (3). This dissection of an observed scene in the artist's mind means going back to the details of what they have

seen. In the graphic novel, this translates to the texture of drawings – lines, shapes, color, thickness, lighting, spatial relationships, etc. The artist must look back to what they saw to recreate, and this seeing anew is inevitably filtered through the lens of memory. We do not access the scene itself, but the scene as it exists in the artist's memory. A drawing is not only a certificate of presence but a testament to observation; it is "an autobiographical record of one's discovery of an event-seen, remembered or imagined" (Berger 3). Looking for the sake of drawing signifies looking to notice and remember, make a record of one own observation.

Ethnographer Andrew Causey has reflected on the process of substituting traditional field notes and photographs in favor of field drawings. The process, Causey concludes, allows him to engage in active observation: "I was able to think out the shapes and forms to re-create them—to see them and to concentrate on those that most honestly represented my experience of the place, without translating the moment to words (8). Causey's ethnographic drawings return to the intrinsic function behind *grapho* or *dzib* – drawing to remember how one sees the world. In the graphic novel, drawing observed instances or life circumstances serves as a record of the experience of a witness. It provides a view of an experiential and subjective truth and a testament to an embodied experience. Actively looking at something and refusing to forget is strongly indicative of witnessing, as anthropologist Michael Taussig declares: "To witness, therefore, is that which refuses, if only for an instant, to blink an eye" (70). To witness is the refusal to let a mental image slip away, and consequently, choose passivity in each circumstance. The witness who draws creates a record of something they have seen and

internalized, evidence that something has existed: “Out of the artist’s mind through the point of a pencil or pen comes the proof that the world is solid, material” (Berger 102).

Drawing one’s own observations calls for active visual engagement. As Causey concludes: “I have come to the understanding that in looking, our vision floats across the visual terrain without directed engagement, while seeing interpretively illuminates the visible, in many ways bringing it into being” (13). Whether one draws on-site or from memory, seeing/remembering becomes a physical act as the eye, and the hand of the observer interact with the technology of pen and paper. The sight is engaged constantly, ensuring that what the hang draws matches what the eye sees and what the mind selects. Artists must choose the elements they draw, continuously curating information, highlighting specific details, avoiding others – drawing is in itself a process of ‘editing’ personal memory. This curation of visual materials resembles editing and arranging film footage; however, drawing as technology reveals the very process of documentation transparently. The documentary is born once these memories are sequences and contextualized on the page. The drawn scene is no longer what the artist observed but an event that now occupies space in the graphic novel. Taussig comments on the corporeality of his own drawings: “What I mean is that my drawing is motivated by the desire to have contact because the thing witnessed dies away as soon as it is seen [...] seeing becomes more a matter of *touching* and the eye becomes an exceedingly strange piece of equipment” (124, my emphasis). The scene is no longer part of the past, as it leaves the artist’s memory and exists physically in the present for us to see. In essence, comics materialize

observed instances, converting the graphic novel into a sigh for negotiating memories.

As the past materializes on the page, it receives a physical shape and occupies space – it no longer exists only in the observer's memory. Drawing, as Berger confirms, is "making the absent appear" (109). Inscription from memory fulfils a specific necessity to release the burden of the past, as drawings are "made in order to exorcise a memory which is *haunting*, in order to take an image once and for all out of the mind an put it on paper" (Berger 49, my emphasis). In the graphic novels I study, these haunting memories have both personal and grander social implications. The subjects depicted in these documentaries are still haunted by the specters of an unresolved past – personal memories that affect how individuals organize their present existence. The narratives are frequently constructed around ambiguous periods of transition, the things that come after – life after the Civil War, after Franco, after Allende/Pinochet, life after years of suppression, or after years of instability. The storytellers are those who have lived to tell a story from the distance of time or those who, as a second-generation, have been raised with stories from the past. They all have a constant necessity to go back to an unresolved period of their life, and consequently, their drawings are a way to revisit these haunting images. The way reality in the present is constantly interrupted by the burdens of the past is physically evident on the page of the graphic novel. Going back to the imagery in figure 1-4, we can observe how the past keeps interrupting the present narrative. When asked to imagine and speak about his future, the individual cannot do so, as he constantly pauses to reminiscence and allows the images of the past to resurface.

Instead of showing ‘what happens next’, each subsequent panel forces us to take a step back and fractures the temporal sequence. As such, the syntax of the graphic novel mirrors a process that exists outside of the artistic object. Documenting the past in the graphic narrative offers a way to materialize the past and allow it to take space in the present physically. It allows both the artist and the audience to stand in front of a historical event repeatedly. As Michael Taussig concludes, through drawing, “history is repeated in slow motion” (89).

CHAPTER 2 :

DOCUMENTING WITH COMICS JOURNALISM AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Figure 2-1. Panel from *Barcelona*. *Los vagabundos de la chatarra*. Splash page illustrating the 2012 March towards Independence in Barcelona.

The graphic novel *Barcelona: Los vagabundos de la chatarra* (2015) opens with a fascinating splash page illustration by Sagar. A vibrantly colored panorama shows a crowd of protesters moving unidirectionally toward the Arc de Triomf in Barcelona. The imagery is clear: a Catalan flag framed by the Arc, numerous *esteladas*, a lively crowd, and a date: "September 12, 2012." This is an iconic scene from the 2012 Marxa cap a la Independència (Catalan independence demonstration), a culminating moment in a series of protests surrounding the Catalan movement for independence. The panorama is one of the most recorded and publicized images of the protests,

appearing on the front pages of news stories across the Web, TV, and print media. Yet, Sagar's illustration points to a different story about Barcelona, one that rarely receives news coverage amid independence politics. This divergence from the oft-told narrative is signaled by a solitary figure that turns away from the crowd. At the bottom of the splash, a scrapper pushes his cart full of recycling scraps and appears indifferent to the movement behind him. Although his figure is positioned centrally at the nearest plane of the image, the scrapper is unnoticeable among the crowd at first glance.

What is more, the directional lines of both movement and gaze are clearly in opposition. While the crowd faces the Arc de Triomf (a potent symbol of the city), the scraper moves away toward the periphery of the image. The overwhelming details of the protest and the coloration of the urban landscape dominate the visual field, leaving the scrapper and his cart as details that are easy to ignore. In the panels that follow, however, the seemingly insignificant details of the splash page quickly compose the central narrative of *Barcelona*, a graphic documentary about the underground scrapping economy that employs underprivileged citizens amidst the economic crisis in Spain. This panel aptly summarizes the type of narratives this chapter explores – graphic documentaries that assume the ethics of journalism and ethnography to record and contextualize the stories of marginalized subjects such as migrants, displaced citizens, or ordinary citizens without a solidified media platform.

Contemporary genres like comics journalism, investigative comics, or comics ethnography became recording tools that document factual circumstances of marginality, discrimination, and political oppression across various national

contexts[1]. I draw on examples from three recent graphic works. The work that opens this chapter, *Barcelona. Los vagabundos de la chitarra* (2005), deals with topics that do not come to mind when one thinks of the popular Spanish *tebeos*: immigration, racism, and economic crisis. Journalist Jorge Carrión collaborated with illustrator Sagar Forniés (pen name Sagar) to document the social conditions behind the informal recycling economy in Barcelona. They traveled to some of the poorest neighborhoods in the city to collect testimonials and spent several years researching aspects of legality, homelessness, and police brutality against immigrants of color at the foundation of the economy.

Similarly, Mexican comics creator Augusto Mora combines the tradition of the Mexican *historieta* with journalistic techniques to document the events that have defined contemporary Mexican politics. His *Grito de Victoria* (2016) narrates a series of student movement protests that have left dark episodes in recent Mexican history. Mora participated in the student-led demonstrations, commonly stylized as #YoSoy132, as opposition to the media's biased coverage of the 2012 general election and PRI's candidate Enrique Peña Nieto. Mora, like Sagar, creates urban landscapes on the ground. He draws scenes of police brutality, the violent suppression of peaceful protests, and the stories of activists that have been disregarded by mainstream reportage.

[1] The terms comics journalism, comics reportage, comics ethnography all refers to the research methods and ethical approach authors hold in creating graphic narrative as a tool to tell the stories of others. They also tend to imply the intended audience and publication venue. In practice, these genres share many narrative techniques regarding the use of observational drawing to document testimonial accounts and their social contexts. For the purposes of my analysis, these terms are interchangeable.

Finally, *Caminos condenados*[2] is a collaboration by anthropologist Diana Ojeda and a team of comics creators led by Pablo Guerra that deals with the status of displaced communities following the armed conflicts in Colombia. The project traces the recent development in palm monoculture that prevents local agricultural communities from accessing vital water sources. The resulting graphic novel complemented years-long research on displaced citizens of color and their struggle to exist economically amid industrialized palm farming.

Comics and graphic novels combine visual and written narratives to express that which otherwise is often ineffable. Drawings have the power to erect a world that the mind identifies as fiction, even if the work itself is nonfiction. This phenomenological concept creates challenges with the objectives of comics artists committed to transmitting the real stories of others faithfully. Yet, it also opens new opportunities for ethical visual representation, allowing the reader to engage with complex realities with an artistic distance. This is because drawings of real-life events are not the acts themselves. Such a distance allows the viewer to encounter facts that might otherwise be too emotionally devastating or simply too easy to overlook. Thus, it is no accident that the genre of comics journalism and comics reportage focuses on narratives steeped in suffering. Graphic novels with global recognition, such as Spiegelman's *Maus*, Sacco's *Palestine*, and Satrapi's *Persepolis*, turned the comics panel into a tool for framing and reframing of nationally critical events, past and present. Throughout Europe and North America, comics matured in

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[2] Hereafter I use shortcuts to refer to the full titles of the books: *Barcelona* (refers to *Barcelona. Los Vagabundos de la chatarra*), *Grito* (refers to *Grito de Victoria*) and *Caminos* (refers to *Caminos condenados*).

the 1980s and 1990s to become a medium for alternative news making and creating compelling stories that support a social cause. The work of Spiegelman and Sacco has been immensely influential in inciting public interest in the stories of Holocaust refugees to America and Palestinians under Israeli occupation. Yet, the relationship between these creators and the communities whose stories they tell is often challenged by generational or cultural disparities. Spiegelman writes as a second-generation American who never directly experiences the past of his European-born parents, and Sacco, a Maltese American, consistently relied on translators to interview survivors in Palestine and Bosnia.

On the contrary, the authors whose work I analyze in this chapter document the sociopolitical contexts of their own countries. Augusto Mora is a direct participant in the events he documents, namely, he joined the student movements he represents in *Grito* and has a personal relationship with many of his informants. In the case of *Barcelona* and *Caminos* the authors find themselves in a challenging situation. Sagar and Carrión are Barcelona-natives and educated professionals who document the story of people of color, many of whom live in Spain as undocumented migrants, make their living within an informal economy, and are not fluent in Catalan. The production team behind *Caminos* experiences a similar outsider-insider position. The Bogota-based creators do not share the economic circumstances, educational level, or race of the agricultural community they document. The representation complicates the role of witnessing, as comics creators witness the conditions and spaces within which their subjects live and provide their testimonials while often maintaining the position of an outsider.

The discussion that follows highlights the unique opportunities of graphic narrative to document stories across the Hispanic world, where a challenging legal or political status prohibits individuals from sharing their testimonies through a digital recording. The analysis is concerned with what Hillary Chute has called "material specificity" in comics, or how socioeconomic reality is inscribed, marked, and displayed as the narratives invest plenty of space into detailed documentation—place, duration, perspective, materiality, and embodiment. I argue that this type of inscription can create social visibility for communities that are invisible within the economic and political context of their societies. It positions the subjects/characters within the spaces that define their social and economic circumstances, thus offering a more ethical view of living on the margins. All three works discussed here develop nonfiction storytelling based on detailed research, observation, and data collection, using media archives, maps, ethnographic drawing. Also, testimonial information from interview transcriptions constitutes a large part of the dialogues in the narratives.

The analysis traces how comics creators engage with communities and individuals and inform about their challenges from within, even if they do not share the same social circumstances. My reading of these works is informed by recent scholarship on documentary media focusing on film studies (Bruzzi; Gaines; Renov) and graphic narrative (Adams; Chute; Mickwitz) that highlights documentary as a non-medium specific form. Additionally, I engage with scholarly inputs on comics journalism – given the tremendous influence of the genre on Hispanic authors – and the work of Joe Sacco (Ludewig; Sacco; Weber and Rall). Finally, the discussion

engages drawing as a core technology of recording from an ethnographic perspective through gaze and active *seeing* (Causey; Taussig).

My analysis highlights two unique aspects of documentation and ethnography through the comics medium. First, the selected examples illustrate the way authors use self-representation to draw attention to the subjective nature of the process of creating a documentary. Second, the examples show the capacity of drawings and panel structure to bring forth material specificity with meticulous attention to material details, spatial structure, and corporeality. I contend that comics documentaries engage drawing and testimonial discourse to present material spaces, objects, and bodies as documents of lived experiences. As such, they engage in ethical documentation of often marginalized segments of society where the graphic novel becomes a safe way to testify without sacrificing visual representation. What is more, these works effectively bring attention to the value of subjectivity and intimate human relationships in a documentary expression as they operate at the crossroads between ethnography, journalism, and reportage.

Modes of Operation: Visual Effects, Authenticity, and Self-Representation

I am interested in how graphic narratives expand the definition of documentary using drawings to record material details. The inherently subjective nature of drawings does not necessarily counter accurate representation. Even film and photography scholars like Michael Renov, Stella Bruzzi, and Bill Nichols have argued against the equivalence between documentary form and objectivity. On the contrary,

they have emphasized the staging element as a defining part of any documentary form. Graphic narrative, in its role as a documentary, is conscious of its position as a subjective expression and makes this fact evident through various visual and organizational techniques. As Chute points out, "all nonfiction comics call crucial attention to the fact that in any medium or genre, 'accuracy' is always an effect" (199). Given that I trace material specificity in these documentaries, my reading throughout is concerned with the effect of accuracy. The analysis of the examples identifies the narrative techniques (textual, visual, and organizational) that authors employ to establish their storytelling as accurate, authentic, and valid.

For this purpose, my reading pays close attention to what Wibke Weber and Hans-Martin Rall call "visual authenticity," or the mode of operation through which the documentary establishes itself as accurate and reliable. They explain authenticity in this context as "not only being truthful and reporting facts accurately but also reflecting the experience of discovery: background, context, different perspectives, tone, language and emotions of the public" (Weber and Rall 380). Considering examples primarily from comics journalism, the authors establish five categories of visual authenticity: (1) the presence of the investigator as a character within the narrative showing them at work as journalist or ethnographer; (2) physical resemblance to real-life people and locations by providing photographic evidence; (3) employment of a visual aesthetic, which differentiates the work from fictional comics; (4) use of documentary evidence by providing original documents and data; (5) inclusion of a meta-story that discloses the production process, the research methods, the sources, and the creator's point of view (Weber and Rall). Of course,

these categories are employed to varying degrees in the graphic documentaries studied here. For example, *Barcelona* and *Caminos* rely heavily on the presence of the artists/ethnographers as characters and, as a result, highlight the ethnographic process—photographing and drawing on scene, recording and taking notes, interacting with the informants, etc. The authors of the works essentially serve as the reader's guide through the document spaces. This process is more implied in Mora's work, although not untraceable, and the author chooses to portray his voice through an omnipresent narrator that establishes the sequence of visual evidence. Similarly, the drawn avatars of informants in the stories vary greatly, ranging from caricaturesque representations to photorealistic drawings. These decisions translate to different effects for the reader, who may be placed in the position of an immersed witness or challenged to engage in a meta-reflection on the process of documentation. Julia Ludewig defines these effects as "immediacy," where the reader is immersed in the story, and "mediatedness," where the story represents the ethnography in a sort of Brechtian manner[3].

Consequently, my discussion is concerned with the process behind these decisions and the ethical and communicative effects they produce. Mainly, my argument for comics as graphic documentaries stems from the medium's capacity to expose the process of editing – research, selection, arrangement, and sequencing. In other words, the documentary is rendered through the impressions of its author(s)

[3] Ludwig referred to 'immediacy' regarding the effect of minimal interference in the transmission of what is documented, "the reader's illusion of direct exposure to the events portrayed", where 'mediatedness' refers to both "the act of transmitting as such and the explicit unveiling of this act to the reader". 'Mediatedness' describes the efforts to draw the reader's attention to how information is transmitted, placing the tools at the center of narration.

and strategically positioned. As Ludewig comments: "[the artist's] perception coexists with personal impressions that are the result of a processing operation and thus the product before the reader is everything but direct" (25). Comics expose the process of mediation as they show not only ‘This is *what* I saw’ but emphasize ‘This is *how* I saw it.’

Drawing as Ethnography and Material Specificity

Many of the research techniques behind the graphic narratives I analyze reflect ethnographic tools commonly associated with fields like anthropology. In his *Drawn to See*, anthropologist Andrew Causey reflects on the process of incorporating pencil-drawn images in his field notes. Along with textual notes and photography, Causey sketches people, landscapes, and scenes he observes during his research trips, concluding that drawing helps him engage in "seeing" in a way that a camera recording could not. He points out that in ethnography, drawing can reveal insights that words and photographs often cannot, provoking the observer to focus on elements that are not communicated verbally: "I came to depend on drawing as an auxiliary ethnographic method the day I became certain that I *could* see more than I *had* seen, more than was recorded in my notes, and more than was documented in my photographs" (7, emphasis in original). Being able to 'see' for Causey then is recreating a replica of what is being observed and taking note of the dynamics that govern the scene, whether that be objects or people. The process of drawing inherently depends on an active process of selection and positioning that captures

the observed relationships, but it also reveals the artist's relationship to their recording.

This aspect of ethnographic drawing revisits the meaning of 'accuracy' in reporting or ethnography. As Causey explains, drawing enables the artist to capture their experience while being there, coming back to the idea of "This is *how* I saw it." As a medium that employs drawing as an ethnographic tool, graphic documentaries simultaneously strive for factual and emotional accuracy. Drawings reveal both what was seen, carefully framed within the panels of the comics page, while challenging the reader to imagine what was left out by being excluded from the frame. Meanwhile, the subjective nature of drawings constantly exposes the artist's hand, reminding us that each panel and aspect is what the artist wants us to see. Unlike a photograph, the drawing always involves a reconstruction process, where the artist must arrange the glimpses of reality they are exposed to. As art critic John Berger has noted, "It is the actual act of drawing that forces the artist to look at the object in front of him, to dissect it in his mind's eye and put it together again" (3). This process of dissecting and reconstructing a graphic documentary is made evident through the syntax of comics, where panels and pages sort, organize and sequence the visual evidence.

