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Sensing Collective Trauma

Acousmatic Sound in Memoria by Apichatpong Weerasethakul

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1 Introduction

As the title suggests, the film is about memory. It experiments with memory as a concept and offers an alternative route to representation of trauma. Shot in Colombia, a country that has been affected by armed conflict for the past 60 years, the film uses fiction to explore the mechanisms of trauma and grief.

The highly complex and therefore hard-to-portray conflict between the Colombian government and various leftist guerrilla groups, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) among others, also involved right-wing paramilitary groups and drug cartels. Decades of confrontations resulted in more than eight million victims, including approximately seven million who were internally displaced, with thousands kidnapped or disappeared (Gomez 2019).

The uniqueness of this piece lies in its poetic approach to trauma without showing the traumatic events that caused it. It operates with what is unseen and unsaid, providing just enough solid ground to prevent the viewer from getting lost in a non-linear narrative. The film uses soundscapes, haptic images and haptic sound, repetition and fragmentation in its meditative exploration of the concepts of trauma and memory. The deliberately slow pacing of the film allows the spectator to enter a sensorial realm where the understanding of the work stems from the subjective experience.

The main character in the film, Jessica, is a Scottish woman living in Colombia. She suffers from insomnia after a mysterious sound interrupts her sleep at night. She keeps hearing this sound in different circumstances as she desperately tries to find its source. On this journey she meets Hernan, a sound engineer from Bogotá and Agnes, an anthropologist, studying ancient human remains found in a tunnel under construction. After Hernan's mysterious disappearance, Jessica travels to a construction site near a village surrounded by mountains. In the village, she meets a fisherman, also named Hernan, who offers her a different perspective on reality and her condition.

Memoria is a highly enigmatic piece, written and directed by the award-winning Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul. The film casts Tilda Swinton in the leading role, and is the director's first film shot outside his home country. After its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival

on the 15 July 2021, the film had a very limited theatrical release in the US, where it continues to be screened in one city at a time, like a traveling exhibition. The director, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, shared that the reason he is reluctant to release the film online is because it was designed for the cinema experience (Website, n.d.). Extremely slow paced, *Memoria* is filled with omnipresent diegetic sound that drives the narrative forward, eventually allowing the images to catch up.

The spectator has an active role, in which she is invited to experience different dimensions of trauma and make sense of them based on her own subjective experience. The film invites multiple interpretations, therefore the analysis focuses on a deep reading of the film and taps into different layers of the work, from the cinematic style to historical context and the references it makes to other works.

The analysis adopts a topographical approach where the human inquirer traces the journey of the main character across multiple dimensions. The outer journey happens in the physical space where the narrative is played out and occurs in parallel to the inner journey within the character and spectator. The outer journey leads Jessica from the urban environment of Bogota with its various sites of memory into the rural mountain region of Colombia that has its own stories embedded in the landscape. The inner journey is non-linear so, in order to detect the subtle shifts, a close reading of the material is necessary.

One of the aspects of the inner journey that both the character and the spectator experience is a sensitisation process, which begins from the first minutes of the film and doesn't end when the film finishes. This state of heightened awareness to sounds, sensations and mental states seems to stay with the spectator even outside of the cinema. Perhaps the ability to listen in a new way is a gift that *Memoria* shares with the audience.

How does the film create this level of embodied affect? This question started off this writing endeavor, which is yet another journey associated with the film. The author's attempts to answer these questions uncovered other questions and themes, which lay deeper under the surface. These curious findings eventually formed a coherent whole, a subliminal trauma theory suggested by the film. This theory offers a new way of looking at the concepts of trauma and memory and how these are embedded in the collective.

1.1 Research question

The main research question for this study is formulated as follows:

How does *Memoria* contribute to our understanding of collective memory and trauma?

In order to answer it, a set of additional sub-questions is used to guide the analysis of the film:

1. What tools does the film employ to explore the subject of trauma?
2. How does shifting the emphasis from the visual/verbal to the somatic (affect, sound, gesture, tactility) move the project beyond a representational paradigm?
3. How does the film create this level of embodied affect?

1.2 Reading guide

The thesis is organized into six main chapters. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical frameworks employed in this study, including an overview of memory theory and trauma theory and the different perspectives present in these fields. It then draws the reader's attention to the problem of representing trauma and how the sensorial and somatic approach offers an alternative representation. This is a natural transition towards film theory and what the cinematic medium can bring to the discussion of memory and trauma. The phenomenological film theory and its focus on the sensorial dimension, particularly sound, is used to analyze the film and bring out the subliminal trauma theory implicit in the work. The final chapter concludes the study by outlining the main aspects of this new theory and discusses its limitations and suggestions for further research.

2 Theoretical frameworks

2.1 Memory

For a long time, individual memory was the only recognised form of memory. Since antiquity, memory, alongside imagination and common sense, contributed to our understanding of how the brain is constructed. Aristotle added a temporal dimension to the concept in suggesting that ‘memory is in the present but of the past’ (Bloch 2007, p. 58).

In the early 20th century, scientists turned their attention to the collective aspect of memory. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs illustrated that memory, like consciousness in general, is not a closed system within an individual mind, but is in a constant state of flux under the influence of the social environment and communication within it. Halbwachs was one of the first to introduce the term collective memory, pointing to a cyclical relationship between memory and the ability of humans to live in groups and communities. He did not, however, delineate the cultural aspect of memory. The latter was reflected in the way Aby Warburg, an art historian, understood collective memory. Even though he did not use the term cultural memory, he pointed out the ability of cultural artifacts to store and carry memory, adding a cultural dimension to our understanding of memory as a concept (Erll and Nünning 2010). Therefore, collective memory can be understood as having both social and cultural dimensions.

To reflect the social and cultural aspects of memory, Jan Assmann distinguishes between individual (inner self), communicative (social self) and cultural memory (cultural identity). The author introduced the concept of communicative memory, in order to highlight the differences between collective memory as coined by Maurice Hallbwachs and cultural memory as described by Aby Warburg. In terms of content and time frame, communicative memory spans only 3-4 interacting generations, while cultural memory has a much wider time frame (‘absolute’ past, the beginning of time). Another significant aspect that distinguishes communicative memory from cultural memory is the participation structure. Communicative memory is diffused, allowing anyone within the social system to participate in its creation, while cultural memory is highly institutionalized (Erll and Nünning 2010). This distinction is instrumental in our understanding of collective memory, particularly in how it relates to power. For example, official history is a part of cultural memory, which is produced by hegemonic discourse. The plurality of experiences

and interpretations of the past can challenge the official history creating resistance to the dominant narrative (Medina 2011). Physical artifacts, as they are discovered, can also challenge official narrative and shape our understanding of the past.

Lieux de mémoire, a term initially coined by Pierre Nora in relation to the physical places and monuments embodying collective memory, now applies to a variety of practices, places and institutions that shape and preserve collective memory. Closely linked to identity, *lieux de mémoire* are created and maintained by nation states to consolidate certain events as part of the collective memory and history of a nation.

Lieux de mémoire, broadly understood to mean 'sites of memory', often embody the memory of war and conflict in an attempt to give meaning to these events. "Commemoration at sites of memory is an act arising out of a conviction, shared by a broad community, that the moment recalled is both significant and informed by a moral message" (Winter in Erll and Nünning, 2010, p. 62). In this way, *lieux de mémoire* serve as an embodiment of that message. The commemoration of particularly traumatic events, like the Holocaust, have their own set of challenges. In contrast with war victims, whose death is given a sacral meaning, the mass murder of millions of Jews was completely deprived of any sort of purpose, and therefore could not be commemorated in the same way as victims of World War I and II. This opens a broader discussion on the difficulty of representing trauma in general, which will be addressed in more detail in the section entitled Sensing trauma.

When the event or its meaning are debated, sites of memory become places of contestation. Examples of this are attacks on monuments in post-Soviet countries or, within the Colombian context, attacks by indigenous activists on monuments of Spanish conquistadors (Martínez, 2021).

In contrast with *lieux de mémoire* that have an institutional character, *milieux de mémoire* are authentic reservoirs where memory is produced and kept alive through the array of human exchanges and cultural practices. When Nora defined *lieux de mémoire*, he saw them as 'artificial substitutes for the living memory-culture of the past', as if the living memory-culture, or *milieux de mémoire,* were disappearing . This argument, according to Jay Winter:

> betrays an ingrained Eurocentrism. Anyone who even glances at the power of the living sites of memory in Latin America or India, for example, will realize that the

> distinction cannot hold. *Milieux de mémoire* are alive and well, and so are oral and written traditions of remembrance that inform them. (Radstone & Schwarz, 2010, p. 315)

Still, it is important to keep in mind that the original term was created in the context of France at the end of the 20th century and was later appropriated to define sites or realms of memory beyond the initial context. The argument that *milieux de mémoire* are alive and well is also debatable. Particularly in the context of Latin America where political violence, globalization and climate change are contributing to the displacement and disappearance of indigenous communities and traditional ways of living, *milieux de mémoire* are vanishing faster than they are created. While some *milieux de mémoire* are disappearing, others live on, reflecting the fluid nature of collective memory.

Memoria features various memory sites, taking the spectator on a journey through *lieux de mémoire* in Bogotá and further into the realms of the living memory that inhabits the landscapes of rural Colombia.

The body in *Memoria* also becomes a sight of memory, which is difficult to classify as either *le lieu de mémoire* or *le milieu de mémoire.* According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, bodies and environments are both subjects to restratification and destratification.

> [T]he bodies and the environments are traversed by very different speeds of deterritorialization, by differential speeds, whose complementarities form continuous of intensity , but also give rise to processes of reterritorialization. At the limit, it is the Earth itself, the deterritorialized (‘the desert grows…’), and it is the nomad, the man of Earth, the man of deterritorialization - although he is also the one who does not move, who remains attached to the environment, desert or steppe. (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 134)

As the analysis will reveal, there are multiple processes of restratification and destratification, taking place in the film. These processes are mainly internal, besides perhaps a very concrete example of destratification that happens inside the tunnel construction. Deterritorialization and reterritorialization will be touched upon in relation to colonization and the armed conflict.

Society, with its *lieux de mémoire,* is the expression of restratification or reterritorialization, where memory is institutionalized and hegemonic discourse restricts the

plurality of memories and stories of the past. On the other side of this continuum is nature, which, in its original form, is unstratified. The body as *milieu de mémoire* is longing to come back to its original state, yet finds itself constantly under the influence of power structures, societal norms and hegemonic discourse. The man who never left the village, Hernan, that Jessica meets by the river in one of the final scenes, could be seen as an embodiment of the man of deterritorialization, yet as we will discover, there is nothing absolute, and he too is still in the process.

2.2 Trauma & PTSD

Trauma is not a new phenomenon. It has probably been there since the beginning of humanity. It is not bound to any particular culture or historical period and essentially appears timeless. However, until the nineteenth century, the word 'trauma' was associated mainly with physical injuries.

> Trauma was extended to include psychogenic ailments through an analogy that connected newly discovered effects of surgical shock to effects that could be produced via "nervous shock". Through this analogy there emerged what might be called an "affect logic," whose starting point is an experience of fear, conceived as a memory, both individual and collective, of traumatic pain. (Young, 1996, p. 6)

This account suggests that the first conceptual model of trauma was fear-based, which is in line with how we still perceive it today. The experience of fear is normally triggered by the information received through senses, with vision being the dominant sense that overrides other senses if the information received through them is conflicting (van der Kolk 200). The hierarchy of senses will be later explored in more detail within the context of media studies as the dominance of the visual sense has been challenged by various media scholars, including Laura Marks and Michel Chion.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Jean Martin Charcot first made the connection between the symptoms of hysteria and the history of trauma. This was then studied by Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud, who, upon his return to Vienna, together with Joseph Breuer made a statement about trauma introducing a different aspect of the traumatic memory, namely its

resistance to decay and its existence within the present. “The … memory of trauma … acts like a foreign body, which long after its entry must be regarded as an agent that is still at work” (Bruer and Freud cited in van der Kolk, 2000, p. 11). This account sets traumatic memory apart from non-traumatic memory and highlights its resistance to being integrated and processed.

The idea that trauma is at the root of much psychological suffering was later dismissed due to the overwhelming nature of this finding. The hypothesis that hysteria, a very widespread disease at the time, might be caused by sexual abuse in childhood was unthinkable, as it would lead to the accusation of a large number of men. The more reasonable explanation, according to Freud, was that the stories of his patients were not real but imagined. “Psychiatry as a discipline, came to follow Freud in his explorations of how the normal human psyche functioned: real-life trauma was ignored in favor of fantasy” (van der Kolk, 2000, p. 12).

In modern psychiatric terminology, the effects of trauma were first acknowledged much later, with the introduction of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the third edition of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III). This new diagnostic construct was added in an attempt to recognise the long-term effects of war trauma in Vietnam veterans, who were suffering from an otherwise unknown disease. The main diagnostic criteria included a “reexperiencing of the traumatic event, avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, and symptoms of increased arousal” (van der Kolk, 2000, p. 7).

The latest edition of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders at the time of writing, DSM-5, requires that in addition to the three original criteria (reexperiencing, avoidance of reminders and increased arousal), a person has witnessed or experienced a traumatic event. Besides this, it also requires that a person experiences:

> at least two “alterations in cognitions and mood”..., including inability to remember an important aspect of the traumatic event, persistent and exaggerated negative thoughts about oneself or the world, persistent distorted cognitions about the cause or consequences of the event, pervasive negative emotions, markedly diminished interest, feeling detached or estranged from others, persistent inability to experience positive emotions. (Bryant, 2019, p. 259)

This updated definition already provides a broader picture of PTSD, including not only fear-based responses, but also other emotional reactions to trauma that were missing in the previous definitions. Nevertheless, does this account fully capture the essence of trauma?

Attempts to capture the complexity of trauma through more elaborate definitions of its symptoms inevitably fail, as trauma is more than its symptoms.

What makes trauma a complex phenomenon is that it unites the cause of trauma (a traumatic event that happened in the past) and the symptoms that an individual suffers in the present. One of the distinct symptoms of trauma is a flashback, which often manifests as the intrusion of vivid memories in the form of images, sounds and sensations, as if the traumatic event were happening in the present moment. Even though the initial traumatic event might have passed, it continues to produce a visceral effect in the present. The experience of flashbacks is extremely distressing and isolating, as others are not able to see what appears so real for the trauma survivor.

Risk factors for PTSD reveal certain power dynamics that are worth looking into. Some events lead to higher rates of PTSD than others. For instance, physical and sexual abuse, torture and war have a higher chance of resulting in PTSD than natural disasters. The risk of developing PTSD is twice as high for women as it is for men (van der Kolk, 2000, p. 8).

"Trauma is a political relationship between individual, group and society" (Fred Alford, 2016, p. 3). When we reduce trauma to a diagnosis, which can only be applied to individuals, it loses its interrelationality and becomes a matter of an individual and his/her symptoms. While this might be the primary subject of psychology, the political aspect of trauma should never be ignored.

