THE EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF LIFE WRITING
VOLUME VI(2017)242–261

"Distinguished Ladies" and the Doctrine of Womanhood: Auto-surveillance and Auto-performance in Diamela Eltit's *E. Luminata*

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ABSTRACT

This essay reads Diamela Eltit's *E. Luminata* as form of auto-performative 'anti-manual' which employs a range of autobiographical forms and functions in protest of codes of womanhood published in an actual manual of women's conduct authored by Augusto Pinochet's First Lady and enforced by his regime's National Secretariat of Women which organized forms of auto-surveillance by which women policed themselves and one another. It argues that if the NSW functioned as a mechanism for the surveillance and discipline of women in Pinochet's police state, Eltit's text functions as a subversive auto-performance of Chilean womanhood offered in protest against the state censorship of women's autobiography. The reading demonstrates the ways in which E. Luminata strategically performs Eltit's own public self-representation of womanhood which, although meant to be impossible, is not unattainable in the regime.

Keywords: autoperformativity, Diamela Eltit, Chilean literature

> "When one lives in a world that is collapsing, constructing a book perhaps may be one of the few survival tactics" —Diamela Eltit, foreword—*E. Luminata*[1]

Phillipe Lejeune reminds us that "[i]n spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing" (132, 133). Nowhere is this paradox more evident than in a history of women's writing about their lives under dictatorship in which the impossible autobiographical act

is not only complicated by the linguistic and narratological confines of self-portraiture, but is also impeded by the oppressive surveillance and censorship of totalitarianism. Although the autobiographical voice is perhaps the most powerful device for offering testimony of human rights violations under the absolute power of dictatorship, it is also the most impossible because it is the least likely to see print. And yet, impossible autobiographies written under curfew, in captivity, and other repressive circumstances of dictatorship, prove to adapt and replicate in resilient forms of resistance to tyranny in spite of their own impossibility. They open the way to forms of autobiographical inscription that are not only outlaws of genre and convention but also public offenses punishable by death.

Although the systematic oppression of dictatorship in Augusto Pinochet's Chile made autobiography an impossible endeavor for women seeking to come to voice about the particularly misogynist nature of human rights violations against women, novelist and activist Diamela Eltit proves that self-representation thrives as a strategic instrument of self-discovery, self-construction, and self-liberation in the confined spaces of dictatorial captivity. Eltit's performative autobiography, *E. Luminata*, thrives on the very surveillance that threatens its existence through a subversive critique of the very scrutiny she faces as a liberal woman writer in Pinochet's late twentieth century military police state. Moreover, Eltit does so under the vigilant, panoptic eye of "distinguished ladies" who support the strict codes of gender and nationalism enforced by the regime.

In order to restore patriotic and family values to what he considered a dangerously liberal and immoral society, Pinochet installed himself as dictator of Chile in 1973 after leading a military coup to oust democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende. He successfully remained in power until 1990, in large part due to the organized efforts of conservative Chilean women. As his primary method of mobilizing women in support of his "New Order" of traditional Chilean gender roles, Pinochet established The National Secretariat of Women (NSW).[2] Led by Pinochet's wife, First Lady Lucia Hiriart Pinochet, the NSW was a non-governmental, policy-making body which supervised women in explicitly political volunteer roles as mothers and wives campaigning for moral order. Under Pinochet's new constitution, women were dignified as public mothers and referred to in numerous public addresses as the "distinguished ladies" who would re-traditionalize Chile and restore old-fashioned respect for the authority of their husbands and fathers.

In the first year of his regime, ten of Pinochet's public addresses are sponsored by the NSW and are specifically addressed to "the Chilean Woman." In these speeches, the Chilean woman—subsumed into a single category—is hailed as his most important ally and the source of support

for the Chilean family at its foundation. In the most famous of these discourses, "Message to the Chilean Woman,"[3] Pinochet addresses his audience as "Distinguished Ladies"[4] and expounds upon the power which lies in their virtue and natural propensity to serve as Chile's "great repository" of national traditions and values (8). He authorizes Chilean women as guardians of the future and "indispensable resources" necessary for a stable government (9). She who complies distinguishes herself as a "lady," a title which denotes both elevated class and alignment with *Pinochetista* reform against undignified liberalism. She who does not suffers a social disappearance from proper society and risks literal disappearance by imprisonment and torture befitting a radical leftist aligned with the Allende presidency. Pinochet's "Message" interpellates the Chilean woman into an ideological acceptance of patriarchal values by suggesting that, as morally superior beings, the "distinguished ladies" of Chile are responsible for bringing ethical and moral balance to the political realm of manhood within which ultimate authority resides. Masculinist cultural tradition is elevated to public policy in which the NSW is empowered to "carry out an authentic dignification of woman" that will distinguish women who are true Chileans from those who are enemies of the state (11, 12). In this double bind, a woman who is *not dignified* is, therefore, *not a woman* and has no means of self-identification in the system, yet a woman who *is* dignified is defined as an object and still fails to achieve the agency and subjectivity promised by her "indispensable" role in building the "New Chile." These discourses, which hail women as leaders of reformed family and domestic sphere, are the very same which strip them of their capabilities as women and leave them abused, neglected, and denied equal rights.