Apart from being able to translate experiences, on a basic level, drawing presents itself as an excellent ethnographic tool because it is unobtrusive, and it can function within places that the camera cannot reach. Namely, in all three works analyzed here, photographic documentation appears problematic. Many informants fear that photography may compromise their safety by revealing their identities; or

in the case of Mora's reproduction of events surrounding the student movements, the chaotic and violent confrontations during the protests simply leave no room for photographs. In an interview, Mora points that drawing helps him fill the gaps of photographic documentation as well as the emotional consequences surrounding the protests: "With cartoons, one can 'capture' moments that escape the camera. You control the graphics and can communicate your emotions and ideas. The chiaroscuro, the size of the vignettes, the kinetic lines, the expressions of the characters, the plans—all this helps generate a certain impact on the reader (Mora and Stefkova). However, drawing here does function simply as a recording tool, only second best to camera technology. What interests me about drawing is its capacity to engage the artist in the active way of 'seeing' that Causey talks about, transforming the artist into a witness that constantly dissects and reassembles their attempt to present the testimonial subject contextualizes within their material circumstances. Drawing forces the artist to pay close attention to numerous details: shapes, colors, positions, interactions, bodily features, facial expressions, and textures, among others. As Julia Ludewig points out: "A saturated representation of an environment aids in creating a sense of place and thus gives the reader access to places and people that are otherwise inaccessible" (34).

As I shall demonstrate, these types of details in drawings stem from detailed research and 'seeing' both literally and metaphorically, as the artists refuse to look away from the social issues they put into a narrative. As I trace the narrative strategies and techniques that establish visual authenticity, I am concerned with the role of space as a sort of protagonist in the narrative. The comics page becomes a

material site where visual evidence from observation and research unfolds in front of the reader, pointing to a specific place, timeframe, and perspective. More importantly than convincing its audience of the story's authenticity, material specificity creates a way for testimonies to be heard and seen. The authors whose work I interrogate in detail move between the seemingly ordinary and news unworthy. As Edward Said has powerfully described, graphic documentaries serve as a much-needed space for "forgotten places and people of the world, those who don't make it on to our television screens, or if they do, are regularly portrayed as marginal, unimportant, perhaps even negligible" (*Palestine* iv). As such, attention to materiality also has an ethical effect. The graphic documentary aims to transmit the first-account testimonies and the intention behind these accounts.

Palestine and the Explosion of Nonfiction Comics

The publication of the *Palestine* series in the mid-1990s and Sacco's formal definition of "comics journalism" served as a pioneering work for reconsidering the role and value of graphic narrative in telling true stories concerning world affairs. Illustrative journalism, of course, had already held a long tradition, but what made Sacco different was his role simultaneously as an information gatherer/researcher, writer, and visual artist who had complete control over his work. *Palestine* expanded both the page limit and the visual resources of a journalistic work through comics as never before. Sacco used innovative graphic techniques to capture his experience of observation, interviewing, and research. Following the 2001 republication of *Palestine* by Fantagraphics Books, endorsed by Edward Said with a prologue, the

comics scene saw an explosion of works that engaged with real people and places. This new focus called for a structural reworking of the traditional drawing-text format, now creating a collage of ethnographic drawings, interviews, testimonies, photographs, documents, raw data, charts, maps, reconstruction of archival objects, among a multitude of other media. Nonfiction comics of this type made their way into academic disciplines, prominently those dealing with ethnography, allowing ethnographers to establish a closer relationship with their informants while maintaining confidentiality (Wadle).

Similarly, data comics became a popular and effective way of communicating data and complex data structures through visualizations across a wide range of research. Most significantly for nonfiction storytelling is Sacco's model of comics journalism, now practiced widely for reporting on both local and international affairs. Comics journalism blends the techniques of fiction storytelling while still following the ethics of traditional journalism operating as "sequential art that uses a combination of visual and verbal signs—images and texts—in order to cover fact-based news, whether print or online, respectively, digital" (Weber and Rall 379).

Graphic journalism has been fundamental to the professional development of all authors studied here. On several occasions, Mora has explicitly stated that Sacco's work has inspired his decision to use comics to represent social issues. What is more, a conversation between Sacco and the creators of *Barcelona* is included in the very appendix of the book. In both cases, the authors have developed a unique style that draws as much from contemporary comics journalism as from earlier traditions,

unique to Spain and Mexico[4]. However, the definition of "comics journalism" has been largely debated, and it remains a difficult genre to discern from other forms of comics ethnography. The works studied here are often difficult to place under a single category exclusively. The only author who has journalistic training is Jorge Carrión, but journalistic techniques are employed indiscriminately across all examples. *Caminos condenados* appears as the closest example of ethnographic comics, given that it was produced as part of multi-year sociological research. Yet again, observational drawings and informant interviews appear throughout. Although my reading is concerned with the particularities of the investigative techniques employed, I do not emphasize the ethics of journalism or sociology. Nor do I discuss in detail the aspect of transparency or credibility in comics journalism or reportage, given the ample literature that already informs my reading (Mickwitz; Chute; and Kavaloski). Instead, this reading seeks the techniques and effects of documentation, the material record of lives, places, objects, and memories. Thus, I use the more encompassing term "graphic documentary" to draw a parallelism between the three works in question. Nonetheless, the artistic practices and theoretical approaches stemming from these different types of nonfiction comics have much to do with documentary expression and inform the reading throughout.

[4] See introductory chapter for the historical predecessors of comics journalism in the Hispanic world, primarily the work of Eduardo del Río.

Media Skepticism and the Rise of Slow News

The relationship between graphic documentaries and traditional documentary media, primarily related to camera technologies, is complex and often problematic. The authors I engage here often incorporate the archival authenticity of photography while also challenging its capacity to represent people and events accurately. For example, Mora includes photographic snippets within his drawn scenes of protests while explicitly criticizing Mexican photojournalistic narrative surrounding social movements. I will return to the ethical discussion of photographic representation in more detail. Still, this dichotomy serves to point out the tense relationship between drawing and media, particularly news delivering media. Nina Mickwitz, in her analysis of the rise of documentary comics, suggests that graphic storytelling has become a popular response to an ever-wider skepticism toward digital images. She explains: "interest in a broader repertoire of documentary expression that resonates with the notion of plural and subjective realities emerges in connection with digital culture and technologies" (Mickwitz 30). In the context of the Hispanic world, particularly Latin America, skepticism toward digital and print media has been a concern since the turbulent mid-20th century and prevails to this day. Citizen skepticism toward state-controlled and censored national media is not a recent development. Therefore, political cartoon satire and comic strips often blamed the national press for misusing photography and recordings and lacking journalistic ethics. As I will demonstrate, contemporary documentary comics in the region present themselves as alternative methods of conveying current news and information and reworking historical accounts.

In addition to media skepticism, documentary comics respond to the news media's often sensationalist aspects, where too much priority is given to the latest breaking news stories. As *New York Times* columnist Nicholas D. Kristof has commented, "there's this battle for *eyeballs* in the journalism world," referring to the fact that, in rushing to cover press conferences and latest disasters, journalism tends to miss the stories of the everyday conditions because they do not count as news (Kristof). Indeed, the limited *eyeballs* Kristof speaks of referring to the inadequate visual space in media for people whose precarious conditions may be a constant over a long period. To that end, comics journalists inspired by Sacco engage in "slow journalism," the process of working outside of the instantaneous newsroom (or Internet) culture. Comics journalism often chooses topics that are not newsworthy per se and deals with the daily complexities of ordinary people under extraordinary circumstances. The graphic reportages I discuss here took months, in some instances years, to complete but allowed an in-depth involvement with the problem and subjects who provide first account accounts. As Georgiana Banita points out, one of the purposes of comics journalism is civil education through the intersection of information, empathy, and mobilization (51). As such, I argue that empathetic documentation necessarily involves a detailed visualization of the represented "other" and their circumstances—visual clues that organically inform the reader of the conditions surrounding the first account testimony and give it life through the syntax of comics. Moreover, narrative empathy stems from the relationships that develop between the documentarist and their subjects, insinuating that

documentation is a process based on human contact rather than a product free of subjectivity.

The Problem of Photographs

The recording precision of the camera that is usually valued for serving as a slice-of-reality often appears as problematic in graphic documentaries where there are legal or ideological consequences. The photographic camera is seen as an invasive tool that often upsets the relationship between the documentarists and their informants – an element that appears across all three works. Identifying the individuals behind the testimonies is something the authors are trying to prevent. Instead, they choose to protect their identity behind the apparent discrepancy between the real people and their drawn avatars. In the case of Caminos, the paratext directly explains that to protect the informants' identities, their names have been changed, and the drawn representations of the informants are purposefully kept vague as to disallow recognition.

Similarly, in *Barcelona*, the rejection of a camera recording appears as part of the narrative repeatedly throughout the book. During one of the first encounters between the authors and their primary informants, we see Sagar as he takes photographs of the urban surrounding as part of his research for the book. A series of panels show the reaction of the informants as they angrily surround Sagar and Carrión, demanding to see the photographs that have been taken (figure 2-2). The fuss around the camera does not stop until the informants are convinced that no photograph has been taken showing their faces. This experience has led the authors

to conclude that: "The comic gives you a type of access that is forbidden to other technologies" (Carrión). For the undocumented migrants who make a living within an informal economy, photography is a piece of evidence that can cause serious legal consequences. Drawings and handwritten markings appear as an ethnographic tool within places that cannot or should not be accessed by a camera.

Figure 2-2. Panel from *Barcelona. Los vagabundos de la chatarra*. A scene where the informants are angry at the use of a photographic camera during the interviews.

The decision to reject the incorporation of digital images in these documentaries has to do with the ethical aspect of visual representation. Namely, the camera is often seen as an invasive instrument where the photographed subject feels an intrusion of privacy; in a certain sense, drawn representation of testimonial

accounts rebels against the voyeuristic nature that photography may presume. Susan Sontag, who has been one of the most prominent critics of photographing people under straining social circumstances, perceives "something predatory in the act of taking a picture", such that to "photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they can never see themselves [...]; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (14). Photographing others carries the risk of converting the photographed subject into an object. On the other hand, drawing, no matter how caricaturesque, transparently communicates an emotional involvement in the act of constructing a depiction that may stand in place of the real person.

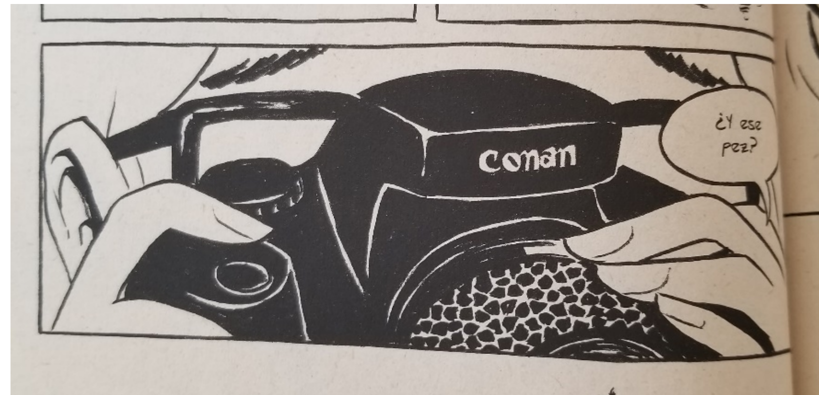
Self-Representation and Documentary Transparency

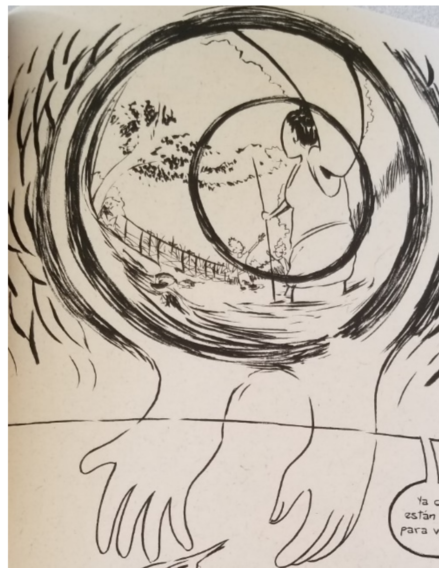
Comics engage in a more transparent process of how the information is recorded, selected, and presented for two main reasons. First, unlike photography, video, or other camera-produced images, the drawings can never hide the hand of their creator, even when they are based on direct observations or copying of photographic materials. The drawing is always an artistic interpretation. Additionally, contrary to more traditional reportages or documentaries that often adhere to stricter time and format constraints, comics can engage in 'slower' storytelling where space can be afforded to develop relationships between the documentarists, their subjects, and surroundings. I contend that by bringing attention to documentary making as a highly subjective process, these works place human experiences at the center of documentation and recording and compel an empathetic reading. In a certain way, the works function as memoirs even though the stories are centered around other

people's circumstances. The authors represent themselves as characters in the stories, often engaging in self-caricature as they illustrate the relationship with their subjects. However, the extent of self-representation varies greatly, resulting in different narrative effects. The following examples show the various techniques authors use to bring attention to the documentary process.

Caminos is a narrative that brings attention to the documentarists to illustrate the documentary work as a collaborative project during both its research and creation phase. The project aims to establish ethnographic validity based on intimate collaboration between the ethnographers and their informants. The book is a collaboration between ethnographer Diana Ojeda, editor Pablo Guerra (who also interviewed informants), and comics creators Camilo Aguirre and Henry Díaz. As Díaz has explained in an interview, all collaborators were present during the research stage for the book and made joint decisions on the visual presentation of the research (Díaz). As such, the visuals that illustrate the ethnographic process offer plenty of information on how the testimonials were collected. The researchers appear as what Ann Cvetkovich has called a "sympathetic witness," as they seek identification with their documented subjects (Drawing the Archive 7). This is most obvious in the second part of the book titled "A Day with Lucia," where the ethnographer (presumably Diana Ojeda) interviews her informant Lucia as she performs her daily tasks: fetching water, cooking, fishing, preparing dinner, and working in the fields. The opening and closing panels that frame the interview illustrate an affectionate embrace between the two women, suggesting a friendly and comfortable relationship. The interview with Lucia is presented as an informal

conversation while maintaining an ethnographic task. We see a frame that 'zooms in' on Ojeda's tape recorder as she explains to Lucia: "I want to accompany you in everything you do throughout the day. And in the meanwhile, you can tell me how everything has changed in the last few years" (Guerra et al. 20).





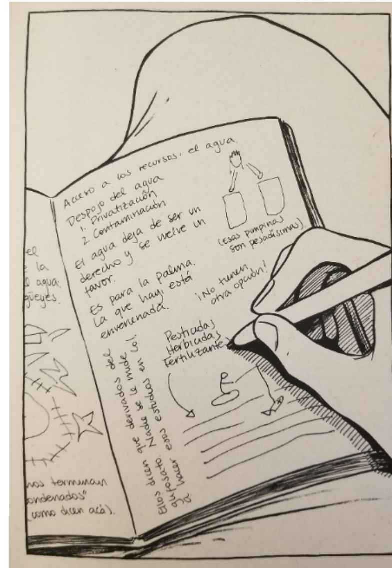


Figure 2-3. Panels from *Caminos condenados*. Fragments that illustrate the process of ethnographic research including recording tools such as a camera and field notes.

Throughout the conversation, Díaz's illustrations often draw attention to the recording process as they outline the various ethnographic tools Ojeda uses—a tape recorder, a camera, notes, and observational drawings. Moreover, the panels

Figure 2-4. Panel from *Barcelona. Los vagabundos de la chatarra*. A splash page without the usual framing arrangement. The authors as characters engage in meta narrative.

Similarly, in *Barcelona* we observe Carrión and Sagar bike through the poor neighborhoods of Barcelona and interview informants on the streets and at recycling centers. Like in *Caminos*, the panels frequently frame the recording tools they use, such as field notes, observational drawings, cameras, and laptops. Carrión's background in traditional journalism is evident in the book as the sequence of panels frequently imitates conventional reportage. For example, the pages in almost all sections follow a similar pattern where the opening panel situates the reader in the overall scene and then proceeds to frame the researcher and his informants. Sagar's illustrations borrow broadcast techniques, such as frequent over-the-shoulder perspective panels that take turns portraying the speakers and panels that focus on the informant's facial expression. The use of shot-reverse shot sequences as well shows the influence of cinematic editing techniques. Moreover, the narrators in *Barcelona* appear more intrusive than the other works, as they engage in lengthy discussions as the two documentarists exchange their ideas and impressions following the interviews. On several occasions, the narrative consciously interrupts the sequence of panels with interviewees to ponder upon the medium of comics. Specifically, on two occasions, splash pages break the effect of immersion in the story. In a splash page (figure 2-4), we observe Carrión and Sagar on their bikes as they traverse the city and their figures appear multiple times on the page, even though all other elements around them seem to remain static. The splash page lacks the panel arrangement that appears throughout the interviews, and there are no borders or page numbers. The opening voiceover serves as a clear indicator that this scene is part of a metanarrative: "During the following weeks we came back several

times. Every comic, every chronicle, is an act of montage" (Carrión and Sagar 54). Speech bubbles, usually reserved for interviews, indicate the conversation between the researchers as they debate whether the story should show the controversial aspects of their informants' lives. Sagar concludes: "In the city there's a little bit of everything, you go from luxury to indigence without interrupting continuity, without a line that separates a panel from the next" (Carrión and Sagar 55). The visuals act to establish a parallelism between the syntax of comics and the ethical decisions behind the creation of the documentary.

These examples reveal a stylistic shift in graphic storytelling from an immersive world-building toward a Brechtian approach with strong ethical concern. Namely, these documentaries effectively use the syntax of comics to create constant reminders of the subjective nature of documentary making. The examples I discuss employ similar research techniques (including interviews, archival montage, and participant observation through drawing). However, they differ significantly in the narrative structure and the visual approach to representation. The presence of the documentarist within their narrative, of course, is not a defining element of comics journalism. In fact, Augusto Mora rarely attempts to demonstrate his presence at the protests. The book is mainly guided by an omnipresent narrator that connects the interviews, drawings, and photographs that compose *Grito*'s graphic puzzle. The only indication of Mora's presence at the events is signaled by a series of panels where we observe the author's character in the book with his girlfriend amid weekday traffic congestion caused by protesters who are physically blocking the

incoming vehicles. Mora decides to leave the car and join the protests to observe the events, aided by his sketchbook and small digital camera.

Contrary to *Barcelona* and *Caminos*, where the documentation is a planned and structured process, Mora presents his observations in *Grito* as a series of spontaneous actions. The result is akin to the concept of citizen journalism, where ordinary citizens participate in the dissemination of news. This emission of his own drawn avatar is not so surprising, given that Mora belongs to the community he documents – he was actively involved in the protests. This points to the fact that documentary transparency has to do with the positionality of the authors, where authenticity behind the recording is more at stake, the further removed the documentarists are from the social contexts they portray.

