

Susan Best, "Chapter 6: Our Dark Side: Milagros de la Torre's *The Lost Steps*" in *Reparative Aesthetics: Witnessing in Contemporary Art Photography*, edited by Susan Best (Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2016)

"The work is emblematic of our times, where there is an increasing militarisation, an overwhelming mechanics of violence and a climate of insecurity. These are terms I can relate to because of my upbringing in Peru; unfortunately they have global relevance today."<sup>1</sup>--Milagros de la Torre

If we are living in a "general global state of war" as many theorists claim, or in "a climate of insecurity" as Milagros de la Torre more modestly puts it, then the investigation of violence past and present assumes a renewed relevance.<sup>2</sup> No doubt in response to this situation, war has become a prevalent theme for recent exhibitions of photography, for example: *Memory of Fire: Images of War and The War of Images* (2008) curated by Julian Stallabrass for the Brighton Photo Biennial; *Stigmata* (2009) curated by Nathalie Herschdorfer for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva (and subsequently published as a book *Afterwards: Contemporary Photographers Confronting the Past*, 2011); the large American touring show, *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and its Aftermath* (2012) curated by Anne Wilkes Tucker, and *Conflict, Time and Photography* (2014) curated by Simon Baker for Tate Modern. The stress on time, memory and in particular the aftermath of war is striking. The 'decisive moments' of combat and victory captured by well known photographs like Louis R. Lowery's *First Flag Raising on Mt. Suribachi* (1945) or Robert Capa's *Death of a Loyalist Militiaman, Córdoba Spain* (1936), sit alongside temporally indeterminate images such as Simon Norfolk's tranquil landscapes of previous battlefields, Rapheal Dallaporta's series of deadpan close-ups of antipersonnel bombs, as well as more traditional humanistic portraits of returned servicemen and women.

In the preface to *Afterwards* a contrast between images taken in the heat of the moment and more reflective images of aftermath is posed. The latter images, it is argued, take a longer view, examining the human effects of war: refugees, survivors, scarred landscapes and recovered ones.<sup>3</sup> Curator Nathalie Herschdorfer asks the salient question about the memorial function of such images: "is it possible to communicate events that took place before a picture was taken?"<sup>4</sup> While her answer predictably enough is in the affirmative, many of the images she includes in *Afterwards* do not communicate what happened before. For example, there is little sense of the prior significance of the sites depicted in Christian Schwager's photographs of autumnal Bosnian forests, Christoph Schütz's Sugimoto-esque images of the Gaza Strip, Peter Hebeisen's panoramas of former European battle sites, or Lea Eouzan's shots of the carpark at Auschwitz. These fairly traditional landscape photographs demonstrably fail to evoke the kinds of associations and feelings that Herschendorf attributes to them: there is no sense of "suffering, disorder, grief and injury" in these mundane images of former sites of conflict.<sup>5</sup>

When there is no visual evidence of violence, warfare or catastrophe, aftermath images rely solely on titles to signal historical significance. Unlike Herschdorfer, Ulrich Baer recognises the problem of pictorial emptiness that is central to this burgeoning genre of images. As we saw in Chapter Two, for him the lack of evidence becomes evidence itself. But is this lack of evidence really sufficient to make spectators into "observers of experiences no one ever wanted to know about" as he claims?<sup>6</sup> Surely, the spectator cannot in any sense be an "observer of experiences." The term 'experience' connotes a direct relationship to events. When historical events are not even depicted, only implied through a title, is 'experience' an appropriate or adequate term?

To give the viewer a visual experience that conjures past violence, there needs to be careful consideration given to what Michael Fried calls the problem of beholding, which entails close attention to how the image hails, addresses or blocks the viewer and the allied psychological issues of identification and non-identification, or to use Ruth Leys' terms from Chapter One--mimetic and anti-mimetic responses. Beholding is the central focus of Fried's recent book on photography, which transfers his ongoing concern with absorption and theatricality in painting into the realm of photography. What distinguishes current art photography made for the wall from past photography that could be shown in a book is not so much the scale of photographs from the 1970s onwards as Fried argues, but rather the constant grappling with what he calls photography's "modes of address."<sup>7</sup> To suggest violence without showing it requires engagement with modes of address and the psychology of viewing.

Milagros de la Torre's relatively small-scale photographs achieve this effect as surely as museum-scale works.

Her images are not depictions of the acts of aggression or violence, heroic or otherwise, that Jean Franco associates with male pack behaviour, what she calls the ethos of the "band of brothers."<sup>8</sup> Franco uses this expression "band of brothers," made popular by the World War Two mini-series of that name, to describe the peculiar male collusion that facilitated systemic violence in South America during the period of the military dictatorships.<sup>9</sup> What this transfer of nomenclature makes explicit is the way in which male bonding, relied upon during times of war, can just as easily support torture, lawlessness and state terrorism. Milagros de la Torre expands this way of thinking about violence showing how civilian crime as much as war demonstrates "the dark side of human nature."<sup>10</sup> In this phrase we are enjoined to share in the psychology that enacts violence rather than seeing it as something perpetrated only by others.

This chapter is about understanding our dark side in these terms. Specifically, I examine de la Torre's oblique representations of violence in the series of fifteen photographs: *Los pasos perdidos* [The Lost Steps] (1996). This series shows objects drawn from the archives of the Peruvian criminal justice system, encompassing incriminating evidence from the civil war in Peru, crimes of passion, cocaine production, as well as objects used for forced entry, victims' clothing and perpetrators' weapons.