In fact, psychological trauma has always been political to some extent. From the moment of recognition of trauma as a potential cause for hysteria by Jean-Martin Charcot and Sigmund Freud, to shifting the focus away from real-life traumatic events "in favor of fantasy", these processes have illustrated how trauma has always been bound by the existing political and societal order (van der Kolk 2000, p. 12).

2.3 Collective trauma

While the concept of collective memory is now widely accepted and used within a range of disciplines, the concept of collective trauma remains controversial and is still a subject of disputes. Freud already pointed to the collective aspect of trauma in 1913 in *Totem and Taboo.* However, the first substantial theories of collective trauma did not appear until the late 30s as a

reaction to the growing crisis that led to World War II and the Holocaust. Freud's ideas on collective trauma and how it is passed on through generations were further explored in *Moses & Monotheism* (1939), rooted in psychoanalysis and the concept of collective unconsciousness. It was, however, never explicitly formulated as theory (Meek, 2011).

One of the modern theories of collective trauma within the field of cultural studies developed by Cathy Caruth is built upon the neurobiological findings of Bessel van der Kolk, who "understands traumatic memory as a direct imprint or indexical trace of an empirical reality" (Meek, 2011, 125). Trauma, according to Caruth, embodies an experience of reality that is not available to others. What is paradoxical in Caruth's understanding of trauma is that it contains truths that are valuable to society, but that cannot be conveyed because trauma resists representation. She calls PTSD a "symptom of history. The traumatized we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history they cannot entirely possess" (Caruth, 1995, p. 5).

In this way, there is something about trauma that not only escapes representation and understanding, but also destroys even the possibility of bearing witness to one's own experience. Caruth speaks about the Holocaust as an unwitnessed event, and not only in the sense that the Nazi regime tried to erase any evidence of its crimes, thus removing the possibility of an external witness. Those who were inside the world of Holocaust could not testify to their own experience as they were made to believe that what was happening to them was justified by their inferiority (Caruth, 1995). These aspects of Caruth's theory, namely the inability to represent trauma and to witness it, raises concerns about the sacralisation of trauma that move the discussion away from the possibility of reconciliation (Meek, 2011).

Kansteiner and Weilnböck show how the concept of trauma introduced by Caruth fails to integrate the psychological and clinical aspects of trauma, using it rather as a conceptual model, in which Caruth claims trauma to be by definition inaccessible to representation, and Weinberg goes further as to label it 'incurable' (Erll and Nünning 2010, p. 232).

Can the latest definition of PTSD in DSM-V shed some light on collective trauma? This largely depends on the type of conceptual model we adopt in understanding this phenomenon. In the field of psychology, PTSD is reserved for individuals, meaning that groups cannot be traumatized, or at least not in the same way. Like memory, trauma is a subject studied within a

variety of fields, from psychology to history. In the field of social psychology, collective trauma is linked to the collective memory of a group. It is not simply inscribed there as a traumatic event from the past. Rather it involves a continuous process of collective memory reconstruction in an attempt to create meaning (Hirschberger, 2018, p.1).

According to Kaplan and Wang, “traumatic events leave traces that are registered in cultural representations and argue that through acts of testimony, witnessing and mourning, traumatic events of the past can be worked-through and give rise to new forms of political agency” (Meek, 2011, p. 12).

Jeffrey C. Alexander developed a constructivist approach to collective trauma. He builds on the assumption that trauma is not a natural phenomenon, but a social construct, because the events that are linked to trauma are not inherently traumatic. These events mark the beginning of the scale, on the other end of which is the representation. The gap between event and representation can be conceived of as the “trauma process”’ (Alexander et al. 2004). In this way, it is not the event in itself that causes collective trauma, but the way in which this event is understood and remembered.

If trauma, according to Caruth, resists representation, the trauma process proposed by Alexander is problematic. When there is no adequate representation of trauma, one cannot speak about a trauma process, unless the search for adequate representation becomes the trauma process itself. These are two vastly different views on trauma, one constructivist by Alexander, who sees trauma as the gap between event and representation, and another one by Caruth, who sees trauma as possessing an innate quality. Fred Alford (2016) focuses our attention on empathy and mourning.

> Trauma is about learning what a human being should never have to know, but almost always will if he or she lives long enough: about vulnerability, about pain, about loss and finally about the evil and vast carelessness of the world. The only way to come to terms with this knowledge is through grief. Mourning is not a cure for trauma. It is the way to live with trauma. (Fred Alford, 2016, p. 18)

In this way, trauma encapsulates the shadow side of human experience, like a portal that connects the one who experiences it with the suffering of the collective.

What makes the phenomenon of trauma so fascinating is that it innately connects the

mental and the material, body and mind. It also ties together individual and collective experience. Rather than empirical clinical psychological phenomenon trauma, which focuses entirely on an individual and his/her symptoms, trauma can also be understood as an esthetic or sensorial modality, the esthetic technique, dealing with the unresolved. This thesis explores how *Memoria* offers a radically different way of viewing collective trauma, which can be considered a subliminal trauma theory. It can be considered subliminal because trauma in the film is hidden behind the surface of society and also because the theory itself is not explicitly laid out but rather comes forth through analysis. By looking at trauma in new ways, we can find the key to this universal experience and bring back the possibility of reconciliation.

2.4 Forgetting & Remembering

At this point, it is useful to bring in the notion of forgetting, which functions differently in the realms of communicative and cultural memory described above. In line with Jan Assmann, the durability of communicative memory depends on the strength of social bonds and traditions of communication, "communicative genres" or frames. Changing these frames and loosening social bonds inevitably brings about forgetting (Erll and Nünning, 2010, p. 111). Conceived in this way, forgetting in the realm of communicative memory is a rather natural process. In cultural memory, the processes of remembering and forgetting are governed by institutions of memory, which normally adhere to the ideology of the state (Assmann and Conrad, 2010).

To explore the mechanics of remembering, Jens Brockmeier draws on the ideas of Jan Assmann, pointing out that 'each culture develops a sense of coherence that is grounded in an underlying connective structure. This structure of cohesion connects and interweaves along two dimensions: social and temporal' (Brockmeier, 2015, p.18). These two dimensions create a symbolic space of meaning that holds communities together by creating a shared past. This shared past, however, is not static, but represents a continuous flow of ideas, narratives, actions and texts between generations, ensuring the preservation and transmission of knowledge and past experiences (Brockmeier, 2015). The author goes on to suggest that narrative is a 'major integrating force' of the mnemonic system. In the symbolic space of memory, the past, present and future are in a state of continuous interplay. The narrative has the ability to capture this complexity, as it integrates the three dimensions, linguistic, semiotic and discursive, in which the

memory exists (Brockmeier, 2002, p.33).

What is missing in this definition is the phenomenological dimension of the mnemonic system. If memory is only seen through a representational paradigm, the very experience of one's memories inevitably escapes, yet it is an experience that the memory originates from and the experience of revisiting a memory is the process of remembering.

The sensorial dimension of memory is explored by Laura Marks, who writes of how objects store memory and meaning. This is based both on the aura they develop through contact or use, as well as on their materiality, which is independent of their intellectual signification. These objects can take the form of fetishes and fossils.

> The fetish is … first of all something intensely personal, whose truth is experienced as a substantial movement from "inside" the self (the self as totalized though an impassioned body, a "body without organs") into the self-limited morphology of a material object situated in space "outside." Works of art are true fetishes only if they are material objects at least as intensely personal as the water of tears. (Pietz sited in Marks, 2000, p. 122)

According to Pietz, fetish is produced in the movement from inside to the outside, it concretizes or embodies an inner state. He provided an example of a fetish as the water of tears, which is a materialized inner state produced in a movement from interior to exterior. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the body without organs is understood by Marks as an "undifferentiated space", which produces fetishes and reabsorbs them, just like the body produces and absorbs tears. The fetish is dissolved when the memory is "revived in the body - when the body remembers" (Marks 2000, p. 122).

This concept of a fetish provides an interesting framework for understanding trauma. If trauma can be looked upon as something material, brought into existence as a concretisation of an inner state, there should be a similar process for it to dematerialize. If it serves as a reminder of an inner state that is not fully accepted by the body, when the body 'remembers', perhaps it will not be needed anymore, so it will dissolve and become integrated by the body.

The memory that both fetishes and fossils carry is imprinted on them through contact. "A fossil is the indexical trace of an object that once existed, its animal or vegetable tissue now become stone" (Marks 2000, 84). Deleuze speaks of the radioactive quality of images as fossils,

which carry an indexical trace of the past reality, which reemerges in the present when fossils are discovered (Marks, 2000). Here is the link between fossils and traumatic memories, as defined by Caruth. They both carry traces of the past and possess an unsettling quality. Fossils are different from fetishes in a way that they do not dissolve back into the space that produced them, or at least not as quickly. Instead, they harden and continue to embody the past that they have witnessed (Marks 2000). Both fetishes and fossils seem to counteract the process of forgetting.

Using fetishes and fossils as conceptual frameworks for traumatic memory, one can conclude that some trauma is like a fetish that dissolves when the body remembers, and some trauma is like a fossil, which will never be dissolved. It might crumble, but it will continue to exist as a reminder of something that perhaps should never be forgotten.

Taking a step back to the level of individual memory, Brockmeier points out a wide consensus in the field of psychology that the nature of remembering is rather permanent, while that of forgetting is transient, meaning that everything that has ever been put in a 'warehouse of the past' can be retrieved using the right tools (Brockmeier, 2015, p. 17).

Within the realm of communicative memory, the mechanisms of remembering and forgetting seem to function in quite the opposite way. The process of remembering is transient, while forgetting has a definite quality to it. Remembering, or retention of memories, lasts as long as the symbolic space of meaning can sustain it. When memories fall outside of this symbolic space, or no longer have the meaning they used to, the process of forgetting begins. Because the symbolic space of meaning is ever changing, some memories make their way back to it, while some can be lost forever. *Le lieu de mémoire* depends on the symbolic space of meaning existing, while *milieux de mémoire* have fetishes, rituals and other forms of embodied memory that allow them to exist outside the symbolic space of meaning.

The body stores memories of senses and these embodied memories are the most resistant to erasure and decay, which makes the process of remembering through senses a form of resistance. According to Eliane Scarry, "the body remains a political witness despite efforts to "reeducate" it" (Marks 2000, p. 200).

In the highly institutional realm of cultural memory, forgetting is often intentional. Building upon the hegemony theory of Gramsci, Molden explores the process in which dominant groups create master narratives of the past by making the other versions of it seem irrelevant

(Molden, 2016). The very act of writing something down has the ability to destroy living memory. In many South American countries imprinted by dictatorial regimes, including Colombia, the official discourse created unified narratives of the past that do not reflect the experience of the majority of the population, omitting the crimes committed by the state power (Medina 2011). These other versions of the past then slip into oblivion, as non-dominant groups eventually come to accept the premises on which the dominant narrative is built as common sense. This process is reversible, as counter-memories may reappear and challenge the dominant discourse. Van Dyke (2019) points out how archaeological findings can be used as a means to restore social justice and bring narratives that have been deliberately erased or silenced back into a public debate. In this sense the radioactive quality of fossils is turned into a positive quality, the power to restore justice through bringing the traces of the actual past to the surface.

As we shall discover in the analysis, the emergence of fossils in the tunnel under construction in *Memoria* disrupts the process of building a road between Bogotá and Kali, a governmental project that had been a source of corruption and environmental degradation.

2.5 Sensing trauma & bearing witness

Trauma can feel very present, yet it is so elusive at the same time. The fragmented nature of traumatic memory and the emotional charge it carries within make it difficult to construct a verbal account of it.

Different treatment modalities are usually centered around exposure therapy, which involves gradually building a cohesive narrative of the traumatic event. This narrative however, is no more than a trauma script. Something seems to happen when the traumatic memory is translated into words. It loses its power because it can hardly be contained by the representational paradigm. Trauma resists representation, especially verbal. “Traumatic memory has the quality of what Delbo calls deep memory (*mémoire profonde).* It is body-based, raw, expressed in images, emotion and physical sensations” (Fred Alford, 2016, p 57). Instead of being remembered, the traumatic memory is relived in the form of flashbacks, sounds, images, smell and touch. Due to this elusive quality, the cinematic medium lends itself perhaps better to the exploration of trauma than the literary one. One of the qualities that makes film better suited

to explore trauma is cinema's embodied affect, the ability to engage our senses, which is something that will be given more attention in the next section.

Within the literary medium, magical realism occupies a special role in relation to trauma. Originating from Latin America, a place of diverse cultural expression, colonial domination and collective trauma, magical realism emerged as a way of making sense of the unthinkable. "By using magical realism, authors turn unspeakable events into speakable tales and reconstruct events which would be as agonizing to forget as to remember" (Abdullah, 2020, p. 1). Magical realism offers an alternative route to the representation of trauma. It provides another dimension, which would simply be flattened or lost in a purely realistic narrative, leaving only the crude facts, the overwhelming horror. This ability of magical realism to convey trauma reveals something about trauma as a phenomenon. Trauma's elusive quality is perhaps its connection to something that is beyond the reality that is normally available to us. The scene with the spaceship in the end of *Memoria* can be seen as an attempt to emphasize this otherworldly quality of traumatic experience.

Access to what is beyond real isolates the trauma survivor from the rest of the world. "In this sense, the traumatic symptom is already socially and politically situated - in the case of Vietnam, with a collective denial of reality. The same can be said about other events, such as the Holocaust - at least for the first decades after the war - rape, and child abuse" (Fred Alford 2016, p. 22). In the case of the Colombian armed conflict that *Memoria* indirectly engages with, collective denial is reinforced through the institutional mechanisms of the forgetting, erasing, and silencing of collective memory. *Memoria* is set in the aftermath of the conflict, where the past runs below the surface of the current reality and sometimes intrudes involuntarily as traumatic flashbacks, in the form of sounds, images and memories.

2.6 Body & Senses

For a very long time, film theory was centered around visuality. This is unsurprising, perhaps, given that film is primarily an audio-visual medium and the visual sense is proven to dominate our perception (Herschederger in Vincze, 2016). This focus on visuality grew even stronger in the 1960s and 1970s, which is reflected in apparatus theory and feminist film theory (Elsaesser and Hagener, 2015, p. 109). However, in the last 20-30 years, there has been a

paradigm shift involving a return to the body, not only in film theory but also in other art forms. Vivian Sobchack and Laura Marks, the pioneers of this movement, have been drawing on phenomenological concepts to explore film as a bodily and sensory experience.

Before this recent paradigm shift, the body in film already had a central role. Everything was centered around the body in the silent film era. Expressive gestures, body language and facial expressions were used to convey a wide range of emotions without relying on music and sound. The body in the silent film era was primarily an instrument of representation, while more recent cinema is more preoccupied with an embodied experience of expression designed to evoke feelings and sensations in the spectator.

Drawing on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, Vivian Sobchack placed an emphasis on the bodily component and the role of experience. “The process is circular or self-reinforcing: film is the expression of experience, and this expression is itself experienced in the act of watching a film, becoming as a consequence the experience of an expression: “an expression of experience by experience”’ (Sobchack in Elsaesser and Hagener 2015, p. 116).

This bodily component and the role of the experience is also where film, trauma and memory theory interact. Film theory and its relation to temporality and spatiality offers a rich ground to explore the concept of trauma from a different perspective that is not so preoccupied with objectivity, in contrast with the empirical perspective of psychology.