While Mora's narrative style in *Grito* attempts to transport the reader into the story with minimal interference from the narrator, the storytelling in *Barcelona* and *Caminos* as I have shown, consistently tries to break the feeling of being there. Julia Ludewig differentiates between mimetic versus non-mimetic depictions of people, places, and events. She explains: "The mimetic mode approaches realistic representation, without ever truly achieving it, of course, but evokes it effectively. The non-mimetic mode, in contrast, consciously violates the illusion that we are looking at real people, places, and events" (28). The examples I have shown identify the moments when the immediacy Ludewig describes is consciously interrupted to provoke a sort of Brechtian space of alienation and meditation. Weber and Rall have pointed out that this narrative technique establishes authenticity in a medium that does not rely on recording technology. However, the examples demonstrate that self-

representation is not only a method for justifying the use of comics as a documentary medium but functions as a tool that provokes meta-reflection on the process of collecting both testimonial and visual evidence. The narratives cast light on moments that would be ethically polemic in traditional reportage, such as emotional involvement with the informants or explicit discussions on recording, selection editing, and sequencing. In this way, graphic documentaries offer a higher degree of documentary transparency that does not attempt to hide the human element.

Contested Spaces

Another unique aspect of graphic documentaries is that they engage drawing to bring forth material details that enrich the testimonies. The panel structure is frequently used to supplement written narration and dialogues and bring attention to the physical space in which documentation occurs: streets, homes, working areas, and other symbolic spaces. Joe Sacco has frequently commented on the painstaking details that an observational drawing can capture. He explains:

> A writer can breezily describe a convoy of UN vehicles as "a convoy of UN vehicles" and move on to the rest of the story. A comics journalist must draw a convoy of vehicles, and that raises a lot of questions. So, what do these vehicles look like? What do the uniforms of the UN personnel look like? What does the road look like? And what about the surrounding hills? (*Journalism* XII)

Observational or ethnographic drawings constitute a crucial aspect of the graphic documentaries I engage. The authors pay keen attention to the pictorial veracity Sacco describes. Specifically, the visual representation of precarity creates a dystopic image that directly, but wordlessly, refers to the socioeconomic conditions

surrounding the characters in these narratives. Physical space is at the heart of constructing materiality in the narrative as a sort of embodied mapping as authors and their subjects traverse both the material and the narrative space.

Figure 2-5. Panel from *Barcelona. Los vagabundos de la chatarra*. A scene at a dump site. The pile of trash overshadows the characters of Carrión and Kheraba.

Barcelona functions as a map of the city that traces the movement of trash collectors as Carrión and Sagar bike around industrial neighborhoods. In doing so, the documentarists engage in a detailed recording of the spaces (public and intimate) that reflect the social and economic conditions that surround the recycling business. Sagar uses detail-saturated images to illustrate urban landscapes with overwhelming details: precisely drawn cracks on old buildings, puddles of water in the streets,

homeless people gathered around burning trashcans, piles of recycles, and traffic jams, among other specifics. The panels frequently prioritize these material details to the point of overshadowing and outweighing the characters in the story. Figure 2-5 is a snippet of a conversation between Kheraba, one of the primary informants in the story, and Carrión. The dynamic page imposes focused panels on Kheraba's facial expression on top of a splash page that shows the interlocutors standing in the middle of a large pile of scraps. Most of the space on the page is dedicated to drawings of scraps in monochromatic colors and shadows. The two subjects appear much smaller than the pile, and color-wise they are almost indistinguishable from the rest of the page. What is more, the speech bubbles which stand in for Kheraba's testimony are scattered around the page, becoming a part of the pile of trash that dominates the visual space.

Similarly, in *Caminos* the narrative develops through constant movement as the informants guide the researchers through the palm fields and their village. The opening panel of the story is a map of the town and the surrounding farms, which immediately situates the subjects in space and signals movements. Two figures are imposed on top of the map – one of the researchers (probably Pablo Guerra) and one of the farmers who explains how the village changes after the armed conflict with the Colombian paramilitaries. The map appears as a legend of the village where tiny houses and parcels are surrounded by many symbols representing the palm plantations. This scene sets the mood for the entire book, as all testimonials are collected by constant walking and shadowing the work of the farmers. The map expands throughout the chapters, showing symbolically the changes that have taken

place. For example, parcels with livestock, water reservoirs, and native cultivations are replaced by the repetitive palm symbols. As the farmer outlines the timeline of the changes for Guerra, a fence that safeguards the palm fields around the plantations keeps appearing higher and higher in the panels. In the final panel that illustrated this conversation, we see the characters reaching the end of their journey as they stop in front of a recent plantation. The fence has grown to become much taller than the characters, guarding an even more towering palm tree. The palm takes the central spot in the frame as Guerra and the farmer have turned their backs to the reader and the stand on both sides of the tree.

This visual saturation with palms in *Caminos* becomes even more, overwhelming in the second chapter of the book during the conversation between Diana and Lucia. Figure 2-6 shows a series of frames in which the presence of the palms takes over the narrative space, both textually and visually. On the left, we see a repetition of sounds denoted by an onomatopoetic "zink," signaling the constant noise palm trees produce when hitting the roof of the house. On the right, the characters stand in front of Lucia's house, which appears trapped in the middle of a palm forest. The birds-eye view of the parcel forces the trees into our sight, and their heavy texturing looks omnipotent in comparison to the semi-empty parcel. The characters standing in front of the house appear as two simplistic caricatures that we may miss without the box frame that surrounds them. In fact, the drawings do not even show facial features. Like in *Barcelona*, in this case, the material surroundings seem to overtake the characters who tell the story. The visual decision to crowd out the characters in the narrative says much about what comprises a testimony beyond

the verbalized account. In these examples, the authors assume the role of active observers who pay attention to material details and translate this as graphic 'staging' for the informants. Sounds, textures, and spatial structure become a formative part of documentation – they provide as much insight (if not more) than what is textually narrated. The graphic documentary pushes the limits of a 'testimony' to include material details and give them equal narrative weight to the transcribed accounts. This is evidenced by the privileged visual spaces materiality is granted on the page.

Figure 2-6. Panels from *Caminos condenados*. A scene in Lucia's house. On the left, panels are filled with an onomatopoeic representation of noise produced by palms. On the right, Lucia's house is trapped between the palm forest.

What is more, the overwhelming focus on mapping in graphic documentaries corresponds to the political power dynamic that dictates the rights over physical

spaces. Drawing the lives and circumstances of citizens within their space serves as a way of proving spatial ownership. Namely, in all three books, the documented communities struggle against a systematic overtaking of space (farmlands in *Caminos*, warehouses, and neighborhoods in *Barcelona*, public streets, and plazas in *Grito*). In essence, all three problems revolve around a similar issue – the limitation of movement across space, be it to exercise the democratic right to peaceful protest or engage in economic activities. Using the basic principle of comics – spatial organization on the graphic page – authors translate a political battle for space visually. *Barcelona* and *Caminos* achieve this implicitly, where the authors serve as guides across the narrative space, where the struggle happens quite literally in *Grito*, particularly in the scenes that depict police violence against protesting students. Much of the visual space in *Grito* creates a map of the student protests and invests plenty of details into representing the chaotic confrontations between the protesters, the police, and paramilitary groups. The frequent bird-eye panels that appear at the beginning of each major scene outline the division of space during the protests signaling strategic movement like a battlefield. Many of the observational drawings use birds-eye perspective to map the direction of the protests as they get intercepted and surrounded by armed forces before frequently culminating in chaotic violence.

Mora establishes a parallel between the events surrounding the 2012 protests and previous incidents of police brutality, such as the massacres against students at Tlatelolco in 1968 and El halconazo in 1971. Mora used archival research and collected testimonies to demonstrate a historical continuity of state-sponsored violence in the absence of observational drawings. The interviewed subjects in *Grito*

are always seen on the streets where the protests were happening, situated within their physical context (see example in figure 2-7). During the research phase, Mora walked the streets of the demonstrations with several of his interviewees. He explains:

> With Luis Fernando, we made a tour of the streets the march followed, and he talked to me about the things he remembered. He would say, "Here we started to hear the screams and over there the hawks with their sticks appeared." [...] I depicted these details in the drawings. I tried to recreate them as faithfully as possible, thanks to his memories. Thanks to these conversations, I was making a map for my book (Mora and Stefkova).

Figure 2-7. Page from *Grito de Victoria*. Testimonial accounts of participants in El Halconazo are imposed over drawn spatial references in Mexico City.

These details, such as the hawks, sticks, screams, and the exact street corner, appear in the drawn renderings of Fernando's memories. Mora's drawings surround the provided testimonies, constantly reminding the reader that testimony must be read against physical reality. As Jeff Adams points out, one of the main objectives of documenting marginalized spaces graphically is to "[...] create a sense of specificity: that events take place in a particular way, in a defined space, and involve visually identifiable individuals" (156). In this way, these graphic reportages contest the social and political invisibility that surrounds the documented communities. The focus on spaces and faces in all the examples I discuss here serves much purpose to visualizing what seems invisible on the surface - those who occupy poor, violent, or politically contested areas.

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Barcelona, *Caminos condenados,* and *Grito de Victoria* are narratives that are structured around first-hand experience of people's lives and the locations they occupy. The examples from these graphic documentaries show comics creators as active observants of people and the material spaces they document. Authors openly use tools to remind us that the production of a documentary involves constant mediation: self-representation, the visual attention to recording instruments, explicit meditation regarding the process of documentation, development of interpersonal relationships between the documentarists and their informants, and of course, the often caricaturesque rendition of people and their surroundings. This emphasis on mediation points to several factors that affect the documentary. First, they are based mainly on secondary information gathered through interviews, which the authors

must translate from an oral to a textual medium. This process involves a montage of textual accounts and a visual rendition of the information presented. Often, the authors must visualize the memories of their informants and situations to which the documentarist does not have direct access. Secondly, mediation exists on a technical level, given that the construction of graphics involves at least a partial manipulation of information. These factors of mediation are not hidden; on the contrary, authors call attention to them to openly declare subjectivity in that is structured politically.

What is more, this visual dynamic that defines the stories compels us to explore the emotional and mental experience behind documentation as much as that of physical space. The people in these documentaries are portrayed as spatially compromised, quite deliberately, where they must negotiate various obstacles within the areas they live. The farmers in *Caminos* and their homes are pushed out of the visual space by the ever-expanding palm fields. Mora's protesting students are forcefully removed from public streets and plazas by tear gas and violent attacks. The scrap collectors in *Barcelona* are limited to working on the streets, moving around trash bins, puddles on the roads, and vigilant police. We watch them as they move their mountains of scraps from one abandoned warehouse to another, constantly attempting to create a home in spaces that were never meant to be livable. These physical impediments also represent the socioeconomic and political obstructions imposed on communities by state or corporate structures. The authors transform the cities and towns into contested spaces where the control over employment, production, or free speech repeatedly interferes with individual aspirations and community wellbeing.

As such, the comics are an apt medium for documentation of precarious social conditions, where material details of ordinary spaces – streets, farms, industrial neighborhoods – become a visual archive that informs of the political and social obstacles people face. These projects offer a different kind of realism, removed from the indexical authority of a photograph or the instantaneity of dominant media discourse. It is a realism that has much to do with the day-to-day, the essential human elements of existence where the documentary specificity draws attention to the geographic and political limitations upon the existence of ordinary people – migrants, farmers, and students.

CHAPTER 3 :

DOCUMENTING FAMILY HISTORIES

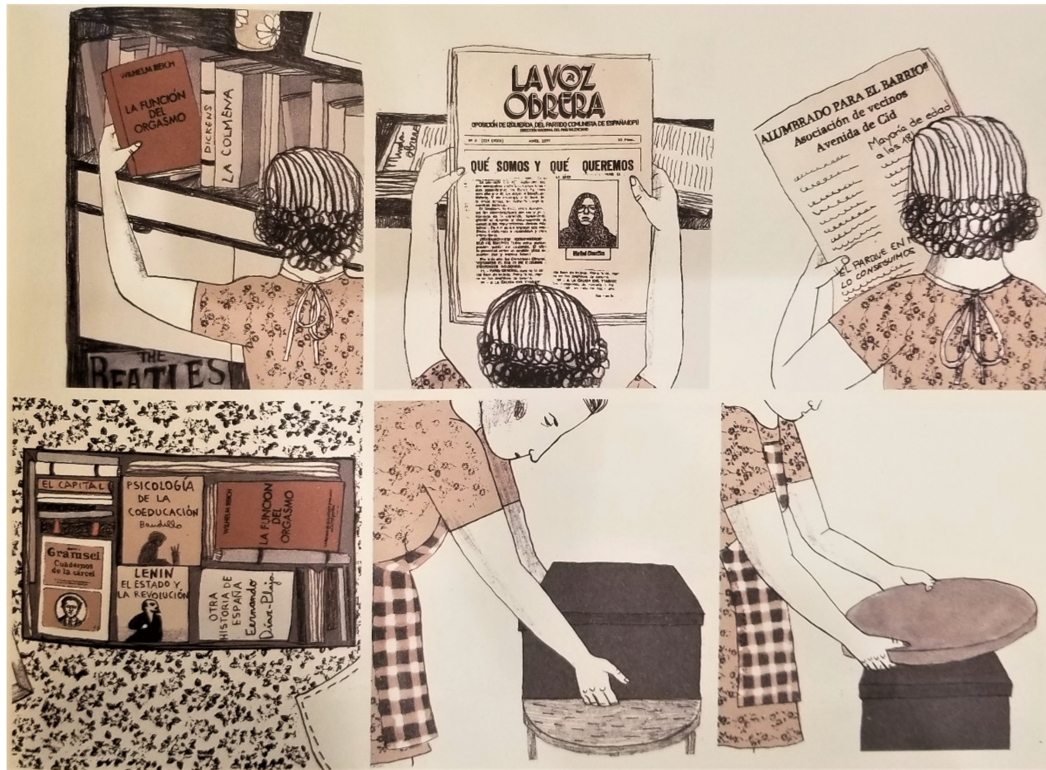

Figure 3-1. Panel from *Estamos todas bien*. Ana's grandmother Herminia encounters books and political material from the transitional period post-Franco as she cleans her house.

Chapter two dealt with graphic documentaries that align most directly with the ethnographic method, and the documentary aims to tell the story of disadvantaged communities that often do not have access to a stable media platform[1]. This chapter

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[1] Segments of this chapter appear in my article "My Grandmother Collects Memories: Gender and Remembrance in Hispanic Graphic Narratives". *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Sexuality in Comic Book Studies*. Frederick Luis Aldama, editor. Routledge, 2020. Included with permission.

focuses on examples that complicate the dynamic between the documentarist and her subject as the documentary is created without the family home, and the dichotomy of insider/outsider collapses. I draw on two recent graphic novels: *Estamos todas bien* [span. *We Are All Doing Well*] by Spanish comics author Ana Penyas and *Notas al pie* [span. *Footnotes*] by the Argentine author Nacha Vollenweider. In this case, the narrative engages with documentation of the domestic space of the documentarist where family members or intimately related persons serve as the primary testimonial sources. As such, the authors engage in observation and graphic rendition of their family house in what Michael Renov calls "domestic ethnography" (Gaines and Renov 141). However, the term 'ethnography' implies a systematic study and analysis of the subject and the inherent implication of being incorporated into a more extensive work. The 'ethnographic method' suggests a scientific approach and predetermined goal for research, implications that can hardly be translated to intimate conversations between a grandmother and her daughter, as is the case in Penyas and Vollenweider's works. To that matter, I prefer to describe this process as a second account documentary, distinguishing it from the external gaze of third account documentaries where the ethnographer/author can relate to their subjects only through common cultural background but holds no previous personal association.

Second account, in the same fashion as second generation, also implies a relationship of continuation. Second account documentarists find themselves in a challenging ethical position. They cannot serve as first account witnesses of the events they document, but their ideological approach has been immensely influenced

by their subjects through intimate relationships and shared experiences. Likewise, second account documentarists appear as heirs of the archives they access as they navigate through 'collections' within their own homes. Familiar spaces, family albums and household objects become subjects of documentation, being recorded for their value as portals of memory. I argue that documenting family histories through the medium of comics reveals a process of intimate documentation, where the private and the individual are politicized, echoing larger collective experiences.

Penyas and Vollenweider construct their documentaries by collecting and visualizing history records within their families' private spaces. Indeed, in these works, records of the past appear among household objects and everyday chores – the scene in figure 3-1 is an example of the stage where documentation occurs. In the series of panels, we watch as Herminia, one of Ana Penyas' grandmothers and her principal informants, performs her ordinary task of dusting bookshelves and organizing old boxes. The objects that pass through her hands reveal much about both the family and the national past: political publications from the communist opposition of Spain with a photograph of a family member on the cover page, books on socialist politics, philosophy, and the sexual revolution, and flyers for social organization among the local community. These objects appear as artifacts symbolizing the transitional period that marked the ending of the Franco regime and the cultural and political redefinition of Spain. In Herminia's household, they form part of a private collection – an archive Herminia cleans, organizes, and stores in boxes to be remembered at some other point. This scene captures the nature of the graphic documentaries studied here, where records are collected at home, research is

performed among old family photographs and accounts are managed by those who have lived all through it – the grandmothers of the families.

However, the main characters of these documentaries are people of no historical renown – they are ordinary housekeepers who do not believe themselves as particularly engaging narrators of history. Indeed, when Ana Penyas asked her grandmother Maruja that she would like to make a graphic novel based on her life, Maruja simply suggested that it would be better for Ana to write a love story instead. Fortunately, Penyas decided that "there are many love stories, but not many about grandmothers" and went along to create her debut graphic novel *Estamos todas bien* [*We are all doing well*]. Despite being Penyas' first full-length graphic work, it went on to win the National Comics Award in Spain in 2018, making Penyas the first woman ever to win the award in the country. The amusing conversation about the love story between Penyas and her grandmother is an apt metaphor for the problematic absence of women's stories in the historical narratives of the Hispanic world. Maruja's rejection of her own life as a worthy topic for Ana's book reflects a more significant assumption among women that their stories are not worth telling.

The late nineties saw an explosion of discourses focused on historical reconstruction in Spain and Latin America. Experiences of suppression, torture, survival, and exile among Maruja's generation have been heavily documented and discussed. Both artistic production and academic criticism somewhat obsessively dealt with memory, reconciliation, justice, and collectivity to a "saturation point", as Jo Labanyi concludes (cited in Tronsgard 267). Yet, this saturated debate seems to have ignored a large part of the conversation which deals with women's experiences

in the recent past of their countries. For a long time, the comics scene was no exception to this trend despite abundant creative production. After Franco's passing, comics proliferated, de-sanctifying the image of Franco and revealing traumatic personal experiences. The now-classic comic book *Paracuellos*, published by Carlos Giménez between 1976-2005, creates a visual memoir of the author's traumatic childhood in a state-sponsored orphanage. Likewise, narratives written by the children of survivors often found their place in graphic novels in the past two decades, especially in Spain. Seven graphic novels were published on the topic between 1997 and 2005 alone, all by male authors speaking primarily of the experiences of male family members during the Civil War and the regime[2].