### 1. The testimony of objects: war and crime in a time of fear

"Literally, the object is a witness to an act...what is more, it carries us toward the drama that divided the life of an individual into a before and an after."<sup>11</sup>—Milagros de la Torre

Milagros de la Torre's work has consistently addressed violence in an indirect, allusive and non-sensational manner by focusing on objects, rather than victims, perpetrators or scenes of destruction. Some objects at first sight seem far removed from violence such as her series *Antibalas* [Bulletproof] (2008) which shows an array of men's and women's garments: a T-shirt, blazers, jackets, through to the classic linen shirt of the Caribbean, the *guayabera* (fig 1). Only the clothing labels, clearly visible on some of the necklines, indicate the strength of the bulletproof protection offered: gold and platinum. Scaled to the size of the body and set in a generous space of pale grey, the garments are hung singly on the wall as if offered to the viewer to acquire or try on. In contrast, *Blindados* [Armored] (2000) shows a range of armoured vehicles drastically diminished in scale, whose potency is further muffled by the tight cropping of the photographic image and the wide mat that surrounds and insulates it (fig 2). These contemporary objects that anticipate and seek to mitigate the effects of assault or attack contrast with *The Lost Steps* series where the objects are part of an archive of past violence. The archive, called *Archivo de los cuerpos del delito* (from the Latin *corpus delicti*—body or evidence of crime), is located at the Palacio de Justicia de Lima, the Courthouse in Lima, Peru. The evocative title of the series, *Los pasos perdidos*, is drawn from the name given to the long corridor of the Courthouse that connects the front of the building to the back where those on trial are held. It calls up both the condition of the prisoner (a lost soul), an irreparable moment, as well as going astray, perhaps following the wayward path to perdition.

The photographs in *The Lost Steps* are also scaled to the body, in this case it is the size of the print itself: each image is 40 x 40 cm, roughly the width of a body. They are large enough to fill the field of vision and yet small enough to draw the viewer close. The objects of varying sizes—bullets, knives, a flag, a letter, a satin skirt, a man's shirt, a crowbar, and a gun, amongst other things—are reproduced at roughly the same size, giving a sense of equivalence despite the very variable qualities of the objects themselves (fig 3, 4, 5). This equivalency is an important feature of the series creating a visual unity that grounds de la Torre's reparative approach (more on this shortly).

The objects are shown in minute detail, their textures and substances exquisitely rendered by rich and dense black and white photographs made with a large format camera. Careful examination reveals small signs of damage and care: cigarette burns dotting the skirt, and a hand-knitted tag for attaching the flag. For things as concrete and particular as archived items of judicial evidence, they appear oddly spectral yet very three-dimensional, almost hyper-real. The spectral appearance is partly the result of their uncertain location—they float radically decontextualised in a circle of light—and partly the way in which these pieces of evidence seem to glow as if emanating light rather than being

illuminated by it, emerging from the inky darkness they have apparently pushed back.

Most of the objects, particularly the white ones, loom into the viewer's space, despite being viewed from above. The strange feeling of torsion or contradictory movements—forwards, downwards—results from the decoupling of the artist's viewing position above the objects and ours facing them. The frequent diagonals further disorient, for example, the skirt worn by Marita Alpaca, viewed from an oblique angle, seems to be sliding into oblivion at the lower end (fig 6). All of the other objects are shown in their entirety pictured within the confines of the central grey circle.

The circles of illumination suggest a number of types of beholding: viewing through a telescope that has brought the far very near, the scrutiny of the spotlight, or a view through some secret aperture: a portal or keyhole. Although none of the above, except for the spotlight, can account for viewing both darkness and light together. Our viewpoint curiously includes both a view through to the object and a framing of that view. The effect produces a very intimate viewing experience, almost clandestine, the eye is funnelled into the centre of the image while binocular vision stands back and registers that inward pull. A kind of immersive vision is nested within a more modernist revelation of the image's own constructedness. The circular form at the centre of each image was produced using a nineteenth-century technique where the lens does not completely cover the negative. The technique places the images in the past where the limits of the photographic world were often visible in the image itself, while also underscoring the otherworldly quality of this ghostly archive.

The depiction of objects calls up the still life genre but the singular focus on one isolated object is more suggestive of portraiture and indeed de la Torre sees each object as a conduit to a particular person, evidence not so much of a crime (although that is implied), but a fateful moment dividing a life, as she puts it, "into a before and an after." Only three photographs, however, are linked to specific individuals. The skirt is identified in the title as "The skirt worn by Marita Alpaca when she was thrown by her lover from the 8th floor of the Sheraton Hotel in Lima. She was found to be pregnant at the autopsy." Alpaca's murder in 1990 by José Leandro Reaño Cabrejos, her wealthy banker boyfriend, was a tabloid scandal with claims and counter-claims about her being pregnant at the time of her death, and even queries about whether her uterus had been stolen postmortem. Infamously, one tabloid headline ran "Where is the uterus of Marita?"<sup>12</sup> After Reaño Cabrejos attempted to elude justice, he was finally sentenced in 1995. Marita Alpaca's story returned to the spotlight after his release, when he supposedly spread rumours of his own death to avoid paying her mother damages awarded by a civil action.<sup>13</sup>

The second photograph of two intertwined belts is titled: "Belts used by psychologist Mario Poggi to strangle a rapist during police interrogation" (fig 7). The sober description contrasts markedly with the sensational nature of the crime. Poggi was gaoled in 1986 for killing a suspected serial killer dubbed the Ripper, who raped and dismembered his victims.<sup>14</sup> Poggi also returned to the news, first in 2001 when he starred in a low budget film of his own life (originally to be titled *Poggi: Angel or Demon*) and again in 2006 when he ran for president of Peru.<sup>15</sup>

The final image is captioned: "Police identification mask of criminal known as 'Loco Perochena'" (fig 8). Loco or 'Crazy' Perochena is a folkloric figure in the mould of Robin Hood who stole from the rich, and by his own account at least, gave to the poor. Arrested in 1982, he too returned to the news when upon his release after twenty-seven years in prison, he resumed a life of crime after supposedly becoming an evangelical preacher.<sup>16</sup>

These frankly fantastical stories, no doubt embellished to further thrill and excite, contrast sharply with the gravity and sobriety of the photographs of the three objects associated with these crimes. For example, the skirt showing cigarette burns around the abdomen makes one wonder if more extended abuse is indicated. Set alongside twelve other photographs of objects without such clear links to particular individuals, our salacious interest in notorious crime is deprived of further inflammatory air.