Although womanhood is relegated to a private experience in the domestic sphere, women feel very public burdens of conforming to expectations in the New Order. Compulsory self-censorship, self-discipline, and the extended acts of systematic surveillance women are compelled to commit against one another violate their privacy and their human rights. The only outlet from this sense of isolation is in the fiction of autonomy provided by the act of monitoring themselves and one another. Under the regime, the NSW functions as a panoptic institution dedicated to the ideological production of conservative Chilean womanhood and the elimination of liberal thought about womanhood as an open social construct. Through deeply internalized forms of auto-surveillance, women believe they are engaging in forms of social ordering that protect and promote their value as women. When brought to the attention of the State, any acts deemed feminist are punishable by kidnapping, imprisonment, rape, torture, and execution. A woman discovered to have sought divorce,

contraception, or abortion is not only prevented from writing about her personal experience, she is marked as an enemy of the sacred institution of family, and therefore the nation of Chile.

As social wardens in a paradigmatic prison of dictatorship, tens of thousands of women worked to ensure that each family functioned as an ideal microcosm of the government in which the rights of women and children would be subject to the unquestionable laws of the father and the nation. As author of the official NSW manual, Hiriart writes: "The terms patria and patriotism come from the Latin pater which means father. They signify, for the most part, a filial relationship with the nation of origin, equal to the concept of filiality and paternity in the family" (*La Mujer Chilena* 6). A reading of this manual—complete with recommendations for how many hours of state-sponsored television children should watch and how long a husband should be allowed to unwind after work before a wife places any demands upon him—leaves little doubt about the extent to which women are instructed in the dominant discourse of womanhood in Pinochet's Chile. Closer examination of the function of this manual reveals a highly organized and effective mechanism of auto-surveillance in which women policed themselves and one another with the endorsement of Chile's military government. As a means to save themselves and their loved ones from the dangers of socialism and feminism—two ideologies thought by Pinochet to pose a threat to the sacred institution of family—the women of the NSW turned existing social organizations run by the church and the local community into mechanisms for the surveillance and discipline of women opposed to the "New Chile." Women who did not behave like proper, feminine, heterosexual married ladies were vilified, harassed, and found themselves restricted from accessing public resources such as education, scholarships, and childcare.[5] Because any autobiographical signature in this environment could be a liability, authors needed to invent methods of subverting censorship and disseminating literature which could function as a testimony for human rights advocacy.

The focus of this essay is on Eltit's use of auto-performative selfhood in, and its subversion of, the system of auto-surveillance enforced by the NSW.[6] Through this veiled autobiographical protagonist, a woman writer ironically named E. Luminata, or "the illuminated one," Eltit acknowledges the power of the dictatorial gaze upon Chilean womanhood and both critiques and subverts it by portraying a self-aware author performing outlawed acts of social, political, and artistic womanhood. This proxy autobiographer, who noticeably denies that her name is "diamela eltit," is able to break through the NSW's fortress of censorship and communicate the impossible: her personal narrative of indoctrination into Pinochet's

repressive discourse of womanhood.[7] Published in 1983 at the height of public protests against Pinochet, the narrative features an incoherent and seemingly insane woman risking arrest by roaming the streets of Santiago after curfew. There, she is vulnerable to the equally public, extreme, and often perverse forms of retaliation against protesters. *E. Luminata* is overwhelming well received by leftists who are inspired by the representation of a woman, such as E. Luminata, in open acts of rebellion as well as by Eltit's more daring attempt to close the gap between the author and the implied author in highly performative public readings. In her most well-known reading, Eltit risks her own arrest by performing in the lobby of a brothel. There she mirrors her protagonist in several acts of protest, including lacerating her own arms and scrawling unintelligible messages on the pavement outside the building.[8]

Eltit is a founding member of CADA, *Collectivo Acciones de Arte* (Collective for Artistic Acts), the group of five artist activists known for their late 1970s and early 1980s theatrical protests against the regime. Known for turning the propaganda of the regime into visually articulated subversions of Pinochet's intended messages, CADA performances served as a model for Eltit's published literary protest in which she critiqued the government "under [her] breath" (Ortega). As when the transgressive, self-aware E. Luminata appears, broken, bleeding, and aimless, to model the consequences of breaking the law, she is disrupting the message of complicity and offering an alternative performance—a subversive performance—mirroring her author. Literally engaged in impossible auto-performative moments of protest, Eltit passes outlawed acts of women's selfhood and self-representation right under the scrutiny of censors. Eltit employs this technique in later novels, such as *The Fourth World* (1998), *Custody of the Eyes* (1994), and *Sacred Cow* (1991), in which determined female protagonists perform indelible and impossible acts of reclaiming public discourse. Among these narrators, readers can find the trademark acts of recuperating women's subjectivity that led Eltit to become a major author of the post-coup "*generación vigilada*" (generation under surveillance) and to restore the power of interpretation to readers stripped of free thought by the dictatorship. The chiaroscuro, photo cover art depicting Eltit wearing bandages on her arms and staring straight into the camera leaves readers with a powerful image suggesting that she has suffered violations—both physical and artistic—in the name of her art.