Likewise, the South American dictatorships inspired an impressive although globally underestimated comics scene, especially in the Southern Cone. Argentina's tense political landscape serves as the narrative basis for what is perhaps the most famous graphic work from Latin America – Solano López and Oesterheld's *The Eternaut*. The last couple of decades saw a surge in the production of short-form comics narrating the years of the regime under the military junta and the lives of the disappeared. Many of these works, such as Gociol's *Historietas por la identidad*, have been directly sponsored by cultural and civil institutions dedicated to maintaining remembrance of life under dictatorship. Comics books of broad genres

[2] All seven graphic novels deal with a historical reconstruction of the Spanish Civil War, or the Franco regime and their authors (apart from Paco Roca) have a family connection to the protagonists of the historical narrative. Many of these works are constructed among detailed research but do not necessarily share the documentary techniques I analyze here, most notably, the direct involvement of first-first person accounts. See: Elena Galán Fajardo and José Carlos Rueda Laffond's "Those Wars Are Also My War: An Approach to Practices of Postmemory in the Contemporary Spanish Comic." *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, Apr. 2016, pp. 63–77.

have dealt with the traumas of the past focusing on the experiences of soldiers, political prisoners, and victims, almost always from the perspective of men. The language of comics has been widely employed for popular reads of historical fiction and graphic biographies of historical personalities like Allende, Pinochet, "Che" Guevara, and various left-wing politicians and activists. Nonetheless, although invaluable to historical debates, these works have mainly ignored women as graphic authors and characters.

Documenting Women's History

The documentary work of Penyas and Vollenweider make a valuable contribution to filling this gap. Coincidentally both released in 2017, both authors are women who use their art to speak on behalf of female experiences. More importantly, their work shares a great deal in narrative approach and documentary technique. Penyas and Vollenweider engage in second account documentation of their families' past, transforming their work into practices of transmitting intergenerational memory. Taking the authors' grandmothers as protagonists, the graphic novels visualize the complexities of women's experiences during critical time frames – the years of the Franco regime, the Argentine Dirty War, and the aftermath of these events, covering the period of political transition to the current moment. Despite the differences in these two political contexts, Penyas and Vollenweider find themselves facing similar social implications. Namely, both women are simultaneously distanced from the traumatic past as second and third-generation family members. Still, they have internalized the family's memories while growing up

with stories from family and community members. They both share a desire to save the family narratives from oblivion while remaining conscious of the weight these memories impose on their own identities and family structure. From a technical aspect, both authors share documentary techniques, as they inform their narrative through interviews with family members (primarily their grandmothers) and combine visual materials from the family and public archives to imagine the past (photography, documents, reproduced personal objects, domestic spaces, maps, and popular media).

There are, however, apparent differences in their social position and aesthetics. While the Civil War has been somewhat digested in Spain, the Argentine dictatorship is a much fresher wound withstanding legal proceedings. Argentina's retaliation to its past has intensified only recently, driven by the general frustration after the 2001 economic crisis and a shift in political ideology with the Kirchner presidency that promoted legal support to long-unresolved human rights cases (Fernández 193). These contextual differences translate to the ideological approaches of the comics artists I study. While Penyas' representation arises from the point of curiosity and empathy toward her family members, Vollenweider's story is heavily centered around self-definition. Consequently, *Notas al pie* is significantly more autobiographical and consciously introspective, where *Estamos todas bien* focuses mainly on the stories of Penyas' grandmothers, who are the principal protagonists. In either case, the narrative tone in both instances is heavily influenced by the intimate approach of the documentarists to their subjects and spaces. As

Renov rightfully points out, domestic ethnography always carries an autobiographical aspect serving as a vehicle for self-examination (141).

The aspect that both graphic novels share and inspire my discussion is the peculiar female intergenerational memory transfer. The narratives offer a gender-focused lens toward past events in which gender has not been considered a relevant element of approaching history. Specifically, the conversation around human rights in the periods of state terror in Spain and Argentina has rarely considered violence based on gender and other differences. Coping with a traumatic national past defined by overwhelming cases of torture, imprisonments and execution have left specifics such as gender to seem irrelevant. However, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer point out that precisely during times of extreme aggression (they use the Holocaust as a case point), conversations about gender are vital. The process of dehumanization of individuals, as they argue, inherently involves degendering (355). In other words, tactics of civil suppression common within both historical contexts that function through the erasure of the self inherently work through the elimination of all individual characteristics, including gender. Within this context, Vollenweider and Penyas' narratives raise questions about the importance of gender in the *past*, during the time of state oppression, and *now*, in the way, we read these experiences. As such, gender-centered readings of these events constitute "at the very least, compensatory, reparative acts" (Hirsch and Spitzer 357). I highlight how the documentary work of Ana Penyas and Nacha Vollenweider through the recording of female experiences serves as "tactics of memory" that enable the documentary to challenge the political and historical erasures of female subjects (Hemmings 75).

Furthermore, disregarding gender within these contexts illustrates a prioritization of experiences in the public sphere within the parameters of recovering historical memory. Regarding postmemory in the contemporary Spanish art, Elena Galán Fajardo and José Carlos Rueda Laffond conclude that the "absence of female narrators helps perpetuate conventions adopted by traditional historiography regarding military events, in which women are displaced from the position of subjects who create discourses, towards the position of the enunciated (or omitted) object" (75). Penyas and Vollenweider build their documentaries around the testimonies of those whose experiences might be deemed of secondary importance. In contrast to the plentitude of accounts from imprisoned, tortured and threatened subjects, these stories focus on domestic and shared experiences and visualize the struggle of everyday survival. The personal life stories of these women offer a glimpse into the seemingly mundane routines of daily life, which nonetheless have much to tell about shared experiences with political connotations. The graphic novels are rich in attention to everyday bodies, objects, and conversations, where, as Hillary Chute observes, the "visualization of the ongoing procedure of self and subjectivity constructs' ordinary' experiences as relevant and political" (*Graphic Women* 140). I propose a focused reading of these 'mundane' and 'ordinary' things that constitute a rich personal archive in the graphic documentaries. I seek to explore the ways in which the domestic sphere can function as a space for the gendered and tangible transfer of memory. Therefore, this chapter expands the definition of a 'documentary' and 'documentation' to include a visual record composed of intimate conversations, private spaces, and personal objects. My

analysis is guided by the conjunction between gender, remembrance, and domestic objects of memory.

Drawing Inherited Memories

Second account documentaries, just like the rest of the documentaries I study, engage with multiple levels of remembrance where memory is constantly curated: selected, described, reinterpreted, and reconstructed by multiple subjects. The narrative reveals a process of witnessing that is deliberate rather than spontaneous and freely available. The graphic novels contest the assumption that testifying is a fluid process and demonstrate that instead, it is an act that "involves reflection, mediation, and much conscious effort" (Abrams and Kacandes 19). The 'truth' about past events is continuously negotiated by competing sources of information that can structurally problematize the authority of the documentarist. On the one hand, the grandmothers appear as the primary sources of historical information as first-account witnesses. Much of the dialogue-based communication in the graphic novels comes from transcripts of interviews and informal conversations between the older women and the documentarists, their granddaughters. On their own part, the authors, as second-generation witnesses, participate in curation of inherited memories influenced by their own understanding of both national and family history. They engage with what Marianne Hirsch has termed 'postmemory': "the *relationship* that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they

grew up" ("The Generation" 106, my emphasis)[3]. What draws me to Hirsch's understanding of postmemory is her emphasis on relationships, signaling the constantly evolving state of this type of remembrance and turning away from the view of memory as fixed and unchanging. The graphic novels cannot represent Penyas and Vollenweider's remembrance of their families' past, provided that generations separate them from the historical events they attempt to portray. Their documentary work is instead based on interactions with historical actors and archives in the present.

The narrative is constructed upon a sequence of moments of encounters where gender becomes an important component. The relationships between the documentarists and their subject are based on highly affectionate bonds between women. The interviews that compose the testimonial material are elaborated in proximity that implies intimacy, both in the interview register and the physical proximity of the interlocutors. Unlike the structured and professional interviews that I presented as examples in chapter 1, in this case we frequently view the women sitting closely together in the privacy of their homes. For example, in *Estamos todas bien* Penyas frequently includes sequences of panels where she speaks long hours on the phone with her grandmothers. Stories of the past are exchanged between family gossip, questions on wellbeing, and discussions on what should be the day's lunch.

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[3] Various scholars have discussed similar concepts in attempt to look at the broader concept of secondary memory: "absent memory" (Fine 1988), "inherited memory," "belated memory," "prosthetic memory" (Lury 1998, Landsberg 2004), "mémoire trouée" (Raczymow 1994), "mémoire des cendres" (Fresco 1984), "vicarious witnessing" (Zeitlin 1998), "received history" (Young 1997). I use Hirsch's "postmemory" due to the term's implication of memory curation and transfer, as well as for its link with cultural productions, such as comics and photography. When Hirsch first introduced "postmemory" she used Spiegelman's *Maus* as a case-point.

Figure 3-2 captures a moment where these informal interviews occur – on the living room sofa – where we see Ana and Maruja hold hands affectionately as Maruja recalls her youth. Penyas segments the page strategically, and instead of showing their whole bodies, the panels focus on body parts that demonstrate closeness: holding hands, household slippers, matching clothing, etc. These images stand as a stark contrast to one of the most popular examples of second account documentation – Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, where father and son sit together to discuss the father's experiences from the Holocaust. Their relationship is often conflictive as son and father struggle to achieve a shared interpretation of the events, resulting in Art drawing "against his father's verbal narration, turning what he calls the 'cognitive dissonance' between the two of them into representational collision (The Shadow 209). Spiegelman often offers a conflictive narration to his father's testimony, unable to establish an empathetic representation of his subject.

Figure 3-2. Panel from *Estamos todas bien*. Ana interviews Maruja in her apartment. The panels zoom-in on details of bodily postures and intimate contact.

On the contrary, what we see in Penyas's work are fragments of moments of affection. The zoomed-in fragments in figure 3-2 showcase a positive recollection of the artist's conversation with her grandmother. The corporal interactions between the women, such as holding hands and wearing matching clothing, implies emotional agreement and cooperation. Similarly, Vollenweider's work includes frequent scenes of herself spending time with her grandmother, chatting, relaxing in the family garden, or rearranging rooms in the house. In an email correspondence, Vollenweider revealed that the documentary process was simultaneously deliberate and an organic process. Regarding accounts from family members, she commented: "What I've included here would be interviews in any formal documentary, but I cannot really call them that. A great part of my personality was constituted by having

been born within that family nucleus. I grew up with those stories and only made a selection" (Conversación). Penyas and Vollenweider appear as what Ann Cvetkovich has called a "sympathetic witness", seeking identification with their documented subjects (Drawing the Archive 113). Rather than prioritizing objectivity in their ethnographic work, the documentarists seek an empathetic representation of their subjects, entangling emotional accuracy with historical authenticity.

The documentary narrative relies on constant collaboration between the narrators and the subjects whose lives they document, and the stories are both oral as much as they are material. The written dialogues that contain the grandmothers' testimonials are delivered through a careful process of selection. They appear on the page of the comic, competing with the granddaughters' voice-over narrations and visual interpretations. What the reader observes on the page is a premeditated 'zoom-in' on visual and linguistic segments. Additionally, the narratives are surrounded by material objects, both within and outside of the domestic space. Newspaper clippings, posters, TV snapshots, and advertisements fill in the gaps of personal recollections. The multimodal nature of comics, in this case, makes us aware that the construction of memory is never a solitary or single-voiced work but "an appropriation and re-signification of elements of the narration of others" (Fernández 212). The memories of the generation of postmemory are a result of a multitude of voices and images. Penyas and Vollenweider demonstrate that family knowledge does not exist in isolation, and it is constantly mediated by public discourses and images.

The documentary in this case is further complicated by the inability to access appropriate linguistic translation of the subject's experiences. The grandmother's testimonies are often fragmented and incomplete due to personal obstacles, such as Maruja's advanced Parkinson's disease or self-censure because of long periods of state control in the case of Nacha's family. As Amy Kaminsky observes regarding the case of Argentina, "not until the basic structures of society can once again be trusted might the victim of collective trauma safely speak" (108). In these cases, the documentarist must research beyond the domestic space and inform their work by external archives to create a complete picture. These materials form a prosthetic memory that serves as "a call to others to take on a memory that was never fully developed, or that was cut off from consciousness by official silence during the time of state terror and unfounded fears of increased instability afterwards" (Kaminsky 112). In many cases, the narrative opts to represent the self-assumed mutism of the witnesses. Due to the personal and collective obstacles, the stories told by first-account witnesses are often told in fragmented parts, and the stories have no clear beginning or end. Marianne Hirsch explains that postmemory emerges in the face of mutism: "These 'not memories' communicated in 'flashes of imagery' and 'broken refrains,' transmitted through 'the language of the body,' are precisely the stuff of *postmemory*" ("The Generation" 109, emphasis in original).

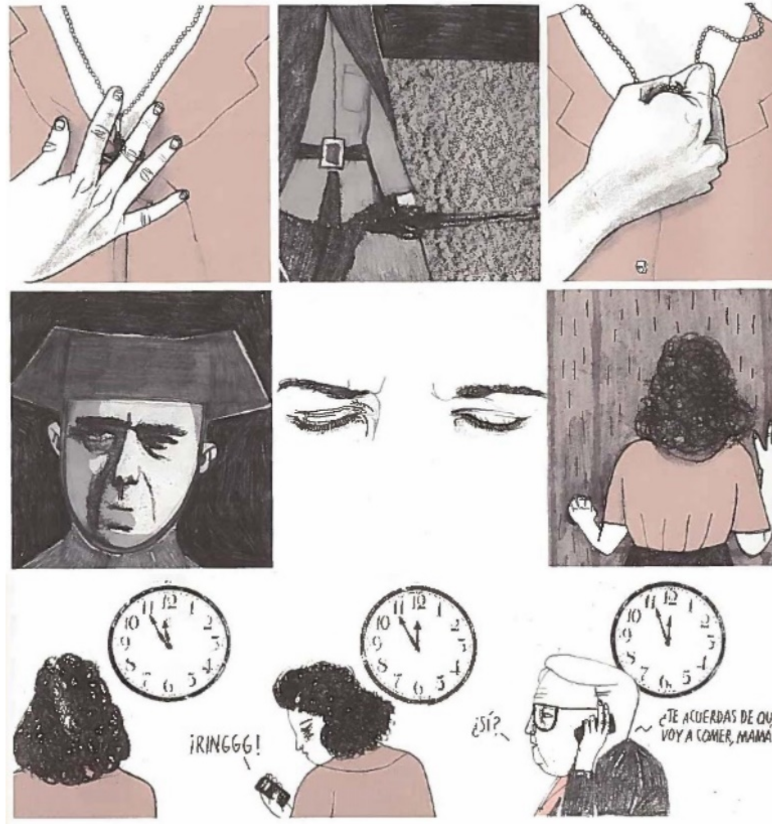

Figure 3-3. Panel from *Estamos todas bien*. Maruja's memory flashes from the Franco regime. The scene is interrupted by a moment in the present when Maruja's son calls her cellphone.

The organization of graphic narratives by fragments and gutters is relevant for presenting stories of trauma and fragmented narratives. The 'flashes of imagery' that Hirsch speaks of translate to the boxed visual frames typical of the comics medium, where a verbal explanation is often unnecessary or impossible to produce. Frequently, the present is interrupted by 'flashes' of past fears, such as a moment where we see Maruja is transported back in time to her home village in 1946, no more than seven years after the ending of the civil war. The visuals narrate the voiceless memories of Maruja's interaction with soldiers at a bar where she used to work in her younger days. The readers are given a verbal clue that it is midnight, as

she tells her granddaughter: "Me daba asco el bar... tenía que esperar a mi tía, que volvía a las doce de la noche [The bar disgusted me... I had to wait for my aunt, who didn't use to return until midnight]". While closing the bar, she spots soldiers approaching. In figure 3-3 we see Maruja experiencing fear of uncertainty; she holds on to her crucifix necklace and prays. A ring of a cellphone transports her back to the present and the traumatic scene from Franco's time ends with a mundane conversation: "¿Sí? - ¿Te acuerdas de que voy a comer, mama? [Yes? – Remember that I'm coming over for lunch, mom?]". The clock on the wall now transforms midnight into noon, time for lunch in her apartment in Madrid. The sequence reveals that what seems like a few minutes on the wall clock is actually the span of decades in Maruja's mind. In later pages, Maruja is seen still wearing the necklace with the crucifix – a personal remnant from that time and likely an object that frequently transports her to the past.

The empty space between the panels, the gutter, points to a fracture of the temporal sequence, and the readers must perceive Maruja's flashback by mentally filling the gaps using what Scott McCloud calls "the closure" (63). The gutter between the fragmented time instances "hints at the traumatic in what is left out, lost, repressed, or silenced" (Ghiggia 2). The comics panels not only translate the fragmentary nature of Maruja's memory but also signal Penyas' incapacity to fully capture her grandmother's experience. She cannot resolve the story at the bar, possibly because she cannot access this information as Maruja cannot remember it. Instead, we see not the presentation of a complete story from the past but a fragment of emotion. Hillary Chute explains that the ambiguous space of the gutter signals

erasure: "comics manifests material frames— and the *absences* between them. It thereby literalizes on the page the work of framing and making, and also what framing *excludes*" (*Disaster Drawn* 17, my emphasis). What is excluded in these frames is the inability to move past accumulated fear – the scene with the soldiers appears after other customers have verbally harassed Maruja at the bar in what seems to have been part of her everyday existence. Seventy years later, the vulnerability of a young and pretty girl in a conservative village still haunts Maruja. Taking advantage of the spatial organization on the graphic page, Penyas forces the past and the present to share the same space and capture Maruja's own frequent lost sense of time. The reader can literally 'see' these temporal interruptions, pointing to the fact that past traumas often return to torment Maruja in her older age.

Drawing an Archive of Feelings

Beyond their capacity to capture the 'unspeakable' of trauma, the visual elements also show the process through which history is transmitted extralinguistically using material archives. The testimonies are supplemented by objects, gestures, and spaces that are meaningful due to their emotional value. Penyas and Vollenweider as documentarists function within the spaces of their family homes, turning the house into a sort of archival collection. They learn as much from the interviews they conduct as nonverbal cues and the objects surrounding them. I am particularly intrigued by what Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer have termed "points of memory" – referring to images, objects and memorabilia that serve as "points of intersection between past and present, memory and postmemory, personal remembrance and

cultural recall" (358). Direct access to these points is what makes the family a privileged space for the transfer of memory. The first time Nacha introduces her grandmother in the story, we observe her reading, surrounded by numerous framed photos on the walls and furniture covered in memorabilia. The grandmother's recount of the past is performed through a 'tour' of the family house, where Nacha and her grandmother pause to converse over people in photographs and objects with some connection with the past.