One other object, however, points to a very particular crime: "Shirt of journalist murdered in the Uchuraccay Massacre, Ayacucho" (fig 9). It is part of a group of three objects that references the civil war in Peru, instigated in May 1980 by the Maoist insurgents known as *Sendero Luminoso* [Shining Path]. In that year the Senderistas launched what is usually described as a terrorist campaign, but which they called *Inicio de la Lucha Armada*—the beginning of armed struggle.<sup>17</sup> The other two objects linked to the Senderistas are labelled: "Fake police ID used by terrorist" (fig 10), "Flag confiscated from Shining Path terrorist" (fig 11). These three images place the series in an intriguing relation to both war photography and atrocity photography. Rather than posing war, terrorism and atrocity as special cases

of violence, they are presented alongside other instances of crime both notorious and anonymous. The archive in Lima where the objects are stored similarly makes little distinction between these objects, which are not rigorously catalogued or organised. De la Torre reports that what is known of the objects rests largely with the memory of the archivist who has worked at the courthouse for thirty years.<sup>18</sup> She was alerted to the existence of the archive by a small display of some of the objects in an exhibition at the Courthouse.

From this repository, she selected fifteen objects to photograph that capture a period of national turmoil and bloodshed just then passing into history. By 1996, when the photographs were taken, Abimael Guzmán the leader of Shining Path was in prison, his capture in September 1992 led to speculation about a postwar era, although further violence continued until 2000 and still erupts periodically in the present.<sup>19</sup> The worst of the violence, the period Peruvian historian Nelson Manrique called *manchay tiempo* [time of fear], occurred from 1983 to the end of that decade.<sup>20</sup> Although in Lima in April 1992, after almost daily terrorist attacks, the president Alberto Fujimori closed Congress and suspend the constitution in a move described as an *auto-golpe* [self-coup], effectively establishing martial law.<sup>21</sup> Finally by 1995, Steve Stern argues the war had wound down.<sup>22</sup> In an interview with Edward Sullivan, de la Torre explains that she wanted “to cover the historical circumstances then, most especially the trials of crimes of passion that were happening at the time and which fascinated everyone because they distracted us from all the daily terrorist reality.”<sup>23</sup>

The terrorist reality unleashed by Shining Path has been described as provoking “one of the cruellest wars in the continent’s history” and “one of Latin America’s bloodiest since the 1960s.”<sup>24</sup> Close to seventy thousand people died, many were Quechua-speaking highlanders from the centre and south of Peru caught in the cross-fire between the Shining Path guerrillas and the government forces, often slaughtered for collusion with one or other of the combatant groups.<sup>25</sup> The “bloodbath” foretold in 1988 by Shining Path leader Abimael Guzmán had become a reality.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, this most bloody of Latin American wars is simultaneously described as surprising, exotic, elusive and enigmatic.<sup>27</sup> Steve Stern explains these characterisations as stemming from the unlikelihood of a group of hard-line Maoists emerging in Peru and in particular their obtuse use of imported symbolism in the initial phase of the conflict. For example, the announcement of the war in Lima was accompanied by dead dogs tied to lamp posts and a sign which proclaimed: “Deng Xiaoping, Son of a Bitch.” As he puts it “as if mention of the architect of counterrevolution in China was a sufficient and relevant political explanation.”<sup>28</sup> Despite the allegiance to Maoism, the name ‘Shining Path’ had a home grown source, it was drawn from a pronouncement made by the leader of Peru’s first Socialist Party, José Carlos Mariátegui: “Marxism-Leninism will open the shining path to revolution.”<sup>29</sup>

The formation of this group of self-styled revolutionaries was not the result of a popular uprising as was sometimes supposed. Shining Path was founded in 1970, in the city of Ayacucho in the southern sierra of Peru by Abimael Guzmán, who taught philosophy at Ayacucho’s National University of San Cristóbal de Huamanga. According to Orin Starn, the core of his followers were students—high school and university students from rural communities.<sup>30</sup> Despite Guzmán’s proclamation of a “people’s war” to overturn the old order, and his direct appeal to the revolutionary thought of Marxist-Leninism and Mao Zedong, Starn reports that the class and race divisions of the broader society were also reflected within the structure of Shining Path: “Dark-skinned kids born in poverty filled the bottom ranks under a leadership composed mostly of light-skinned elites.”<sup>31</sup> Shining Path’s class-based Marxism, he observes was “notable for its lack of appeal to ‘indigenous’ or ‘Andean’ roots,”<sup>32</sup> thereby radically departing from the position of Mariátegui who sought to build on Peru’s Andean traditions for his form of socialism.<sup>33</sup> Anthropologist Enrique Mayer puts the case for Sendero detachment from indigenous politics even more strongly, the Senderistas, he says, “vehemently rejected Andeanism,” referring to it as “nacionalismo mágico quejumbroso [magical-whining nationalism].”<sup>34</sup>

Other reasons for surprise about the rise of Shining Path include the fact that prior to the launch of the armed insurrection in 1980, unlike other Latin American countries such as Guatemala or El Salvador, Peru had not endured what Carlos Basombrío Iglesias describes as “a seemingly unending dictatorship,” more significantly, he reports, Peru had not “experienced grave human rights violations.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, he notes that state repression never assumed a systematic pattern in Peru, as it did in other Latin American countries like Colombia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.<sup>36</sup> The total disregard for human rights is another striking and surprising feature of Shining Path thought and practice. Guzmán proclaimed: “human rights contradict the rights of the people...Human rights are nothing more than the

rights of bourgeois man.”<sup>37</sup> Again, Basombrio Iglesias underscores the divergence from other guerrilla movements in Latin America: “guerrilla movements in Latin America generally sought to have the cause of human rights on their side.”<sup>38</sup> As he explains “denunciations of the state as the principal violator of human rights usually have formed an important part of the political discourse of guerrilla movements.”<sup>39</sup> Which is not to say that the state was innocent of human rights abuses in Peru, during the “dirty war” phase of counter-insurgency from 1983 to 1984, as Stern reports, government forces were guilty of “indiscriminate repression.”<sup>40</sup>

