

KAMCHATKA

REVISTA DE ANÁLISIS CULTURAL



Teatro y Violencias de Estado en América Latina y España

Maria Morant Giner ed. n. 23 / 2024

K A M C H A T K A

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TEATRO Y VIOLENCIAS DE ESTADO EN AMÉRICA LATINA Y ESPAÑA

Theater and State violence in Latin America and Spain

Presentación. Teatro y violencias de Estado en América Latina y España 5-20
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“MEMORY IS NOT FOR SALE!”

LA VENDA SEXY AND POLITICAL SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CHILE

“La memoria no se vende!” La Venda Sexy y la violencia política sexual en Chile

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Recibido: 2 de abril de 2023

Aceptado: 23 de mayo de 2023

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0902-9383>

<https://doi.org/10.7203/KAM.23.26428>

N. 23 (2024): 311-337. ISSN: 2340-1869

RESUMEN: Este artículo examina uno de los sitios conmemorativos más conflictivos en Chile: Irán #3037, una casa particular en Santiago que sirvió como centro clandestino de detención bajo el régimen de Pinochet. También conocido como la “Venda Sexy” o la Discotéque, el sitio era conocido por la violencia y el abuso sexual durante la dictadura. Basándose en testimonios de sobrevivientes y la teoría de performance, este artículo analiza la obra de Patricia Artés Ibáñez y Tomás Henríquez Murgas de 2019, *Irán #3037 [violencia político sexual en dictadura]*, para considerar como el “teatro de protesta” puede desempeñar un papel catártico para una nación en crisis y servir como un potente vehículo en la lucha por la justicia por los crímenes de “violencia política sexual” en los tiempos de dictadura. Mi lectura se centra en la memoria corporal en la obra: las dimensiones afectivas, experienciales y situadas de la memoria que recrean la violencia bajo la dictadura cívico-militar, incluso cuando se encuentran ecos en el estallido social de 2019. Por lo tanto, este ensayo retoma la violencia de género en el pasado y el presente, considerando el impacto de la estrategia de “funa” en la conciencia social y los avances recientes en los casos penales legados de la era de Pinochet en Chile. Este artículo adopta un enfoque literario crítico, basándose en los campos de los estudios de género, los estudios de la memoria, la fenomenología y el derecho.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Chile, memoria corporal, estallido social, funa, violencia política sexual, testimonio, Venda Sexy.

ABSTRACT: This article examines one of the most fraught memorial sites in Chile: Irán 3037, a regular house in Santiago that served as a clandestine detention center under the Pinochet regime. Also known as the “Venda Sexy” or the Discotéque, the site was known for sexual violence and abuse. Drawing on testimony of survivors and performance theory, this article analyzes Patricia Artés Ibáñez’ and Tomás Henríquez Murgas’ 2019 play, *Irán #3037 [violencia político sexual en dictadura]*, to consider how the “theater of protest” may play a cathartic role for a nation in crisis and a potent vehicle in the fight for justice for dictatorship-era crimes of “political sexual violence”. My reading focuses on bodily memory in the play: the affective, experiential, and situated dimensions of memory which reenacted violence under the civic-military dictatorship even as they found echoes in the 2019 *estallido social*. This essay thus takes up gender-based violence in the past and present, considering the impact of *funa* on social awareness and recent developments in Pinochet-era criminal cases in Chile. It takes a critical literary approach, drawing on the fields of gender studies, memory studies, phenomenology, and law.

KEYWORDS: Chile, bodily memory, estallido social, funa, political sexual violence, testimony, Venda Sexy.

LA VENDA SEXY

Irán 3037, also known as “La Venda Sexy” or the “Discotéque,” is a domestic house on a corner lot at the intersection of the Calle Irán and Los Plátanos in the tranquil, middle-class district of Macul in the capital city of Santiago.¹ A two-story residence with a winding, marble stairway and a large patio, the house is surrounded by a low wall (figure 1). It sits on a wide, leafy street near a park where children play. The site served as one of the major clandestine detention centers operated by DINA (Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional) in the early years of the brutal 17-year regime of General Augusto Pinochet.² Until recently, the house was a private residence. Block stencil prints reading “¿Dónde están?” and “Aquí se torturó” track the pavement like footprints. A mosaic plaque in front of the house reads: “Aquí en Venda Sexy Mujeres Militantes Populares Resistieron y Sobrevivieron a la Violencia Político Sexual Ejecutada por la Dictadura Cívico Militar” (figure 2).

1 I am grateful to Maria Morant Giner and Jaume Peris Blanes for including my article in this special issue of *Kamchatka* on theater and state violence and for the generous and insightful reviews of two external reviewers. Special thanks to Chilean theater director Patricia Artés Ibáñez for sharing the screenplay of *Irán #3037* with me.

2 The code name for the site was “Tacora,” and the barracks was run under the direction of the Chacal Group. The first Chilean truth commission report, *Informe de la Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación* (1991), considers La Venda Sexy one of the four main detention centers operated by DINA during the dictatorship: “Este local completa la lista de los principales recintos secretos de detención y tortura que mantuvo la DINA. Junto con Londres No. 38, José Domingo Cañas y Villa Grimaldi, La Discotéque es uno de los lugares donde permanecieron, durante el período que nos ocupa, muchos de los que luego serían ‘detenidos desaparecidos’ de la DINA” (Informe Rettig, 1996: 467).



Figure 1. The ex-Venda Sexy detention site, Oct. 11, 2019.
Photograph by Terri Gordon-Zolov.



Figure 2. Plaque in front of the Venda Sexy, Oct. 11, 2019.
Photograph by Terri Gordon-Zolov.