When examining the viability of self-representation in this environment and identifying codified forms of resistance that do, in fact, see print under Pinochet's rule, it is necessary to conceive of the liberal Chilean woman author as writing in captivity. In reading Chilean women's

literature for individual or collective acts of autonomous self-representation, it must be recognized that any woman who seeks to self-identify in terms which are counter-doctrine does so under circumstances similar to those of writing while physically sequestered. As for all women in Chile, the state determines her role as a woman in society and takes responsibility for determining what her needs are and how to meet them according to the strict norms of Chilean nationalism. As a liberal woman who writes liberal womanhood, she is both invisible to others *and* blinded from seeing others in the public sphere. Removed from official discourse, she can neither model improper womanhood nor disrupt notions of propriety for others. She is collectively and individually isolated from others by the deeply internalized auto-surveillance engineered by the NSW. Her unauthorized "identity" prevents her from accessing resources distributed by the NSW. Curfews make it impossible for her to collaborate with others in ways that could potentially liberate her from her repressive environment. She is restricted from communicating with other women writers and with the public by censorship practices that enforce a mandate of silence upon liberal thoughts and ideals. She is acutely aware of the dynamics of her surveillance and responds by self-consciously censoring herself.

Eltit challenges Pinochet's doctrine of womanhood and nationalism by showing the effects of self-censoring auto-surveillance on the Chilean woman. An "anti-manual" of conservative Chilean womanhood, *E. Luminata* critiques the lives women are intended to live as moral guardians of the nation and proponents of traditional Chilean manhood. Its acts of auto-performance challenge the NSW's propagandizing of women's subjectivity because they reveal the dysfunction of the doctrine of womanhood and provide precisely what is being denied to women: the capability to perform their womanhood on their own inherently transgressive terms. Eltit uses self-conscious auto-performativity as a tool against a discourse of womanhood that commands silence, sacrifice, abnegation, and other ladylike virtues upheld by the auto-surveillance of the secretariat. Her narrative functions as an artistic, collective self-representation of the liberal Chilean woman in which the protagonist's body, the public spaces she occupies after curfew, and the text in which her performance of womanhood is depicted all serve as metaphors for the public discourse in which Chilean woman can reclaim the power of self-representation.

My focus on E. Luminata as an autobiographical protagonist is not driven by autobiographical details but by her emblematic representation of womanhood under Pinochet. Not the conventional memoir which readers have come to expect from Isabel Allende and Marjorie Agosin who have enjoyed the freedom to write and publish about their

experiences of Chilean womanhood outside of Chile, *E. Luminata* is the product of a much more repressive environment and masquerades as an act of counter-discursive autobiography—a public self-representation of womanhood made to be impossible. Much like Eltit, the protagonist after whom the book is titled plays out various acts of self-representation in a public "prison" of totalitarian dictatorship. All we know about her at the outset of the narrative is that she is a frustrated, traumatized Chilean woman author who isn't what she used to be. Her mind, "emptied of all memory," leaves her with no story and no past (10). As a woman out unchaperoned after dark, she also isn't what she "should be" in the "New Order." She rejects the archetypical Marian model of moral superiority and is, instead, "like the most cracked of madonnas" (111). Held to the ideal of self-sacrificial womanhood, E. Luminata fails as a paragon of virtue. She comes out in public after curfew and engages in illegal and illicit behavior which risks the very life she is trying to articulate.

Eltit presents readers with a symbolic, if not actual, autobiographical act which seeks the vindication and liberation of its subject in the act of self-representation under the surveillance of state terrorism. She uses self-representational strategies as a codified form of activism against the repression of liberal womanhood in the public eye. Her protagonist occupies a space denied to both the author and her autobiographical figure. To be a presence, both in the public square and in the public discourse, despite government and self-censorship, she presents readers with a figural self whose physical body and manuscript in progress are inscribed by the invisibility and silence mandated by the regime. Eltit describes racing back at night to make it home before the 8 pm curfew went into effect and seeing empty public plazas lit by street lights which appeared to her like an empty stage of available but uninhabitable spaces (Lazzara 30). This paradox bids Eltit to consider public streets a stage in which she could imagine a character who could occupy them for insurrectional purposes (Lazzara 30). In the captive spaces of auto-surveillance, Eltit performatively demonstrates the Chilean woman's inability to represent herself autonomously in that public sphere. She performs textual insurrection by enabling impossible autobiographical acts in three of the most territorialized spaces in Chile: the female body, published literature, and the public center of military surveillance referred to as "the square."

The square where Eltit's protagonist creeps unlawfully about represents the public sphere of the "New Chile" where she is under constant surveillance by the regime. Here, she is curiously guarded by the light of a flashing neon sign, a symbolic representation of dictatorship, a "light/power emanating from an unseen source," that illuminates her and names her (160). Like the NSW doctrine, this light which names

her is acknowledged as an artificial illumination which distorts her even as it makes her visible, "bestowed by the signboard that will turn on and off, rhythmic and ritual, in the process that will definitely give [women] life: their civic identity" (14). The light, which symbolizes the invasive gaze of Pinochet's regime, enables others to keep watch over the citizens of Santiago. As a result, E. Luminata's performance becomes conspicuous precisely because "this sign that lights up at night is constructing his message" (16). Yet, she refuses to be authored by any "message" of Pinochet's doctrine: "Even though they know she requires precisely that space in order to put on her show. She has assumed another identity: did it through literature. That way, she recognizes herself in her own image, the one reflected on the ground when a new pencil of light falls from the luminous sign" (25). It is in the light of this message that E. Luminata reclaims the square and her body. She deflects the "aliases" hurled down from the sign and constructs a selfhood that only she recognizes, one which is outside any clearly identifiable proper name—or "distinguished" one, for that matter (27). A reader can never be sure if this illuminated body seeking subjectivity in the square is, or is not, capable of performance outside the square and the message penciled in the square is never quite stated. Clearly a reference to Pinochet's "Message to the Chilean Woman," Eltit resists efforts to prevent her from assuming a new literary identity in the text and in the square where this message can presumably be read.