The photographed shirt in de la Torre’s series dates from this “dirty war” period of counter insurgency. The shirt belonged to one of the eight journalists massacred with sticks, stones and axes in January 1983 by the *comuneros* (villagers) in the indigenous village of Uchuraccay, a remote Andean community in Ayacucho province, partly controlled by the Senderistas.<sup>41</sup> The journalists from Lima and Ayacucho (three of whom spoke Quechua) were on their way to the village of Huaychao to investigate claims that villagers had killed seven Senderistas, a practice encouraged by the counter-insurgency authorities.

Much has been written about this incident, most notably by the Nobel prize-winning Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, who was appointed head of the commission sent by the president to investigate the massacre. The villagers had already confessed to the crime three days after it occurred when a patrol was sent to check on the whereabouts of the journalists. The villagers claimed that they thought the journalists were members of the Shining Path. The case generated an enormous amount of media attention and speculation due in large part to the fact that the victims were members of the fourth estate themselves, as well as other factors such as: the grisly nature of the deaths, the mutilated bodies, the apparently ritualistic burials, the missing body of the guide Juan Argumedo, and discovered photographic records of the initial encounter between the journalists and the *comuneros* that contradicted the latter’s unwavering, and to some, overly uniform testimony.<sup>42</sup> According to Vargas Llosa, the Uchuraccayans refused to give details of the murder to the Commission, but a camera belonging to one of the journalists, Willy Retto, was discovered hidden in a cave with footage of the initial confrontation, indicating that the journalists had most likely spoken to the *comuneros* and were not carrying a Senderista flag as had been claimed.<sup>43</sup>

Predictably perhaps, there was speculation about a cover-up and both Senderistas and the *sinchis* (security forces) were also blamed for the crime. Jean Franco reports that in the findings of the Peruvian *Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación* [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] of 2003, it finally became clear that the community had repeatedly asked authorities for protection from the Senderistas, and that these appeals had been ignored.<sup>44</sup> Franco also criticises the way in which Vargas Llosa handled the case, and in particular, the alacrity with which he embraced the idea of ‘primitive’ violent Andeans. At one point in his magazine article of 1983 for the *New York Times*, strangely for someone living in Peru at this time, he states: “The violence stuns us because it is an anomaly in our ordinary lives. For the Iquichanos, that violence is the atmosphere they live in from the time they are born until the time they die.”<sup>45</sup> Franco wonders how he can be surprised by the violence of the murders committed by the Iquichanos “when modern life offers daily examples from the shooting of illegal immigrants crossing borders to torture and the bombardment of the innocent.”<sup>46</sup>

Vargas Llosa’s article consistently presents a vision of the Andean community as a veritable heart of darkness of “isolation and primitiveness,” where “old beliefs” prevail and “strangers take on a phantasmagoric quality, as if they were the projection of unconscious terrors.”<sup>47</sup> In the Andes, he says, the “Devil merges with the image of the stranger.”<sup>48</sup> Franco quite rightly refuses to see this crime as indicative of a different sensibility: “an ancient, archaic Peru,” as Vargas Llosa puts it.<sup>49</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission came to a similar conclusion pointing to the “clear and present danger brought about by Shining Path’s tactics and the army’s advice that outsiders should not be tolerated.”<sup>50</sup> As Franco indicates, there was nothing ‘magico-religious,’ “absurd,” or “atavistic” about the reaction of the villagers.<sup>51</sup> Caught in a war zone, where allegiances are uncertain we are all capable of projecting our unconscious terrors onto strangers. If it is atavistic to kill under such circumstances, then it is an atavism we all share. It is this same sentiment of inclusion that animates de la Torre’s series; it underpins her desire to show this shameful period of Peruvian history as indicative not of dark powers, but of our dark side.

## 2. Dark enlightenment: Perversion, Shame, Shock

"The blood of the people has a rich perfume, and smells like jasmine, violets and daisies."<sup>52</sup>—  
Ayacucho ballad, unofficial anthem of Shining Path

"Oh!  
what a frightening thirst  
for vengeance  
devours me"<sup>53</sup>-- Osmán Morote, Anthropologist, Shining Path's second-in-command

"Our dark side" is also a phrase used by French historian of psychoanalysis Elisabeth Roudinesco; it is the title of her recent history of perversion in the West. Just as Ruth Leys charts the disappearance of survivor guilt as a diagnostic category in contemporary psychiatric manuals, so too Roudinesco points to the disappearance of the term perversion and the consequent loss of capacity to explain the worst excesses of violence in our histories. In other words, while her phrasing 'our dark side' stresses the continuity of normal and pathological psychology, she also seeks to underscore the specificity of perverse acts and behaviour. For her, the key aspect of perversion is the transgression of norms; such deviance, she states, includes "all the transgressive acts, good and bad that humanity is capable of."<sup>54</sup> For her, the allure of perversion is that it encompasses both good and evil. She explains:

Perversion fascinates us precisely because it can sometimes be sublime, and sometimes abject... No matter whether the perverse are sublime because they turn to art, creation or mysticism, or abject because they surrender to their murderous impulses, they are part of us and part of our humanity because they exhibit something we always conceal: our own negativity and our dark side.<sup>55</sup>

Here, Roudinesco brings perversion into close dialogue with sublimation. The destructive instincts she reminds us, not the sexual instincts, are what are channelled by sublimation.<sup>56</sup> Violence and mayhem may occur, she implies, when there is no recourse to this defence against the socially unacceptable wishes and desires of instinctual life.