At the time of the coup, Irán 3037 belonged to a member of the Communist Party, Héctor Domingo Muñoz. Muñoz went into exile and put the house in the hands of his brother, who rented it out to the head of a DINA group, ostensibly to be used for temporary police accommodations (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2016: 115). The house served as an active clandestine torture center from June 1974 to March 1975. About 100 prisoners were detained there, most of whom were university students active in the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) or the Socialist Party. Twenty-seven of the prisoners disappeared (*Patrimonio de la memoria de los derechos humanos en Chile*: 2017: 289). Torture, and especially sexual torture, was a regular and systematic aspect of the prison (CMN, 2016). Prisoners were blindfolded at all times, and loud, ambient music blasted from speakers to cover up the sounds of screams.³ In a book consecrated to memory sites, the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes notes: “[L]a singularidad de Irán fue la práctica indiscriminada de la tortura sexual, sea por los frecuentes y reiterados abusos sexuales de parte de los agentes y guardias con las prisioneras en las noches como está acreditado o, más aberrante aún, por el perro alsaciano pastor alemán de nombre ‘Volodia’ que, entrenado por la también fallecida mayor de Carabineros Ingrid Olderock Bernhard, violaba a mujeres y hombres en el subterráneo” (2016: 119-20).⁴ In 1985, the house was sold to the neighbors, a couple who was aware of the abuse that had taken place on the site (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2016: 116-17). They first tried to rent it out and then to establish a nursery school for children, but inhabitants invariably fled when they learned of the sinister history of the place. Industrialist José Saravia bought the house in 2005 and moved in with his family.

The house, which was declared a National Monument in May 2016, has been one of the most contested memorial spaces in post-dictatorial Santiago. Sites with the denomination of National Monument are accorded a special status: they may not be altered or destroyed, and the government has the first right of purchase in the event of a sale

³ “Los agentes del equipo operativo funcionaban dentro de un horario similar al común de la jornada de trabajo.... El recinto tenía música ambiental permanente, razón por la cual era conocido como ‘La Discotéque’” (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2016: 118).

⁴ Truth commission reports stress the emphasis on sexual torture at La Venda Sexy. The Rettig Report states: “Los métodos de tortura se diferenciaban del de los otros recintos en cuanto se enfatizaban las vejaciones de tipo sexual. La violación de las detenidas y otros abusos sexuales de parte de guardias y agentes eran práctica corriente. También los detenidos varones eran víctimas de tales vejaciones.” (Informe Rettig, 1996: 468). See also the *Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura* (2005): 443. Decreto No. 277 (2016) of the Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales de Chile considers the case of the Venda Sexy to be “a testimony to gender discrimination” under the dictatorship: “Es un testimonio de la discriminación de género aplicado en las torturas sexuales por parte de los agentes de Estado durante la dictadura, cometiendo violaciones sistemáticas a los Derechos Humanos, la dignidad, el cuerpo y la sexualidad de las prisioneras.”

(CMN, 2019). In 2016, the center-left concertación government of Michelle Bachelet offered Saravia 356 million pesos for the house. He refused. But, three years later, in May 2019, he sold the house to a real estate agency for almost half the price (Chornik, 2019). Associations of survivors and families of victims were worried that it would be razed like the José Domingo Cañas memorial house—which was demolished by the owner shortly before it was to gain the official status of National Monument (Chornik, 2019). Collectives actively contested the sale, and provocative feminist protests and performance pieces were held regularly at the site. Activists sought to recuperate the site both as a space of memory and as a feminist memorial. In a joint public statement issued in August 2019, the *Colectivo de Mujeres Sobrevivientes Siempre Resistentes* and the feminist umbrella organization *Coordinadora Feminista 8M* declared: “Es nuestra responsabilidad asumir la tarea de la recuperación de Venda Sexy como un espacio para la memoria activa de las mujeres reivindicando la lucha que muchas libraron y seguimos por un proyecto político de transformación revolucionaria de la sociedad” (“Declaración ante la venta del ex centro de torturas ‘Venda Sexy’”, 2019).⁵ As can be seen in this poster by *Memorias de Rebeldías Feministas* from a protest at the site of the Venda Sexy in August 2019, “La Memoria No Se Vende” is a predominant trope of feminist campaigns (figure 3).

⁵ See, for example, a video of the site-specific protest, “No a la Venta de la Venda Sexy”, that was held on August 19, 2019 (Bertin, 2019). The joint statement calls torture sites “una nueva arista del mercado neoliberal”. Echoing the sentiments of many survivors and families of survivors, it notes: “Es verdaderamente espeluznante que un sitio de memoria pueda ser transado en el mercado sin que ninguna instancia del Estado, particularmente el responsable por ley de preservar y fiscalizar el patrimonio, se haya enterado”. See also De La Maza, 2020.



Figure 3. “Recuperate Venda Sexy for Feminist Memory”/“#Memory is Not for Sale”

Along with site-specific protests, a growing body of contemporary literature has turned to the fraught nature of memorial sites. The Venda Sexy, in particular, has been dramatized in a number of works, such as Carlos Cerda’s 1996 novel, *Una casa vacía*, and Patricia Artés Ibáñez’ and Tomás Henríquez Murgas’ 2019 play, *Irán #3037 [violencia político sexual en dictadura]*. The figure of Carabineros agent Ingrid Olderock is the subject of two plays, Guillermo Alfaro’s *Yo amo a los perros* and Eduardo Vega’s *La mujer de los*

perros, as well as Hugo Covarrubias' Oscar-nominated, animated short film, *Bestia*.⁶ A recent documentary created by the Núcleo Temático de Investigación Género, Imagen y Memoria of the Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, *Venda Sexy: Memorias de un centro de tortura*, captures the experiences of six survivors of the Venda Sexy, all of whom were blindfolded and subject to sustained and systematic interrogation and torture, including beatings, electric shock treatments, rape, sexual abuse, and verbal and physical humiliation.⁷

In a remarkable recent development, the government of left-wing President Gabriel Boric expropriated the property for the compensatory sum of 403 million pesos. Marcela Sandoval, the Minister of National Resources (Ministra de Bienes Nacionales), emphasized the state's commitment to the preservation of memory in the context of the 50th anniversary of the coup: "A 50 años del Golpe, este hito refleja la voluntad genuina del gobierno por avanzar en justicia y reparación y también es un reconocimiento y una victoria para las familias y organizaciones de derechos humanos que no han bajado los brazos por décadas" (Batarce, 2023). At an emotional recovery ceremony held at Plaza Arabia in Macul on September 7, 2023, Minister Sandoval noted that the recuperation of Irán 3037 was part of the state's larger mission to establish a memory site in each region ("A 50 años del golpe", 2023). The house will be turned over to the Asociación de Memoria y DD.HH. Irán 3037 and human rights organizations in Macul in 2024 ("Histórico", 2023). While it is unclear what form the space will take, its status as a space of memory is secured.