Figure 3-4. Panel from *Notas al pie*. A bureau in Nacha's family home displays the grandmother's collection of mementos, combining family and national events.

This traversal of time periods is done literally by traversing the home, which begins with the bureau in figure 3-4. The documentarist, Nacha, labels each of the

items explaining: “Mi abuela es una gran coleccionadora de recuerdos. Cada objeto en su casa cuenta una historia. [My grandmother is a big collector of mementos. Every object in her house tells a story]”. The linguistic ambiguity of the word 'recuerdos' in Spanish, meaning either 'mementos / memorabilia' or 'memories', points to the twofold significance of the objects in the house. Nacha's grandmother is a collector of memories – a curator who intentionally selects, displays, and maintains an exhibit of the family's past. Her collection contains mementos that carry memories of family experiences, as well as national events. The left corner of the bureau displays a statue of the Virgin Mary, accompanied by a drawing of the tomb of Eva Perón and a photograph of Néstor Kirchner's visit to their hometown. Perón was Argentina's first lady between 1946-1952, popular for charity programs and speaking on behalf of labor rights and women's suffrage[4]. Kirchner served as president (2003-2007) and was instrumental in abolishing pardoning laws for the Dirty War military criminals, which led to new trials[5]. Also, his administration established a strong bond with the human-rights organization Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, an institution with which Nacha's grandmother has a close relationship. The right side of the bureau holds a set of mate gourds used by the family, bottles

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[4] Eva’s husband, Juan Perón, was strongly supported middle class and got elected three times as president. His presidency alongside Eva’s popular programs was the start of the political movement *peronismo*. Over time *peronismo* has grown to have a variety of social and political implications, although the insistence on popular labor politics remains and was the rhetoric promoted by the Kirchner presidencies until 2015. On the rhetoric of the ‘politics for the poor’, see: Javier Auyero’s *La política de los pobres. Las prácticas clientelistas del peronismo* (Manantial 2001).

[5] It is still disputable to what degree Kirchner’s law reforms helped the legal resolution of dictatorships crimes, but they are valued as symbolical acts to recognizing victims and their families.

from trips with Nacha's belated grandfather, and photographs of Ignacio, Nacha's uncle and grandmother's first son, who became one of the 30,000 disappeared persons during the military regime.

Through this 'house tour,' the reader learns that the grandmother was one of the early members of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and spent years searching for her son. Thus, the collection reveals the ideological and political orientation of the grandmother, justified by her connection to the Dirty War. The collection of objects on the bureau blur the individual and the collective lines, as photographs of family members and political figures occupy the same shelf. For Nacha's grandmother, remembering personal history and displaying it has much to do with the political past that defined contemporary Argentina. As Hillary Chute explains, graphic narrative establishes an "*idiom of witness*, a manner of testifying that sets a visual language in motion with and against the verbal in order to embody individual and collective experience, to put contingent selves and histories into form" (*Graphic Women* 3, emphasis in original). As evident from this example, the historical and the political are intertwined with the domestic – a process that puts pressure on the conventional form of the archive, transforming mundane objects into relics of collective remembrance. Traumatic experiences, in this case, the loss of family members and living in constant fear, creates what Ann Cvetkovich has called an "archive of feelings". She explains: "the memory of trauma is embedded not just in narrative but in material artifacts, which can range from photographs to objects whose relation to trauma might seem arbitrary but for the fact that they are invested with emotional, and even sentimental, value" (Cvetkovich 17).

Furthermore, the points of memory in this archive of feelings are what challenges the notion of historical narrative as linear and progressive. They embed the clash of temporalities as they testify to the presence of people and events in the past, and yet, they still physically occupy space in the present. Hirsch and Spitzer explain that the term' points of memory' "is both spatial—such as a point on a map—and temporal—a moment in time" (358). The concept is easily translated through the medium of comics considering that time is determined spatially – the sequence of frames signals the passing of time. Thus, the points of memory rupture the continuity of the present and serve as a portal to the past. In fact, within the household, objects seem to outlive the people who used them frequently. Penyas consciously employs these points as a narrative strategy to transport her readers back– and– forth between her grandmother's youth and the present. The door to the past is always a simple object: a necklace, a saucepan, a shopping bag. For example, the reader can observe that elderly Maruja still wears the crucifix she holds in her palm in figure 3-2 while fearing Francoist soldiers. In a similar scene from Maruja's youth, we observe her younger self learning to cook lentils to gain 'prestige' with her new husband and sister-in-law, only to be reprimanded by her adult son in the following frames for burning her hands with, precisely, the same saucepan of hot lentil soup. These objects demonstrate that, regardless of the many changes in Maruja's life, many of her relationships have remained constant. Likewise, Vollenweider uses the family home as a map through which the past can be navigated. As she and her grandmother traverse the house, the narrative is constantly interrupted by flashbacks of events that took place decades earlier.

Figure 3-5. Panel from *Notas al pie*. The jackets of the disappeared Ignacio and his mother still hang by the door 40 years later after his disappearance.

What is more, the objects displayed embody the absence of family members who are no longer living. Nacha passes by two jackets hanging in the hallway, as illustrated in figure 3-5. The textual narration explains that one of the jackets was left behind by her uncle Ignacio, who forgot to put it on the very night he was kidnapped – the jacket was preserved by Ignacio's mother and has remained in its place by the door for the past forty years. The other jacket belongs to Nacha's grandmother, who used to wear it during her trips to Buenos Aires to look for her disappeared son and participate in the protest with the rest of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Ignacio's jacket, which will never be worn by him again, magnifies the absence of his body in his mother's house. The jackets, hanging side by side,

prove that Ignacio and his mother occupied the same space. As Nacha and her grandmother stand in front of the jackets, the reader is transported to the past multiple times to 'witness' Ignacio's disappearance and his mother's protests in Buenos Aires. What these panels suggest is that within the household, objects seem to frequently outlive the people who used them and stand in their place to tell the stories of their lives.

As these examples demonstrate, the points of memory, recreated on the page of the comic, serve as points where different temporalities converge. Penyas herself explains: "When we talk about Francoism, it is always done in the past tense. I wanted to link it with the present, with the heritage that is still in our homes" (Las abuelas de). Gender is a crucial element in forming this heritage, as women in their role of homemakers are its primary keepers. These objects situate the reader in space and time while simultaneously revealing an emotional relationship with the shared past. History is recounted through affective bonds the witnesses establish with their own archive: a mother who refuses to dispose of her son's clothing, the wife and grandmother who refuses to stop cooking even when motor functions fail her. The archive of feelings gives value to personal objects and spaces, transforming them into historical material that deserves to be recorded, albeit graphically, and interpreted within the documentary.

Drawing the Family Album

Family photographs are a special kind of points of memory due to their ambiguous position as both an intimate possession and its status as a conventional

historical document. Photography's power comes from its indexical nature, its seemingly direct and unmediated relationship to reality. In his influential *Camera Lucida*, Barthes states: "every photograph is a certificate of presence" (87). No other point of memory in the house has such power as photography to testify that something or someone had a physical presence. The camera-produced image has enjoyed a privileged status as a truthful, almost scientific way of capturing reality. Yet this long-held conception is questioned in graphic narratives, where the photograph is organized in a carefully preserved family album, a sequence with a story – much like the structure of comics. Both Penyas and Vollenweider include photographs as drawn copies from their family albums, where the overt human touch of the drawing challenges the idea of photography as unmediated and 'objective'. Of course, the documentary nature of photography helps the authors to establish authenticity in their narrative and demonstrate that these people and events are, in fact, real. The use of photography as paratext is commonly employed in Hispanic graphic narratives of postmemory, where the faded sepia tones of older photographs add to the feeling of a historical record and transport the reader to a time before the digital image (Tronsgard, De la Fuente Soler). However, as Nancy Pedri points out, photography in comics not only fulfils a documentary function that corroborates the facts in the drawn story (2). Instead, photographs cooperate with other visual and textual elements to advance the storytelling. The drawn reproductions of photographs encompass subjectivity as they draw attention to the hand that drew them and the hand that selected them – in this case, the story around these photographs is narrated twice. The reader is aware that these photographs are

reproduced as stand-alone objects but things that are being looked at. Photographs are always associated with a subject that interacts with them: the hand of a woman holding an album, or the hand of another cleaning a framed portrait on the wall.

Figure 3-6. Panel from *Notas al pie*. A photograph of Ignacio hangs above a public street and catches the attention of Nacha and her girlfriend.

An example from Vollenweider's story points out photographic reproductions as sites of remembrance. An intriguing reproduction that reemerges continuously throughout the narrative is the photograph of Nacha's disappeared uncle, Ignacio.

Although his disappearance took place several years before Nacha was born, the uncle's presence is frequently manifested through the numerous framed photographs his mother keeps throughout the family home, along with Ignacio's personal belongings – his furniture, books, and clothing. Ironically, while maintaining a record of his existence, the uncle's photo is a constant reminder of his absence. Hirsch explains this duality: "The referent is both present (implied in the photograph) and absent (it has been there but is not here now). The referent haunts the picture like a ghost: it is a revenant, a return of the lost and dead other" (Hirsch 5). What is more, Nacha has a peculiar connection to her uncle as she inherited his name after his disappearance (Nacha is short for Ignacia). The ghost from the photo still haunts Nacha's life; he is someone she has never met but whose name she carries and whose jacket still hangs by the entrance door.

What is more, Ignacio's ghost is not contained within the family home and appears within spaces of historical importance nationally, the memorial sites of the dictatorship. In a scene where Nacha walks through her hometown with her girlfriend, they spot a memorial site where portraits of the disappeared hang above the street. Figure 3-6 is part of a sequence where we observe a scene where Nacha visits her hometown and prepares for a hike together with her girlfriend, initially a completely irrelevant scene to the family's past. In the panel below, the women interrupt their walk to look at photographed portraits of Argentina's disappeared. The photographs hang above a street in the old part of the town and Nacha spots once again the face of her uncle. The reader can recognize the same photographed subject from an earlier photograph in the house while Nacha interviewed her

grandmother. Ignacio's specter interrupts the present by appearing on the street through his portrait. Nacha's interest in her uncle's history is driven by curiosity and a feeling of family pride. She stops the walk to narrate Ignacio's story to her companion, by which, of course, she recounts the events of his life as she has learned them from other family members. In surrounding panels, this interest in the uncle's life grown more personal for her Nacha as she attempts to define her own identity against his absence. An earlier scene in the story portrays a government official who explains that a person cannot be given any legal status if their death is not confirmed: "Pero mientras sea desaparecido, no puede tener ningún tratamiento especial. Es una incógnita. No tiene entidad. No está. [But while he is missing, he cannot have any special treatment. He is unknown. Has no entity. Doesn't exist.]". The government official is portrayed as facing the reader, and in the moment of drawing, he would be facing the author, Nacha herself.

Then, Vollenweider's drawings are a conscious statement of the burden of the past – she carries the name, and by extension the identity, of someone who does not exist physically or legally. Regarding the psychological burden of postmemory Hirsch explains: "To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation" ("The Generation" 107). Thus, by looking at Ignacio's photographs, Nacha is looking for information and a continuation between the family's past and the present in which she lives. The pictures are a testament to Ignacio's existence and, by extension, her own. She attempts to define her present identity in the face of

the inherited memories from her family's past. When asked what drove her to research the history of her family members, Vollenweider herself explained: "I draw to inquire into questions such as: who I am, where I come from, why I am here in this present, what it means to be – today" (Conversación).

Figure 3-7. Panel from *Estamos todas bien*. The grandmother Herminia uses the photo album to reveal unpleasant sexual experiences for women in her generation.

Moreover, photographs as points of memory can also offer a positive opportunity for women to appropriate history. Narrating photography through graphic rendition can rewrite stories and give context beyond the scope of the photograph. Graphic narratives can revise historical images by giving them fluidity on the page as they are literally 'redrawn' to reimagine and re-mediate the historical (Cutter and Schlund-Vials 6). Penyas frequently portrays herself sitting with her grandmother Herminia as they reminiscence on the past on the kitchen table and list it through family albums. They are seen in the panels as they hold the albums and point at photographed subjects. In doing so, their hands and fingers are imposed on top of the photographs to remind the reader that the images we see are subjected to interpretation; they are hand-selected and presented with an active narrator. Through these albums, we learn how the relationship between images and words puts into motion the transference of knowledge from one generation to another.

Herminia points at a picture of her own grandmother, explaining: “Mi abuela era quien me contaba los cuentos, esos que luego te contaba yo a ti, cuando eras pequeña. [My grandmother was the one who used to tell me the [family] stories, the ones I would then tell you, when you were little]". Gender becomes an essential element in the continuation of history, as this peculiar transference is communicated only between the women of the family.

Additionally, the photographs serve to point to the often-bitter experiences of women, those that remained hidden behind societal taboos for generations. In figure 3-7 we see a scene where the conversation surrounding the Civil War and living under a regime with traditional turns to an important aspect that defined Herminia's generation of women. Ana asks her grandmother about the sexual experience of women during her youth. Herminia explains that women would engage in intercourse only to satisfy their men, never experiencing sexual pleasure. Two photographs ironically surround her explanation: on the right, a handwritten romantic message captioning a portrait of a handsome young man, and on the left, a wedding photograph of a smiling bride and her friends. Herminia's contextualization of the images points to the fact that love and sex had a different meaning in traditionalist Spain. It certainly explains that the smiling bride in the photograph will not keep her smile on her first wedding night. The photographs and Herminia's narrative surrounding their hidden meanings contribute to paint a different aspect of history, one that points to the relationship between political ideology on a national level and the consequences for how ordinary women were expected to live. Photographs are assigned new meaning on the page, revealing female experiences

hidden behind staged smiles and romantic portraits. The image-text interplay in such cases questions the perception of the archive as fixed and unchanging, giving way to stories that have been long disregarded.

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The examples I have discussed here illustrate a unique intergenerational transfer of memory where women, both as witnesses and documentarists, record a highly gendered version of history. The ongoing process of curation evident in graphic storytelling is precisely the work of a documentary, where 'raw material' is selected and arranged into a sequence to provide a coherent narrative. Documentary theorists Phillip Rosen insists on the sequence as a crucial element of the documentary ethos: "This value lies in the great assistance sequenciation provides for centralizing and restricting meanings derived from the points at which actual contact with the real is asserted—the realm of the document" (74). Penyas and Vollenweider, as members of the generation of postmemory, draw from a multitude of fragmented and often sentimentally overwhelming archives. Through graphic records, they construct a historical puzzle that contains pieces of memory communicated by verbal testimonies, nonverbal cues, family spaces and objects, and mediated archives. Robyn Warhol suggests that through drawing, autobiographical narratives reappropriate the archive in an attempt to create a more coherent narrative of life (5-6). The syntax of the comics medium, which depends on the spatial organization on the page, allows for an organization: "through sorting memories, ordering, understanding, the comics page allows for organization, not just of space but also mind" (The Shadow 203).

Telling stories through drawing brings attention to witnessing and subjectivity due to the inherent relationship between drawing and looking. Art critic John Berger explains drawing is a process that depends on a sum of experiences, multiple views, and moments of sight. The many fragmented boxes on the graphic narrative page collaborate to form a totality and express a more abstract and complete view of history. The unapologetically subjective glances and narration operate intimately in comics. Testimonies and objects in the medium are always linked to a speaker who carries a perspective, time, and origin. As Rachel Rys explains, language in comics always has an associated voice, "words emanate from a speaker and exist in time" (9). These voices carry identities paired with hand-made drawings and handwriting to redefine what it means to record and document history. The significance of the record Penyas and Vollenweider collect lies precisely in its subjectivity and the way they draw attention to intimate relationships within the family home. They give meaning to the 'ordinary' and the 'mundane', where an archive of personal objects can offer alternative modes of knowledge.

In this way, the family home becomes a museum of memory where women serve as the curators of an archive that carries affective value. The reader has access to a double-mediated window of history: on a fundamental level through the pieces of history the older generation of women presents. On a secondary level, through the archive, the younger women create graphically. Second account graphic documentaries can stand in opposition to institutionalized archives, offering a rightful status for the ordinary individuals and families as witnesses of history and transforming domestic and intimate places into historically valuable collections.

These graphic narratives invite readers to revisit historical sites through the lens of gender and challenge the way history is told and documented within the home. The next chapter expands on the concept of these affective archives and turns to cases of autobiographic documentaries, where the tensions between personal experiences, drawing from memory recollection, and the archive further complicate the definition of documentary.

CHAPTER 4 :

DOCUMENTARY AUTOGRAPHY

Figure 4-1. Left: A panel from *Historias clandestinas*. A drawn reproduction of a photograph of President Allende on inauguration day.

Figure 4-2. Right: Salvador Allende gives his inaugural address as president of Chile in 1970. Image courtesy of the Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional, Chile.

In the chapters so far, I offered a close reading of graphic documentaries across cultural contexts that illustrate the power of graphic storytelling to reframe, symbolically and structurally, long-held narratives surrounding social events of national signification. The analysis so far has privileged graphic works where the authors represent someone else's story – the documentary is created on behalf of communities and individuals who offer their testimony. While the tension between the personal and the collective, and hence, the domestic and the public, is present in every documentary I have discussed so far, it appears most pronounced in works that narrate the personal experiences of their authors. This chapter is concerned with

autobiographies presented through the comics form, termed by scholars and fans as graphic memoirs, graphic autobiographies, or simply autographies – terms I use interchangeably.

The prologue of the graphic novel *Historias clandestinas* (*Hidden* Memories) by Chilean siblings Sol and Ariel Rojas Lizana begins with a drawn reproduction of a historic photograph (see figure 4-1). The panel that serves as a prologue is a minimalist portrayal of a man in front of a blurry crowd. Akin to a Linoleum block print, the drawing style uses textured pencil lines to create shadows and accents. It successfully captures the feeling of something dated and historical but purposefully omits a photographic resemblance to the historical moment it represents. Nonetheless, the under caption of the frame establishes the relation to a specific social and political context in Chilean history. Namely, the caption "La Unidad Popular" that accompanies the portrait has a dual role on the page, serving both as the prologue title to the graphic novel and a reference to the left-wing political alliance that supported the first democratically elected socialist leader in Latin America. Readers familiar with modern Chilean history will undoubtedly recognize the figure drawn as President Salvador Allende. He was photographed on his inauguration day in November of 1970 as thousands gathered in front of La Moneda Palace (see figure 4-2).