Joel Whitebook in his study of perversion and utopia also picks up on the Janus-faced nature of perversion, but frames it very differently: perversion can be oriented towards either utopianism or destruction. In the first instance, he locates this insight in Freud's thinking by bringing together Freud's early account of perversion with his more sociologically oriented essays such as *Civilisation and its Discontents*. From the latter essay he draws out the fact that Freud sees rebellion--that is, the "urge to transgress the strictures of civilization"--whether utopian or destructive, as underpinned by what Freud calls "the remains of the original personality," in other words, Whitebook argues, the perverse impulses.<sup>57</sup> Revolt, for Freud, is just as likely to develop civilisation by opposing injustice, as to turn "against civilization as such."<sup>58</sup> In the twentieth century, such turns against civilisation are represented by the crises of Western modernity that Whitebook lists: "fascism, Stalinism, total war, the Holocaust and the bomb (and later the ecological crisis)."<sup>59</sup> In the more recent theory of both Herbert Marcuse and Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, Whitebook identifies the persistent alignment of perversion with utopian rebellion as a response to these crises. He calls this alignment the "idealization of transgression," "perverse-utopian wish" and the "perverse-utopian impulse."<sup>60</sup>

Most importantly, Whitebook emphasises the importance of the disavowal of reality for Freud's later account of the perverse position, pointing out that for Freud the defence mechanism of disavowal ultimately emerges as the centre of the perversions.<sup>61</sup> This disavowal of things as they are also has a dual orientation: it can propel a utopian revolution and account for unspeakable destruction. Roudinesco gives a particularly vivid example of the operation of disavowal on the part of the infamous Nazi, Adolf Eichmann. According to the commandant of Auschwitz Rudolf Hess, Eichmann wanted to check on the operation of the gas chambers to assure himself that suffering was not part of death by gassing, and despite evidence to the contrary (according to testimony of the *Sonderkommando* bodies and faces were covered with bruises), concluded the bodies "showed no signs of convulsion."<sup>62</sup> Eichmann must have seen but did not see what had happened to the bodies: an avowal and a disavowal of reality are held in tension. The desire to remodel reality according to inner demands is facilitated by this contradictory formulation. Such fragile compromises are ill adapted to civil society, they are part of what

Chasseguet-Smirgel calls our “perverse core” that she argues more easily “becomes unbound under conditions of social and political upheaval,” as Whitebook glosses her position.<sup>63</sup> At such times, Whitebook argues, “institutions can no longer integrate it [the perverse core] into social life.”<sup>64</sup>

De la Torre’s *The Lost Steps* series bears witness to this unbinding. Her photographs show a world where even everyday objects like paper and broken glass (fig 5) or parts of a bed (fig 12) can be fashioned into a weapon and a means of assault against things as they are. Perhaps they were manufactured to defend against conditions such as defencelessness, powerlessness and vulnerability. Or from the point of view of the one attacked, these objects might suggest that violence can come out of nowhere realised by the most ordinary parts of the environment. These are not the uses of things imagined by Martin Heidegger: the readiness-to-hand object reached for in an unthinking average everyday way.<sup>65</sup> A perverse attitude to things is at play, where everyday belongings are turned to inventive purposes: items of clothing are used to strangle, silverware becomes part of the production of cocaine (fig 13), a carpentry tool is used for forced entry (fig 4), a love letter recoils on its writer, transformed into incriminating evidence (fig 14). Sustained exposure to such resourceful and inventive involvements with things creates an unstable and uncertain lifeworld where innocent objects may quite correctly elicit a startle response and hypervigilance becomes routine.

Alongside this dark vision of the unmaking of the lifeworld, there are also patches of light that are equally startling. In one photograph an erstwhile symbol of violence is disconcertingly touching (fig 11). When you look closely at the confiscated Senderista flag, the crinkled metallic paper that forms the hammer and sickle suggests humble homemade manufacture, a suspicion confirmed by the hand-knitted fastening clearly visible on the left hand side of the image. The “extreme masculinity” Jean Franco associates with Latin American violence is strangely undercut by these poignant details of handicraft.<sup>66</sup> Why should these signs of the hand so unsettle the image of the violent terrorist? Is it the suggestion, to an occidental viewer at least, of domesticity and female craft? That he (if it is indeed a he) is somebody’s son, lover, brother; part of the same network of ordinary familial favours and ties that bind us all?

By bringing the viewer up close to the objects, de la Torre’s series generates these kinds of questions. Some objects, however, provoke this reaction more strongly than others. For example, the rudimentary weapon of paper and glass raises questions about what crime could have been perpetrated by such poverty of means. Is it a projectile, was it prepared in advance or constructed on the run? Or looking at the belts of Mario Poggi, I can’t help thinking why are there two belts? This duplication seems to me even more puzzling than the fact that he committed this crime while the suspected serial killer was in police custody. Although the location of the crime also provokes curiosity: what possessed Poggi to kill in circumstances where he could not possibly hope to get any with it, as the saying goes? But perhaps that question needs to be turned around, why didn’t the reality principle of his immediate surroundings check this flamboyant character’s murderous or avenging impulses? What did he refuse to see that made this action possible? This same logic of disavowal may help to explain the actions of the Uchuraccayans: seeing a party of approaching strangers and having been warned that strangers could be Senderistas, they did not see but also saw a Senderista flag. Their unflinching insistence on the presence of a flag, hints at the operation of this defence.