To read the square is to see it as an actual physical fortress of oppressive and almost surreal or, as Eltit refers to it, "phantasmagoric" security measures where she can expect to endure torture if she doesn't conform to feminized precepts of morality (53). It recalls for readers the site of the National Stadium of Chile in Santiago, which is an enclosed space converted from the former soccer arena known as the site of the mass imprisonment of 40,000 Chileans deemed enemies of the state during the 1973 coup. The police state installed by Pinochet used ruthless and systematic methods of repression which relentlessly eliminated opposition. These methods involved routine kidnapping, interrogation, torture, imprisonment, and "vengeance killings" which successfully silenced tens of thousands of people suspected of anti-Pinochet sensibilities (Ensalco 35). Mary Louise Pratt captures the significance of captivity and corporal punishment as a public spectacle when she describes the repurposed stadium as "a canonized arena for the exercise of a secular, civilian, masculine nationality" (157). It is here in this powerfully symbolic space where E. Luminata attempts to regain her subjectivity as a woman in acts of self-inflicted violence which echo the public memory of death squads responsible for the imprisonment, torture, rape, and execution of Chilean

women. These acts of physical violence against herself are all staged in this space where she exploits her visibility to the new regime. If E. Luminata seeks to reclaim the territory of the plaza and herself in it, she must do so in the symbolic light of dictatorship's highly invasive gaze which functions as a symbolic prison of auto-surveillance.

Through E. Luminata, Eltit demonstrates that, without ever having to be physically enclosed in this famous arena, women are held captive by their own self-scrutiny in a panopticon of the NSW's mission to "create a national conscience of women's mission in the family and society" (*Síntesis* 20). The public space of the arena is also emblematic of torture and imprisonment in the private sphere of the home. Here, Eltit shows her protagonist birthing, nursing, copulating, and performing other private acts in ways that refuse to mystify or romanticize the civilian duties of a wife and mother in the New Order. The NSW indoctrinated women into highly visible civic roles as public caretakers whose unpaid volunteer work charged them with the same social responsibilities they were expected to manage in their private families. As volunteers in care centers, elder care facilities, afterschool programs, and healthcare clinics, women were public mothers of the Chilean family (*Síntesis* 21, 22). By bringing E. Luminata's private acts into the square in ways that seem indecent and depraved, Eltit demonstrates the abhorrent nature of women watching other women suffer violations of their human rights under this indoctrination. The woman promised a sacred role in the future of Chile is, instead, imprisoned and defiled before the vigilant eye of public scrutiny. She exists completely and totally within an ideological prison built on the surveillance of women by women and, indeed, by themselves as functions of their own subjection, a means of self-censure which is equally, if not more, efficient in the reproduction of ideal womanhood as confinement behind bars.

In the psychic condition of captivity reproduced in the square, the flawed, fragmented, and incomplete E. Luminata is like a prisoner of the divine and biological destiny she is compelled by the NSW to fulfill. Her awareness that the "gaze is alert everywhere" results in an internalized oppression in which she, like all women targeted by the NSW, functions as an instrument of auto-surveillance under Pinochet's dictatorial power (195). Her confinement to the doctrines of conservative womanhood is carried out within her own perpetual auto-surveillance, which, like the effect of the panopticon, is intended to maintain "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 201). The social architecture reinforced by the manual of the NSW ensures that women see themselves as active bearers of civic and political influence. Their "volunteer" participation in a self-regulating body of women makes the actual exercise of state power unnecessary due

to the illusion that individual self-determination as women and Chileans is in the hands of each "distinguished" lady.

While the power of public surveillance lies in its invisibility (it cannot be easily seen and, therefore, cannot be easily subverted), E. Luminata's greatest vulnerability as a woman in Pinochet's Chile is her visibility. Tools of her oppression achieve the opposite effects of what we might expect of captivity. Rather than "to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide," her constant illumination in the light of the square overexposes and blinds her. In his exploration of the Benthamite panopticon, Foucault reminds us that "[v]isibility is a trap" (Foucault 200). The inability to avoid detection makes E. Luminata a conspicuous presence to the gaze yet isolates her from others who are blinded from her sight. Her place in the spotlight effectively prevents her from seeing herself among others, a critical element of self-identification. In its panoptic effect, the power of the regime intends for her to be seen, to be interrogated—not to see or to communicate (Foucault 200). The ceaseless gaze of the NSW which is represented by this constant illumination is highlighted as a method of control over Chilean women. Intended to ensure conformity with the dominant ideology, it prevents her from engaging in any iterative process of identifying herself among other Chilean women outside of the bounds of official discourse of feminine vocation. This invisibility of nonconformist women to one another parallels the way inmates in a prison are unavailable to one another for collaborative or collective communication and rebellion. By calling on women to instill in themselves and in others "the fundamental importance of domestic tasks for the destiny of society," the NSW creates an environment in which women insist on compliance with the performance of dignified womanhood (*La Mujer Chilena* 23). It renders the Chilean woman the "object of information, and never a subject in communication" (Foucault 200). They can be inscribed with "the dignity that radiates from the concept of service" to the public but never engage in acts of self-exploration, self-construction, and self-inscription as subjects (*La Mujer Chilena* 23).