Drawing on testimony of survivors and performance theory, this essay analyzes *Irán #3037* to consider how the "theater of protest" may activate embodied memory—memory situated in bodies and situated in space—and provide a potent vehicle for social justice and legal accountability for politically motivated gender-based violence.

IRÁN #3037: BODILY MEMORY

Irán #3037 is situated in a landscape of burgeoning political theater. While theater moved underground in the precarious climate of the dictatorship, post-dictatorial Chile witnessed a resurgence of dramatic performances grappling with the country's troubled past.⁸ Theater companies such as Teatro Los Barbudos and Teatro Público have

6 For a discussion of the figure of Olderock in contemporary drama, see Llanos, 2020.

7 For an analysis of the documentary, see Arellano Hermosilla, 2019.

8 In fact, the emphasis on the politics of memory in the Chilean dramatic scene led the independent theater troupe Ictus to stage a self-reflexive, meta-play entitled *Esto (no) es un testamento* in 2017.

mounted performances dealing with the constellation of gender-based violence, historical memory, and national trauma that informs Artés' Ibáñez' and Henriquez Murgas' play. One such production is Cristian Flores' *El país sin duelo* (2018), the second work of Teatro Los Barbudos' "Justicia, utopía y militancia" trilogy, in which three generations of women confront the silence surrounding the sexual and political violence of the past. Numerous plays have specifically addressed the fate of spaces of memory. For example, Guillermo Calderón's *Villa* (2011), a dialogue between three women—each named Alejandra and each born of rape at the notorious Villa Grimaldi torture and detention center—considers what form the memorial site should take. During the *estallido social*, the 2019-20 social uprising that rocked the nation's urban centers, site-specific street performances provided a bodily expression of the protests against impunity for Pinochet-era crimes, social and economic inequality, and colonial violence. The *Santiago a Mil* festival of January 2020, whose works showcased themes such as racial oppression, police abuse, migration, and indigenous rights, brought the street protests of the *estallido social* into the space of the theater. "We are in a special situation here," remarked the festival's director Carmen Romero, "but Chilean theatre is always political" (Fisher, 2020).

The production of *Irán #3037* coincided with the outbreak of the *estallido social*. The play opened on October 4, 2019 at the Sala de Teatro of the Universidad Mayor in Santiago.⁹ Following a night of violence on October 18, 2019 that triggered a state of emergency and mass mobilization, the university canceled all performances out of safety concerns. The play eventually resumed in November. On the decision to reopen, the company explained, "Nos alegra no porque volvamos a la 'realidad' y a la 'normalidad', sino porque sabemos y sentimos que nuestro trabajo es un aporte a la visibilización y denuncia de la violencia político sexual como una estrategia del estado para doblegarnos, y por sobre todo, porque sentimos que potencia los deseos de justicia y de cambios profundos que nos atraviesan colectivamente" (Escena, Crítica y Memoria, 2019). In line with this sentiment, a series of performances were held at the Teatro Nacional Chileno as part of a "Theater in Emergency" cycle. The drama has had a long run, playing across the country and via online forums during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is not surprising given the unexpected reverberations of the play into the present.¹⁰

9 I attended two performances of the play: one at the Sala de Teatro Universidad Mayor and the other at the Teatro Nacional Chileno. I also undertook a joint interview with the director and attended a conversation between Patricia Artés Ibáñez and Beatriz Bataszew on the theater as a platform for the denunciation of political sexual violence on December 5, 2019.

10 The film was screened for the first time to an English-speaking audience at an OLA (Observatory on Latin America) event at The New School in New York City on October 13, 2022 and is available for distribution. The screening was followed by a conversation with the director.

The play dramatizes the situation of the family living in the ex-Venda Sexy detention site (figure 4). All of the action takes place within the confines of the house. The setting is sparse: the dining room and a bedroom in the house (which morphs into spaces of the former torture site). There are four main characters: an oppressive, right-wing father, a conventional stay-at-home mother, the intellectually and morally awakening daughter Valentina, and her rebellious friend Selva. In the course of doing history homework, the girls uncover the truth of the house. Valentina eventually confronts her father, who justifies his purchase of the house on ideological and practical grounds (it was “[u]n buen negocio”, he says, Artés Ibáñez and Henríquez Murgas, 2023: 62). The mother, on the other hand, is haunted by ghosts in the house, and her state of guilt and terror is revealed in a Lady Macbeth-esque scene in which she obsessively tries to remove stains from the floor. The play juxtaposes the patriarchal, heteronormative parents with the revolutionary, horizontal new generation. In one telling scene, a raunchy sex scene between the debauched parents is set against an innocent first kiss between the girls (figure 5). The play also shifts between past and present, dissolving into scenes from the past in which terrorized women take solace in each other. In one scene, for example, two female prisoners (played by the same girls) discover they know each other from childhood in the notorious space of the bathroom at the Venda Sexy, a scene which is drawn from the testimony of Nora Guillén.¹¹ Through the collapse of the time-space continuum, the house becomes a living, layered, palimpsestuous site. History itself is ever-present, something that *appears* out of the past or *erupts* into the present, much like the space of memory itself.

¹¹ Guillén recounts the experience in the Venda Sexy documentary: “En una ocasión, una compañera me dice, ‘Vamos al baño juntas.’ Fuimos al baño y pudimos entrar. Entramos a ese baño que tenía una ventana como una claraboya como esas de barco, eh... y una vez en el baño nos cerramos, el pestillo, y ambas nos sacamos la venda. Y... ella me dice su nombre y yo le digo el mío, y luego nos abrazamos las dos. Y la idea era que quien saliera primero avisara a la familia de la otra. Para eso era decir el nombre. Pero en este caso ocurrió como un milagro, ambas nos habíamos conocido cuando niñas chicas. Ella era Ida Vera Almarza. La mataron después, la desaparecieron, la hicieron desaparecer. Eh... nos contamos brevemente nuestras actividades. Bueno, tuve la ocasión de verla, de tener este encuentro maravilloso con ella” (Núcleo Gime, 2019). I am grateful to Ignacia Castellon Ramirez for her transcription of the testimonies in the documentary. For recent works on testimony and gender-based violence, see Navarrete Barría, 2019 and Solarte González, 2020. See also Toro Agurto, 2013.