De la Torre’s series encourages these kinds of lateral connections between so-called ordinary crime and acts of war. Both types of transgression issue from our perverse core, whether it is the instinct for rebellion or the disavowal of reality (Freud’s two accounts of perversion), or a combination of the two. What she calls her “serial structure/sequence” serves this lateral movement well: each image is considered singly and in relation to the others.<sup>67</sup> Significantly she also links objects of victims and perpetrators together; in this unusual move de la Torre makes it difficult to adopt a fixed or moralising viewing position on the period of history on show. This intermixing is further amplified by the allusion to both positions in some of the images: some objects of victims point to perpetrators such as the shirt of the journalist and the skirt of Maria Alpaca. Just as some perpetrator objects point to victims: the prostitute’s letter to her lover, Poggi’s belts to the suspected rapist, as well as at one further remove, the female victims

Observing the series as a whole one is moved from photographs that suggest a world coming undone for individuals and the nation (and indeed moved by them), to cases where neither the criminal nor the act is known, the only surety is that someone was tried in a court of law. This method of inclusion departs from the norms of political art propagating ideology critique, instead of clear-cut

distinctions between good and evil, we see a field of very different yet roughly concurrent events that are difficult to cleave apart in that fashion. In bringing together the silent testimony of these objects, de la Torre constructs a complex picture of life in Peru in the final two decades of the twentieth century. Shelley Rice describes her action in both universal and particular terms: at once, “drawing everyone very close into the circle of the human condition,” while also acknowledging the particularity of de la Torre’s worldview. Rice concludes: “That condition, in her world, is often violent.”<sup>68</sup> De la Torre’s reparative method is evident in this complex balancing act that holds together the universal and the particular, the human and what we often prefer to regard as inhuman.

Bringing together victims and perpetrators for the purposes of commemoration is not without its critics in Peru. In 2007, when it was discovered that the commemorative sculpture in Lima—*El Ojo que Llora* [*The Eye that Cries*] (2005) by Dutch-born artist Lika Mutul—included all the names of the victims of the civil war (soldiers, bystanders and Senderistas), there were demands for the names of the Senderistas to be removed.<sup>69</sup> In turn, in the spirit of reconciliation in the same year many marched in favour of the monument, including the most affected highlanders.<sup>70</sup> While the desire for the removal of Senderistas is understandable, the nomenclature is perfectly correct, as Katherine Hite points out international human rights law “defines those killed extra-judicially, including convicted criminals, as victims.”<sup>71</sup> Peru’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which encouraged the construction of memorials, of course, took the same stance.

For reconciliation to take place the sharing of victimhood must proceed in the same inclusive fashion as the sharing of shame. When the chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Salomón Lerner, handed the final report to the president he began his speech by underscoring national shame. He said:

The History of Peru registers more than one difficult and painful period, of authentic national prostration. But, sure enough, none of them deserves to be so deeply marked with the stamp of shame and dishonor as the period of history we are forced to tell in the pages of the report we give to the Nation today. The two final decades of the XX Century are—it is obligatory to say so plainly—a mark of horror and disgrace for Peruvian society and State.<sup>72</sup>

His invocation of collective shame did not mean that questions of guilt and responsibility were avoided or assuaged. However, he singled out for blame not the combatants of either side, but rather those who did nothing to stop the crisis. He described “a double outrage: that of massive murder, disappearance and torture; and that of indolence, incompetence and indifference of those who could have stopped this humanitarian catastrophe but didn’t.”<sup>73</sup>

In de la Torre’s series, the crimes of Peru’s recent history are not coloured by this tone of recrimination. Her photographs simply, and in a politically neutral fashion, bear witness to the evidence of the transgression of the law, which is not to say they suggest some kind of resigned fatalism about human nature or the human condition. These photographs of objects still disturb and alarm, the spectral life they carry forth into the viewer’s space does not speak of something entirely or easily consigned to the past. The objects feel very present, despite the presentation via the double framing: the circle of light, and then the dark surround. The photographs strangely hold in tension the illusion of presence and the exposure of that illusion. A photographic equivalent of disavowal is perhaps at work in this unusual and contradictory viewing experience: at once “theatrical” to use Michael Fried’s term, calling attention to itself as an image, and yet immersive as the objects fully absorb our attention. But perhaps this tension is the key to the operation of the images; the objects can feel very present precisely because they are doubly framed as strictly pictorial. It is far easier to consider violence and atrocity when they are contained, and where the imagination must do part of the work, allowing viewers to speculate about the objects, people and events only as far as is psychically comfortable or possible.

The *Lost Steps* series is thereby situated between the two poles of conflict and atrocity imagery: the afterimages, with which I started the chapter, where there is simply too little to see to generate an engaged, identificatory response and overly explicit or shocking images where there is often too much to take in, resulting in the impulse to turn away, feelings of being overwhelmed and numbness. In both very different cases, there is nonetheless little or nothing to trigger the work of imagination that leads to prolonged inquiry.

In her book *Regarding the pain of others*, Susan Sontag describes turning away as the position



of the “coward,” yet she is also critical of its polar opposite--“voyeuristic appetite” for such images.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, her ambivalence is evident when she asserts that for photographs “[t]o accuse, and possibly alter conduct, they must shock,” but she also draws attention to the fact that we can become inured to shock.<sup>75</sup> As Michael Fried remarks Sontag’s book is characterised by a “reluctance to take up a simple or consistent stance toward the difficult questions it continually raises.”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, Sontag moves very quickly across a range of ethical challenges raised by regarding photographs of the pain of others.