Although Eltit is writing in the "*generación de los vigilados*," or "the generation under surveillance," she demonstrates that there is also power in her visibility and that the conditions of resistance are still possible under surveillance. Eltit shows her protagonist, and indeed herself, in the midst of this crisis and shows the grounds upon which she can come to voice and effect change in the public sphere. E. Luminata's powerlessness exists in relationship to power; like her author, she is constantly under surveillance. Therefore, her resistance to power must also exist within the uneven power dynamics that create her seemingly counter-intuitive combination of conspicuous visibility and ultimate voicelessness. In the

moments before E. Luminata decides to write a message on the pavement, the narrator declares that "she sacrifices the gaze, castrates herself of the eye that gazes at her to the point of wearing it down and renewing it in its true role" (112). With this decision to "castrate" herself of the patriarchal "eye that gazes," she rejects compulsory auto-surveillance and replaces it with auto-performance. Eltit draws attention to this act as a "renewing" of the gaze as a tool of self-representation, albeit not one without limits as her illumination can yield innuendo of behavior considered undignified for a Chilean woman: "She wrote: illuminated entirely, turned on" (134). In these words, Eltit transforms the gaze as a tool of oppression into a tool for the diffusion of Chilean women's identity in a range of self-representational techniques of contested womanhood.

Eltit's most striking technique is the use of violent, macabre, and perverse behavior on the part of her protagonist. Eltit shows how the "New Order" and its discourses of womanhood inevitably lead to the destruction of the very woman it purports to uphold. When E. Luminata appears, she is lurking about in this public, politically charged, illuminated space. She appears to have been tortured and bears open wounds inflicted both by the military government and by her own hand. A surface reading of her appearance and her erratic self-destructive behavior may lead censors to assume that this transgressor is insane and, therefore, feel justified in assuming that she deserves to be brought to order. Yet, read as a manifestation of a more complex condition, her instability may be a sign of a psycho-social schism brought on by the repressive environment in which she lives. The ruptures of selfhood and of nation that occur under Pinochet's dictatorship are opportunities for generating possibilities for re-invention and re-construction within the confines of dictatorship. When dislocated from *Pinochetista* paradigms of womanhood, her subjectivity becomes diffuse—an active and live organism which enacts a powerfully symbolic form of social protest against the NSW's supposed ideological truths of collective Chilean womanhood. Instead of aspiring to be a firm structural cornerstone of fascist Chile, this character engenders her subjectivity more democratically as an open physical and discursive construct through which to subvert Pinochet's doctrine of womanhood and its effects on her art. The undecidability of E. Luminata's selfhood dispels the illusion of a unified women's selfhood and resists the inscription of an inherent motherhood and wifedom on public discourse. In this way, she can show herself in the act of performing a traumatized womanhood that appears to enable the dominant patriarchal ideology while it, in fact, dismantles it from within the walls of patriotic discourse and authority.

Roberto Canovas has described *E. Luminata* as "a trance of pain" in which Eltit consciously acts out the abuses committed against women and

"exorcises" them in auto-performative scarring (Canovas 27, translations mine). Her protagonist's self-inflicted pain functions as a self-inscription of suffering and visible testimony of her abuse within the traumatized social and physical body of Chilean womanhood. To inflict scars on herself is to overwrite the inscription of Chilean woman's identity imposed by the doctrine with something self-constructed, self-validating, and counter-discursive. The contours of E. Luminata's new subjectivity, "which emerges from pain," carry a story of her lived experience as a liberal woman in Pinochet's Chile and the lasting proof of her scars (Canovas 25, translations mine). In this way, E. Luminata's body, which is described by the narrator as "demolished by razing scabs," is a transgressive text which fills gaps in the unarticulated and, perhaps, in-articulable violence committed against Chilean women (80). Elaborating E. Luminata's "demolished" body into new subjectivities, dissident subjectivities whose identifying scars are evidence of her protest, keeps her from being swallowed whole by the abyss of dominant discourse in which she is a function rather than a subject (Castro-Klaren 23).[9]

By publicly wounding their bodies, Eltit and E. Luminata enact literal and symbolic forms of communal suffering shared with the social body of women in post-coup Chile. This use of pain and the visible markings of trauma concretizes Eltit's solidarity with other women and against the physical and social trauma resulting from dictatorship. The narrator clarifies, "To put it differently: it's not the wound that causes the cry, but precisely the reverse: for her to be wounded, the cry was necessary, all the rest's pretext" (29). The scars she inflicts upon herself are ritual acts of her self-destruction as an individual "I" with intact and impermeable borders and lend themselves as open, perpetual wounds in her ongoing process of reconstruction as part of a collective "we" of dis-identification with official womanhood. They are a sign that what is fragmented is never made whole; what is violated is never restored. Instead, the protagonist persists without resolution in serial acts of self-expression which are as readily identifiable with her individual wounds as they are with the collective trauma of dictatorship. This dis-identification is important to ensuring that Eltit's audiences and readers accept her disturbing forms of self-expression as progressive acts of making the invisible experiences of dissident womanhood visible. Visible signs of torture show the woman's body as a site of her oppression upon which we can read a story of shared experience: "Cry and illuminated sign stalk each other/Like enemies in the night they compete" (31). By resisting an autobiographical "I" proper, Eltit maintains a collective voice for the performance of liberal Chilean womanhood and joins E. Luminata's individual body to an anti-Pinochet social collective. Physically exhibiting herself and her protagonist as