Memoria appeals to the senses far beyond the limits of the audio-visual. As it deals with a subject that resists representation, it is bound to tap into the somatic realm of perception. “When verbal and visual representation is saturated, meanings seep into bodily and other dense, seemingly silent registers” (Marks, 2000, p. 5). It activates the senses and invokes memories, appealing to the universality of human emotions and the experience of trauma.

According to Cataldi, “[t]he deeper the emotional experience”, as trauma truly is, “the more blurred and de-bordered the world-body border becomes, the more we experience ourselves as belonging to or caught up in the Flesh of the world” (Cataldi, 1993, p. 115). This idea of blurring the boundaries between the self and the world is instrumental in understanding collective trauma, and it will be explored in more detail in the analysis.

Images become mimetic through the memories they invoke. When presented with an image, a viewer engages in a process of what Henry Bergson labeled “attentive recognition” -

constructing a mental image and invoking a memory associated with it, which is then compared with the image presented (Marks, 2000, p. 48). This is a circular process that plays out alongside narrative identification. On a very basic level, we feel what the characters on screen are feeling, by identifying with them and invoking our own memories of being in similar circumstances. Beyond that, we are accessing other memories, triggered by the sensory impressions, which take us on our own journey, as we watch the character's journey unfolding on screen. In Deleuzian terms, cinema "necessarily pulls the viewer between objective and subjective poles, between accepting and reflecting upon a given image" (Marks, 2000, p. 42).

Building on the Bergsonian idea of the image as a variety of impressions, Marks suggests that "images are always both multisensory and embodied". While drawing on Bergson's ideas on memory, Marks criticizes his theory for not recognizing that memory can be traumatic. 'Bergson's *pure memory* is unconscious, not in the psychoanalytical sense but in the sense that it is latent until called upon in action' (Marks, 2000, p. 64). This, however, is far from the truth when traumatic memory is concerned. "It is a paradox of traumatic memory that events cannot be recalled by conscious effort but at the same time intrude involuntarily" (Ross, 2000, p.84). It floods the senses with information in the form of flashbacks, yet it resists conscious recollection.

In Bergson's defense, it can be said that when he wrote *Matter and Memory* in 1896, trauma did not exist as a concept, as it was before the first conceptual model of trauma was developed. Still, since traumatic memory functions differently to other forms of memory, there is a limitation to where Bergson's theory can be applied.

Deleuze speaks about the affection image that invokes "bodily contemplation" and invites a "direct experience of time" (Marks 2000, p. 73). In the case of *Memoria*, the whole body of the perceiver is engaged in an active process of spectatorship from the first minute of the film. How does the film create this level of embodied affect? Sound and acoustics play a big role in this regard.

2.7 Sound

In the silent film era, sound was visually represented in an image in the form of ears that listen, mouths that scream, hands clapping, feet stomping and other visual expressions of sonic

events. With the integration of sound into cinema, the situation changed quite radically. Suddenly sound became unseen, as it no longer needed visual representation.

Today, sound is what "embodies" the image. While we are able to see only what is in front of our eyes, the experience of sound invites multidimensionality by creating an acoustic space that is not confined by the boundaries of the screen (Elsaesser and Hagener, 2015). "Audible sound comes from an object whose mechanical vibrations cause vibratory waves in a medium, as in air, water, flesh or bone. Sound rubs against and within us" (Branigan cited in Vincze, 2016, p.110). Sound connects the world on screen with the world beyond the screen and the body of the spectator. It travels through these different worlds, causing vibrations in flesh, the flesh of the world and the body of the spectator.

The combination of all the sounds that can be perceived by all living beings, naturally or with the help of technology, creates the *sonosphere.* Pauline Oliveros (2011) conceives of it as "beginning at the core of the earth and radiating in ever increasing fractal connections, vibrating sonically through and encircling the earth" (p. 163). The origins of the *sonosphere* at the center of the earth makes a connection to the mysterious sound in *Memoria*, which the character of Tilda Swinton describes as a "rumble from the core of the earth" (Weerasethakul, 2021).

Another concept introduced by Oliveros, deep listening, is useful in describing the sonic experience of *Memoria.* Deep Listening means expanding the perception to include not only sound itself, but also the silence in between sounds, the place where they originate and dissolve, "always giving attention to more than one flow of sound, in parallel or simultaneously, as well as discerning direction and context" (Oliveros cited in Schroeder, 2013, p. 221). The difference between deep listening as defined by Oliveros and the sonic experience of *Memoria* is that a practice of deep listening is associated with openness and acceptance of the continuous flow of sounds, whereas in *Memoria* the sonic experience changes from fear and hypervigilance to a gradual opening of the senses to eventually become deep listening.

Michel Chion distinguishes between three types of listening, *causal*, *semantical* and *reduced*, which also help to analyze the experience of *Memoria*. The first two are the most common ways of listening that we employ every day, while the third one requires some conscious effort in order to avoid falling into the trap of our habitual listening. Causal listening involves labeling sounds based on their cause, which is mostly easy when the source of sound is visible. Humans often fail to attribute the cause of sound based on the sound alone. This is

widely used to cinema's advantage, when Foley artists reconstruct sounds in a studio using a variety of objects that have nothing to do with the original scene. Semantic listening is the act of decoding a message in a spoken language or other sonic codes, which largely ignores the subtle differences in pronunciation and the acoustic qualities of sounds in favor of their meaning. Finally, reduced listening is a term coined by Pierre Schaeffer to describe a "mode that focuses on the traits of the sound itself, independent of its cause and of its meaning" (Chion, 1994). This mode is similar to deep listening as it is concerned with sound as a phenomenon in and of itself and its perceptual characteristics.

"A central concept that unites cinema, sound and trauma is *acousmaticity*, which rests upon, and redefines, through sound, the boundaries of presence and absence in a cinematic context" (Jasnoch, 2022, p. 2). The concept has its roots in ancient Greece, where Pythagoras performed his lectures to an audience while hidden behind a screen, in order to avoid visual distractions and intensify the listening experience. A term for sound appearing in absence of its cause was proposed by Pierre Schaeffer and later studied by Michel Chion. The notion of *acousmêtre* is developed by Chion to describe "the active force of sound that has the power to attack, invade or manipulate rather than just being a transitory aural whiff carried by the wind" (Elsaesser and Hagener 2015, p. 138). Sometimes it serves as a point of deliberate misalignment, which breaks the illusion of the sensorial coherence of the medium.

In a cinematic context, *acousmêtre* is often presented as a mysterious voice whose origin remains unknown until it is finally revealed in a dramatic turn of action. In fiction, the *acousmêtre* is often endowed with three magic powers which include *seeing all, omnipresence* and *omnipotence.* These qualities are intertwined, but not all of them have to be present in an *acousmêtre*. The "unveiling process" is described by Chion as *de-acousmatisation*. When an *acousmêtre* is a voice, the *de-acousmatisation* process occurs with embodiment "which tames the voice and drains it of its power" (Chion, 1994, p. 131). When a mysterious voice is attributed to a human being, its magic powers cease to exist.

> In other cases, the *acousmêtre* foregrounds misalignment or dissonance, in which a character or a collective group is shown to reconcile, within the acoustic plane, certain fragmentation of subjectivity due to structural violence, crisis or loss. In these cases, the "contract" between sound and image reveals the acoustic cracks in the cinematic body through which sounds, voices, and echoes seep through

time and space. (Jasnoch, 2022, p. 4)

The postcolonial, post-conflict space depicted in *Memoria* is teeming with such acoustic ruptures. Examples include distant thunderclaps or the sound of a bursting tire that appears like a gunshot before its source is identified and, of course, the 'bang' is an example of an acoustic rupture created in the split between image and sound. They are warnings that things are not what they seem to be, marking a departure from mundane reality and into the unknown, unimaginable and unseen.

Soundscapes, on the contrary, don't create questions about the origin of the sounds. By inhabiting the scene, they allow the spectator to enter the environment depicted. Mirjam Schaub argues that sound has the ability to anchor the body in space, and expand our perception to what is beyond our field of vision. 'Whereas the eye searches and plunders, the ear listens in on what is plundering us. The ear is the organ of fear.' (Schaub cited in Elsaesser and Hagener, 2015, p. 131). This statement makes a connection between sound theory and trauma theory, as the earliest conceptual model of trauma is based on the feeling of fear.

More than just stabilizing the body in space, some sounds have the ability to make the spectator aware of her own body. "Because of its material qualities, sound has a more visceral effect on the human body than immaterial light. Our body reacts physiologically to sound: it affects blood circulation, skin resistance, muscle tension and respiration" (Recuber cited in Vincze, 2016 p. 110). This awareness of the body and its sensations can activate memories stored in the body.

Even though memory in film is often represented visually, through, for example, flashback, the realm of acoustics, according to Walter Benjamin, lends itself better to embody memory in a cinematic context. Although Benjamin was more concerned with representation, the way he speaks about sound as a metaphor for memory or déjà vu is rather phenomenological:

> The shock with which the moments enter consciousness as if already lived usually strikes us in the form of sound. It is a word, tapping or a rustling that is endowed with the magic power to transport us into the cool tomb of long ago, from the vault of which the present seems to return only as echo. (Benjamin sited in Lovatt, 2013, p. 64)

In *Memoria*, the mysterious sound, 'the bang' that the protagonist is woken up by at the beginning of the movie is such a shock. The rich soundscapes of *Memoria*, as well as in other

works by Weerasethakul and the sound designer Akritchalerm Kalayanamitr where ambient sound dominates the image, leave the spectator no choice but to embrace an “embodied, phenomenological engagement with the scene” (Lovatt, 2013, p. 62).

What are the qualities of sound that make it suited to transmit memories and trauma? On the one hand, it is the temporal dimension of sound, its existence only in the present moment, and on the other hand, the materiality of it. “Evanescence of sound is what makes it a rich metaphor through which to explore the transient, and often involuntary nature of memory. However, the sonic realm also has concrete material properties that affect both the body and imagination of the listener” (Lovatt, 2013, p. 64).

While sound helps to stabilize and anchor the spectator in space, it can do precisely the opposite. In an acousmatic situation, where sound is experienced in the apparent absence of its source, sound is often destabilizing and disorienting. This is precisely what happens in the opening scene of *Memoria*. The loud ‘bang’ heard within the first few minutes produces a physiological reaction, throwing the viewer into a state of hypervigilance. Sound takes on a role of trauma transmission and invokes the transition from fearful hypervigilance to deep listening, which lasts throughout the entire movie, and even extends beyond it. Born in the transition from causal listening, desperately trying to identify the source of the sound, to welcoming all sounds, a heightened state of awareness follows the spectator outside the cinema and into the world where familiar sounds are now experienced in a new way.

3 Background information

The idea for *Memoria* came out of the director’s head, quite literally, when he was suffering from a condition called ‘exploding head syndrome’. It manifests itself as a loud ‘bang’ appearing usually in the early morning while the person is still asleep. This condition accompanied Weerasethakul during his research trips in Colombia, where he was developing *Memoria*, when one day the mysterious sound in his head finally disappeared.

Another rare psychological condition that is featured in the film is hyperthymesia, also referred to as ‘Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory’ or HSAM. People with this unique condition can recall anything that happened to them in the past on any given day, including their

earliest memories. The film explores the connection between memory and senses, particularly the sense of hearing and touch. What is interesting about the senses is that they invoke the embodied memory that may or may not have a verbal or visual narrative attached to it. It is particularly common when the memories are formed during the preverbal phase of development. Even though most people do not have clear memories from this early period of their life, memories are being created and stored in the 'warehouse of the past'. In this way, the senses become portals into the past that have the power to invoke distant memories that had seemed to have faded away completely. *Memoria* explores how far back one can travel through the senses.

Memoria is the first film by Weerasethakul that was not shot in Thailand. A new culture and language could have potentially caused challenges, but they actually inspired the filmmaker, revealing a lot of similarities between Thailand and Colombia. These countries share more than just a tropical climate. A violent history that has been forgotten and erased resulted in collective trauma that lives under the surface of society and can be felt in both countries.

Through the lens of magical realism, *Memoria* indirectly engages with the violent multifaceted conflict that affected Colombia over the last sixty years. In fact, it reaches even further back, making references to the country's colonial past and pre-colonial times. What allows Weerasethakul to make these references without sounding ignorant is his own country's experience of political violence and his ability to seamlessly weave memory sites and artifacts into the narrative in a way that allows them to speak for themselves.

Memoria stars Tilda Swinton as a protagonist, something that made the film even more character-driven than the director himself would have expected (Camia and Brady-Brown, 2021). The actress is also a co-producer of the work. The film is the result of a long-term friendship between the director and actress, who had been wanting to co-create together for a number of years. As Weerasethakul shared in one of his interviews:

> I was always fascinated by Latin America culture and there is something overlapping with where I grew up in terms of the chaos and in the embracing of life and colors. Tilda Swinton and I have known each other for a long time and always wanted to work together. We figured it should be in a country where both of us are foreigners so that we could open our senses and embrace the differences. (Website, n.d.)

In this way, Weerasethakul was not starting from zero, as the theme of memory, central to his work, was previously explored in *Tropical Malady* (2004), *Syndromes and a Century* (2006), *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010) and *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015). His approach, characterized by magical realism and a strong focus on the sonic dimension, is felt in *Memoria* as well, particularly in relation to sound. As the sound designer of *Memoria* Akritchalerm Kalayanamitr puts it, the film uses "ambience to tell the story" (Mankowski, n.d.). The diegetic sounds and soundscapes are amplified to the extent that they begin to dominate the image.

The combination of Kalayanamitr's soundscapes and stunning cinematography by Sayombhu Mukdeeprom make *Memoria* a masterpiece that can only be appreciated fully in the movie theater.

What is unique about *Memoria* is that the thesis implicit in the film seems to occupy the space where media theory and trauma theory overlap. It explores the idea that bodies and environments have the ability to store, record and transmit memory, which can be accessed through the senses. The spectator is invited to tune into these memories, which Jessica seems to receive like an antenna. The curious aspect of an antenna is that it can both transmit and receive signals, which is also true for Jessica.

The memories in this case are real stories that were gathered by the director during his research trips in Colombia. The book about *Memoria*, by the same name, edited by Giovanni Marchini Camia and Annabel Brady-Brown, contains fragments of Apichatpong's research as texts and images, telling the stories of the people he encountered while traveling the country. These are intensely personal stories of trauma, loss and resilience that have inspired the film in various ways. Fragments of these stories appear as memories of the older Hernan in the village embodying the experiences of people in rural areas of Colombia where large parts of the conflict took place, hidden from the eye of the public. When Jessica begins to channel the memories of Hernan, she uses the power of her voice to put these unspeakable experiences into words, so that they can finally be heard and acknowledged.

4 Research design

The analysis adopts a topographical approach, which is based on a deep reading of the film, using thick descriptions of the scenes in chronological order. This approach has been chosen in order to closely follow the trajectory of the non-linear narrative development and trace the transitional spaces traversed throughout the film. As sound travels in the earthly realms, so does the character and ultimately the spectator. It also allows us to unpack the multiple layers of meaning along the way, as the character moves from the urban environment into nature, from *lieux de mémoire* or sites of memory, including monuments and institutions, to *milieux de mémoire*, the living realms where memories are created and preserved.