By opting to redraw a photograph of a monumental historical event, the authors effectively position the reader with a specific timeframe. This drawing, of course, performs a different role than the photograph of Allende's election. The drawing obscures many details of the event, such as the details of the crowd and the

surrounding architecture. Instead, it focuses on the iconic elements of the photograph. The effectiveness of a drawn image as an icon functions via the principle of what comics theoretician Scott McCloud has explained as 'amplification through simplification.' McCloud elaborates: "When we abstract an image through cartooning, we're not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential 'meaning,' an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't" (30). The drawn figure of Allende stands as a symbolic representation of the political movement, and unlike the original photograph, it already contains an implicit political commentary. Perhaps most strikingly, we observe Allende wearing a presidential sash on his shoulder, absent in the photograph. This creative addition draws attention to the symbolic effect of Rojas Lizana's representation, hinting at an idealized outlook toward Allende's figure and his legacy. Unlike the photograph, which simply captures Allende's inauguration without further comment, the drawing reveals the political orientation of its authors, effortlessly showing that this is a story of those who supported Allende and his legacy. More importantly, this simple drawing at the very front of the story wordlessly declares an entire subjective approach: this is *our* redrawing of history. In contrast to the photograph, the drawing transparently carries the signature of its authors.

This first panel from the prologue of *Memorias clandestinas* encompasses many of the ideas behind this chapter surrounding the graphic rendering of turning points in national history through a personal narrative. This chapter engages autobiographies that assume a documentary approach to recount the lived

experiences of their authors and offer a first-account perspective on life amid political crises. The analysis is grounded by two autographies, *Historias clandestinas*, a collaborative work between the Chilean siblings Sol and Ariel Rojas Lizana and *La pirámide cuarteada. Evocaciones del 68* (*Cracked Pyramid: Remembering the 68*) by Mexican comics author Luis Fernando[1]. Although the works arise from two entirely different political and cultural contexts, they share stylistic and narrative approaches. Specifically, both works engage with the adult memories of childhood experiences during times of social upheaval. While the Rojas Lizana siblings narrate their childhood memories during the fall of socialist President Allende and the years of Pinochet regime, Luis Fernando focuses on his adolescent experiences in Mexico City, during the student movement of 1968 and its violent culmination with the Tlatelolco massacre at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. Guided by these two graphic documentaries, this chapter fundamentally explores the *how* and *why* behind documenting one's life through the medium of comics. I propose a critical reading of these autographies as 'mediated memories' where the historical, the material, and the cognitive merge to document the personal against the national.

[1] The English version of *Hidden Memories* exists as a forthcoming draft for publication. I am using the title that the authors and publishers have already chosen. The drawings in the book are produced mostly by Ariel, whereas the textual narration was prepared mostly by Sol, but there was an overlap in these roles frequently.

Cracked Pyramid exists only in its original Spanish version, and I am using this translation of the title as agreed with the author Luis Fernando. For brevity, henceforth I shall refer to these works as *Historias* (for *Historias clandestinas*) and *Pirámide* (for *La pirámide cuarteada*. *Evocacciones del 68*).

Documenting Childhood Memories

Despite the differences in national and political context, *Historias* and *Pirámide* assume a similar approach to narrating history. Both narratives take a nostalgic sentiment toward the past, accentuated by the drawing style and coloring hue prominent throughout the pages – the stark black and white in *Historias* and a dominant sepia in *Pirámide*. The protagonists assume a young voice with the typical preoccupations like childhood games, family events, friendships, school, and first romantic encounters. Yet, the innocent narrative quickly turns disturbing as political tensions are normalized within a story of growing up. The protagonists of *Historias*, Ariel and Sol, live in a clandestine safe house for political exiles under Pinochet's dictatorship. For many years their family hosts political dissidents, such as Andrés Pascal Allende, the former president's nephew, and Ernesto, principal leader of the Revolutionary Left Movement (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria, MIR), a left-wing political and urban guerrilla organization. Sol and Ariel become active witnesses of the Chilean resistance and actively participate in the creation of clandestine propaganda.

Similarly, Fernando's unnamed adolescent protagonist unexpectedly gets involved in the Mexican Student Movement of 1968 (Movimiento Estudiantil) through friendships at his art school. He illustrates flyers and posters for the movement, participates in several student protests against the advice of his family, and eventually discovers the violent suppression at Tlatelolco. His innocent ideals are shattered by his witnessing brutality on the very streets he frequents to walk to

art school. The book's ending reveals the identity of the adolescent as the author Luis Fernando, who spends over forty years working as a political cartoonist.

The choice to use the comics to tell a story of childhood is hardly surprising, given the global popularity of recent works such as Marjane Satrapi' bestseller *Persepolis* (2000, 2004), Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006), and Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do* (2017) among others. In all cases, the violence and insecurity define the childhood of the protagonists, illustrating a not-so-ordinary narrative of growing up. In the works I analyze here, the temporal separation between the narrated events and the moment of creating the graphic novels spans forty to fifty years. Dori Laub, a psychiatrist, and an expert in testimonial methodology, has been influential in studying the childhood memories among adult trauma survivors and distress. Laub points to the fact that traumatic experiences need the distance of time to be narrativized. The delay of cognitive processing of the event that took place and ultimately the necessity for the reorganization of thoughts and emotions surrounding traumatic experience. A return to such feelings and memories necessarily demands a physical and temporal distance. As Laub explains, this delay does not occur due to "the courage of the witnesses, not in the depth of emotional responses, but in the human cognitive capacity to perceive and to assimilate the totality of what was really happening at the time" (Felman and Laub 69).

These works are temporal crossroads, reflecting the different mental verticals of two instances in the life of the narrating subjects. Namely, autobiographies are childhood representations of impactful events processed through a politically informed adult. This clash frequently causes a narrative dichotomy where the

somewhat innocent first-person voice and visual form of the child protagonists are layered atop the retrospective view of the adult narrator. Fernando and Rojas Lizana likewise choose to juxtapose these perspectives by assigning the voice of their present adult to the drawn avatar of their much younger bodies. These two diegetic levels – the textual and the visual – allow for both versions of the 'self' to exist on the page side by side. It is perhaps not surprising that the authors in both books are overtly conscious of this temporal clash and resort to self-caricature to represent their embodied selves. Ariel Rojas Lizana frequently chooses to draw himself and his sister by using stick figures akin to drawings produced by children in contrast to the highly detailed facial features used to represent adults within the panels.

Similarly, Fernando exaggerated the facial features of his character, poked fun of his youthful body and volatile adolescent emotions. Embodiment functions as a communicative technique that allows the authors to engage with their younger versions by imitating the artistic style of children. Drawing a childhood self through comics involves facing the past through repetition as the body of the drawn characters unfolds panel after panel. Often, authors opt for multiple visual versions, representing inconsistencies in how the authors view their characters. Comics scholar Elizabeth El Refaie comments on this practice of producing numerous visual versions of oneself, a process that "necessarily involves an intense engagement with embodied aspects of identity, as well as with the sociocultural models underpinning body image" (4). Moreover, drawing and writing the self repeatedly page after page allows authors to directly revisit challenging aspects of their past. When

contemplating his autobiographic character, Luis Fernando implies a process of tension:

> Confronting myself and how to express it, not because anything was holding me back, but because it is very unusual and very troubling to come face to face with yourself. [...] Maybe it was hard for me to *see* myself. I was moved by many things, and I was forced to face all that, to remember it, although I have never forgotten it (Fernando and Stefkova, my emphasis).

Fernando captures the central paradox of traumatic childhood memory, both at the difficulty to communicate the 'self' of the past yet being unable to forget the experiences that defined him. While these memories may no longer be lineal nor verbal, they have behavioral consequences and impact the visual space. Fernando insists on this aspect, on seeing himself for the first time through the exercise of drawing his past self, suggesting that self-confrontation, in this case, is a tangible process. Drawings of the self are akin to mirrors, where the authors confront a past version of themselves.

As with previous chapters, the analysis here privileges the presence of a testimonial voice, its recording, as well as its multimodal presentation. However, while the authors who privilege comics journalism and post-memorial writing always present themselves on the comics page as principal narrators, the testimonies that anchor their works belong to others. For example, in *Barcelona*, Carrión and Sagar serve as guides to the life of migrants who collect trash on the streets of the metropolis. Likewise, Penyas and Vollenweider open document their family history through the testimonials of their grandmothers. Conversely, Fernando and the Rojas Lizana siblings' work is centered on their own experiences, including their past and present traumas, allowing for a graphic space where their multiple selves exist

simultaneously. As such, unlike authors who capture the testimony of others and are only aware of the present self of their informant, authors who represent their own life must engage with the evolution of their own self. This evolution translates multimodally in the comics format as authors represent both their ideological changes (through narration and dialogues) alike the evolution of their embodied self (expressed by drawings and photographs).

The temporal distance authors assume allows them to view their seemingly ordinary experiences of growing up as lived political acts that speak to larger collective remembrance. As Hillary Chute puts it, "visualization of the ongoing procedure of self and subjectivity constructs' ordinary' experience as relevant and political, claiming a space in public discourse for resistance that is usually consigned to a privatized sphere" (*Graphic Women* 141). While the narratives are constructed around pivotal historical moments, they position these events as building blocks of an intimate life account. Panels of private family conversations get interrupted by voice-overs from political speeches at protests, and childhood games often appear side by side with panels capturing murder. For example, figure 4-3 presents a map of the neighborhood where Ariel and Sol grow up, detailing their household along with sites of memories that appear throughout the book. The houses of childhood friends, elementary schools, and parks appear side by side, with sites of murder and military helicopters surveilling the city. Thus, the self appears in a constant dialogue with the national political: Rojas Lizana's narrative addresses those who survived Pinochet's dictatorship in isolation or exile and continue to suffer the losses of family members. Fernando employs his remembrance to speak to issues that continue to concern

Mexican modernity, namely state violence against democratic demonstrations and free speech.

The close reading of the two graphic novels traces the peculiar composition of the self through the medium of comics. Life writing is composed of an amalgamation of blocks from remembered instances, people, and spaces. On the comics page, this process becomes literal as each block is captured by a visual element, often framed within borders, and ordered with gutters. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate, Rojas Lizana and Fernando engage a hybrid expression that complicates the traditional drawing-text relationship in comics by inserting and reproducing other media. They allow these multiple verbal and visual codes to collaborate to make a coherent narrative while creating instances where these blocks come in conflict with one another. As Frederik Køhlert's points out, the self within comics is a performative task that is prone to create an unstable and decentering reading experience due to the multimodal nature of the form. Thus, as Køhlert frames it, the autobiographical self becomes a "site for ideological struggle" (4). This continuous struggle of the self guides my discussion here as I trace the way comics authors construct themselves graphically.

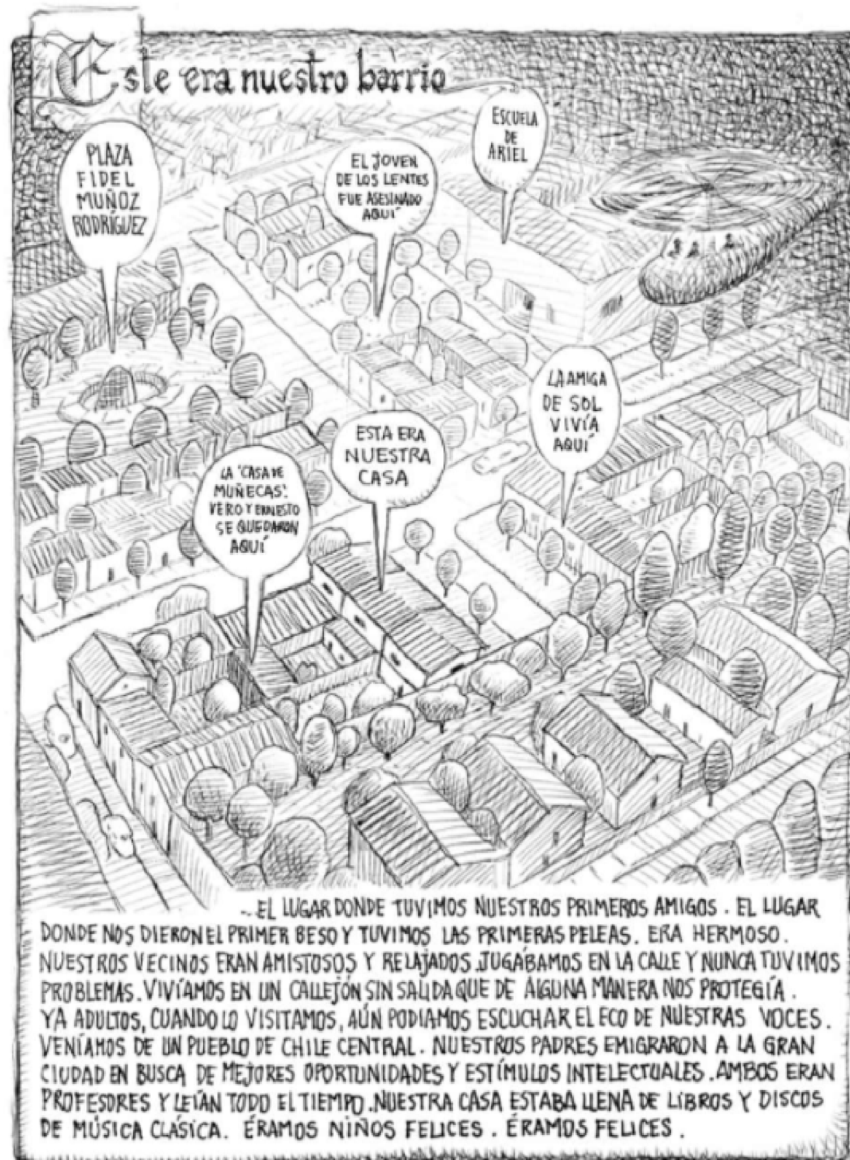

Figure 4-3. A panel from *Historias clandestinas*. A map of the neighborhood, detailing the Rojas Lizana household and significant sites of childhood memory.

Autography as a Documentary of the Self

> Autographics, n. Áwtográffiks: Life narrative fabricated in and through drawing and design using various technologies, modes, and materials. A practice of reading the signs, symbols and techniques of visual arts in life narrative (Whitlock and Poletti v).

Graphic autobiography, or autography, presents itself as a suitable medium for documenting one's life experiences, particularly in cases where the author(s) engage with circumstances that are not easily narrated verbally. Due to its multimodal nature, writing through comics expands how authors communicate that which is often difficult to articulate, such as instances with gaps in memory or extreme emotions. The narrated 'I' is constantly fragmented by multiple layers of what would be traditionally categorized as the narrator, namely, textual voice-overs, the drawn avatars of the narrator, speech bubbles, characterized narrators, among others. Thierry Groensteen's distinction between the *recitant* and *monstrator* outlines the fundamental division of the narrative voice, referring to the basic structure of textual and visual narration, respectively (4-7). Recent scholarship has experimented with labels for these works, using terms such as autobiographix, graphic memoir, graphic life-writing, or autography (see Chaney; Warhol; El Refaie). My analysis here is informed primarily by the concept of 'autography' (plural 'autographics') and its focus on the relationship "between 'auto' [self] and 'graph' [writing] in the rapidly changing visual and textual cultures of autobiography" (Whitlock and Poletti v). This process in comics allows a particularly intimate approach to one's memories as the 'self' is physically inscribed on the page through markings, drawings, handwriting, as well as the appropriation of archival materials. As Robyn Warhol explains: " 'Autography' suggests the writing of the self, the drawing of the self, and even the signature, or autograph, indicating the authentic imprimatur of the self" (2).

Comics differ from prose not only with its visual-verbal syntax but also due to its materiality, particularly its composition through hand markings. In that sense,

comics have more in common with diaries, letters, postcards, and other intimate archival material. As media scholar Sonja Neef argues, handwriting (and by extension drawing) involves a direct connection between the eye and the hand and the technology of paper, a process that most closely allows for an "embodiment of thoughts" (Neef et al. 118). By putting their memories on paper, Fernando and the Rojas Lizana siblings engage self-inscription and self-documentation as a political act, inserting their personal story within the historical context of their countries.

The Shoebox: Autography as Mediated Memories

Autographies with a documentary approach further complicate life writing as the narrative self is constructed through a variety of technologies and media. Using examples from *Historias* and *Pirámide*, I will demonstrate how the autographic voice is not limited to internal processes of remembrance. The authors appropriate artifacts from personal, family, and public archives that often carry existing political interpretations. As such, I contend that graphic documentaries are a unique medium for life writing that exposes how personal identity is constructed through an extended memory system that includes external spaces, artifacts, media, and relationships. *Historias* and *Pirámide* are examples of documentation where the authors materially create something akin to a museum of the self. Unlike private acts of remembering, these documentaries are deliberate constructions to be communicated with others, a purpose which affects "how they select, interpret, and combine their memories into stories" (El Refaie 100). These graphic archives of the

self are almost always political acts, where snippets from family conversations and childhood toys reveal as much as presidential speeches and organized protests.

In *Mediated Memories*, José van Dijck presents the concept of personal memory through the metaphor of a physical 'shoebox,' referring to private collections of items with symbolic value: photographs, letters, diaries, clippings, mementos, video, and audio recordings. The act of creating and presenting shoeboxes are what Van Dijck terms' mediated memories', "the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies, for creating and re-creating a sense of past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others" (21). Van Dijck's 'shoebox' informs my critical reading of *Historias* and *Pirámide* – I trace the collection of personal imagination, recollection, relationships, and artifacts that mediate the authors' relationship to their past, as well as their relationship to their present self and other individuals and groups.

Van Dijck's approach to mediated memory prioritizes a conscious construction and materialization of memories, a process that adequately translates to the creation of autography. I focus on two fundamental aspects of this definition as they translate to my reading of autographies. For one, Van Dijck draws attention to space and time. Time in the graphic novel, coming back to Scott McCloud's definition, is determined spatially. Therefore, Van Dijck's view of personal cultural memory as the process of positioning oneself in time and space translates aptly through the syntax of comics – placing oneself in space and time transpires literally on the time-space of the graphic novel. Second, Van Dijck's definition focuses on the collaboration between the personal and the cultural. I agree with Dijck that the two

can be distinguished, but never separated as authors construct narratives structured around the individual (the internal) while allowing for the cultural (the external) to build the narrative *I*. The cultural is directly involved through various types of media; they become items in the 'shoebox': photographs, family albums, newspaper clippings, as well as digital artifacts, such as radio announcements, speeches, TV clips. Of note to my analysis, Van Dijck opposes the assumed binarism between personal and public media:

> It is practical to assume that personal cultural memory is generated by what we call home media (family photography, home videos, tape recorders) whereas collective cultural memory is produced by mass media (television, music records, professional photography), implying that the first type of media is confined to the private sphere, whereas the latter pertains to the public realm. But that simple division, even if functional, is also conceptually flawed: it obscures the fact that people derive their autobiographical memories from both personal and collective media sources (Van Dijck 18).