damaged, fractured women in gestures of communion with her people proves that the broken and flawed Chilean woman lives a life more precisely like that of her equally ruptured nation than the life that can be surmised from reading NSW propaganda about the feminine duty "to promote and channel women's support for the government" (21). Eltit captures a Chile which is fragmented, not reformed by a campaign for traditional values. The Chilean woman who identifies with the trauma of dictatorship is invisible in the public discourse. In articulating that social self, Eltit must avoid approximating the authoritative voice of the First Lady whose mobilizing rhetoric promises to "channel" women's national identity rather than explore it as a social construct (*La Mujer Chilena* 21).

There is no pretense of E. Luminata's particular suitability to perform a coherent Chilean womanhood. She projects only the instability of language and literary stylistics which are limited and fragile structures upon which to inscribe her autobiographical self. Eltit substitutes proper womanhood with a range of other bodily experiences—copulation, autoeroticism, menstruation—in distorted, erratic, and even grotesquely ritualistic moments that deconstruct the ideal models of Chilean womanhood. Bernardita Llanos suggests that myths of morality and proper behavior figuratively pass through the body of E. Luminata and become unseated along with all conventions of tasteful selfrepresentation. Her impropriety serves to "sketch a disfigured and unmasked subject before its culture, its conventions and norms" and prove the ideal womanhood endorsed by NSW propaganda to be no more exempt from examination as an ideological construct than her own performance (Llanos 112, my translations). When E. Luminata challenges the dominant codes of woman hood, she always does so irreverently and in plain view of the gaze. Her performance makes visible forms of counter-doctrine behavior which undermine the myth that Chilean national womanhood takes only one shape as the chaste, selfabnegating, moral wife and mother. Through her, Eltit re-appropriates the often sexualized violence and auto- surveillance used as tools to repress women and transforms them into a tool for seeking autonomy—a performative act of self-examination, autonomy, and recuperation that restores women's bodies and their voices. Staged as an artistic act of social protest, her performance is similar to those staged by CADA. This public performance of womanhood subject to cruelty and oppression overwrites these very same "physical and psychic weapons" Pinochet used against the people in the resymbolization of public space as a virtual prison (Pratt 159). Like the square, the female body is used by Eltit as a metaphor for Chilean society, a territory to be appropriated and subdued with corporeal discipline. By using her body to perform improper acts of womanhood, she is resisting the cultural violence of

auto-surveillance used by the NSW "to disseminate patriotic and family values" (*La Mujer Chilena* 21).

Placing E. Luminata's actual and symbolic body in the public square at night marks her very existence as rebellious. No matter what she does, it is inherently counter-doctrine because it occurs in this outlawed space where the act of censorship is immanent. Almost as soon as she writes words of protest on the pavement, she herself erases them in an instinctive act of self-censorship and self-preservation (113). Chalking the pavement functions for her as a temporary and easily undone form of coming to voice in the public sphere. Once she decides to re-write her message, it isn't long before her instincts are validated and a crowd of spectators respond defensively by using their own bodies to walk over her words and deliberately erase them. Understanding her speech as a dangerous act of aggression, they effectively determine the limits of her speech and its impact on society (114). Narrator, protagonist, and author are all public and "published" selves claiming representational power over an already over-determined Chilean womanhood.

In order to write the experience of the woman under surveillance, Eltit's narrative must be counter-discursive but not marked as such by censors. She cannot be identified by that gaze as an enemy of the state. Her auto-performative acts require a "new identity" to be born in the text. In a form of rebirth, Eltit describes a baptism by fire in which innovation and manipulation of generic and narrative convention clear a space for a performance of her identity as a woman writer under the regime. Eltit writes, "Only so [that] she will be granted a new identity does she resort to tradition and like a quotation, facing the fire she brings her hand near, stretches her hand over the flames and lets it fall upon them" (41). This baptism is painful, self-inflicted and requires a certain degree of risk, much like the dangerous act of coming to an autobiographical voice of social protest in a police state. It signifies the physical pain a woman risks in the performance of unauthorized acts of self-representation and Eltit's foreword affirms it by describing the process of publishing her work under Pinochet's dictatorship as passing "unscathed through an ordeal by fire" (5). Just as Eltit is fully aware of the repressive tool of censorship, E. Luminata poses before the nameless wanderers in the plaza and bends over to chalk the pavement in full acknowledgement of the possible "loss of intelligibility of the message" (38). Her attempt to inscribe a message on the pavement is a figurative act of twinning the author's and the protagonist's re-appropriation of public discourse. It allows readers to see an implicit Eltit bearing witness to her own struggle to expose and subvert Pinochet's doctrine in an environment which is so heavily patrolled by the new regime that there is, presumably, no place to hide from censorship

(104). With her words, E. Luminata disempowers the threat of interrogation in the presence of other indoctrinated subjects. With the words she writes in the pavement, "Where [are] you going?"—the gaze of military surveillance is inverted in a mimicry of the discourse of interrogation through which she reclaims the right to occupy the public square after curfew (113).