It is also a movement from interior to exterior, as first the sound is heard within, until eventually it finds its expression and its source in the outside world. The first part of the film has little dialogue but is rich in diegetic sounds, while the second half is more dialogue-led. This perceived dichotomy is typical of Weerasethakul's films. For example, in *Syndromes and a Century* the first part of the film features more natural light and is shot in a countryside setting, while the second half is characterized by artificial light and an urban hospital environment. It is not entirely a dichotomy, as in *Memoria* there are various natural elements scattered across the first part of the film, including birds, water, plants and minerals. Their presence intensifies as the journey unfolds and finally takes over almost entirely in the final scenes.

Besides the spatial movement and physical changes that take place along the way, there are also inner processes that take place within the character and spectator. These are subtle and teasing them out requires close attention to detail, such as various nuances in texture and the timbre of sound, gesture, color and light. The spectator becomes sensitized to these changes as does the human enquirer, allowing the analysis to go deeper into the layers of the cinematic body. This heightened attention reveals the connection between cinematic elements and the concepts of memory and trauma, which are experienced in new ways. This phenomenological perspective reveals the elements of memory and trauma that risk slipping through the cracks of a purely ontological approach.

The concept of trauma implicit in the film is conveyed through transmission rather than representation, moving the analysis from interpretation into the somatic and sensorial realms. The text is seen as an active, rather than passive, subject of analysis, affecting the human inquirer

in a variety of ways. It opens a creative dimension to the analysis, by encouraging the reader to listen with openness, which is the very quality *Memoria* cultivates from its very first minutes (Thiselton, 2009).

It involves not the ears and eyes alone, but the whole body. The analysis interrogates the material scene by scene in chronological order, which allows one to observe the change in perception, from fearful vigilance to deep listening.

This topographical approach is combined with the metaphor of an archaeological search. One moves from one site, which is both a physical location within a narrative space and a filmic space containing a multitude of layers, including a narrative layer, cinematic layer (visual style and sound design), symbolic layer (symbols & metaphors), contextual layer (the social and historical context), and an intertextual layer (references to other texts). Beyond the physical locations and filmic space, there is a phenomenological realm, a subjective direct experience, which is particularly of interest here, as *Memoria* is first and foremost a sensorial journey. All these layers are in a state of continuous interplay, so the layers that are relevant in each scene are explored while others are left out.

The cinematic layer, with a strong focus on the *sonosphere,* is almost always referred to, as it contains the key to the transformation that takes place in the protagonist and the spectator/listener. The analysis of the cinematic layer examines the cinematic style and the artistic choices made by the filmmaker. Which senses do these choices appeal to? What is the role of sound design in the film? How does it affect our understanding of the concept of trauma?

Analyzing the context in which *Memoria* has been made helps to deepen understanding of the film. By revealing the motivations and interests of the filmmaker, the experiences and historical background that shaped the film, the contextual analysis seeks to bridge the gaps in the viewer's understanding of *Memoria*.

The intertextual layer that is explored in a number of scenes deepens our understanding of the film through the references it makes to other texts, including philosophical readings, artworks, and the exhibition of a Colombian painter, Ever Astudillo, which is featured in one of the scenes.

Another framework used to interrogate the material includes the theory of perception by Mieke Bal, particularly her concept of textual navel. The belly button, or navel, being a central

point of the human body as well as a point of nurture and connection to the outside world in the primordial phase, lends itself well as a metaphor for significant aspects within a text where a multitude of meanings merge into one. Around each textual navel there is a passage that leads the human inquirer deeper into the analysis. It serves as a key that unlocks multiple layers of meaning embedded within the subject of analysis (Bal, 2001). Finding these textual navels again requires close reading and utmost attention to detail, as well as the ability to step back and look at the bigger picture.

This analysis combines film theory with trauma and memory theory, and particularly explores the area where they intersect. As the analysis unfolds, it uncovers certain assumptions about collective memory and trauma that come forward in the film. These assumptions give rise to a new kind of trauma theory that is not rooted in clinical studies and empirical understanding and is qualitatively different from the theory of trauma existing in cultural studies.

5 Close reading of *Memoria*

The following pages present an analysis of the film through a deep reading focusing on the sensorial aspects of the work. The first section presents general remarks on the cinematic style and the following sections interrogate the material scene-by-scene in chronological order and discuss the various elements and patterns in light of the theoretical frameworks outlined above.

5.1 Cinematic style

One of the first things the spectator encounters in *Memoria* is the incredibly slow pacing. It expands and challenges the boundaries of the viewer's patience, yet it can hardly be labeled boring. What is the purpose of this slowness? What makes it possible to keep the viewer present and awake while maintaining this slow pace?

The slow pacing can be explained in terms of cinema's embodied affect. Despite being primarily an audio-visual medium, cinema can and does appeal to senses other than seeing and hearing. It invites identification with the character not only on an intellectual level, but also on a perceptual level. "Theories of embodied visuality acknowledge the presence of the body in the act of seeing at the same time that they relinquish the (illusory) unity of the self. In embodied

spectatorship the senses and the intellect are not separate" (Marks, 2000, p. 151).

The slow pacing leaves space for the viewer to engage with the content through the body (somatically). The processing speed of the body is much slower than that of the mind, therefore bringing experience to the level of the body requires slower pacing. Static frames lingering for a longer time allow the viewer to fully take it in.

The magnificent cinematography by Sayombhu Mukdeeprom makes mundane objects and situations appear strikingly poetic. "There is a certain composition only Sayombhu understands that I want in the framing. We also have a shared love for natural and fluorescent light" (Website, n.d). This visually poetic style is something that Apichatpong and Sayombhu developed over years of collaboration. In the case of *Memoria*, the two major visual references that affected the visual style of the film are the fluctuation of light through clouds and the work of Colombian painter Ever Astudillo, whose works are also featured in the film (Website, n.d.).

The director's use of the wide angle combined with a slow pace changes how we engage with the image. The way the viewer's eyes examine the surface of the image is akin to physical touch, a process of perception that Laura Marks calls haptic visuality. According to her, the purpose of haptic looking is "not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture", in which the eye "is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze" (Marks, 2000, p. 162). Marks draws parallels between haptic image and Deleuze's affection image, suggesting that they evoke "the direct experience of time through the body" (Marks, 2000, p. 163).

Instead of being guided by a sequence of shots, the viewer is left on their own with the image. What comes to the forefront, what is noticed, is up to the spectator. The film does not tell the viewer where to look and what is important in the image, instead it creates a space where multiple experiences and sensations can arise, as a result of the interactions between the viewer and the image. "The haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative" (Marks, 2000, p. 163).

What makes it possible for the viewer to enjoy this freedom of perception without losing the narrative thread is the sound design. The sonic experience drives the narrative forward, creating an anticipation for the mysterious sound to appear again. In his interview for KODAK, Weerasethakul shares his concerns on realizing *Memoria* online, because the sound in the film is designed for a movie theater.

> *Memoria* is the ultimate sound movie. This woman is almost like a microphone that walks and records what she hears and sees. There's a nuance to all of this ambience and richness of sound, she keeps waiting for this bang to happen and along the way has to really listen to music and people's footsteps. She becomes highly sensitive to sound and in the process absorbs other people's memories. It's a bit like science fiction in the latter part of the movie as she synchronizes this audio memory with a guy in a small village. (Website, n.d.)

In *Memoria,* the established hierarchy of the senses is reversed. Vision is invited to take a backseat, while hearing is the driver. Although as Chion suggests, it is not really a matter of one or the other, it is the sense of audio-vision that is being invoked here (Chion, 1994).

As we shall discover in the analysis, the sound design of *Memoria* amplifies the diegetic sounds and soundscapes, often foregrounding objective-internal sounds like breathing and sighing, to create a sense of intimacy. "[T]he ear becomes trained not to hear, but to *listen*" (Jasnoch, 2022, p. 17). In combination with the image, soundscape creates an illusion of sensorial unity allowing the spectator to sink into the present moment and have an embodied experience of time.

"On the other hand, the *denial* of this sensorial unity - which occurs when sound does not appear to correspond to a visual referent - is a key point of departure for a dialogue with trauma studies" (Jasnoch 2022, p. 17). The film's use of acousmatic sound is central to the narrative and the subliminal trauma theory implicit in the film. The *acousmêtre* both creates suspense and initiates a process of sensitisation, making the spectator even more aware of the soundscapes and diegetic sounds. It is worth noting that all sound in *Memoria* is diegetic, meaning that it happens in the space of the narrative and both the spectator and character can hear it.

According to Lovatt, the shift in focus from the visual to the sonic invites another way of spectatorship. This shift "opens up the possibility of an ethical spectatorship based on listening" (Lovatt, 2013, p. 63). This embodied spectatorship moves Apichatpong's work away from signification, which often creates a certain power dynamic, into the phenomenological realm where multiple, personal meanings can emerge.

5.2 The room

Even before the opening scene, the soundscape is already present. A clean ambience envelops the spectator when the opening credits appear on screen. The texture changes to a slightly more pronounced hiss as the opening scene begins. It positions the spectator in the space and fills the room with a sense of calm. The opening shot is static, dark and a bit blurry. One can recognise closed curtains, but it is really not important what it is. It is like looking through nearly closed eyes, or from the inside of the womb. There is a bit of light somewhere, diffused, but mainly, it is hearing that is the primary sense here. “As a primordial medium of sorts, sound gathers all the undifferentiated emotions that are typical of the prenatal phase, such as fear, dependency and helplessness, as well as the pleasure of immersion and protection” (Žižek cited in Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015). Through this connection to the womb, the soundscape contains the entire spectrum of emotions, without any of them taking central stage. The viewer is just there, present with whatever is unfolding. Brief distant sounds of birds or the beeping of a car horn create a connection with the outside world, perhaps a city. Still, it is so quiet that one can hear the sound of someone's slow breathing, which mingles with one's own. For as long as 40 seconds, the spectator is left to linger in this liminal space, surrounded by rich ambience inside and out.

This is a classic example of a haptic image, as defined by Marks, where the eye wanders through the surface of the image, taking in its texture and feeling, before settling on an idea of what it is looking at. The objective-internal sound of breathing is heard up close, creating a sense of intimacy even before the person itself is visible.

Suddenly, the loud ‘bang’ cuts through the ambient noise causing the spectator to shudder and blink. The intensity of the sound is just enough to create a sense of shock, without overwhelming the spectator too much. Perhaps it is on the verge of being slightly under the limit, to account for individual differences in perception, their history of trauma and differences in their mental states. “It takes a shock to unroot a memory, to revive a flow of experience. Such a shock is what Deleuze looks for in time-image cinema” (Marks 2000, 64). He would certainly find it here, a textbook example of a shock that disrupts the state of passive spectatorship creating

vigilance and alertness. What is less clear is the memory. What kind of memory is it here to 'unroot'?

The sound is followed by movement, a dark silhouette appears in the frame, accompanied by the diegetic sounds of slipping from under a duvet. This tactile, intimate sound is in stark contrast to the mysterious 'bang', whose origin is unknown. A person, apparently woken up by the noise, is visibly stunned. There's a brief pause, during which the person appears frozen and no breathing is heard. It might even cause the spectator to hold their breath too, through unconscious identification with the character.

After a few seconds, the person starts to breathe again and moves slowly under the duvet, transitioning to the edge of the bed and releasing a couple of deep sighs. The head is pointing downwards, and the shoulders are lifted towards the ears, hiding the neck. This body language signals distress and invites the viewer to share the experience, to feel what the person is feeling.

The camera starts to turn slowly, capturing the darkness of the room and leaving the person out of frame for a few seconds until the silhouette appears again, reflected in a mirror. It lingers for a few seconds, then the person walks past the mirror and into the shot again. One can recognize that it is a woman, probably in her 50s. She gracefully lifts her arm, carefully pushes a heavy sliding door that makes a grinding noise. The noise animates an otherwise visually calm scene, an effect that appears several times with different objects, including the door and the chair scraping on the floor.

This first scene is significant in a sense that it sets the tone for the entire film, foregrounding the slow pace and a sense of anticipation, born from the splitting of image and sound. There is no dialogue to rely on, only soundscape amplified to its very deliberate presence. This scene is an invitation to leave the representational paradigm, and trust the senses to lead us through this journey.

The use of acousmatic sound, the 'bang', first evokes causal listening, where the spectator is trying to understand what makes this sound, until she is left with the feeling of not-knowing. This way of listening slowly transitions towards reduced listening, or deep listening, as the narrative unfolds.

Even though it is primarily a sensorial journey, there are a couple of metaphors that are worth looking into. The mirror metaphor, first appearing in this scene, is a recurring element in *Memoria* that represents a transitional space, a precursor of a change in states, in this case

dreaming and wakefulness, conscious and unconscious. In this brief moment when the dark silhouette is reflected in the mirror, we are presented with the “window on the unconscious”, particularly onto that shadow side of the psyche that is normally obscured. This scene informs the viewer that the film is going to engage with the subconscious as much (if not more) than the conscious mind. The dark silhouette framed by the mirror resembles a shadow, an obscure inner self, or “surplus or excess of Self” (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015, p. 63). It suggests that the film engages with the spectator’s embodied inner self. Another purpose of this scene is to draw the viewer’s attention to the body and its language.

5.3 Terrace

The first cut brings the viewer to the terrace. The ambience is slightly different here; one can hear the wind and the noises outside more distinctly through the glass windows. There are several green plants and a little cage with two birds moving softly on their perches, still half asleep. The woman walks onto the terrace and the door slams behind her causing her to micro-shudder. She has become sensitized to the noise, after being woken up by the ‘bang’. One of the birds also seems to react to the noise. The woman looks out into the darkness of the early morning, then turns around and stands there for a few seconds. She then pulls the chair out with a screeching sound that vibrates like a musical tone. She sits down and releases a few audible exhales, slowly coming back to herself. She turns her head to look at the birds who seem to be undisturbed by the loud ‘bang’ that has interrupted her sleep.

As the character becomes sensitized to noise, so does the spectator. Sounds that would normally go unnoticed are now carefully paid attention to, as they might contain sonic cues about what is going on in the narrative.

The opening sequence conveys a sense of disturbance, caused by the ‘bang’. The ‘bang’ and the ambient sounds work together. The ‘bang’ creates a shock, it invades, while the ambience frames it, like the mirror when it frames the silhouette, making it more salient. The contract between the two elevates the sense of disturbance. When the bang subsides and the ambience envelops the viewer again, the initial peace, the safety of the womb, is never completely restored. The ambience and darkness of the room at this early hour and the awareness evoked by the ‘bang’ create a backdrop on which other distinct sounds (the door slamming and

the chair scraping the floor) reveal themselves more loudly. This heightened state of awareness is now the new normal.

The cage, as a metaphor, represents limited freedom, which seems to be accepted by the birds. Perhaps they are out of place, without knowing that they do not belong there. They have undergone a process of restratification adapting themselves to the conditions of captivity. The cage itself is an example of a reterritorializing force that establishes a new order, structure and power that is initially imposed but gradually becomes accepted by those it has been imposed upon. The processes of restratification and reterritorialization take place both internally in the character and externally, as the character ventures from the urban environment and into nature.