Figure 4. Photograph by Macarena Rodríguez. Courtesy of Patricia Artés Ibáñez.



Figure 5. Photograph by Cris Saavedra. Courtesy of Patricia Artés Ibáñez.

The inclusion of documentary evidence into the play gives it a testimonial and historical function.¹² The material in the play is based on archival sources, including testimonies, photographs, and blueprints of the house from the municipality of Macul. At the outset of the second scene, a text is projected onto the wall: “Esta historia podría ser ficción. Podría no tener lugar en la ciudad. Pero es dolorosamente real. Tiene calle y número. Irán #3037” (Artés Ibáñez and Henríquez Murgas, 2023: 31). As the girls learn about Chile’s dark past, a map “con geolocalización de distintos centros de detención y tortura,” as the screenplay specifies, is projected, and an arrow zooms in onto Iran #3037 (Artés Ibáñez and Henríquez Murgas, 2023: 37). The girls study a blueprint of the house. In an off-camera voice, Vanda Sexy survivor Beatriz Bataszew gives a testimony in which she says, “Yo fui luchadora, soy luchadora, y lo seré hasta el último suspiro en esta vida” (Artés Ibáñez and Henríquez Murgas, 2023: 75). Photos of women who disappeared are projected onto the rear wall, photos meant to capture their full personhood. “[B]uscamos otras fotos [que fotos de la cara]”, the director explained in an interview. “[F]uimos al archivo del Museo de la Memoria.... [P]or eso tenemos fotos donde salían bailando, fotos de la gente feliz o normal” (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov Interview, 2019). At the end of the play, the names of perpetrators are projected onto the wall in a continuous scroll, a kind of public, written record or condemnation. This use of documentary evidence—maps, testimony, photos, and names—has the effect of anchoring the play in reality.¹³ It also incorporates archival material into what Diana Taylor calls the repertoire, the “embodied acts” of performance, such as gesture, word and movement. By integrating maps, photographs and blueprints into the dramatic landscape, the play *activates* the archive and renders it part of the live transmission of knowledge.¹⁴

While the historical material is grounded in documentary evidence, the discourse on memory is evoked experientially. The necessity to represent violent, traumatic events in narrative form presented a challenge to the dramatic team. “¿Cómo contribuimos a la circulación de una memoria crítica? ¿Cómo nombramos el horror desde un punto de vista político sin volver a re-victimizar? ¿Cómo distribuimos las imágenes, los sonidos, los cuerpos, los textos en escena?” wonders the director in a reflection on the play (Artés

¹² In regard to the use of documentary evidence, Artés said in an interview: “Para nosotras era importante, es decir, no es hacer la ficción por ficción, es una herramienta política para contar la historia” (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov Interview, 2019).

¹³ In the Vanda Sexy documentary, survivor Alejandra Holzapfel emphasizes the importance of “naming names” (Nucelo Gime, 2019).

¹⁴ The repertoire of “embodied acts” includes “performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing,” all of the transient elements that make up theater (Taylor, 2016: 188). As Taylor points out, the archive and the repertoire have complimentary and interconnected functions: “The archive and the repertoire often work together, although each has its own logic and mechanisms of transmission” (Taylor, 2016: 189).

Ibáñez, 2020: 13). In order to avoid the risk of sensationalizing events and appealing to a prurient interest, the dramaturges chose to evoke violence rather than represent it directly. “[N]o quisimos representar la violencia tal cual, sino que hacerla circular de otras maneras, como las visuales y lo sonoro. O sea, evocar aquello que puede ser una sensación de tortura, pero no volver imágenes realistas de la tortura” (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov Interview, 2019). The play captures the lived experience of horror through sensorial visual and sonorous devices. For example, in a scene depicting the spaces devoted to torture (and collapsing present and past), vertical lines traverse the bodies, suggesting electricity and conveying a sense of existential strangeness and terror (figure 6). Contemporary 1970’s songs by Julio Iglesias and Nydia Caro are accompanied by an original score of ambient music, whose emergence on the scene provides a disturbing disconnection to the viewer. The use of amplified “sonic space,” in Hans-Thies Lehmann’s words, has an experiential effect on the viewer. “Charged by physical energy, such immediately spatialized *body-time* aims to communicate directly with the spectators’ nervous system, not to inform them,” writes Lehmann in a reading of Pina Bausch’s *Nelken* that is relevant here. “The spectators do not observe but experience themselves inside of a time-space” (Lehmann, 2006: 152).



Figure 6. Photograph by Cris Saavedra. Courtesy of Patricia Artés Ibáñez.

The key to this play lies in the phenomenological dimension, its reenactment of the lived experience of the body. In “The Phenomenology of Body Memory”, Thomas Fuchs understands body memory as the “underlying carrier of our life history, and eventually of our whole being-in-the-world” (Fuchs, 2012: 20). Body memory includes our way of perceiving and acting in the world, but also the “memory cores that connect us most intimately with our biographical past” (Fuchs, 2012: 20). Traumatic memory is a particular type of body memory.¹⁵ In the case of trauma, experience lodges into the body and may be recalled or relived through sensorial triggers. Fuchs refers to a poetic recollection in which Israeli novelist Arahon Appelfeld describes how sensory experience takes him back to the five years he spent hiding out in the woods in Ukraine during WWII:

Since the second world war, over 50 years have passed. Much have I forgotten, above all places, dates and names of people, and yet I sense this period with my whole body. Always when it rains, when it gets cold or stormy, I return into the ghetto, the camp or the woods where I have spent such a long time. Memory obviously has longstanding roots in the body. Sometimes the smell of scroungy straw or the cry of a bird suffices to throw me far away and deeply into myself. – All that has happened then has been imprinted into the cells of my body. Not into my memory (Appelfeld, 2005, quoted and translated in Fuchs, 18).