The acknowledgement of the gaze suggested here enables both E. Luminata's deconstruction as a subject of Pinochet's rule and her construction as an individual unlike the others in the square who are silhouettes, "opaque and reduced" by surveillance (16). The narrator suggests that one must recognize the fiction of interrogation by questioning its traditionalizing gaze: "Point out the defect in the gaze, the fictiveness of its/angle" (21). This act points to the hope for a new democratic Chile in which the voice of the people is not repressed by the neo-paternalism that drives the NSW. It permits her to occupy the borderline between self-regulating and self-identifying in ways that reveal how each method has operated in the interest of Chilean women's indoctrination as guardians of the family. In a birthing sequence, E. Luminata is seen to exhibit animal-like behavior by raising her "haunch" and mooing like a cow (62). Naturalized as a stock breeder, the protagonist appears not only inhuman, but also careless as she alternately suckles herself and squirts her milk onto other people in the crowd of onlookers.[10] This conspicuously inhuman figure is later said by the narrator to "know her pen well and also the fences which restrain her" in the literal spaces and functions where her behavior is observed and regulated (75). As she shows herself in the act of resisting distinguished Chilean womanhood, the methods of control which "restrain" her also come into view and are, therefore, also subject to scrutiny. This performance of unregulated womanhood dismantles the effects of the dominant discourse by denationalizing and denaturalizing its power to represent any natural Chilean's women's selfhood and nationalism. Her performance does not replace the prevailing traditional image of womanhood but re-places it into the space of the public prison of sexual and political conservatism where she can unpack it in the custody of the military gaze.

While *E. Luminata* stages such scandalous acts of rebellion, the complex and multilayered postmodern stylistics may have been too complicated for censors to decipher. This is due, in large part, to the fact that she so self-consciously constructs her protagonist as a product of autosurveillance. Later, in her interview with Michael Lazzara, Eltit confirms her subversion of censorship by describing her process of writing with the state-mandated process in mind as an effort to "screw" the censor by imagining him in the room even as she escapes his scrutiny:

> Well, you know that in Chile at the time when I published *E. Luminata*, there was an office of censorship, a physical office. And books were to go through that office for a publication permit because otherwise no bookstore would get them. This means that someone could publish, but without official permission they had no chance of reaching the bookstores. And, since I publish an editorial column, obviously my book was going to pass through that office. In that sense, I wrote with a censor at my side, in the most symbolic sense of the term because I knew exactly that my book was going to that office. So, I had several censors: in one way, the real censor was there but I did not know him; on the other hand, there was the censorship that I would imagine—my own […]. In the end, there were the revisions of the writer plus the inherently censoring atmosphere, plus the actual censor—a censor with whom I always wrote. I wrote with him at my side. So, it was interesting because I would write something that to me seemed very politically insurrectionary. And I would say, well, here I'm screwing the censor, you know? So obviously my first book [*E. Luminata*] is written with that censor. I wrote with him. But my integrity as a writer was never, ever to write *for him*. It is one thing to say I would write *with him* and another to say I would write *for him*. Never for him, that is, never the censorship that the censor wanted. (9, my translations)

In imagining her censor and his mandate to publish only those works which will endorse the "New Truth," Eltit appropriates the discourse of state propaganda and allows her protagonist to appear intelligible as a cautionary figure. It is likely that her censor read this bleeding woman crawling in the streets and assumed that she was insane. Taken as a cautionary tale justifying Pinochet's doctrine of family values, the protagonist demonstrates what might happen to a woman who chooses not to be a proper wife and mother. In this way, like the "photographic cut" mused upon in the text, the performance of her Chilean womanhood is examined by a "constrained" eye to whom the actual performance is invisible: "And what about the eye then?/The eye that reads it, erratic, constrained only by its own contour, imprisons itself in a linear reading?" (Eltit 157). The imprisoned linear reading suggests a censor's search for straightforward details of plot and other surface information that would identify acts of dissent. "Despite the fact that a 'cut' is essentially 'divulged' by the author as a signal for subversive reading, the censor experiences it as an annoying/unseen interruption" and it goes unnoticed as an act of resistance (Eltit 157). Her victory over surveillance is announced in the language of artistic technique, "*Trompe l'oeil*," which relies on optical illusion to lend depth to the depiction of "flat" objects (157).

Eltit occludes her autobiographical self in codes like this which both afford the artistic flexibility to "keep to the edge of insinuation" and appear to protect her from the possibility of imprisonment (7). Not only

is Eltit engaging in what she calls the "dispersion" of genres by "working with bits of materials, scraps of voices, exploring vaguely (I mean to say, like a vagabond) genres, masquerades, simulacra, and verbalized emotion," she is representing a writer who is trapped in an environment in which she is not free to write the truth without dire consequences (7). Eltit describes the relationship between narrator, protagonist, and author in the fortress of auto-surveillance:

> Her soul is this world and nothing else in the lighted square
> Her soul is being E. Luminata and offering herself as another.
> Her soul is not being called diamela eltit/white sheets/cadaver
> Her soul is to mine the twin. (90)

The implied "diamela"—small "d"—is dangerously identified, yet not completely assigned the author's proper name and left vulnerable to the fate of a cadaver—silenced and rendered further anonymous by white sheets. The reference to herself permits E. Luminata to speak *for*, yet not explicitly *as* the autobiographical Eltit (Gilmore 87). She offers up a construction of selfhood which she recognizes but cannot be easily identified by others as Diamela Eltit. This ambiguous twinning also allows her to claim a voice as the "author" of her representation of Chilean womanhood without the authoritarianism against which she objects in the repressive environment of the NSW.