In contrast with the mirror and the cage, the sound that the woman is awakened by, the 'bang', is not a symbol, but rather a phenomenon that simply cannot be contained by the representational paradigm. Based on the absence of its source and its invasive quality, one can conclude that the 'bang' is an *acousmêtre*. It is a rupture in the acoustic space, a leap between worlds, the beginning of a sensorial awakening to another dimension (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015).

What is this other dimension? It is a state of acute presence marked by a heightened perception of reality. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, it is a destratified state, free from fixed structures and habitual patterns where new ways of being can emerge: a state of Deep Listening, as Pauline Oliveros would describe it. It is a state where one is attuned to the sonic environment to such a degree the entire time/space continuum of sound is perceived. Normally, we tend to block out sounds that are not relevant to our current process, but it takes energy (Oliveros, 2011). When we open our senses to receive all sounds, suddenly this energy becomes available to us. Laura Marks calls it haptic hearing, where all the sounds in the soundscape appear "undifferentiated" (Marks, 2000, p. 183).

It is important to note that Pauline Oliveros makes a hard distinction between listening and hearing. Hearing happens involuntarily, while listening is an intentional process (Osborne, 2001). Jessica first hears the 'bang', which awakens her to a heightened state of perception, and she begins to listen to her surroundings in another way. Through identification with the character and the power of acousmêtre, the spectator also enters a heightened state of perception and the process of destratification begins.

5.3 Parking lot

The second cut brings the spectator outside, where a dozen cars are parked along the perimeter, facing each other. There are both newer and older models of cars, reflecting perhaps the diversity of incomes in the neighborhood. The position of the cars conveys a sense of order, suggesting that the neighborhood is rather safe. The presence of different time periods is reflected in both the cars and architecture. There is a new building in the background, but the ones on the right and in front are from earlier times. The writing on the wall is half gone, making it difficult to interpret the meaning of it. It reflects the impermanence of memory, its predisposition to decaying or erasure.

The tone of the sky between the buildings and the quietness of the parking lot suggest that the scene takes place around the same time as the previous scene with Jessica. Perhaps it is happening just outside the building that she is in.

The camera moves forward in a smooth slow motion. The texture of the ambience is different outside, with more clean and distinct sounds present. After about thirty seconds, an alarm in one of the cars goes off, seemingly by itself. A few seconds later, it triggers the alarm of another car. In a chain reaction, five cars are honking and beeping with their lights flashing on and off for over a minute, until the parking lot goes silent again.

Before the alarm goes off, the cars are ‘sleeping’. There is something human about them, the way they are positioned, facing each other. The only movement in the scene is the movement of the camera, which gives a sense of floating slowly through the air above the parking lot, creating a feeling of anticipation and the presence of an unknown entity that is about to reveal itself. The car alarm breaks the quietness of the moment and, when other alarms get triggered as well, there is total chaos. The initial feeling of calm and order is replaced by a nagging cacophony that lasts for a long minute. Headlights flash, illuminating the rough surface of the asphalt. Once this bizarre concert comes to an end, silence envelops the parking lot, bringing a sense of relief that spreads through the scene and the body of the viewer for another twenty seconds before the change of scene takes place. The chain reaction represents interconnectedness, a shared experience that is contagious.

In contrast with the first ‘bang’ that is introduced rather gently, the scene with the cars is overflowing with intensity. It builds up gradually, but quickly, maintaining the highest intensity

for a bit longer than one would hope for. It extends the spectator's tolerance of audible stimuli and shows that listening happens with the entire body, not only the ear. The boundary between sound outside and sound inhabiting the body from within becomes less clear.

In this case, although the sound of an alarm possesses an invasive quality like the 'bang', its cause is evident: it is a car alarm. What is unknown is the reason it went off. This is, in a way, another example of the splitting of image and sound. The result is evident, but the cause is unknown and this cause operates like a silent *acousmêtre* that only a car alarm system can register.

Through *acousmaticity* and haptic hearing, the film seems to put forward several assumptions about trauma. First, when trauma is concerned, the border between the individual and the collective becomes blurred. Individual trauma is embedded in the field of the collective and has the ability to affect it in various ways. It can also be tapped into through the process of deep listening.

The *acousmêtre* is a trauma transmission within the cinematic context. Here, the magic powers of *acousmêtre* come into play. Seeing-all-quality, omnipresence and omnipotence refer to the ability of trauma to be invoked by a variety of situations that often do not have anything to do with the original traumatic event. It is as if a mysterious force has been watching the subject and waiting for the perfect moment to intrude. In the case of *Memoria*, the seeing-all-quality can perhaps be replaced with hearing-all. As the later scene in the restaurant shows, the *acousmêtre* reacts to certain words, suggesting it has the power to hear everything. Its omnipotence is reflected in the current scene, when the car alarm goes off for no apparent reason.

5.4 Hospital room

The next cut transports the viewer into a hospital room where Jessica sits next to the bed of her sister Karen who is still asleep. Soft daylight filters in through half-closed curtains. The ambience is rich in hissing, with occasional distant sounds of the hospital ward, birds and wind. Jessica is looking at her phone when Karen opens her eyes and blinks a few times before turning her head. Jessica reacts immediately to this movement and looks at her sister. After a brief moment of hesitation, she leans forward on her chair, which emits a series of creaking noises, and greets her sister. Karen takes Jessica's hand, strokes it and lightly squeezes her palm in a

loving gesture, then takes her other hand and strokes her forearm. Jessica responds by gently stroking Karen's knuckles with her thumb.

The creaking noises animate the image as if announcing the transition from stillness to movement and dialogue. The image of hands touching is a recurring motif throughout the film, which embodies a form of communication. In this case, perhaps, it is no more than an expression of affection and care, while later in the film it becomes a key element that helps the story to unfold. What is interesting though is that this tactile, physical form of communication between the sisters seems to be superior to the verbal. As this scene shows, the dialogue between them is slightly unaligned.

Karen is surprised to hear that Jessica has been there since the morning when they supposedly saw each other, as she cannot recall that. Jessica tells her she has been looking at the pictures and shows her a few. Karen's face lights up with a smile when she looks at the phone that Jessica holds in front of her. Suddenly, Karen remembers a dream she just had about a dog that got run over in front of her house. Her smile is instantly replaced with a frown, signaling worry and confusion. She wonders if the dog has put a curse on her, since it was the same day that her mysterious symptoms started. She laughs at the thought of it and soon falls asleep again. Jessica looks at her for half a minute, then sits up, pauses and slowly leans back, as if trying not to make any noise, but the chair responds with a long series of creaking sounds. She looks at Karen and releases a deep sigh.

The ambient sound in the first scenes transmits the intense quality of presence, as if reminding the spectator to listen deeply. It is sound rather than dialogue that tells the story and drives the narrative forward.

The story about the dog creates a connection to a scene in another of Weerasethakul's films, *Syndromes and a Century,* where a monk shares his dream with a doctor. The monk, who came to the doctor because he had a problem with his leg, says that his symptoms started the previous night when he was dreaming about chickens. He believes that the chickens are trying to make him suffer as revenge for him torturing the chickens at his friend's farm by breaking their feet when he was a child. It brings up the topics of karma, justice and animism that are intricately connected in Apichatpong's films.

A deeper meaning can be found in this scene, when viewed through the prism of trauma theory. The simple act of sitting by someone's bed and watching them sleep is an act of bearing

witness. It recurs again and again throughout the movie, within the narrative and across the filmic space, where the spectator becomes a witness to the process of something unfolding on screen and ultimately to their own process. It is as if the spectator is being trained to witness, by witnessing the other witness and becoming a witness to their own experience.

5.5 Cafeteria

Jessica and Juan, Karen's husband, are sitting on the open terrace in the university cafeteria. There is a pink orchid on the table, wrapped in plastic. Juan asks if it is infected, but Jessica responds that the infected ones are already in the lab. The cafeteria is busy and rich in diegetic sounds, but the dialogue is very clear, as if the spectator were sitting at the table with them. Despite the notorious use of wide angle, the point of audition in the film is usually close to the character. Juan points out that the bus card Jessica has is no longer in use. She comments that her bank card has expired as well.

The bus card and the bank card, which are no longer in use, become memory artifacts, or recollection-objects that embody a certain period of time. This idea that objects contain history and memory develops throughout the film. "Personal objects remember and attest to events that people have forgotten" (Marks, 2000, p.107). Besides being an expired bus pass, this object holds a memory of the time when it was used, perhaps a memory of the time Jessica last visited her sister and Juan in Bogotá, which was apparently a long time ago.

Juan looks at the orchid and recites a poem in Spanish:

What is this thing that springs from the living?
The scent of a virus
The perfume of decay
Making a verse of bacteria
Fermented wound
Molecular spectacle
Plotting a dance without organs. (Weerasethakul, 2021)

Jessica smiles. When they continue going through the papers, Juan mentions the death certificate of Jessica's recently deceased husband. He is sorry to bring it up, but Jessica is calm and focused on the papers. He hands her a pen to sign a loan transfer agreement. A death certificate is another recollection object that testifies the death of Jessica's husband.

The poem recited by Juan is one of two poems that appear in the film. This one refers to something invisible, which can, however, be felt through other senses, in this case olfactory (scent, perfume). Bacteria and viruses are pathogenic, pointing out the nature of something that can cause harm. The 'molecular spectacle' brings a change in scale, from macro to micro. A dance without organs can be interpreted as a reference to Gilles Deleuze's body without organs. In that case, dance without organs is an activity that resists stratification and classification and welcomes intensity.

The remark about the deceased husband reveals early in the film that Jessica is going through a process of grief. It places her between two worlds, one of which we are able to perceive as humans and one that is beyond our perception.

"So when one loses, one is also faced with something enigmatic: something is hiding in the loss, something is lost within the recesses of loss. If mourning involves knowing what one has lost [...], then mourning would be maintained by its enigmatic dimension, by the experience of not knowing incited by losing what we cannot fully fathom" (Butler, 2020, p.22). This process of discovering what is "hiding in the loss" is also an act of bearing witness. It takes patience and courage and openness. This enigmatic dimension places mourning and trauma into the category of experiences that are beyond the range of normal human experiences, hence their capacity to break the usual patterns and bring one closer to the destratified state. The film is the journey of discovering what is 'hiding in the loss'.

This, however, should not be seen as an attempt to romanticize trauma and grief. It does bring a change in perception that has the ability to bring about a deeper experience of life, not as a side effect, but rather a reward for the tremendous amount of work one has to put in to work through the traumatic experience or loss.

5.6 Street in Bogotá

Jessica crosses a busy street and waits at the traffic light. The bus passes by with a groaning and hissing sound. Suddenly a loud ‘bang’ is heard and a man falls to the ground, then lifts his head up and frantically looks around.

The next frame reveals the source of the sound - a popped tire on the bus. The man runs off and keeps turning his head past his shoulder as he continues to run. Clearly, he has mistaken the bursting tire for an explosion. Some passers-by look at him in amusement, some express confusion and some do not react at all. Jessica stops and keeps looking at the scene.

This is an acousmatic situation, where the *acousmêtre* is quickly *de-acousmatized* by revealing the source of the sound. However, the man running remains under the power of the *acousmêtre*, while everyone else is not.

This episode is significant as it makes reference to the armed conflict. The sound must have triggered a traumatic memory, causing the person to act as if the traumatic event was happening in the present. The scene illustrates the phenomenon of flashback, where traumatic memory intrudes, triggered by a sensory stimulus, causing the person to relive the traumatic experience.

Caruth and Blank see traumatic flashback “as a form of seeing that is closely bound up with not knowing”, pointing to the fact that others would never know, or never want to know the truth of the traumatic event (Caruth cited in Fred Alford, 2016, p. 21). This is a way of seeing trauma as political, suggesting that the one who experiences flashback is “seeing for the larger society”. The fact that the man experiences a flashback on a busy street surrounded by dozens of people who witness his experience feeds into this “philosophy of flashback” (Fred Alford, 2016, p. 26).

5.7 Outside the house

The next scene continues to suggest that conflict still persists in Colombian society. A wide shot of the house lingers for long enough to study the window gratings, the barbed wire on top of a high wall, a red car parked next to the house and a mysterious red stain on a sidewalk, which looks like blood. It is raining heavily, but it is not getting washed away. There are lush

green plants growing by the side of the house and spreading up one of the walls. The ambience is filled with a combination of steady rainfall, single droplets and streams of water.

This smooth and continuous sound provides a sense of relief from extensive alertness generated by previous scenes. The rain creates "visual *microrhythms*" on the surface of the image, "rapid and fluid rhythmic values, instilling a vibrating trembling temporality in the image itself" (Chion, 1994, p. 16).

Jessica comes out of the house with a black umbrella and opens the first gate. Thunder is heard in the distance. Someone runs past the house quite fast as she walks out, opens the second gate and waits for Juan to come out. Even though the sound of rain provides a soothing passage to rest the awareness on, the visual image and the acousmatic sound of thunder remind us that one should never completely relax. The person running by could be just rushing to catch a bus, but the way he enters the frame preceded by a thunder strike makes it quite dramatic.

Jessica notices the red stain, comes closer and touches it with the toe of her shoe. When Juan and his son come out of the house, she quickly retracts it and turns around, like nothing happened. One can hear them talking, but the dialogue is muffled and hard to discern, as the point of audition is the same as the camera or equally far away from the characters, automatically positioning the spectator outside the scene. Juan kisses Jessica and his son goodbye and walks away. The other two walk the opposite way. Neither Juan nor his son notice the stain on the sidewalk.

The stain embodies the imprint of trauma on Colombian society, a trace of violence from the past seen in the present. The fact that Jessica is first attracted by the stain, but quickly stops looking at it and turns around can be read as an attempt of the present to 'simultaneously recapture and distance itself from the past'(Assmann and Conrad, 2010, p. 62). It may refer to the difficulty of addressing a violent past, as there are multiple narratives and interpretive frames for understanding past experiences. It also points out a peculiar aspect of trauma, which manifests in its duality. On the one hand, there is a tendency to avoid everything that has to do with traumatic memory. On the other hand, a compulsion to repeat trauma or relive some aspect of it is a common propensity among trauma victims (Alexander et al. 2004). The fact that Juan and his son do not notice the stain at all tells us something about living in a country where violence is a widespread phenomenon.

5.8 Auditorium

The following scene, which is again a wide shot, depicts a man speaking on stage. The room is dark, but one can see the people in the audience, the speaker illuminated by the stage light, and an image of the screen with a diagram of a guitar. The man talks about the property of wood to absorb water and anything in its surroundings. The next slide illustrates a process of bending the sides of the guitar, which are held tight within the bender for several days to keep the desired shape. The man adds that using a low-quality material may result in small cracks.

This seemingly neutral episode actually plants a seed that will sprout in the final scenes of the movie. It makes a connection between the material or body and its environment, vibration and sound. This idea that material absorbs whatever is in its surroundings is later applied to memory, which is stored in objects and bodies in the form of vibrations.