For Appelfeld, traumatic memory is “rooted” in his body and “imprinted” in its cells. This bodily imprint left by the lived experience of the boy is only accessible to the man through the world of the senses (“the smell of scroungy straw,” “the cry of a bird”), and it is relived in a corporeal way as well (“with my whole body”).

In *Irán #3037*, two scenes are consecrated to the body. In Scene 4, “La Historia de la Casa”, Selva’s voice narrates the history of the house off screen, and the space transforms into the ex-Venda Sexy torture center. Valentina draws back in fear as white lines of light map out the rooms of the house. The lines unfold and retract in a weird geometrical maze. A blindfolded female prisoner appears naked and reaches out to Valentina. Valentina shrinks back as if she has been approached by a ghost, but she then comforts the girl, and the two slide to the floor. Valentina herself seems to become inhabited by a figure of the past as the principal sites of torture manifest around her. The naked prisoner rises and faces the audience. The trauma is visible on her body as she breathes deeply and shakily. The scene comes to a jarring climax: a telephone ringing, flashing

¹⁵ In *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, Edward Casey outlines three types of body memory: habitual, traumatic, and erotic (Casey, 2000: 146-180). Fuchs distinguishes between six: procedural, situational, intercorporeal, incorporative, pain, and traumatic (Fuchs, 2012: 12).

spaces, indiscriminate voices, a dramatic musical crescendo and then—silence. In Scene 6, “El Baño”, two girls in undergarments take solace in each other. The sounds are guttural: heavy breathing, water running through pipes, quiet sobs. The movement is tactile: the girls feel each other’s hands and arms and trace the features on each other’s faces. Once they recognize each other as childhood friends, they make a solemn vow to bring their stories to their loved ones. The nudity in these scenes underscores the girls’ vulnerability, but also the weight of their bodies, of their existence. The audience has been given access to a private space and a sacred encounter. The bodies of the girls are bearers of memory, “portadores de una memoria encarnada, viva, performativa”, memory which is at once individual and social (Zaliasnik Schilkrot, 2016: 16). For those who lived through the histories enacted on stage, these scenes may carry out the two central functions that Jeanette Malkin attributes to memory-theater: to “[imitate] conflicted and sometimes repressed or erased memories of a shared past” and to “[initiate] processes of remembrance” (Malkin: 1999: 8). In a post-play conversation on November 21, 2019, Beatrice Bataszew employed a bodily word—shaken up (*convulsionada*)—to describe her reaction to the play: “Estoy igual un poquitito convulsionada, cuando una ve la memoria propia reflejada así. Como decía la compañera en la obra, “Todas las memorias comienzan a recorrer este cuerpo”¹⁶ In its affective dimensions, *Irán #3037* provides the “densidad psíquica,” “volumen experiencial,” and “huella afectiva” that Nelly Richard saw as lacking in the official discourse on memory in the transitional period (Richard, 2007: 137).

As Fuchs points out, our memory is situated, situated in our bodies and situated in space. “Implicit memory is not confined to the body itself. It extends to the spaces and situations in which we find ourselves. Therefore, it is a spatial memory as well: It helps us to get our bearings in the space of our dwelling, in the neighborhood, in our home town. Bodily experience is particularly linked to interiors, which, over time are imbued with latent references to the past and with an atmosphere of familiarity” (Fuchs, 2012: 13). The transformation into clandestine prisons of places normally devoted to care, such as regular houses, clinics, and schools, inverts social and legal codes and “unmakes the world,” in Elaine Scarry’s sense.¹⁷ As opposed to an “atmosphere of familiarity”, the

16 Post-play conversation on November 21, 2019. In a philosophical conversation about memory that the girls engage in, Valentina suggests, “Recordar es volver a pasar por el cuerpo” (Artés Ibáñez and Henríquez Murgas, 2023: 36).

17 See Gordon-Zolov, 2016. See also Macarena Gómez-Barris’ elaboration of the “dwelling” place of memory in *Where Memory Dwells* (2009: 28-36), Diana Taylor’s discussion of the “house as theatrical space” in *Disappearing Acts* (1997: 126-127), and Megan Corbin’s discussion of the encounter with space and place in “Testimonio y materialidad” (2016). As Taylor indicates, “The takeover of the house, which concurrently signifies the nation, the family home, and the body’s protective shell, indicates that the three spaces—social, familial, individual—have collapsed into one” (1997: 127).

house of torture renders domestic space unreal, unfamiliar, unsafe. For Scarry, the body is a room in small, whose basic protective function (“[to keep] warm and safe the individual it houses”) is “undone” in the situation of torture (Scarry, 1985: 38). In its focus on the body in space, *Irán #307* captures the ways in which memory is fundamentally *situated*. Like the house in Carlos Cerda’s 1996 novel *Una casa vacía*, *Irán #307* is haunted.¹⁸ In Cerda’s novel, a young couple attempts to restore the former ex-Venda Sexy house, only to discover its sinister history through a series of uncanny signs, such as moans emitted from a tree branch scratching a windowpane. The house in *Una casa vacía* is a metaphor for the nation, a nation whose attempts at reconciliation and “restoration” actually constitute a form of erasure. The skeleton branches which overlay the house in *Irán #307* are reminiscent of Cerda’s gothic universe. In Scene 4, the naked female prisoner appears out of nowhere, out of the past itself, and the house is traced out like a camera negative, as if to demarcate invisible spaces, ghostly remains, the “imprint”. As in Cerda’s *Una casa vacía*, in which the poetic voices of the disappeared make their presence known, the house itself seems to speak. In a chapter devoted to memory spaces in post-dictatorial Santiago, Nelly Richard refers to the ambition of some to make the memory space of Londres 38 speak (“de ‘hacer hablar’ al lugar”), to convey to visitors “la dramaticidad de lo vivido” (Richard, 2017: 118). “Nos dimos el tiempo de probar los sonidos y las imágenes. Es decir, el primer tema era ¿cómo hacemos que la casa en sí hable de sí misma?” explained Artés in an interview. “Es decir, que la casa hablara de sí misma” (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov Interview, 2019).