I want to conclude by considering more slowly the conjunction of shock and accusation she mentions in passing, as it serves to highlight the power of the middle way of de la Torre’s art photography. Sontag’s call for images to accuse, of course, matches the typical stance of ideology critique--the paranoid approach analysed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (and discussed in Chapter One), which typically proceeds through exposure and the denunciation of the guilty. Shock, however, is what the paranoid approach seeks to guard against, paranoia functions to minimise surprise, shame and humiliation through hypervigilance. Images that shock and images that accuse, I would argue, are highly ineffective means for art photographers to generate prolonged interest in complex political events. Shocking images have a peculiar power to imply accusation and draw accusation. In recent times, the most pertinent example of the latter phenomenon is the incredible furor generated by Georges Didi-Huberman’s catalogue essay for an exhibition in Paris in 2001 titled *Mémoires des camps: Photographies des camps de concentration et d’extermination nazis (1933-1999)*. For the catalogue, Didi-Huberman analysed four images taken of the operation of Auschwitz by an anonymous member of the *Sonderkommando* in August 1944. Images he describes in the essay as “four pieces of film snatched from hell.”<sup>77</sup> In his book written two years later, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, two of the images are captioned “Cremation of gassed bodies in the open-air incineration pits in front of gas chamber of crematorium V of Auschwitz, August 1944,” the other two are captioned “Women being pushed towards the gas chamber at crematorium V of Auschwitz, August 1944,” although one of these shows only details of trees.<sup>78</sup>

Didi-Huberman was accused of “voyeurism” and “*jouissance* in horror”; his analysis of these sole surviving images of the Holocaust was described as “gruesome and encouraging pernicious ways of thinking.”<sup>79</sup> Typical accusations of the inappropriate aestheticisation of horror and suffering were also made: one critic wrote “Auschwitz, a photogenic object? . . . This is deeply shocking.”<sup>80</sup> As Didi-Huberman explains the controversy:

It was the exhibition itself, as much as my analysis--which appeared at the end of the exhibition catalogue--that “shocked” Elisabeth Pagnoux. Consequently, she concluded that to visit the exhibition amounted to an act not only of inappropriate voyeurism but even of abject sadism: “Unless one exults in the horror, there is reason enough not to see the exhibition.”<sup>81</sup>

Didi-Huberman defends his interpretation of the images, stating he was simply attempting “to see in order to *know better*.”<sup>82</sup> To know something about an image, he later extrapolates, one must spend time working on the image, to “imagine for oneself” what it depicts.<sup>83</sup> There is nothing remarkable or out of the ordinary here; the task of the art historian is to try to enter the grain of the image in order to better understand, and to render that work of imagination into language for others to evaluate—to affirm or disagree with the interpretation. So why did his analysis of these images lead to outrage and such intemperate accusations of his perversity? Why did his two chief interlocutors “see red,” as he put it?<sup>84</sup>

Anger is of course a stock response to shock, a word that occurs repeatedly in the criticism. As neither critic could direct their response to the images that they did not want to see, accusations that seem more appropriate to what is pictured are directed at Didi-Huberman, who is blamed for making them see by rendering their content so well into language. It would appear that when hypervigilance fails and shock occurs, it is countered (rather than warded off) by accusation. The response to this exhibition is by no means an isolated incident; North American images of lynching provoked a similar controversy.<sup>85</sup>

In sum, shock is not a useful strategy for art images. For documentary photography it may be unavoidable. But if one aims to provoke seeing in order to better know, more subtle strategies are required. De la Torre’s way of approaching conflict and atrocity, enables seeing and knowing. Her work joins with Paul Ricoeur’s project of thinking about “appeased memory,” where suffering is not forgotten, but it is spoken of, or pictured, without accusation or anger.<sup>86</sup> Her reparative approach serves this

purpose well.

<sup>1</sup> Milagros de la Torre in Edward Ball, "Interview: Milagros de la Torre," *Schon Magazine*, November 23, 2013, <http://schonmagazine.com/MilagrosDeLaTorre> accessed November 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder, "Introduction," *Concerning War: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder (Utrecht: BAK, 2010) 12. Hlavajova and Winder cite a number of theorists (unspecified), building on the work of Giorgio Agamben, as well as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, as proponents of this idea of general global war. In contrast, Steven Pinker argues this is the most peaceful period in history. See *The Better Angels of Our Nature: A History of Violence and Humanity* (London: Penguin 2011).

<sup>3</sup> William E. Ewing, Roger Mayou and Klaus Scherer, "Preface," Nathalie Herschdorfer *Afterwards: Contemporary Photography Confronting the Past* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011) 11.

<sup>4</sup> Herschdorfer, "Introduction," *Afterwards*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 2002), 83.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008) 152.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Franco, *Cruel Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) 3, 11, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>10</sup> Milagros de la Torre in Edward J. Sullivan, "Interview with Milagros de la Torre," May 17, 2011. <http://www.as-coa.org/articles/interview-milagros-de-la-torre> accessed July 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Francisco Reyes Palma, "Fetishes of Infamy. Fetishes of Light (An Interview with Milagros de la Torre," *EXIT #1 Crimes and Misdemeanors*, February/April 2001 <http://www.exitmedia.net/prueba/eng/articulo.php?id=14> accessed December 2014.

<sup>12</sup> A Peruvian blog, El útero de Marita, perpetuates this tabloid headline: <http://utero.pe/>. El útero de Marita has thereby become a byword for murky and sordid journalism in Peru. See the blogger Marco Sifuentes' explanation here: <http://peru21.pe/noticia/52385/marco-sifuentes-utero-marita-blog-nueva-ahora> accessed December 2014.

<sup>13</sup> <http://peru.com/2012/05/11/actualidad/mi-ciudad/sujeto-que-asesino-marita-alpaca-1990-aparece-haberse-hecho-muerto-noticia-63532> accessed December 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Poggi features in James Marrison, *The World's Most Bizarre Murders: True Stories That Will Shock and Amaze You* (London: John Blake, 2008) 178-81.

<sup>15</sup> <http://elcomercio.pe/blog/huellasdigitales/2011/02/mario-poggi-o-el-histrion-de-l> accessed December 2014.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.larepublica.pe/20-12-2010/vuelve-el-loco-perochena-pistolero-de-los-80-reaparece-balazos-en-surco> accessed December 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Colleen Sullivan describes it as a terrorism campaign in, "Shining Path," *The Sage Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, ed. Gus Martin, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Sage, 2011) 541.

<sup>18</sup> Milagros de la Torre in Sullivan, "Interview."