This tension between the home and mass media, the private and the public, dictates the writing of the self in *Historias* and *Pirámide*. Due to their multimodal nature, I argue that these graphic documentaries are an apt medium that captures the relationship between self and the archive. Life writing in these narratives reveals itself as a multilayered composition, a pastiche of rich multimedia expression that constantly challenges the limits of the self. In what follows, I trace the interaction between the self and the archive to demonstrate three fundamental aspects of life writing: 1) an appropriation of the national political through public spaces; 2) the merging of the political and the domestic; and finally, 3) the reproduction of personal remembrance as an act of bearing witness.

Appropriating Public Spaces

Memories and *Pirámide* are narratives where drawing is a method of reproducing national history to tell an intimate childhood story and growing up. It is no surprise then those public spaces of historical significance, such as monuments, memorial sites, plazas, and streets surrounding governmental buildings, are prevalent in these stories. Both digital photographs and drawings of these spaces become part of the personal 'shoebox.' Fernando spends the first part of his book contextualizing the protagonist's life in the late 60s in Mexico City. The panels that open the story are detailed postcard-like frames of the city, buildings, streets, monuments, and other physical remnants that survive to this day in Mexico City. It is a direct way to establish a connection between Fernando's past experiences and the present time in which the book is created. Moreover, the panels demonstrate the protagonist as an observant, someone with a keen eye for detail who visually collects small pieces of the urban landscape. Therefore, the protests that define the student movement are something the protagonist discovers accidentally, as an interruption to the usual route the adolescent traverses through the streets. In the first panel that depicts a scene of the demonstrations, the panels present a switch of perspective from third to first person. The reader's view is shared with the adolescent who turns his back to the page (figure 4-4). The exclamation marks around his head signify the shock of what the adolescent sees, primarily due to the volume of people. After that, the adolescent assumes the role of a guide through the streets of Mexico City, tracing the physical presence of the movement – the central streets where the students

gather, the plazas where faculty and rectors from the universities give speeches, and of course, the Plaza de Tlatelolco.

In this way, Fernando maps the development of the movement of 68' as a way of appropriation. We only see snippets of the student movement, personalized by how Fernando remembers these events. In some instances, the process of mapping is literal, as the example from *Historias* in figure 4-2 suggests. Maps are common tools of conveying authenticity in autographies, as they provide specific links between locations and physical spaces in the world outside the narrative. It is a way of establishing a connection between the drawn rendition and the physical space that many readers may still recognize. What is more, by inserting their own bodies (through their visual avatars), authors can convert public spaces into a site for revisiting emotions. As Hillary Chute explains, by "placing themselves in space, authors may forcefully convey the shifting layers of memory, and create a peculiar entry point for representing experience" (Chaney 293). As such, the graphic reproductions allow for a literal revisiting of spaces, where authors can interact with their memories in a literal, physical way.

Similarly, much of the narrative space in *Historias* happens within spaces of political significance. The book opens with what has become perhaps the most important and recognizable memory site for both Chileans and foreigners - the Memorial for the Disappeared. It is a tall and imposing marble wall at the very entrance of the Santiago General Cemetery, the city's most important graveyard that houses Allende's remains. The wall itself is somewhat of a public 'shoebox' where the base of the memorial is constantly piled with photographs of family members,

flowers, personal objects, and banners calling for justice from the government. The wall appears as the inner cover of *Historias* and simultaneously serves as a dedication page. We observe one of the protagonists, Ariel, leaning against the wall in an intimate manner (figure 4-5).

Figure 4-4. Left: Panel from *La pirámide cuarteada*. The adolescent discovers student demonstrations on his usual route to school.

Figure 4-5. Right: Inner cover of *Historias clandestinas*. Arel leans against the Memorial for the Disappeared.

The body of the protagonists appears to claim the wall. It also provides a timeframe for the story, as the dedication on the wall suggests that the book's events take place between 1973 – 1988. The names of the victims in the drawing are engraved in marble, inscribing the life of the disappeared in history. On the page, the list of

names appears as barely readable line-markings and visually carries the same weight as the lines that form the page's background. The names become part of the texture of the page, equal in significance to the other pencil lines that form the illustration. In this way, the image suggests an equivalency between the wall and the book as sites where the past meets the present. Moreover, they are sites where history keeps being negotiated. The wall itself is a dynamic inscription as the names of the victims move from 'disappeared' to 'deceased' as remains are found or identified among unmarked graves throughout Chile. Likewise, the graphic novel supplements and reframes the story of several of the names that appear on the wall.

Knauer and Walkowitz, in their influential volume *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space,* point out the ongoing discussions that have taken place since the 1980s over the right, power, and authority to decide what happens at memorial sites. They point out examples of public discussions that are carried out anywhere from official state assemblies to public forums, op-ed pages, and of course, literature. These discussions illustrate, as they say, "the transformative power of a political event to reshape the historical meanings we impose upon, or derive from, a contested public space" (2). In both Chile and Mexico, engaging memory to provoke political change carries the risk of opening historical wounds. As such, within this context where a "widespread amnesia is accepted as the price of social peace after a civil war or the ending of a dictatorial regime", the discussion of who gets to appropriate a public space is always a political battle (Walkowitz and Knauer8). Memorial sites are places that capture the ideological tensions behind what Teresa Meade has called "a political and economic

laboratory" (124). Namely, Chile's center-left democracy has been attempting both free-market economics and increased taxation for the expenditure on social programs. The country swings between the western neoliberal model (as established by Pinochet) and democratic socialism (a model closer to Allende's politics). Rojas-Lizana frequently reference these contradictions as originating already with the election of Allende and throughout Pinochet's years. As Meade rightfully points out, memory sites such as the Memorial for the Disappeared "exist as monuments to the contradictions of Chilean society and to the fragility of its democracy" (125). Meade further explains that memory sites are often left as free-standing buildings, almost like photographs from a past moment, unaccompanied by any sort of narrative to contextualize and explain their commemorative significance. What we see in the graphic novel is an attempt to fill this gap in context. As public spaces are reproduced through drawing, they are surrounded by other visual and textual elements that provide insight into their historical significance.

In the case of Tlatelolco, Fernando revisits public spaces that have been historically sanitized and contain little or no commemoration. Namely, the Tlatelolco massacre is denoted only by a small memorial stele dedicated to the victims and does not provide much context to the events of the massacre. The movement did not receive its museum until 2007 when the Memorial del 68 was housed in the former Chancellery of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, nearby the Tlatelolco plaza. The lack of public commemoration corresponds to the legal failures of persecution and the ongoing challenges to collect material evidence. While Tlatelolco indeed served as a watershed event for the cultural and social resistance in Mexico, it was also an event

where, as Samuel Steinberg observes, the PRI benefited from its results (9). The endurance of the political power was demonstrated time and again with the events that followed Tlatelolco, most notably the violence at The Corpus Christi Massacre or El halconazo in 1971. It is no surprise that Luis Fernando, who was a participant in both events, is driven to revisit spaces that continue to be significant as sites of political contestation.

Public spaces of conflict speak volumes to the way historical processes are narrated and contextualized. In the graphic novel, they serve as mediated memories that embody the complex interaction between the material space and the way said space is imagined. As Van Dijck points out, mediated memories "can be located neither strictly in the brain nor wholly outside in (material) culture but exist in both concurrently" (van Dijck 28). In my view, narrating memorial sites is a way to bring attention to the diversity of spatial forms that surround spaces of memorialization. Narratives 'capture' visually that which is material, tangible, and constructed while addressing the ineffable stemming from personal loss and shared political ideology. These panels revisit the places "where memory dwells," as Macarena Gómez-Barris explains, encompassing the whole meaning of dwelling: "as a literal "living with" and inhabitance of bodies, psyches, and spaces; and as a lingering presence, one that persists, insists, resists, and exceeds the containment of these bodies and of the nation's boundaries, the afterlife of the event of violence" (28). By reproducing and narrating public spaces graphically, authors engage in appropriation, converting these spaces into elements of personal memory, one more piece of the 'shoebox.'

The Political Infiltrates the Private

What fascinates me about autographies is their capacity to host both the public and the private within the same narrative space, positioning them as equal parts of personal memory. Demonstrations, political speeches, and commemoration spaces exist side-by-side with family lunches and private arguments. In the examples above, I demonstrated how authors can claim public spaces employing embodiment and drawn reproductions.

Figure 4-6. Panel from *La pirámide cuarteada*. Insertions from the political show Cotorreando la noticia.

This process, however, is multidirectional, given that the public sphere – the national political – infiltrates the private and domestic spaces in turn. *Historias* and

Pirámide position public media (radio, television, and print news) as gateways through which the political infiltrates the private. Fernando frequently incorporates external media to demonstrate an interruption of daily life. In a scene where the adolescent spends leisurely time at home, the family chatter is interrupted by insertions from a popular political comedy show (figure 4-6). The humoristic program is replaced by Salinas's condemnation toward police brutality against students, and the show gets terminated in a manner of protest. The snapshot of television stills is an abrupt change to the drawn sequence of family conversations, where the voice of the host appears to usurp the flow of casual conversation. Throughout the book, Fernando frequently uses this technique with news programs' insertions, clippings from newspapers, and political flyers. Their presence always provokes a disruption to the otherwise mundane family activities, causing heated political arguments within the home. The decision to use insertions rather than drawn reproductions of external media is an intelligent way to signify the alien nature of media, something that does not belong to the domestic space. The stylistic conflict between the drawings of family members and the inclusion of these clippings effectively translates the weight of political tensions to everyday life.

In *Historias,* we observe a similar process where the larger political tension has infiltrated every level of society as illustrated by the micro-narratives of conflict between neighbors and family members. Sol and Ariel's household experiences physical changes as their guest house is converted into a safe house for political refugees, and Ariel digs an escape tunnel in the backyard. The family structure too changes throughout the book.

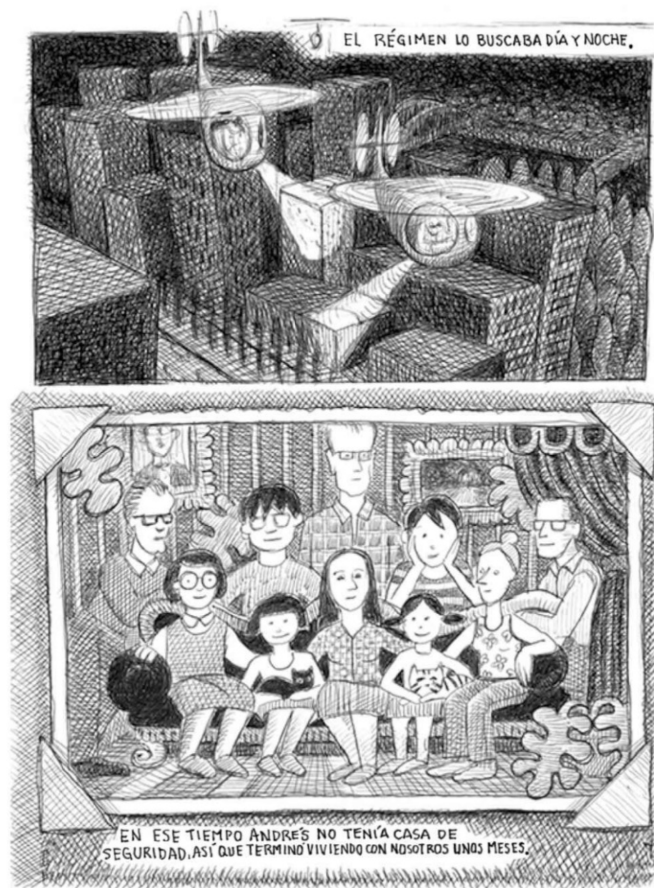

Figure 4-7. A panel from *Historias clandestinas*. A night scene from military helicopters over Santiago is followed by a drawn reproduction of a photograph of the household members living in Sol and Ariel's home.

The familiar circle grows as Sol and Ariel's mother welcomes influential members of the resistance, such as the couple Vero and Ernesto, the latter serving as head of MIR. On the other hand, the family's father leaves due to the pressure of their clandestine situation, and several extended family members become estranged. Once again, the archive is engaged on the page to demonstrate the evolution of the family dynamic. Political refugees become part of the domestic album, such as the scene where Allende's nephew, Andres Pascal Allende, takes refuge at the home for several

months. In the two panels representing Andres' arrival, we observe a night scene of military helicopters patrolling the streets of Santiago followed by an image of the members living in the house (figure 4-7). The sharp contrast of the upper panel and its implied context of surveillance signify fear, sharply contrasting with the bright portrait of Sol and Ariel's make-shift family. The family portrait is framed in the style of a photograph, the corners of the image denoting the family album, which Sol introduces earlier in the book. Photography within autographies always s creates a moment of contention. On the one hand, photography aids the autobiographical referentiality by locating the author's body in the world outside of the comics while signifying the fragmentation of the narrated self through multiple presentations of the author's body.

Linda Haverty-Rugg best summarizes this duality in her discussion on the inclusion of photography in traditional narrative autobiographies. She argues a "double consciousness" for the authors when pondering upon photographs of themselves: "the awareness of the autobiographical self as decentered, multiple, fragmented, and divided against itself in the act of observing and being; and the simultaneous insistence on the presence of an integrated, authorial self, located in a body, a place, and a time" (2). Yet, in *Historias,* these 'photographs' are not insertions but drawn reproductions, engaging in a meta-narrative that leaves open the question of whether these photographs ever existed or not, and as such, whether there ever was such family unity as is represented in the work. Rojas Lizana's drawing imitates photography, presuming photography's referential authority while controlling the visual mapping of bodies in the household. For authors who live

under a dictatorial regime, a photograph can be used as an oppressive tool through identification paper. Thus, the photograph becomes unwanted evidence, as the narration suggests: "Por dieciséis años crecimos acostumbrados a la idea que nos vigilaban dondequiera que fuéramos [For sixteen years we grew up used to the idea that we were vigilated everywhere we went]" (Rojas Lizana). The narration appears next to a dark figure of a man taking photographs behind a window shade.

Moreover, in *Historias* and *Pirámide* we observe how the first-person narration is constantly shaped by others, as the voices and avatars of family members, friends, and mediated personas (through radio and television) surround the voice of the children whose story we follow. Psychologist Anna Gibbs' uses the term 'contagious feelings' to describe the feedback loop between self and others[2]. We can see how these contagious feelings are reflected in the narration of both Fernando and the Rojas Lizana siblings. The experiences, feelings, and particularly interpretation of memories directly contribute to the formation of the narrative self. The phenomenon Gibbs describes is pronounced within the context of childhood memories, where the gaps in both personal memory and a developing sense of self are filled by the stories of surrounding adults. These examples demonstrate that the narrative 'I' is always volatile, as the voices of others constantly influence the

[2] Phycology studies have demonstrated that individuals tend to develop dependent memory systems where the individual's memory is complimented by the memory of others, particularly other family members. See for example the concept of 'distributed self': "[...] dyads and other intimate social groups often develop transactive memory systems. In such distributed memory systems, there is a cognitive interdependence between group members, which means that agents rely on each other for their cognitive performance" (in Heersmink 3137).

narration of the autobiographical protagonist. The borders between a family and public archive, the personal and the political, are constantly blurred.

Images of the Mind

Comics expand the traditional definition of testimonial language, where textual and visual elements collaborate to translate personal memories in a poignant way. In both *Memories* and *Pirámide* the culmination of the narrative is represented by traumatic memories that still seem to be etched in the memory of the authors. For Fernando, a large part of the impulse to write *Pirámide* was the disappointment of the violent suppression of the student movement during Tlatelolco and its aftermath, shattering his initial enthusiasm for the energy within the movement. The Rojas Lizana siblings witnessed the execution of members of the political opposition in their neighborhood. In both cases, there is little or no photographic documentation supporting the details of the violence, and the authors rely solely on their memory to represent these events. The graphic renditions of these moments put into motion the authority of the witness, where the visual elements provide an insight not only into the *what* but the *how* of what the authors experienced. As Ann Cvetkovich puts it well, drawings document an emotional impact, demonstrating the "visual testimony's power to provide forms of truth that are emotional rather than factual" (114). As such, the drawn renditions of these memories allow an insight into the unconscious, empowering the textual account of the witness. As I will show in the examples below, the visual and the textual collaborate to portray different aspects of

remembrance. The visual elements do not simply supplement the written testimony but demonstrate that which cannot or should not be communicated verbally alone.

What is more, these graphic narratives create a language that enables the communication of trauma. Testimonial literature has frequently been perceived as a case where language often fails to capture the experiences that still haunt their narrators, what W. J. T. Mitchell's has called "trauma theory's cult of the unrepresentable" (60). Comics take advantage of both the visual and the linguistic register to expand the communicative capacity of narration, especially when remembrance is primarily a visual experience. Trauma narrative scholar Cathy Caruth insists on trauma as a visual phenomenon: "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (4-5, emphasis in original). The language of comics lends itself to capture this possession of images, translating how the event exists in the mindscape. I have previously dealt in more detail with the visual nature of traumatic memories, especially in chapter 3, but what interests me in the case of autography is how the verbo-visual language engages the role of a direct witness.[3] Namely, in drawing personal memories, the authors base their narrative authority on *seeing* as a way of proving that certain events took place.

[3] See the discussion on 'flashes of imagery' in relation to Ana Penyas' *Estamos todas bien*.

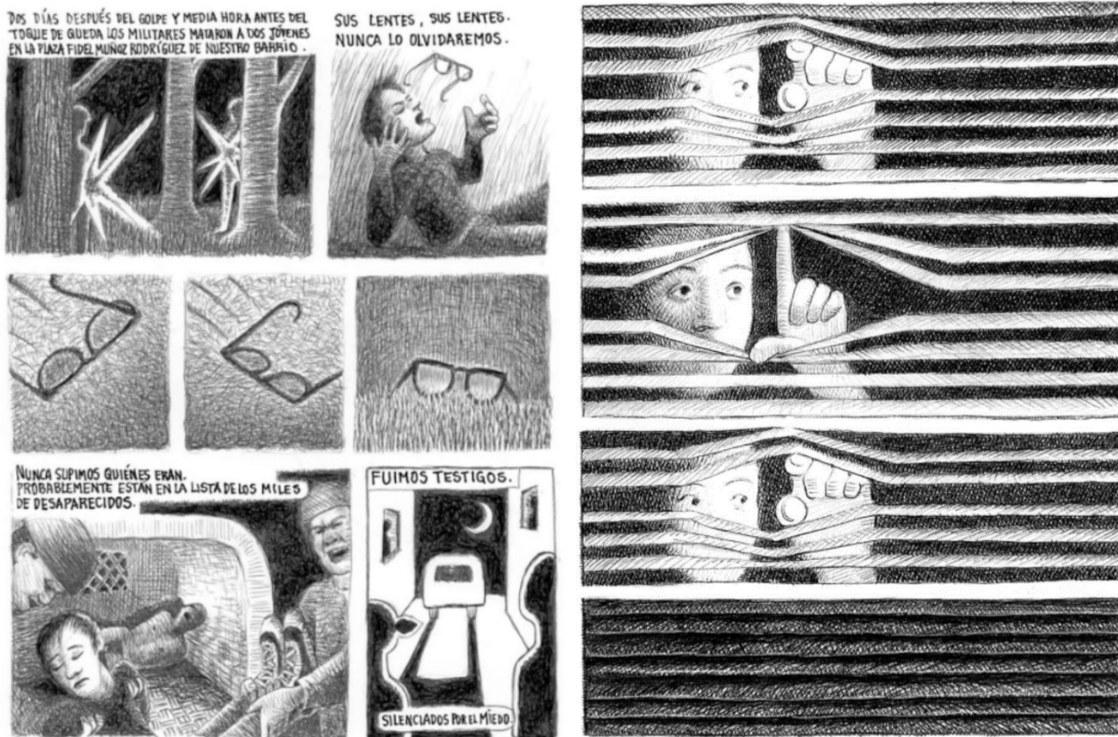

Figure 4-8. Panels from *Historias clandestinas*. Left: Ariel and Sol observe the execution of two unknown men by military officers. Right: Ariel watches the scene behind the blinds of his window.