Although the drama relies heavily on textual markers, from emotional conversations to verbal disputes to political speeches, it is the voice of the house—a voice conveyed experientially through the ghostly presence of its former inhabitants and the eerie nature of the house itself—that leaves a lasting impression upon the viewer. The use of affect enables the transmission of the ineffable and unspeakable, of a “meaning that cannot be named” (Lehmann, 2006: 95). For Hans-Thies Lehmann, the physicality of the body is central to the production of a semiotic space, in Julia Kristeva’s sense, in postdramatic theater.¹⁹ “The physical body ... has become its own reality which does not ‘tell’ this or that emotion but through its presence *manifests* itself as the site of inscription of collective history” (Lehmann, 2006: 97). Building on Lehmann’s work, theorists such as Gail

¹⁸ See Michael Lazzara’s analysis of trauma in Cerda’s novel in *Chile in Transition* (2006: 124-128). See also the chapter devoted to “haunting” and the disappeared in Argentina in Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters* (2008: 63-135).

¹⁹ Lehmann writes, “Postdramatic theatre again and again transgresses the pain threshold in order to revoke the separation of the body from language and to reintroduce into the realm of spirit—voice and language—the painful and pleasurable physicality that Julia Kristeva has called the semiotic within the signifying process” (96).

Bulman emphasize the “affective bond” produced by experiential theater and the ways in which it may lead the viewer to become more politically aware and engaged (Bulman, 2022: 20). James Thompson claims in *Performance Affects* that “affective intensity is in itself the propellant of political action” (Thompson, 2009: 128).

JUSTICE AND POLITICAL SEXUAL VIOLENCE

While the play falls into the genre of political theater or “teatro de denuncia,” it also serves as a protest in of itself, as a kind of *funa*.²⁰ The *escrache* (Argentina) or *funa* (Chile) is a staged, public denunciation of an unprosecuted crime. In a chapter devoted to *escraches* in *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor considers how performance “transmits traumatic memory,” highlighting elements such as repetition, situatedness, and visceral effects (Taylor, 2003: 164-167). Like the “performance protests” of the H.I.J.O.S. in Argentina, which “enact collective trauma” in a situated space, *Irán #3037* conveys traumatic memory viscerally and performatively (Taylor, 2003: 165).²¹ Indeed, the director indicated in an interview that the drama could be considered “un acto de denuncia de un centro de tortura” (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov Interview, 2019). At the end of the play, the girls break the fourth wall and assume positions downstage, facing the audience with bullhorns (figure 7). In the tradition of *funa*, they accuse the perpetrators by name and call for justice. Valentina shouts: “Exigimos que se tipifique legalmente la violencia político sexual como un delito específico y que aquellos que durante la dictadura cívico militar ejecutaron la práctica de la violación y abuso sexual sean debidamente imputados, procesados y detenidos” (Artés Ibáñez and Henríquez Murgas, 2023: 87). Finally, they lead the audience in a chant: “¡Si no hay justicia, hay funa! ¡Si no hay justicia, hay funa!” (Artés Ibáñez and Henríquez Murgas, 2023: 88). The actors then enter the audience and distribute flyers with the slogan, “¡A Recuperar La Venda Sexy! Por Un Centro de Memoria Feminista.” The experience of the play is a galvanizing one, akin to that of a collective, social action or demonstration.

20 For a discussion of the “teatro de denuncia,” see Sandoval-León, 156-59.

21 H.I.J.O.S. is an acronym for Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio.



Figure 7. Photograph by Macarena Rodríguez. Courtesy of Patricia Artés Ibáñez.

One of the characteristic features of funa, however, is the site-specific nature of the action. “The ‘FUNA’ is a direct action group, mainly composed of young people, that has mobilised as many as several hundred people at a time for public denunciations of former perpetrators at their homes or workplaces...”, explain Katherine Hite and Cath Collins. “[T]he FUNA has an essentially confrontational, mobile, resolutely anti-institutional character” (Hite and Collins, 2009: 391). While the play does not take place on site, we are positioned in front of the house—a symbolically reconstructed house. The role that the audience plays is crucial to the “funa” function of the play. It is worth it to consider another play set in a domestic house *qua* torture site: Griselda Gambaro’s *Información para extranjeros* (1973), an experimental drama in 20 scenes which anticipates the torture and terror that will mark Argentina’s “Dirty War”. In Gambaro’s play, the audience members are participants in the play, and actors are interspersed in the audience. Divided into groups, the audience members follow the guide through the labyrinthian space of a two-story residential house. Each of the twenty scenes depicts a scene of violence. The play, which Gambaro herself described as “a guided tour through the places of repression and indignity”, has a carnivalesque, distorted fun house quality reminiscent of a scene in a Kafka novel (“Griselda Gambaro by Marguerite Feitlowitz,”

1990).²² The viewers are culpable—they have paid the admission price. “Si ya pagaron, nadie puede arrepentirse,” says the guide. “El gasto ya está hecho. Mejor gozar” (Gambaro, 1987: 70). As Taylor points out, *Información para extranjeros* renders the spectator complicit. “Gambaro forces us to relinquish our comforting assumptions about violence, our claims to deniability, innocence, and quietism, and instead urges us to understand what prompts it and how we participate” (Taylor, 1997: 138). Unlike Gambaro’s play, which implicates the viewer, the audience in *Irán #3037* is part of a protest. We are given access to a closed space and a history that has been rendered largely invisible. When the actors break the fourth wall and enter into our frame, we become part of a collective drama to call out state-sponsored violence enacted on the bodies of women.

A *funas* is generally understood to be a form of social justice. The Chilean “Comisión Funa” that was created in 1999 by Acción, Verdad y Justicia (H.I.J.O.S.-Chile) sought to impose public sanction on those whose crimes were protected by the 1978 Amnesty Law. Because the period of transition to democracy in Chile was marked by the excavation of truth rather than the administration of justice, associations of families of victims and survivors organized *funas* as a way to impose social sanction. Hundreds of *funas* have been carried out in Chile, most recently to address police violence in the *estallido social*. “[L]o que no llegue a la justicia por lo menos va a ser sancionado moralmente, socialmente y políticamente”, explains Alicia Lira, the president of the Agrupación de Familiares de Ejecutados Políticos (Quoted in Trafilaf, 2014). In an interview, the director of *Irán #3037* reflected upon the role of the play in terms of justice. “Lo que sí es interesante que pensar es que no hay una justicia institucional o estatal, pero está habiendo de una justicia social o una justicia simbólica” (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov Interview, 2019).