This scene extends the discussion on fetishes and fossils, suggesting that all objects and bodies have the capacity to record and store memory in the form of vibrations. If one is attuned to all sounds, in a state of deep listening, one can access memories that are everywhere in our environment. At this stage, it is presented as a hypothesis, which later becomes developed into a subliminal theory of trauma.

5.9 Sound studio

Jessica meets a sound engineer named Hernan who helps her recreate the sound from her head using a library of sounds for movies. Before Jessica arrives, a wide shot captures the room and the profile of Hernan, sitting in front of a large mixing console and a couple of screens. The small integrated lights in the ceiling of the studio emanate soft warm and uneven light, making the room appear like a 3D model. Hernan is listening to the composition *Memoria* by César López and writes down some notes in a small notepad with his left hand.

According to César López's official YouTube channel, this piece is dedicated to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its commitment to peace work in Colombia *(César López // Memoria // La Verdad Ilumina*, 2019). This is another indirect reference to the armed conflict that would most likely not be understood by an international audience and feeds into the narrative undercurrent of the conflict's aftermath in Colombian society.

Jessica passes by the window of the studio and opens the door. Hernan pauses the music and stands up to greet her. He asks her to wait a little and invites her to sit down. The next frame is a medium shot of Hernan and Jessica sitting at the back. His face, illuminated by the light, as well as his body, reflect a state of deep contemplation. His eyes have a soft focus and he listens with his whole body, which can be observed by the movement of his chest. When the music stops, he closes his notebook and puts it aside. He moves to another chair, inviting Jessica to sit next to him by the mixing desk.

Long sequences of music are not unusual in Weerasethakul's work. Sometimes it is the scene of a concert, like in *Syndromes and a Century,* a music performance in one of the later scenes in *Memoria,* or a joyous pop-song in *Tropical Malady*. They provide space for being here and now, to witness the experience of life unfolding without being distracted by too much action. They provide space to reconnect with the body and feelings, as an act of bearing witness to oneself through witnessing another.

Jesscia describes the 'bang' she heard in her room as a "big ball of concrete that falls into a metal well, surrounded by sea water" (Weerasethakul, 2021). After she finishes the sentence, they look at each other in silence before starting to giggle. This scene refers to what Chion calls causal listening and how we tend to describe sounds by what produces them. The description Jessica provides is not something common, yet it helps to convey an idea of what the sound is like.

Hernan says that he prepared some sounds when Professor Juan told him about Jessica's mysterious sound. He presses some combination of keys, and sliders on the mixing console line up. Jessica looks around in amusement. When Hernan asks her about the size of the ball, she concentrates to recall the sound, when suddenly the sliders change their positions several times without Hernan doing anything. They both notice it, but don't react and continue to speak. Jessica tries to imitate the sound with her voice, which requires her to imagine the sound in her head and apply reduced listening, a listening mode that focuses on the acoustic properties of sound.

This seemingly insignificant moment becomes a key, or a textual navel, as defined by Mieke Bal (2001). It is a crack in the cinematic body through which new meanings emerge. It makes it clear that there is something about Jessica that makes things in her surroundings react in strange ways. This pattern continues throughout the movie, with the electric lights changing in

the library where Jessca is sitting, or lights going off in the gallery while Jessica is contemplating works of Ever Astudillo and finally, in one of the final scenes, when she touches a strange object in Hernan's house in the village and the blades start to spin, without the object being connected to electricity. All these scenes will be analyzed in more detail further in the text. When looked upon as a pattern, these moments reveal that Jessica is both a transmitter and a receiver.

Hernan plays some sounds for Jessica to hear. After a series of attempts, Jessica says that her sound was more "earthy", that it was like a "rumble from the core of the Earth", and they both laugh. There is a certain similarity in the way Jessica describes her sound and Pauline Oliveros' concept of *sonosphere*, which also starts at the core of the earth. Seen in that way, the bang becomes a primordial sound, originating from the same place as the *sonosphere*. While it may not create the *sonosphere*, it certainly creates our experience of it, as after the 'bang' is heard, both Jessica and the spectator begin to listen to the *sonosphere* in a new way.

Hernan opens a library of sounds for movies and they continue the search. Jessica asks him to play the sound titled "body hits duvet hit woods bat". The combination of the words 'body', 'hit' and 'bat' in the title of this sound creates an association with violence. When the sound is played, her whole body reacts. She shudders each time the sound is played and her shoulders go up slightly. After a few repetitions, Jessica stops Hernan by putting her hand lightly on top of his arm. This gesture has a double meaning: it clearly means 'stop', while at the same time it acts as the precursor of the relationship that develops between Jessica and Hernan.

Jessica says that her sound was more "round". Hernan opens the image of the rgb waveform that he refers to as "the mountain". This "mountain" is a visualized sound, which represents yet another way to convey sound without actually transmitting the essence of it. It refers to the idea that trauma resists representation. Only when the sound is played does Jessica's body remember. They make a few more adjustments, during which the sound is played again and by the end of the process Jessica seems frozen. Hernan asks her to repeat her name, in order to assign the correct title to the file, but she doesn't seem to hear the question, until when he asks again, she finally replies.

This scene illustrates how the process of revisiting a traumatic memory can lead to a trauma response. In attempts to reconcile with the violent past, there is always a risk of being retraumatized. On a cultural level, the dual aspect of trauma also manifests itself as a compulsion to remember and a compulsion to forget, which can be observed in public debates on, for

example, memory of the Holocaust or the Vietnam War, where there is a disagreement between groups of people about whether the past should be remembered in order to prevent it from happening again, or whether it is time to leave these memories behind (Alexander et al. 2004).

On a different plane, what happens in the mixing room can be seen as the creation of a fetish, as defined by Marks. A sound from Jessica's head is materialized in the world in the form of an actual sound. Keeping this connection in mind clarifies some things that happen later in the movie, like the mysterious disappearance of Hernan.

5.10 Hospital room

This scene begins with a medium shot of Karen sleeping in her hospital bed. The room is dark, and there is a beam of light dancing on her face. She blinks her eyes open, looking in the direction of the light, so that only the white of her eye is visible for a moment. The sound of a car alarm cuts through the ambience of the room.

The motif of awakening and falling asleep represents a transition between states and different levels of perception. Dreaming in sleep means being in another time and space, while simultaneously being here and now. The beam of light that wakes Karen up causes these two worlds to collide for a brief moment when she opens her eyes.

The next frame is a medium shot of Jessica standing by the window and peeking outside through an opening in the curtains, another instance of being between two worlds, inside and outside. A sunny university yard is seen through the window, with green grass and trees, as well as a small parking lot where a few cars are parked in two rows. Three of the cars have their lights flashing, indicating that their alarms are on. People are passing by without reacting to the sound. Jessica's reaction suggests that this is another appearance of a silent *acousmêtre*, as there is no apparent cause for the alarm in sight.

The image of the window appears frequently throughout the movie, starting with completely closed curtains in the beginning, then partly open in the hospital room in the morning while Jessica is not facing the window, to the current scene where Jessica opens the curtains slightly and looks outside. In one of the final scenes, she stands next to the open window and listens. It is a natural progression in which Jessica opens herself more and more to the experience.

5.11 Corridor

The scene begins with a wide shot of Jessica sitting on a bench in the university corridor. Next to her is a wooden board with a collection of photographs, and a sign dedicated to the first centenary of the birth of Professor Calixto Torres Umaña on August 13, 1985.

A woman comes by and asks if she could open the door that is blocked by the bench where Jessica is sitting. Together they move the bench and the woman comes in. Jessica tells her that her sister is a patient in the ward. The woman invites her to come in.

In the first part of the movie, Jessica spends a lot of time in institutional spaces, like the university, library and hospital. These places are *lieux de mémoire* or sites of memory, which attempt to capture and maintain collective memory. This concept is useful here as it connects immaterial memory and material spaces, a link that grows stronger as the narrative unfolds.

The hospital itself would not generally be considered a *lieu de mémoire*, but for the filmmaker, it has meaning and personal memories attached to it, as both parents of Weerasethakul are physicians (Chan, n.d.). It is also a place where people experience physical suffering, fear, worry and other distressing emotions, which infuse the atmosphere of these places.

5.12 Library

There is a wide shot of Jessica sitting in the library, showing the architecture of the building: a curved roof with small square openings through which the light comes in. Another signature of Weerasethakul is a keen awareness of space, light and composition, which can be attributed to the fact that the director studied architecture before attending art school. The ambience reflects the acoustics of this large space. A clicking sound followed by the change of light in the room appears several times. The light just above Jessica's head blinks, causing her to lift her head. The next frame is a medium shot of Jessica wearing glasses with a collection of books on her desk. She piles them up and begins to study a page in the book in front of her. A closeup of the book reveals pictures of fungi on orchid leaves and flowers. The title reads "Fungus, virus and bacteria". She turns the page to find two large photographs of an orchid flower displaying various stages of infection. Jessica slides her hand along the book.

The various stages of infection refer to the temporality of memory. Ordinary memories tend to fade with time, while traumatic memory often seems to be completely absent from the conscious mind in the beginning, before it begins to intrude in the form of flashbacks. The pathogen affecting the orchid flower is a metaphor for traumatic memory that has the ability to erode the self. Winnicott, whose view on trauma is rooted in Freud's psychoanalytic theory, distinguished between two types of trauma, one that is seen as a "dramatic penetration of the core self" and the other as "subtle erasure of the core self" in a prolonged process (Fred Adford 2016, p. 44). The metaphor of a flower affected by fungi seems to reflect the second type, the gradual process.

On a contextual level, the infected orchid tells a story of Colombia being the second largest exporter of cut flowers, after the Netherlands. The growth of this industry had a positive impact on society by creating jobs and limiting coca farming, which is closely linked to violence and corruption (Camia and Brady-Brown, 2001). Yet, the flower industry also has its dark side, in the form of poor working conditions. The majority of the workers are women, who experience harassment from male supervisors, long hours of work with few breaks and exposure to various chemicals, mostly fungicides and pesticides. Besides the use of chemicals, the negative impact on the environment also comes from draining the water supply (McQuaid, 2011). In that sense, the story of the flower industry in Colombia illustrates how something can be both a blessing and a curse, a principle of duality that is explored in the film in relation to trauma and grief.

The dark side of the flower industry of Bogotá is explored in Marta Rodriguez and Jorge Silva's *Love Women and Flowers* (1988), a film that looks at flowers as transnational objects and recollection objects, where "human suffering is transmuted into value". According to Deleuze, "the carnation is a recollection-image of women's work, pain and solidarity" (Marks, 2000, p. 97).

The blinking light above Jessica's head reflects how the environment is reacting to her presence. Perhaps she is not the only one who is attuned to the environment, and it is a mutual process where the environment also senses her. Examples are the moment in the mixing room when the sliders move seemingly without any external reason, or when the car alarms outside the hospital and in the opening scene gain new meaning as the bigger picture starts to arrange itself out of these details.

5.13 Exhibition

On her way out of the library, Jessica stops in a room where the artworks of Ever Astudillo are exhibited in a small gallery space. Her footsteps on the wooden floor make a rhythmical tapping sound. She stops next to a few artworks, her silhouette against the white wall, resembling the dark silhouette on one of the images. She walks further and stops next to the artwork *Signos Vitales* and snaps a picture. Her phone makes a loud sound mimicking a camera shutter. Unexpected sound animates an otherwise quiet scene. Jessica quickly turns it off and takes another picture. Suddenly the light in the studio goes off, leaving *Signos Vitales* illuminated. Jesscia instinctively looks past her shoulder, then continues to walk through the exhibition.

Weerasethakul shared in an interview that Ever Astudillo's works were a visual reference for *Memoria*. "[S]ilhouettes of people that are cinematic and mysterious" often appear throughout the film. This scene makes an explicit reference to Ever Astudillo's work that inspired this visual motif. The focus on this particular artwork, *Signos Vitales* or *Vital Signs,* and the fact that Jessica is attracted to it, is not accidental. The beam of light creates an association with aliens, a theme that comes back in the final scenes of *Memoria.* Conspiracy theories aside, it may refer to the alienating aspect of trauma and grief, particularly in connection to collective trauma caused by the armed conflict, various aspects of which are still denied by official history in Colombia.

5.14 Street

Jessica walks down a street in Bogota in the evening, passing some shops and graffiti on the walls. The ambience is filled with the noise of the city. Jessica leaves the frame, but the shot lingers, depicting a man who stops in the middle of the street and checks the inner pocket of his jacket, then continues to walk. A dog enters the frame and walks in the same direction as Jessica. Next to a Chinese restaurant, Jessica looks past her shoulder and notices the dog.

These small details, like the moment with the man stopping to check his pocket and a few scenes earlier the man that starts to run when he mistakenly took the sound of an exploding tire for a gunshot, tell a story of a country trying to find itself in the aftermath of a violent conflict,

where robbery and shootings are not uncommon experiences. Living in these conditions, one has to always be alert, attuned, awake.

The next frame shows a small square, surrounded by trees on one side and a V-shaped tree, growing on a small patch of soil surrounded by concrete. The ambience is different here, featuring the sound of cicadas, an element of nature in the urban environment, along with the patch of soil, tree and dog.

Jessica walks into the frame, looking past her shoulder, followed by a dog. She stops and backs off, changes direction, as if performing a peculiar dance. The dog sniffs something on the ground for a few seconds and finally goes on its way. Jessica looks in the direction the dog went and sits down under a tree in the middle of a square to take a breath after this distressing experience. This is a medium shot of Jessica sitting under a tree. Loud voices enter the soundscape and dissolve, followed by the sound of a few cars passing and stopping at the traffic light. In that moment, Jessica is stunned by the familiar sound, the ‘bang’. She instinctively turns her head for a moment, then looks down and sighs, as if realizing that the source of the sound is not anywhere around. Distinct sounds fade away leaving a clean ambience.

The sound of cicadas and the tree under which Jessica is sitting are juxtaposed with the sounds of cars and other city elements, creating a contrast between city and nature. The dog sniffing something on the ground is, like Jessica, being guided by her felt sense. Jessica learns to trust her senses and embarks on a journey that leads her away from the noise of the city and into nature, where the mysterious source of the sound finally reveals itself.

5.15 Lab

The scene begins with a close-up of an archaeologist examining a skull. His voice appears loud and clear. One can hear the distant sounds of a university campus and hospital ward, at the same time as a pencil lightly scratching paper as an assistant researcher takes notes. This scene is one of the few rare close-ups in the film. It allows one to experience the texture of the skull, a memory artifact in a process of disintegration.

After a medium shot of Jessica standing next to the table on which various bones are laid out, Agnes, the anthropologist she met in the corridor, rearranges them in a way that allows them to see that they belong to a young girl. They were found in the tunnel under construction, where she is going to travel the following day to join the extraction team. She picks up a skull and says

that it is probably 6,000 years old. Jessica is surprised to see a hole in it. Agnes says that it is probably a result of a ritual to release bad spirits and hands her a pair of gloves. Jessica seems overwhelmed by the story and the presence of the artifact. She puts on the glove and lightly touches the inside of the hole in a circular motion.