One of the most visually impactful scenes in *Historias* relates to the murder of two young civilians by military officers in a public square, not too far away from Ariel and Sol's family home. The scene is narrated over seven panels, capturing the gunshots, and loading the bodies in a truck (see figure 4-8). Pointed black and white contrasts add a dramatic tone to the scene while maintaining the child-like quality of the lines and the exaggerated facial expressions of the characters. The page dedicates four out of the seven panels focusing on a detail of the execution of one of the victims – his glasses falling on the ground. The caption that accompanies the panels reads: "Sus lentes, sus lentes. Nunca lo olvidaremos. [His glasses, his glasses. We will never forget that]". It shows a fixation on that detail as the only evidence that the execution

took place at all. Unable to gather any further information about the identity of the victims whose bodies are taken away and no other trace remains, the glasses are the only physical proof that the execution took place at all.

The insistent focus on the glasses in this scene points to two essential aspects. For one, it demonstrates the influence of objects as political symbols. The rendition of the execution with a focus on the falling glasses carries an uncanny resemblance with the suicide of President Allende. Namely, Allende's own glasses found in the Palacio of the Moneda, now kept as a museum object by the same institution, serve as a powerful symbol of Allende's violent death and the overtake of his government. The president's broken glasses were a trace of his presence after the body was removed from the Palacio – a likely inspiration for Rojas Lizana's rendition of the execution of the civilians. The scene illustrates a process of documentation that undergoes creative treatment. As Ann Cvetkovich explains: "graphic narrative's hand-crafted drawing distinguishes it from contemporary realist forms such as photography and film and reminds us that we are not gaining access to an unmediated form of vision" (Drawing the Archive 114).

What is more, the glasses appear as a metaphor for the very process of witnessing that takes place. They are one of the many references where the narrative alludes to the active process of *seeing*. Glasses, eyes, mirrors, and cameras are a repetitive motif. It is notable that these scenes almost always obstruct the gaze of the viewer. For example, the children observe their neighbors hidden behind a wall, or a journalist takes photographs obscured by curtains. Similarly, the execution scene is followed by a three-panel page of Ariel peeking behind the blind shades of his room.

The sequence serves as the cover page of *Historias, further emphasizing the motif of a clandestine gaz*e, obstructed, always partial yet engaged and conscious. In his analysis of graphic documentaries, Jorge Santos Jr. aptly notes that the recurrent images of eyes and similar allusions to *seeing* "remind us that observation is a form of documentation, one that compels us to witness – and to testify" (Santos Jr. 102). Indeed, Ariel and Sol are conscious of their role as witnesses. The final panel of the execution scene includes the children as they are watching the military truck depart with the dead bodies, captioned: "Fuimos testigos. Silenciados por el miedo. [We were witnesses. Silences by fear]" (Rojas-Lizana 35). As such, the drawing of this event serves to fill the gaps in documentation of the thousands of missing individuals caused by state terrorism. The drawing, just like the glasses in this scene, serves to leave behind a trace of an event that does not have any other material proof. Simultaneously, personal interventions in the recording effectively capture the psychological consequences of witnessing. In this case, the fear of speaking up against human rights violations. The result is startling as scenes of executions become normalized in the graphic novel, something that occurs on plazas in residential neighborhoods. It takes the Rojas Lizana siblings close to forty years to address this event publicly and create *Historias*.

Luis Fernando chooses a different approach to frame the culmination of the student movement. He avoids the direct reproduction of physical violence. Throughout the narrative, we observe a similar insistence on engaged observation, where the reader interacts with the demonstrations through the eyes of the adolescent. The presence of his body on the page sends a similar message of

witnessing as in *Historias*. Moreover, the narrative voice insists repeatedly on the authority of physical presence to contradict the coverage of events in the news. In one instance, the adolescent argues with his family members who read the newspaper coverage of the first protest he attended. The conversation includes several panels of newspaper clippings and numerous captions that contradict the headlines: "¿Cómo pueden poner esto? ¡Yo estuve allí, nunca pasó! ¡Es totalmente falso! [How can they show this? I was there, it never happened! It is completely false!] (Fernando 99). Unlike *Historias*, where the visual and the textual aspects of the testimony collaborate to amount evidence, Fernando frequently introduces a conflict between these two elements.

Fernando employs this technique in the scene representing the culmination of state violence, namely the very night of the Tlatelolco massacre. The pages that narrate violence stand out stylistically, given that Fernando abandons the sepia hue that is present throughout the rest of the book and chooses a stark black-and-white contrast. Likewise, the panels retract the otherwise neat structure of the book and instead include a somewhat chaotic accumulation of realistic drawings, photographs, political cartoons, and newspaper clippings. The visual disorder simultaneously suggests the emotional confusion the narrator experiences amidst the chaos of the protest. More importantly, it casts doubt on the fact that media representation can provide a coherent narrative of the event. Unlike *Historias*, Fernando never explicitly shows violence. The images of the massacre are hidden as the adolescent turns his back to the reader, obscuring the uncensored photographs in a magazine depicting the victims' bodies at Tlatelolco (figure 4-9). The accompanying text

provides the only reference to the content of the photograph: "Son las imágenes más horribles que ha visto en sus recién estrenados 18 años [They are the most horrible images he has seen in his recently earned 18 years]" (Fernando 111).

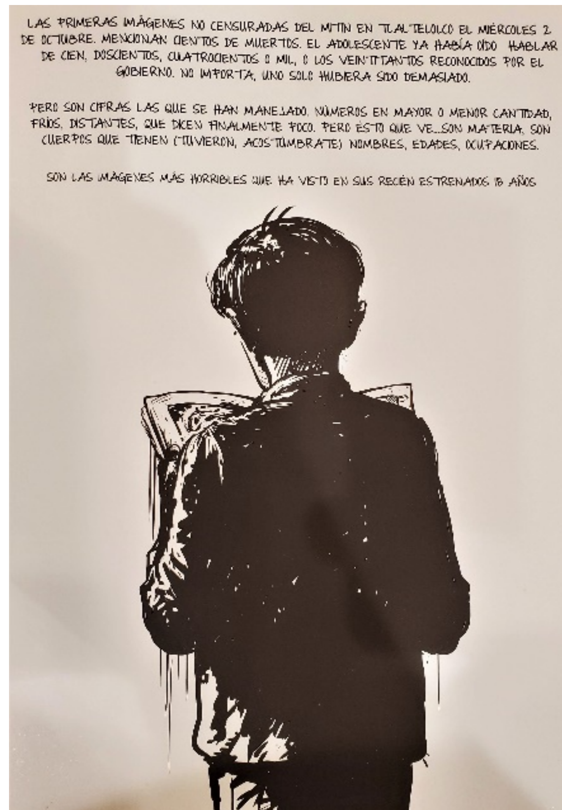

Figure 4-9. Panel from *La pirámide cuarteada*. The adolescent looks at uncensored photographs of the massacre of Tlatelolco.

The emotional effect of this scene arises precisely from obscured details to the point of being disturbing. In this scene, the interruption of the regular panel sequence, the color switch, and the decision to obscure explicit imagery become powerful narrative tools. As comics semiotician Barbara Postema explains, in a comics sequence, "fragmentation and absence become operative throughout as signifying functions" (xiv). Absence implies a refusal to directly engage with

memories of violence, even fifty years after the event. Moreover, the suggestive nature of the narration challenges the reader to imagine the possible photographs behind the body. Finally, the single-panel page breaks the continuity of the sequence we have been following all along, producing an effect of timelessness. Postema adds that single-panel pages are striking because they "stand on their own more, calling for attention as individual works of art rather than parts of a sequence" (32). Given that the sequence of panels and their spatial organization dictate timing on the comics page, this panel stands outside of the temporal sequence. When Fernando switches back to the sequential art mode, the narration implies that graphic narrative can somehow order and structure the historical record, where other media could not. The visual rendition of traumatic experiences allows authors to grapple with images that seem etched in their memory, despite a significant time delay. Luis Fernando comments on the depiction of Tlatelolco:

> The images were very simple to make. For example, creating the images of when I see the first march was almost like copying a photograph. [...] All these scenes are very alive, very much alive. I didn't have the strength to recreate all of those moments because they were so intense, they're still very present in my mind (Fernando and Stefkova).

Fernando speaks to a tension common among autographic writing, the need to inscribe images on paper that actively live in one's mind – like copying a photograph – while facing the challenge to come face to face with traumatic memory. The reader gains access to photographic memory through this visual inscription, where the eye becomes a recording instrument. Drawing the repetitive images of these experiences speaks to the core of traumatic memory: "[...] the delay or incompletion in knowing,

or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely true to the event" (Caruth 5).

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Historias clandestinas and *La pirámide cuarteada* demonstrate the powerful capacity to represent life writing in a meaningful, politically significant manner. With its unique syntax, language, and intermodality, autography expands the ways personal memories are curated both as a way to face personal struggle and establish a connection with shared remembrance. In autobiographical memory, the self meets the social. Autography is a reconstruction of the past and a tool for communication with the collective – making a statement, attempting a connection. The conversation with the audience is always a conscious effort. I have analyzed these works as mediated memories, as material shoeboxes where authors curate public and private media archives and bring them into conversation with snippets of childhood memories to make a coherent narrative of growing up. The comics page becomes a museum of the self where public monuments, family albums, personal relationships, and mental images collaborate to construct a complete picture of the 'self.' This graphic collage blurs the lines of the public and the private, as Van Dijck argues:

> [...] here is the tendency to discern memory as an internal, physiological human capacity and media as external tools to which part of this human capability is outsourced. Adjunct to this distinction is the implicit or explicit separation of real (corporeal) and artificial (technological) memory. Third, media are qualified either in terms of their private use or of their public deployment, as mediators of respectively personal or collective memory (15).

Once again, graphic narrative becomes a site where history is narrated from unexpected places: a childhood bedroom, a neighborhood park, the family dining

room. Luis Fernando and the Rojas Lizana siblings share the personal, and often the painful, the unreconciled, to create a personal archive of national history. These narratives, however, do not assume passivity and resignation from the traumatic past. They instead become an ideological site where ordinary people claim public spaces and mediated archives and impose their personal stories to claim history as their own.

EPILOGUE

As I am writing the epilogue to my 3-year long doctoral research (with some excused interruptions here and there), the world remains on lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, more than ever in the modern digital age, isolated individuals have needed to connect through images, recordings, streamed events, online meetings, and instant messages. The way we present ourselves during a global quarantine is not by physically being 'there' but through mediated avatars that stand to take the place of our embodied self. As an ordinary citizen, working and studying from home for more than a year, and simultaneously as literature and media scholar, I have become increasingly aware in a visceral form of the ways in which the self is fragmented, often displaced, and translated through images. I must admit that studying comics during a pandemic has a particular appeal. Like the comics form, the world is now organized by little blocks, each functioning independently yet craving for a connection with the rest. Life expressed through images in tiny boxes seems awfully familiar during Zoom meetings, online events, and Instagram pictures of activities in isolation. The modern world has never been more physically fragmented and simultaneously never more connected through media of all forms. What is more, isolation has provoked an increased need to record, mediate, and document our lives as a way of staying connected and sharing our personal stories. And this, among other things, has led me to understand the *why* and the *how* of documenting life during a crisis.

Throughout *Graphic Documentaries,* I explored the very process of recording and organizing reality within panels, the essential elements of the comics medium. I argued that graphic documentaries prompt readers to engage in metacritical awareness of mediated events and history as editorial and curative processes. I highlighted how these visual narratives encourage readers to question what evidentiary forms, such as photography, press coverage, or video footage, are accepted as truth. In doing so, I demonstrated how graphic documentaries call attention to the process through which past and present are narrated, and the cultural consensus is formed, continually pointing to the participation of ordinary citizens in the dissemination of historical narrative. I began my discussion on graphic documentaries with three fundamental questions at the intersection of narrative subjectivity and the archive:

4. How do comics challenge the ethics of visual representation within the context of social, political, and economic inequality?
5. How do comics generate new forms of testimonial address, particularly for disenfranchised individuals and communities?
6. How do comics question long-held assumptions around what constitutes a documentary record and/or historical archive?

To answer these questions, I analyzed the graphic documentation of critical events and processes throughout the Hispanic world in the context of economic disadvantage, political suppression, social invisibility, and childhood trauma.

I demonstrated how comics journalism and ethnography can bring about ethical visual representation of disenfranchised communities. In the face of media

and social invisibility, the graphic documentaries *Barcelona*, *Caminos condenados*, and *Grito de Victoria* open a platform for the politically significant stories of migrants, displaced citizens, and farmers, and organized social movements, respectively. Through the analysis of self-representation in these works, I demonstrated that graphic narratives bring forth transparency to the process of documentation. Moreover, using attention to material details and active observation, these works expanded testimonial discourse to public spaces and material information. Hence, graphic documentaries are an apt medium for representing political and economic circumstances surrounding testimonial subjects.

Furthermore, using the writing of postmemory in *Estamos todas bien* and *Notas al pie* I examined how the graphic documentation of family history can transform ordinary households and housekeepers into compelling narrators of history. I exemplified the work of documentarists that function within private, domestic spaces and collect pieces of the past among household objects, family albums, and memorabilia. I demonstrated how history can be reframed through the lens of gender and affective relationships within the family home. I argue that graphic documentaries blur the line between private and public archives, transforming private spaces into museums of shared national remembrance. Thus, in their role as documentarists, comics authors of the generation of postmemory empower family members by including their life stories into the national historical discourse.

Finally, I explored how authors communicate their childhood memories through the autographies *Historias clandestinas* and *La pirámide cuarteada*. Using

the concept of mediated memory, I demonstrated that graphic narrative is the perfect medium to translate the composition of personal memory as an amalgamation of personal recollection, familiar relationships, commemorative spaces, and the public and private media. Also, the examples demonstrated how drawing as a recording tool can capture the interplay between conscious (explicit) and subconscious (implicit) processing of childhood trauma. I concluded that authors can create an intimate archive of their life in documentary autography as a way to connect to others and society at large. Moreover, I contend that graphic narrative allows the inscription of the self as a political act, allowing the individual to contest dominant historical discourses.

Despite the diversity of narrative approaches and perspectives, all graphic narratives throughout my dissertation shared some essential benefits of recording reality through graphics. For one, these graphic documentaries allow an ethical representation of individuals and communities in the face of political suppression, media bias, and social invisibility. The works expand how we read testimonial discourse, compelling us to place the testimonial voice within the specifics of a body, material space, and physical circumstances. Moreover, graphic narrative provides a safe platform for the accounts of politically and socially threatened communities.

What is more, these graphic documentaries constantly push the limits of what constitutes a historical record in two fundamental ways. One, due to its hybrid nature, the graphic documentary opens a conversation between multiple registers – the verbal (narration, dialogue, onomatopoeic expressions) and the visual (symbolic, iconic, photographic, collaged). In doing so, the syntax of comics places media

archives within a sequence, allowing authors to re-frame and recontextualize their meaning. The documentary compels its readers to pay attention to archives and consider a more empathetic interpretation of the historical record. Second, utilizing drawing as a recording tool, graphic narratives transform hand-produced inscriptions into evidence. Drawing allows comics authors to fill in the gaps of the historical record, inscribing where the camera was not allowed to peek. More so than historical supplementation, drawing as evidence communicates the emotional and psychological circumstances of bearing witness. It enables the testimonial subject to tell *what* took place and show *how* that felt. For some authors, especially those who narrate with the distance of time, drawing also permits them to face their past and create space for the mental images that challenge their sense of self.

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Ultimately, what fascinates me about graphic narrative as a documentary medium is its capacity to empower individuals in the face of crisis (be it personal, national, or global). *Graphic documentaries* dealt with real, challenging circumstances of poverty, fear, isolation, trauma, and a sense of invisibility. However, the people behind these graphic documentaries are anything but victims. On the contrary, the acts of remembering, observing, ordering, and drawing, become performative acts of empowerment. To put a name to this process, I borrow Ann Rigney's "memory-activism nexus," which argues for the interplay between commemoration and activism, for remembrance as a positive, hopeful act. Indeed, the authors whose captivating work I have investigated use their art as a tool for social activism. Jorge Carrión and Sagar's *Barcelona* caused a positive interest in the

status of migrants who support the city's most widespread underground economy. Since the publication of *Estamos todas bien*, Ana Penyas has conducted numerous workshops where families and elderly citizens participate in life writing. Winning the National Comics Award also opened the door for increased women's participation in the comics industry. Some authors have used drawing for contributing to the historical archive even outside of the medium of comics. Luis Fernando's illustrations continue to support student movements through graphic initiatives like #IlustradoresConAyotzinapa –collective support for the families of disappeared students at the 2014 Iguala mass kidnapping. For their part, Ariel and Sol Rojas Lizana have contributed to Chile's political opposition by helping produce "El Rebelde," MIR's official publication (Archivo MIR).

Graphic documentaries demonstrates how comics authors can become active participants in the democratization of historical and present narratives. Through observing, drawing, and creating comics, as Michael Taussig puts it, "if only for an instant, to blink an eye" to critical social problems (70). As a medium where time is space, comics places individuals in a specific time, space, and social context. Graphic documentaries give a body and material surround to testimonial voices, allowing people to claim visibility. Characters in the works I study appropriate spaces, discourses, and archives to tell a story for change. In this way, I view the Hispanic graphic narrative as a growing platform for social change. Contemporary comics across the region show infinite potential for artistic experimentation where individuals can represent the stories of their lives and communities and participate in a global conversation. As indicated by the recent explosion of graphic narrative in

Spain and Latin America, the conversation around this art form is only at its beginning. In a globalized and digital world, where images compete for meaning, comics allow for a dialogue between the self, the community, and the world.

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