A number of recent, landmark cases in Chile suggests that actual justice may be in the works. Along with other forms of cultural production, the play is part of a sustained effort to bring about actual justice for politically motivated acts of sexual violence. In a recent study of accountability for dictatorship-era sexual violence in Chile, Caroline Davidson argues that “cultural and social forces, including feminist mobilization in Latin America, have played a critical role in putting sexual violence on the front burner” (Davidson, 2019: 107). Since 1998, when Pinochet was put under house arrest in London, the Chilean courts have increasingly applied international human rights standards to get around the 1978 amnesty law. Drawing on international human rights instruments and an interpretation of disappearance as an “ongoing” crime of kidnapping, judges have been able to make convictions for the dictatorship-era crimes of unlawful arrest and detention, torture and use of force, enforced disappearance, and murder.²³ To date,

²² For a discussion of Gambaro’s drama, see Taylor, 1990: 165-182 and Jehenson, 1999: 85-104.

²³ See Collins, 2016 and Collins, 2009. For first-hand accounts of gender-based violence in the context

there have been over 400 human rights convictions, and thousands of criminal cases are wending their way through the judicial system.²⁴ However, gender-based crimes have largely been dismissed or subsumed under other categories. As Davidson noted in a 2019 article: “While the courts have adjudicated many cases of disappearance, homicide, and, more recently, torture, the human rights prosecutions have largely ignored the issues of sexual and gender-based violence. Although judgments have occasionally mentioned sexual violence in passing, there has not been a single criminal conviction for rape or other crimes of sexual violence” (Davidson, 2019: 104-105).

In a lengthy “Guía para comunicar sobre Violencia Política Sexual”, the Brigada de Comunicación Feminista lays out the main features of political sexual violence. Attributing the origins of the term to the Mujeres Sobrevivientes collective, the guide defines political sexual violence as “institutionalized” violence used for political purposes or in the name of a political body. “[E]sta es una violencia sexual institucionalizada y como tal es una violencia que se utiliza con fines políticos, encontrándose entonces dentro de los métodos de agresión, represión y/o sometimiento contra uno u otro” (Bricofem, 2021: 21). The body subject to gender-based violence thus serves as *territory* to be conquered, as a space that belongs to another and is subject to violation. The guide indicates: “[U]na de las funciones de la VPS, es que es una violencia territorial en tanto que los cuerpos feminizados son utilizados como verdaderos territorios de conquista de unos hombres sobre otros, cosificándolo, traficándolo entre hombres, siendo ocupado como territorio de otros (hombres)” (Bricofem, 2021: 22). According to Svenka Arensburg, political sexual violence is a form of “terrorismo de Estado” which produces not only physical scars, but lasting and complex psychological damage (quoted in “Violencia política sexual,” 2019). As Davidson points out, the term “political sexual violence” is not currently recognized as a legal term in Chile or the international community.

In the past decade, however, there have been important developments in the recognition and prosecution of gender-based crimes under the dictatorship. Chile signed onto the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT) in 1988, and the penal code was modified in 2016 to bring national law into conformity with international law. The 2016 law criminalizing torture identifies sexual violence specifically as a potential form of torture.²⁵ In a 2017

of Argentina’s “Dirty War” and developments in national and international jurisprudence for crimes of sexual violence, see Vassallo, 2011.

24 See Davidson (2019: 104) and UN Human Rights Office of the High Commission (2019).

25 Law no. 20.968, “Tipifica delitos de tortura y de tratos crueles, inhumanos y degradantes,” holds: “Se entenderá por tortura todo acto por el cual se inflija intencionalmente a una persona dolores o sufrimientos graves, ya sean físicos, sexuales o psíquicos, con el fin de obtener de ella o de un tercero infor-

judgment in which the Supreme Court convicted several agents at Villa Grimaldi of torture, for example, sexual violence was identified specifically as one of the “aplicación de tormentas” of the case (Davidson, 2019: 123-124). The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which entered into force in 2002, identifies rape and grave acts of sexual violence “when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population” as crimes against humanity.²⁶ By drawing upon the Rome Statute, courts may circumvent the narrow definition of rape in Chile as well as the statute of limitations (Davidson, 2019: 130-131). In August 2023, the Chilean congress passed a resolution to condemn the sexual violence under the dictatorship, a resolution that was not without controversy (Hiner, 2023).²⁷

The ex-Venda Sexy torture site has been at the center of legal battles. In 2016, Beatriz Bataszew filed a criminal complaint concerning kidnapping, torture, sexual violence, rape, and sexual abuse.²⁸ Drawing on the language of international criminal law, the complaint alleges, amongst other items, the crime of “sexual violence as torture” (Davidson, 2019: 129-30). A recent landmark case in Chile suggests that actual justice may be in the works. In a historic ruling in November 2020 at the Santiago Court of Appeals, Minister Mario Carroza sentenced three former DINA agents at the Venda Sexy to 15 years in prison for “una forma específica de violencia contra la mujer” (“Ex agentes de la DINA,” 2020). The ruling held that this form of gender violence constitutes a crime against humanity: “En efecto, estándares internacionales abordan el problema de la violencia contra la mujer desde una perspectiva de género y le reconocen como violaciones a toda la humanidad” (“Ex agentes de la DINA,” 2020). The ruling was upheld by the Chilean Supreme Court on August 21, 2023 despite appeals by the perpetrators (“Corte Suprema,” 2023). While the principle of “political sexual violence” is yet to be encoded into law in Chile, this case sets an important judicial precedent. It also suggests that

mación, declaración o una confesión, de castigarla por un acto que haya cometido, o se le impute haber cometido, o de intimidar o coaccionar a esa persona...”.

26 The Rome Statute holds: “For the purpose of this Statute, ‘crime against humanity’ means any of the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack: (a) Murder; (b) Extermination; (c) Enslavement; (d) Deportation or forcible transfer of population; (e) Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; (f) Torture; (g) Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity;...” (1998/2002: 3).