The skull with a hole is literally a fossil, and a fossil as defined by Laura Marks. It carries a memory that has been imprinted on it and inscribed through ritual. The invitation of the anthropologist to feel it suggests that these bones have an aura attached to them, which can be experienced through contact.

5.16 Independence Park

During a wide shot of Jessica sitting in Independence Park under the monument of Nicolaus Copernicus, birds are chirping to a backdrop of the city ambience. Hernan comes into the frame and walks towards Jessica. She stands up to give him a hug and kiss on the cheek, and he sits down next to her and hands her his headset.

In a medium shot of Jessica and Hernan, she puts on the headset and listens carefully. ‘That's it’, she says, when she hears the familiar sound. Then her face lights up in amusement. Hernan smiles and says that he mixed in some of his own sounds. Jessica is contemplating the music that only she can hear through the headset, while the spectator and Hernan hear the birds chirping and an occasional beep of a car, while observing her reaction, bearing witness to her experience.

Suddenly the wind comes and Jessica closes her eyes and her whole face relaxes. She blinks her eyes open, exhales deeply and shakes her head. She takes off the headset and says that she is really moved by the interpretation.

A gust of wind and the sense of relief that Jessica’s face emanates when she listens to the music illustrate the process of integration. The music composed by Hernan features the ‘bang’ and other sounds, thus giving it context, something that trauma often lacks. By contextualizing the ‘bang’, Hernan gives it a new meaning and by witnessing her experience, integration takes place.

On a different plane, if the recorded sound is seen as a fetish, this moment marks the dissolution of it, it is being integrated back into the body without organs that produced it. “When

the sense memory is revived in the body - when the body remembers-the recollection-object ceases to exist as such" (Marks, 2000, p.122). This moment is a precursor of the disappearance of Hernan, whose role in Jessica's journey is fulfilled.

The location where they meet is also significant. The monument to Nicolaus Copernicus, made by sculptor Tadeush Lodziana, was erected in 1974 as a gift from the People's Republic of Poland followed by a recommencement of the diplomatic relationships between the countries, which were stopped during the period of La Violencia, a decade-long civil war between conservative and liberal forces.

5.17 Fridge factory

Jessica and Hernan visit a fridge factory in Bogotá to look for a fridge for Jessica's flowers. It has the echo of a big space, and the ambience is filled with the industrial sounds of spraying and polishing in a shot of two men in white clothing working inside the factory space. There are yellow markings on the floor and a road sign on the wall, a blank circle with a red border signifying that all vehicles are prohibited in that area.

Markings and signs reappear several times in the first part of the movie, feeding into the narrative of a journey, both outward and inward. In this particular case, the 'stop' sign and a warning from the saleswoman when a truck is about to pass close to Jessica and Hernan, underpin the emotional character of the scene.

A voice-off of a woman poses a question in Spanish, about how many flowers are intended to be conserved. The camera turns 180 degrees to capture a medium shot of Jessica, Hernan and the sales woman walking through the factory space. The camera is handheld and shaky, creating a destabilizing effect, which reflects the emotional state of the character.

They stop next to two fridges, which, as Jessica points out, look identical. The saleswoman says that one is a national product and the other one is from the Netherlands, commenting that the latter conserves flowers much better. 'The time stops here', says the sales woman smiling when she opens the glass door. Jessica slides her hand over the shelf inside the fridge. The sales woman also mentiones the Nano-seal technology that prevents fungi and other pathogens. Jessica asks if they have a distributor in Medellin, where she has her farm. As they

continue walking, the sales woman remembers that a farm in Guasca has a system like that, so it is possible to see it in action. Hernan offers to drive Jesscia there to see, but she is hesitant.

This seemingly mundane episode of visiting a fridge factory is infused with a sense of internal resistance that Jessica experiences in this moment, which is echoed in the industrial soundscape of a factory and the visual warning sign.

5.18 Street

The scene begins with a wide shot of Jessica and Hernan exiting the factory and crossing a busy street. Jessica says she cannot afford the fridge. Hernan says he could chip in, because he would like to help her buy it. Jessica looks away for a few seconds, then turns to him and asks 'why'. A camera follows them as they are walking down the street with multiple shops selling household electronics, which might serve as recollection objects for capitalism and its consequences, such as consumerism and materialism, inequality, environmental degradation and exploitation of labor to name a few.

This scene captures a medium shot of the two along with many Colombians, men, women, couples, who are walking along with them or stand beside the shops. 'I've always wanted a giant fridge' says Hernan and they both laugh. After a few more attempts to convince Jessica, Hernan stops and invites her to go back to the shop. Jessica looks at him, chuckles, then keeps walking, smiling to herself. Hernan catches up again just before they come to a crossroad.

At the same time as they are walking and having this conversation, we witness dozens of passers-by that appear in the frame. This scene is a tribute to the Colombian people who bear the wounds of history that are imprinted onto the collective. We can see their faces without being confronted by anything in particular, because no-one is looking into the camera. To film this scene, the production used a 150-meter dolly, which apparently required sourcing every single dolly truck in the country. The initial idea was that Jessica and Juan would be talking the whole way, but the plan changed.

> After seven takes, Joe spontaneously decides to try an alternative and asks the actors to speak their dialogue during only the first part of the dolly, no longer the whole way through. The effect is quite drastic. Since it's a flirtatious exchange having the characters talk as they dodge people - separating and reuniting, getting

> waylaid and catching up - made for a playful dynamic, like a ballet. Now that they eventually stop talking and walk most of the distance without exchanging another word, there is a strong ambiguous charge to their silence (Camia and Brady-Brown 2021, day 15 of production diary)

This scene suggests that for Jessica, her relationship with Hernan is developing a little too fast, as she is still going through a process of grief. This feeling is hard to articulate but it is 'heard' in the silence. It is also a precursor for the mysterious disappearance of Hernan in one of the following scenes.

5.19 Plazoleta del Rosario

This scene starts with a wide shot of Plazoleta del Rosario in the rain, capturing the monument of conquistador Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, the founder of the city of Bogotá. The monument stands on a platform surrounded by flowers. There are a few trees in the background and a green bush in the bottom of the frame. A tower of the Church of San Francisco can be seen in the opening between two buildings. There are a lot of people with black umbrellas, with the exception of two street vendors in raincoats pushing a cart with a big umbrella in rainbow colors, a bright visual element that animates the scene.

A soothing sound of splattering rain changes into a tapping sound as the film shifts the point of audition, while cutting to a medium shot of Jessica standing under a sunshade along with a group of people. Their silhouettes appear dark against the backdrop of a square as the drops of water run from the edge of a sunshade with a tapping sound.

The statue of Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada is an example of a *lieu de mémoire* and a site of contestation. While a part of the cultural heritage of Colombia, to many, the statue perpetuates a colonial narrative and serves as a painful reminder of the violent subjugation and displacement of indigenous peoples. Due to its colonial legacy, the monument has been vandalized with graffiti and subsequently restored and improved by installing a drainage system and planting vegetation around it (de Quesada, 2018). *Memoria* features the monument after its restoration. A few years later, in 2021, the monument was pulled down by an indigenous activist group. Members of the Muisca indigenous community performed a ritual burial of the statue (Martínez, 2021).

Around the same time, several monuments in Bogotá were attacked by indigenous activist groups, which led to a series of discussions on collective memory between authorities, protesters and experts. As a result, the monument of Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada was placed in the museum of Bogotá after its restoration and is now part of the museum's collection (WebmasterIDPC, 2022).

Another *lieu de mémoire*, also part of a colonial heritage, is the Church of San Francisco. This is a place where Catholic ceremonies take place and Christian holidays are commemorated. At the same time, the church is also a site of contestation, as it represents the imposition of Christianity and suppression of indigenous beliefs and practices, often through the means of violence.

The theme of religion and Christianity is touched upon in one of the later scenes, when Jessica visits a doctor in Pijao. This slightly humorous scene shows how big a role the Catholic church still plays in modern Colombia.

5.20 Restaurant

In a medium shot of Karen, Juan and their son sitting at a table in a restaurant, soft music is playing in the background. Juan is eating, Karen has her elbow on the table with her chin resting on a palm of her hand, and their son is drawing something with a purple crayon. Juan and Karen discuss her relationship with work, which makes her look quite confused. Jessica enters the shot greeting everyone and sits down with them. She is surprised to see her sister who just got out of hospital. Karen makes a joke that she got out quicker because Andres, the dentist, was intending to visit her. Jessica looks stunned. The waiter fills up her glass with red wine. She is convinced that Andres died last year, while both Karen and Juan reassure her that it is not the case. To change the topic, Jessica asks what is good on the menu and Juan offers her a piece of his osso buco. Jessica tries it and confirms that it is indeed really good. Juan continues a conversation with Karen in Spanish, stating that she either needs to get some distance from her work, change her attitude or leave it altogether. Karen puts it firmly that she will not quit. Jessica, who missed the beginning of the conversation, asks why Karen would change her work. Karen explains that Juan thinks that her sickness is related to her work, particularly to the piece they are currently working on with Mapa Teatro. For this theater piece, she researches an

unidentified Amazon tribe, called ‘the invisible people’ who are believed to be quite dangerous. In the evenings, the elders of this tribe gather for a ritual that is meant to prevent people from reaching out to them. Jessica sits up in astonishment. Karen does not want to admit that this is causing her sickness, but Juan asks her to tell the story about the man who wanted to build the road that would cross these people’s land. Karen continues saying that this man was doing illegal trafficking and had gathered a big group of people to help him build this road. At the exact moment when she says ‘building this road’, Jessica hears the ‘bang’. Jessica instinctively looks past her shoulder, then turns back to Karen in a state of shock, which she is trying to hide. Karen continues the story to the point that all the workers have quit except one, but the man decided to continue with this one person, as he had a plan of colonizing these people, but eventually they both disappeared. Another ‘bang’ is heard when she says ‘disappeared’ and then again followed by Karen’s dialogue: ‘he might be dead, of course’.

This story makes a connection with another famous building project, the tunnel La Linea, featured later in the film. It also echoes the history of trauma in Colombian society, where thousands of people were killed or disappeared without a trace as a result of guerilla attacks, military operations and drug trafficking.

La Linea is a massive governmental project started in 1934 in order to improve the connectivity between Bogotá and Cali. Over the years, construction was stopped several times due to corruption, environmental concerns and lack of funding. Still, it is referred to as the ‘dream of Colombians’ (Camia and Brady-Brown, 2021). In the film, construction is suspended because of the ancient remains accidentally found in the tunnel. This can be seen as a metaphor for counter-memory emerging to challenge the dominant narratives created by the state (Van Dyke, 2019). The construction was indeed stopped several times due to geological faults (cavities) found in the mountain, making it unsafe to continue working. Another concern is the poisonous rock found inside the mountain. The construction used dynamite implosions, which caused contamination of the waters in several towns including Calarcá, Armenia, Salento and Cajamarca (Camia and Brady-Brown, 2021).

The impending eruption of a volcano with an epicenter just 8 km away is a metaphor for other counter-memories that have not yet made it through the hegemonic discourse but are shaking its foundation with increasing frequency (Medina 2011).

What are these memories? The book about *Memoria*, which features Weerasethakul's research notes and photographs, along with the script, interviews with the director and producer and the production diary, mentions the story of this region affected by tunnel constructions, the mining industry and various natural disasters. The small town of Pijao, where the final scenes of *Memoria* were filmed, has a long history of trauma, including the persecution of liberals in the 40s, which marks the beginning of the armed conflict. There is a place nearby, called the 'Butcher's Hill', where liberals came to hide after the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the leader of the Liberal party. The communist guerilla groups also started out in these areas, followed by the drug lords in the 60s who used guerillas for help and protection in order to build laboratories in these mountains. Then, there was a series of dramatic events, one after another, including the coffee crisis in 1997, the earthquake in 1999, a guerilla attack in 2001 in addition to a volcano that could erupt anytime within the next 100 years. On the positive side, Pijao is very green and its river is not contaminated, like in other places, because the underground waters were down when the tunnel was built (Camia and Brady-Brown, 2021).

The scene by this river is one of the key elements in the narrative, featuring Hernan, the older man who never left the village. One could imagine that since he is around 60 years old, this man has lived through most of these events. The detailed analysis of this scene comes further in the thesis.

The earthquake that the inhabitants of Pijao have experienced is an example of a powerful deterritorializing force, and the subsequent conflicts between guerillas and the government are attempts to reterritorrialize this area, and impose a different order. At the same time, the residents were protesting against mining and eventually won in 2014, when Pijao was included in the network Cittaslow, or "slow cities (inspired by the slow food movement)" (Camia and Brady-Brown, 2021).

Back to the scene in the restaurant, the moment of the 'bang' appearing several times during Karen's story establishes the connection between sound and the traumatic events during the armed conflict and the process of building the road, so the link between the 'bang' and collective trauma grows stronger. It also illustrates the hearing-all quality of the acousmêtre. Shortly after this, Jessica is invited by Agnes to join her at the extraction site, which takes place inside the tunnel under construction.

5.21 University hall

Jessica comes down the stairs into the empty hall and walks along the corridor looking into the rooms. Her silhouette is reflected in the glass windows. She stops in a beam of sunlight, looks around in hesitation, then walks towards the end of the corridor. The next frame depicts her entering a big room behind a glass wall where three men are working. She asks about Hernan, but they don't seem to know who he is. She leaves the room in a state of confusion, then comes back and describes him in detail, only to hear that there is no one with that name working at this place. She thanks them but hesitates to leave, startled by the sudden disappearance of Hernan. Jessica keeps looking for him on the first floor. She walks along the wall made in dark wood, looking at the people practising behind the glass windows. The sounds of different instruments merge into an uncoordinated stream, an awkward melody reflecting the bizarre atmosphere of the moment.

The different melodies heard at the same time might be seen as representing the different realms within the memory system, which are merging and colliding at this very moment, causing Hernan to disappear without a trace. It shows how the process of remembering can feel.

Another assumption that the film puts forward is that when trauma is concerned, time is non-linear. The past manifests itself in the present, and sometimes it is a very distant past. The mysterious disappearance of Hernan in Bogotá and a strange conversation at the dinner, when Jessica says that Anders, the dentist, died last year, while both Karen and Juan are very certain that he is alive, indicate that Jessica is alternating between different dimensions of time. In one dimension, she meets Hernan, the sound engineer, while in the other dimension it seems like he never existed. This movement between dimensions is anchored cinematically in the filmmaker's use of mirrors and reflective surfaces. In the scene where she is looking for Hernan, she wanders the corridors of the university looking through the windows, where her silhouette is reflected, as if she is looking for herself.

When Jessica appears on the third floor, her dark figure against the light, like the character of Ever Astudillo's artwork, a guitar chord is heard from an open door, along with some voices. She comes towards the sound as the music starts to play outside the room.

The next frame depicts Jessica standing in the door frame, along with other people, who are listening attentively. This medium shot lingers long enough to observe the reactions of the

people, their faces and body language, as well as Jessica who seems to be taken over by the music. This is another moment of bearing witness, in this case to the experience of a group of people contemplating the performance.