Just as one either is or isn't a distinguished lady under the NSW's unilateral reading of Chilean womanhood, the protagonist either is or isn't Diamela Eltit. E. Luminata subverts the strict codes of who she *is* or *can be* under Pinochet's rule and leaves her identity an open construct. This in no way suggests that she has doubts about who she is, at least no more doubt than any person seeking the power to self-identify. But it does interrupt the unilateral reading of her discursive and political womanhood in which there are only two options: either *she is* or *she isn't* the author/activist. And it exposes the fraudulent promise of agency embedded in the rhetoric of distinguished womanhood that Pinochet authorizes to determine her identity. It is, ultimately, the reader who will determine who is being constructed in the plaza and who is sharing the struggle to exist as a woman outside the permissible boundaries of womanhood under Pinochet. Moreover, the reader is forced to consider the circumstances of recording some truth about that existence under such repressive conditions as darkness, confinement, and mandated silence. The tensions between the self-representation one desires to reify one's own autonomous existence under dictatorship and the self-censorship required to survive remain

unresolved in the gray area between "assigning" her name to the protagonist without "signing" her autobiographical signature. This gray area allows her to construct a selfhood without losing her life. One of multiple possible interpretations is that she is an autobiographical figure for Eltit, an author who artfully protests her own indoctrination into Pinochet's audience of distinguished ladies. Autobiography is a virtually impossible genre under the restrictive conditions of dictatorship. The form cannot be itself and must take on a variety of fictionalized forms. Eltit's narrative cannot take the generic form of memoir as can the popular works of other Chilean women, such as Isabel Allende and Marjorie Agosin, who enjoy the freedom to write and publish outside of Chile. As a product of the repressive environment of Pinochet's Chile, Eltit's work can only find its way into print as a voice of dissenting autofictional performativity where it can be read as an emblematic autobiography of nonconformist womanhood under Pinochet. As figural autobiography it can respond to the social policy of the NSW, to Pinochet's systems of surveillance, and to the perversion of family and morality.

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NOTES

1 Eltit, Diamela. *E. Luminata*, pp. 5.

2 *Secretaria Nacional de Mujeres*.

3 *Mensaje a la Mujer Chilena*.

4 *Distinguidas Damas*.

5 Before the institution of the NSW, local *Centros de Madres, or* "Mothers' Centres," had provided workshops and training to women in everything from artisanal trades and professional skills to home economics since the 1920s. After Hiriart took control of the *Centros*, they only assisted women who carried the "carnet"—an identification card issued to women who proved their loyalty to the new government after a 6-month probationary period during which they were observed (*Diez Anos*). This civic identity card afforded mothers many privileges, including family health care and entrance into stores where they could buy special products reserved for mothers. The carnet was a successful tool in regulating behavior, as it could be taken away at any time. It ensured that women upheld and reproduced the official discourse of dedicated "card-carrying" membership in this distinguished group led by the First Lady. On behalf of her husband's military regime, Hiriart used the carnet to restrict the distribution of scholarships, childcare, and other benefits only to those who attended parades or rallies and showed public support for Pinochet's leadership. Structured in the image of the new regime, it had no democratic leadership, only posts held by the wives of high-ranking military leaders who used the "new truth" of traditional values to determine regulations and requirements for earning the carnet. Whether women joined for economic reasons or ideological ones, they were the bearers of Pinochet's "message" to the Chilean woman and the blunt instrument of women-centered surveillance with which he subdued those who rejected his ideal that

the most suitable public life for women corresponds to their natural feminine capabilities as the "cornerstone of society" ("*Mensaje*" 8 and 10).

6 Originally published as *Lumperíca* (1998), the title protagonist synthesizes the anonymity of the lumpen proletariat with the conspicuous and transgressive feminine figure who defies the unprecedented systematic repression of women's personal and political expression in Chile.

7 Indeed, the ways in which Eltit sheds light on human rights violations against women under Pinochet's regime not only achieve an impossible autobiographical performance of womanhood from within the prison of censorship, they achieve the international recognition of a 1985 Guggenheim fellowship. See "Fellows Finder" (https://www.gf.org/fellows/all-fellows/diamela-eltit).

8 The performance appears in the brief *avante garde* film *Zona de Dolor I/Maipú, Zone of Pain/Maipú* (1980) in which she is filmed burning and lacerating both arms, literal zones of pain on her arms and shoulders (Neustadt 2). The protagonist of *E. Luminata* is based on this performance and other public performaces for which Eltit is known. For more details about Eltit's self-mutilation and performance art, see Robert Neustadt's essay "Diamela Eltit: Performing Action in Dictatorial Chile."

9 Eltit was known to self-mutilate in public for protests staged by CADA (Holmes 1). *Colectivo Acciones de Arte,* 1979–1989.

10 This bizarre depiction of E. Luminata squirting breast milk is likely be an encoded critique of the breastfeeding campaign of the NSW which insisted on the selflessness of new mothers who were to stay at home and be constantly available to nurse their infants. She appears to be mocking the role of the public mother as she figuratively "nurses" strangers in the public square.