27 The motion was passed by the House of Representatives by a vote of 71 to 50 (15 lawmakers voted against it, and 35 abstained). Far-right representative Gloria Naveillán characterized the claims of systemic sexual violence under the dictatorship as “part of an urban legend.” See Hiner’s “Remembering the Women Victims of the Pinochet Dictatorship in Chile” (2023) for a discussion of the “denialism” that has accompanied the rise of the far right in the country in the past four years.

28 This was the second complaint she filed; the first was dismissed.

nonviolent political protest, whether it be in the form of a street demonstration or a work of art, may act as a potent political force.

The play is relevant not only to efforts to achieve justice for Pinochet-era crimes, but also to the protests against gender-based police violence that took place in recent social uprising as well. One of the central tenets of the *estallido social* was “The revolution will be feminist or will not be,” and feminist performance pieces, street art and body art were defining features of the revolt. The *estallido* was in full force from October 2019 through March 2020, at which point the quarantine connected to the COVID-19 epidemic enabled the state to regain control of public space (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov, 2022). As with other global protests, the social uprising continued throughout the pandemic in virtual forms. The dramatic changes brought about by the social revolution led to two attempts to revamp the Pinochet-era constitution.

When the *estallido social* broke out in October 2019, the play assumed new significance. “[L]a obra tanto para nosotras como para los públicos, cobró un nuevo sentido”, explained the director. “La sensación de lo insostenible que tiñó el proceso de creación se expandió al presente de manera radical” (Artés Ibáñez, 2020: 4). Suddenly the public had the sense that they were witnessing an allegory of their own time. The excessive and disproportionate police response to the protests, which included tear gas and hardened rubber bullets aimed directly at the head, led to bodily injuries and over 400 grave eye injuries. In an eerie echo of the past, a UN fact-finding mission led by former president Michelle Bachelet determined there were “un elevado número de violaciones graves a los derechos humanos”, a claim echoed in the street art motif, “En Chile se tortura 2019” (Oficina del Alto Comisionado, 2019: 31) (figure 8). “La gente yo creo que siente algo así como qué terrible que no estamos viendo una obra del pasado, sino que, viene hoy”, Artés said in an interview. “Y eso ha sido muy fuerte y doloroso, pero movilizador también” (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov Interview, 2019). The act of awakening, encapsulated in the motto of the social revolution, “Chile Despertó,” is embodied in the main character, who herself “wakes up.” The play itself connects the past to the present, addressing systemic violence against women in the current moment. Valentina’s discovery of the history of the house acts as a trigger to her own suppressed memories, and she realizes that she had been sexually assaulted by her grandfather, a kind of unrecognized abuse that appears to be widespread in society. In a particularly prescient scene, Valentina’s friend Claudia is arrested at a peaceful demonstration and sexually assaulted by officers in a police vehicle. The director sees the play as cathartic: “[E]s cómo una metáfora de Chile. Por eso, yo creo que la gente la recibe tan bien. O sea, se emociona tanto porque como que antes era potente igual. Pero ahora lo que pasa es como catártico” (Gordon-Zolov and Zolov Interview, 2019).



Figure 8. Stencil at Plaza Ñuñoa during the *estallido social*. Photograph by Eric Zolov.

In the *estallido*, gender-based violence, from verbal abuse to degrading treatment (such as being forced to squat for cavity checks) to sexual assault, was a prevalent practice of the *carabineros*, as was captured in the body movements and lyrics of the rape protest song, “Un violador en tu camino” (“A Rapist in Your Path”) by the Chilean collective Las Tesis.²⁹ Based on Argentine anthropologist Rita Segato’s seminal works on structural violence, the feminist anthem calls out the patriarchal institutions of the state (Segato, 2021). One performance of the flash mob dance took place at a performance protest at the ex-Venda Sexy on December 14th, 2019. To the driving beat of a drum, a group of activists, many of whom were dressed in black attire and black blindfolds, chanted the lyrics of the song, signaling the Macul police precinct in particular. Amongst other offenses, the officers of the 46th precinct were reputed to have forced three girls in a peaceful protest to strip naked at the station.³⁰ Survivors see a continuum between the unpunished crimes of the Pinochet regime and the practice of gender-based violence.

29 The National Institute of Human Rights cited in their February 2020 report 3,765 injured people across the nation and 1,835 complaints of human rights violations, including 520 counts of torture and cruel treatment, 197 counts of sexual violence, and 1,073 counts of excessive force (INDH, 2020).

30 See Prado, 2019 and González, 2020.

ce today. An October 2019 information campaign to draw attention to contemporary political sexual violence by state agents maintained that the kind of violence that “hoy sufrimos las mujeres, disidencias y estudiantes durante las detenciones en las manifestaciones, no son más que el fiel reflejo de la impunidad de la violencia política sexual o tortura sexual que fue ejercida sobre nosotras durante la dictadura” (DDHH, 2019). *Irán #3037* provides a powerful vehicle to protest gender-based violence. The unexpected reverberations of this play about the past in the present suggest that memory work today is more important than ever.

CONCLUSIONS

Patricia Artés Ibáñez' and Tomás Henríquez Murgas' *Irán #3037* has contributed to efforts by feminist activists and survivor networks to recover the ex-Venda Sexy by raising awareness of dictatorship-era crimes of political sexual violence and the impunity that has largely accompanied them. Like the actual *funas* at the site of the house, the play provided an iterated protest—in a symbolic mode—thus contributing to the pressure exerted on the owners of the house and the state. The ghostly register of the space conveys the haunting effects of trauma and its transmission from one generation to the next. In its collapse of temporal dimensions, the play suggests that meaningful history is not linear, but layered or accumulated. This aesthetic production of space is inherently political in that it suggests that the repressed contents of the past will persistently make themselves felt in the present. Through its use of sensorial devices, such as electrified and amplified sonic space, tactile impressions and bodily nudity, the play makes an impression on the viewer that is likely to have lasting and mobilizing effects. It took 50 years for the survivors and families of victims of the ex-Venda sexy to gain access to this laden site. While the pace of memorialization has been slow, the story of the ex-Venda Sexy is a testament to the power of collective action and artistic engagement.

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