<sup>19</sup> Orin Starn, Carlos Iván Degregori and Robin Kirk, "The Shining Path," *The Peru Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed Orin Starn, Carlos Iván Degregori and Robin Kirk (Durham: Duke UP, 2005) 321.

<sup>20</sup> Starn, Degregori and Kirk, "Manchay Tiempo," *The Peru Reader*, 353-355.

<sup>21</sup> Sullivan, "Shining Path," 542.

<sup>22</sup> Steve J. Stern, "Introduction to Part Five," *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980-1995*, ed. Steve J. Stern (Durham: Duke UP, 1998) 377.

<sup>23</sup> De la Torre in Sullivan, "Interview."

<sup>24</sup> Gustavo Gorriti, "The Quota," *The Peru Reader*, 331.

<sup>25</sup> Starn et al., "Introduction," *The Peru Reader*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Guzmán cited in Gorriti, "The Quota," 331.

<sup>27</sup> Steve J. Stern, "Introduction. Beyond Enigma: An Agenda for Interpreting Shining Path and Peru, 1980-1995," *Shining and Other Paths*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>29</sup> Mariátegui cited in Sullivan, "Shining Path," 541.

<sup>30</sup> Orin Starn, "Villagers at Arms: War and Counterrevolution in the Central-South Andes," *Shining and Other Paths*, 224, 229.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 229.

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- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 233
- <sup>33</sup> See Starn et al., "The Advent of Modern Politics," *The Peru Reader*, 229.
- <sup>34</sup> Enrique Mayer, "Peru in Deep Trouble: Mario Vargas Llosa's 'Inquest in the Andes' Reexamined," *Cultural Anthropology*, 6.4 (November 1991) 481.
- <sup>35</sup> Carlos Basombrío Iglesias, "Sendero Luminoso and Human Rights: A Perverse Logic that Captured the Country," *Shining and Other Paths*, 427.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., 440
- <sup>37</sup> Guzmán cited in Basombrío Iglesias, "Sendero Luminoso," 431.
- <sup>38</sup> Basombrío Iglesias, "Sendero Luminoso," 431
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Steve J. Stern, "Introduction to Part 2," *Shining and Other Paths*, 122.
- <sup>41</sup> Mayer describes the tools used in the massacre in Mayer, "Peru in Deep Trouble" 466. Jean Franco reports that the territory was partly held by the Senderistas in Franco, *Cruel Modernity*, 57.
- <sup>42</sup> Mayer is suspicious of the "unanimity of the testimony" seeing it as highly scripted. Mayer, "Peru in Deep Trouble" 490-491.
- <sup>43</sup> Mario Vargas Llosa, "Inquest in the Andes," trans. Edith Grossman, *The New York Times*, July 31, 1983, <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/07/31/magazine/inquest-in-the-andes.html> accessed November 2011. The photographs can be viewed here: <http://uchuraccay.blogspot.com.au>
- <sup>44</sup> Jean Franco, "Alien to Modernity," *A Contra corriente: A Journal of Social History and Literature in Latin America* 3.3 (Spring 2006) 9.
- <sup>45</sup> Vargas Llosa, "Inquest in the Andes."
- <sup>46</sup> Franco, "Alien to Modernity," 8.
- <sup>47</sup> Vargas Llosa, "Inquest in the Andes."
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Jean Franco's summary of the conclusions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Franco, *Cruel Modernity*, 63.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., 60
- <sup>52</sup> Cited in Starn et al., "The Shining Path," *The Peru Reader*, 320.
- <sup>53</sup> Osmán Morote, "A Frightening Thirst for Vengeance," *The Peru Reader*, 324.
- <sup>54</sup> Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Our Dark Side: A History of Perversion*, trans. David Macey (London: Polity, 2009) 160.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., 4-5.
- <sup>56</sup> She cites Freud's letter to Marie Bonaparte in June 1937: "One may regard . . . curiosity, the impulse to investigate, as a complete sublimation of the aggressive or destructive instinct." Ibid., 71.
- <sup>57</sup> Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 1995) 21.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., 20.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., 218, 63.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 42
- <sup>62</sup> Hoess (Hess) cited in Roudinesco, *Our Dark Side*, 110.
- <sup>63</sup> Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia*, 62.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962) ¶ 15, 95-102.
- <sup>66</sup> Franco, *Cruel Modernity*, 15.
- <sup>67</sup> De la Torre in Reyes Palma, "Fetishes of Infamy."
- <sup>68</sup> Shelley Rice, "Observed: Milagros de la Torre," *Le Magazine Jeu de Paume*, March 23, 2012. <http://lemagazine.jeudepaume.org/blogs/shelleyrice/2012/03/23/observed-milagros-de-la-torre/> accessed November 2014.
- <sup>69</sup> Katherine Hite, "The Eye that Cries": The Politics of Representing Victims in Contemporary Peru," *A Contra corriente: A Journal of Social History and Literature in Latin America* 5.1 (Fall 2007): 111.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., 112.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>72</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Press Release 226: "TRC Final Report was made public on August 28th 2003 at noon." <http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ingles/pagina01.php> accessed November 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003) 38, 82.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 72, 73.

<sup>76</sup> Fried, *Why Photography Matters*, 32.

<sup>77</sup> This is the title of the first section of Part 1 of the book. Part 1 is the original catalogue essay. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2008) 3-17.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 12-15.

<sup>79</sup> Critics cited in Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 55, 54.

<sup>80</sup> Elisabeth Pagnoux cited in Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 55.

<sup>81</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 66.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 56-7.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>85</sup> See Sontag's discussion of the lynching photographs in *Regarding the Pain*, 81-83; see also Fried's commentary on her discussion, Fried, *Why Photography Matters*, 31-32. See also Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Memory, History, Forgiveness: A Dialogue between Paul Ricoeur and Sorin Antohi," trans. Gil Anidjar, *Janus Head* 8.1 (2005): 11.