The next frame reveals the source of the music, a quartet featuring an acoustic guitar, double bass, piano and drums. This is an impromptu performance based on an original piece by César López. The musicians seem to be improvising, fully immersed in their melodies at the same time as they communicate with each other to create a coherent whole. A touching piano solo is followed by a violent drum solo. These two instruments seem to be talking to each other, each trying to tell their own story. The performance reaches its peak and stops, with the drummer holding the sticks up in the air.

There is not a lot of information about the original piece, but a large part of César López's repertoire is dedicated to peace and reconciliation. Besides being a musician, he is an anti-violence activist, who is famous for transforming an AK-47 into a musical instrument, 'escopetarra' (the name comes from combining two words *escopeta,* which means 'gun' and *guitarra,* Spanish for 'guitar'). "As part of the 'No Violence' campaign, López and other musicians have traveled to communities afflicted by violence to collect testimonials on video that are now shown at interactive concerts entitled Resistance" (UNODC, n.d.).

In the shot that features the audience, one can observe the reactions to the music on the people's faces, as if witnessing them coming to terms with something. Jessica is also going through an experience: she is coming to terms with the disappearance of Hernan. An open door signifies a threshold, a portal into the realm of the unknown that has now fully opened for her. Even though the source of the music is obviously in front of the audience, its immediate absence within the frame produces an acousmatic situation, a split between image and sound. It creates suspension, and an anticipation of finding Hernan among the musicians, which however doesn't get fulfilled. It is interesting to note that the position of the camera makes the people look towards the spectator, who shares the sonic experience with them. This is an act of witnessing another while being witnessed.

5.22 Glass box

There is a wide shot of a place in the corridor where two glass walls separate a small rectangular patch of soil caught between the outside walls, lit by sunlight. The architecture of the building creates geometric shadows on the walls. The ambience of the corridor is animated by the distant sounds of beeping cars. Jessica walks into the frame quietly, her footsteps almost silent. She looks towards the light, then continues walking, takes out her phone, looks at it as if reading a message, then walks out of the frame, followed by her reflection in the glass. Her footsteps disappear in the distance restoring the quiet ambience of the hall.

This scene again juxtaposes city and nature through the use of architecture and light. It features a piece of nature embedded in the urban environment, this time bigger than the tiny patch of soil in the middle of the square featured in one of the previous scenes. It marks a transition into the natural environment of rural Colombia where Jessica is headed in the scene that follows.

5.23 Car

In a view of a road in the countryside, seen through the front window of a car, the steady hum of an engine is heard as the car moves in slow traffic. Military personnel stand on both sides of the road, each holding a hand up in front of them. A street vendor appears in the frame offering groceries to the people inside the cars. As the car comes closer, it becomes evident that the military are showing a thumbs up to the drivers passing. A group of military men wearing yellow vests talk to the driver of the truck, and one is holding a stop sign. A similar truck passes by in the opposite direction making a hissing sound.

The sight of military soldiers on both sides of the road is quite dramatic, so the appearance of the street vendor selling groceries neutralizes the scene, suggesting that it is something mundane rather than extraordinary.

Behind the wheel, Jessica looks out of the side window impatiently. The car is completely still, she is wearing glasses, but it is possible to see that her eyes are puffy and red. She moves forward very slowly, until she passes the men in yellow vests, one of them holding a green sign. She presses the accelerator a little more, then changes gear and the landscape outside becomes

more blurry and the noise intensifies. As she drives faster, the car starts to shake. The wind outside makes a throbbing, helicopter-like sound. Jessica seems to be getting slightly distracted by the views on both sides. The wind plays with her hair, her mouth slightly open. She takes her hand off the steering wheel and tucks her hair behind her ear.

The scene in the car captures the transition space between different realms. Jessica leaves the city with all its *lieux de mémoire* and enters *milieux de mémoire,* the environment in which living memories are created, stored or recalled. In that transition, she encounters a living reminder of the era of La Violencia embodied in the young soldiers standing on both sides of the road offering the thumbs up to the passing cars. This bizarre gesture is meant to reassure the drivers that it is now safe to travel by car through these areas, but until recently it was not, due to the conflicts between the government, guerillas and drug lords who had their laboratories in these mountains. “It’s supposed to be reassuring, to let us know that the army is looking out for us. A human touch. It’s nice even though it’s kind of weird” (Porras cited in Camia and Brady-Brown, 2021, day 28 of production diary). What is even more bizarre is that according to the 1st assistant director Santiago Porras, it started during the presidency of Uribe, who is responsible for the state army killing thousands of civilians in collaboration with paramilitaries in order to inflate statistics and receive aid packages from the US (Camia and Brady-Brown 2021).

5.24 The tunnel

In a wide shot of a tunnel, whose walls are gray and uneven with various markings, including a big orange plastic half-circle signifying the beginning of a construction zone, rhythmic pounding is heard in the background. The brakes of a truck make a screeching sound, as it slows down and drives into the tunnel. The construction site is illuminated by a projector casting white LED light with two warmer lights hanging above. The truck drives forward, becoming completely dark with red lights on, casting a giant shadow on the wall of the tunnel. The shadow looks slightly animalistic, resembling a bear figure sitting on top of the truck. On the left, there are two people sitting at a table and more people inside the tunnel wearing yellow vests. Rhythmic pounding continues in the background, merging with the groaning of a motor and a screeching sound of brakes followed by a hissing sound.

A group of people comes into the shot, their silhouettes dark against the opening of the tunnel. The voice of the archaeologist says that the excavation site is a bit further down. One can recognise her figure in the dark, accompanied by Jessica.

The next frame brings the viewer further into the tunnel in a wide shot of an excavator turning to scoop out a portion of rocks, then piling them up next to it. There is a continuous roar of the engine, amplified by the acoustics of the tunnel and the thud of rocks being dumped. The next frame transports the viewer even further into the tunnel, closer to the source of the rhythmic pounding, which is the hammer drill, lit from above by a warm projector light. A literal destratification is taking place, where the sediment structures that took millions of years to form are destroyed by the hammer drill.

There are two people standing next to it; one points the flashlight to a place where the drill hits the surface of the tunnel and signals to drill higher up. The ribbons hanging from the roof of the tunnel sway gently in the wind in stark contrast to the heavy machinery. The ribbons are markings within the construction space, a result of reterritorialization after initial destruction. They also make the place look surreal.

The next shot depicts a more narrow opening of the tunnel, its roof supported by four columns, positioned wide enough for a person to pass through. The dampened noise of the hammer drill suggests that this place is located even deeper into the tunnel. There is a sound of water dripping, and a distant rumble. A group of people enter the frame from inside the tunnel, walking towards the camera with flashlights, their figures turning dark as they exit the zone lit by the projector light. One can recognise archaeologist Jessica, who is sliding her flashlight across the roof of the tunnel.

In this sequence, the spectator is presented with what Marks calls a haptic image, where the texture of the images and the meaning they signify enter a complex relationship, producing a set of meanings and experiences. Besides being a location that is in itself a site of contestation, simultaneously being a ‘dream of Colombians’ and the source of environmental destruction and corruption, it is also a metaphor for the depths of the human psyche, and the passage one has to go through in order to be born or re-born. The soundscape begins intensely, adding to the atmosphere of chaos and destruction, then subsides and finally features the soothing sound of the water dripping, the underground creek in the depths of the tunnel, as the source of consciousness.

The presence of the creek is soothing and alarming at the same time, as it means that there is potential for further water contamination. This is in itself a powerful meditation on duality, as the very existence of consciousness means the possibility of suffering.

A wide shot of the archaeological site depicts several people working at their stations. A person in a yellow jacket polishes a rectangular plate with a consistent frictional sound, probably continuing the construction work. There is a medium shot of two archaeologists next to the site documenting the uncovered artifacts, measuring the depth at which they were found and length of the bones. This is followed by another medium shot of the archaeologist sitting down at the site, carefully removing soil from the bones with light brush strokes. Despite the noise in the background, the voice of the archaeologist dictating measurements and the soft strokes of the brush are heard clearly. The precision of the archeologists stands in stark contrast with the heavy machinery related to the construction work, yet at this moment they are working together to extract the memory artifacts from the sediment.

Seen through the metaphor of the human psyche, and applying the concept of fossils as memory, the archaeologists uncovering these human remains are perhaps uncovering the traumatic memories that come from generations ago. The intergenerationality of trauma first hypothesized by Freud became empirically studied in the wake of the Holocaust, proving that the children of Holocaust survivors exhibited physical and physiological effects of trauma as if they had been exposed to an extremely traumatic event, without this necessarily being the case. Although these studies were rendered controversial and inconclusive, the theory was later applied to indigenous groups and immigrants from Latin America living in the US and Canada and some empirical support was found in these studies (Cerdeña et al. 2021). The theory of historical trauma developed by Sotero (2006) distinguishes intergenerational trauma from historical trauma in a matter of scale, where the effects of historical trauma in people can be traced back to generations which the person experiencing the effects had no contact with due to the length of timespan. This theory illustrates how trauma transmission is reflected in biological, psychological and social factors affecting the subsequent generations.

This hypothesis about historical trauma derived from this scene is based upon understanding traumatic memory as fossils, in that it does not disappear with time, but remains covered by the layers of strata, which include social and cultural conditioning. Despite being buried under these layers it still carries the imprint of the original traumatic event and has the

power to transmit it through contact. The ways one can come in contact with it vary, as it does not always mean direct contact. As the scene in the restaurant shows, making contact can occur indirectly through research, for example. Being exposed to the content of the traumatic event in one way or another activates the radioactive quality of the fossils, forcing the person exposed to it to dig deeper and perhaps seek a more direct contact with the traumatic memory in order for it to be integrated.

5.25 Downtown Pijao

In a wide shot of a small square in Pijao, music is heard playing outside the bar. Above the entrance there are four small flags, resembling the flag of Ecuador, waving in the wind and a sign that says 'Discoteca', flashing with different colors. Across the road is the cafe 'Dimonte' with red umbrellas above the tables. A young man dances alone to the rhythm of the music for a few seconds before he is joined by another young man who is black. They dance facing each other and one can see that the black man has a slightly different style, which can mean that they come from different regions. The black could even come from Ecuador, as the flag association suggests, and have African heritage as a result of Spanish colonizers importing slaves from African countries to work in various industries.

There can be a lot of assumptions made about the meaning of this scene and what different elements signify. However, it might be more fruitful to approach it from the phenomenological perspective. The dance itself is an expression of cultural memory, *milieu de mémoire*, a living, embodied memory of a culture. What this approach can do is transmit this experience to the viewer without explaining the history, the complexities and interrelations between cultures. Different cultural memories become evident in the transmission through the differences in movement and expression. Within Spanish colonial institutions, dance was a common language for African slaves,

> Brought to the Americas in the motor-muscle memory of the various West African ethnic groups, the dance was characterized by segmentation and delineation of various body parts, including hips, torso, head, arms, hands and legs; the use of multiple meter as polyrhythmic sensitivity; angularity; multiple centers of movement; asymmetry as balance; percussive performance; mimetic

> performance; improvisation; and derision. (Hazzard-Gorgon cited in Muñoz, 1997)

This description brings about the association with the 'dance without organs', that Juan mentioned in his poem in the beginning of the movie. According to Deleuze, the body without organs is the space of infinite possibility, the body which is not subjected to its physical limitations and needs. Despite the historical trauma and memory imprinted on the body, the dance is an act of liberation, spontaneous expression and resilience. To this day, it remains a form of resistance, the embodiment of counterculture and preservation of cultural identity in the motor-muscle memory. This exemplifies how bodies can store memories beyond our lifetime, becoming sites of cultural memory, or *milieux de mémoire.*

Continuing the conversation on historical trauma, this scene emphasizes the role of the body in historical trauma transmission, which is much broader than the role biology and genetics assign to it. The scene also points towards the body as a potential source of reconciliation. As in the case of fetishes that cease to exist when the 'body remembers', can traumatic memory be neutralized when it is relieved in the body? The work of Peter Levine and other somatically-oriented trauma therapists supports this idea (Levine, 1997).

The next frame is a medium shot of Jessica and Agnes sitting on a bench on the other side of the square. The music is still there but is more distant. The women sit cross-legged, each holding an arepa (a thicker version of a tortilla typical in Colombia), and a dog is sleeping next to them. The cicadas are singing in the background. Jessica asks a question, as she continues to chew, producing a characteristic sound. She wonders whether Agnes can hear the sound of the animal bells. The archaeologist hesitates, as if trying to hear and politely confirms. Jessica shares that she thinks she is going crazy. Agnes agrees and reassures Jessica that "it's not the worst thing to be" (Weerasethakul, 2021). Jessica takes another bite of her arepa and chews it, then puts it in the napkin, while smacking her lips and says that she has composed a poem. She then licks her fingers one by one, preparing to recite it.

This scene emphasizes the movement deeper into the sensorial realm. The act of eating itself is very bodily and sensorial. The linking of fingers is a gesture that is both shameful and delightful and at the same time very practical. This gesture and the sound of smacking of the lips conveys a sense of intimacy and closeness between the two women.

Poem of the Sleepless Nights

Beyond the petals,
And once furious wings
The air gasps
At its fading shadow. (Weerasethakul 2021)

This poem in the context of the scene points to the passage of time and the transformation it brings. The act of gasping is associated with breathing in more air. When this act is assigned to the air itself, it creates a symbolic loop that invites a sense of struggle and repetition. Applied to the tendency of trauma to repeat itself, in combination with the word 'fading', it suggests the possibility of disappearance or waning of something once prominent or significant. Perhaps it represents the moment when trauma loses its grip, creating an opportunity to let go of the past experience.

Agnes is squinting her eyes as if trying to see something better, while she is listening to Jessica. It is interesting to observe how the action associated with the act of seeing is transferred onto hearing, feeding into the idea of mimesis or blending of the senses. When she finishes the line, there is a pause and Agnes wonders if there is something more, but Jessica says 'that's it' and takes a bite of her arepa. Agnes takes a sip of her beer. Jessica takes a blue silk scarf out of her bag and shows it to Agnes, then slides her other hand across the scarf and suddenly it turns white. Agnes smiles with her mouth closed, as she is still chewing.

The trick with the scarf visualizes a complete and quick transformation. It is also an attempt to change the mood and bring in more lightness after the seriousness of the poem. The change that is taking place in Jessica is palpable and reflected in the way she carries herself. She seems less concerned of what others might think of her and expresses herself in a more authentic way, even if it goes against the cultural norms, like linking her fingers in public, a sign of the destratification that the character is going through.

5.26 Doctors office

In a medium shot of Jessica being examined by a doctor in a local hospital, the blinds are fully open and one can see a misty mountain and the ceramic roof of a house. Birds are singing

outside. Jessica sits on a chair with her eyes closed and the doctor stands next to her, holding her hands on Jessica's lymphatic nodes. She blinks her eyes open when the doctor asks if it is painful and says that at high altitudes blood pressure can produce a sound, a ‘pop’. This makes Jessica laugh, as her sound is clearly not a ‘pop’. They both laugh for a second before the doctor gets serious again, asking Jessica about her pillow and how well she is sleeping. Jessica answers that she does not sleep. The doctor notes something down and proposes that the sound Jessica is hearing might be a hallucination. She asks Jessica if anyone in her family had any psychological issues. Jessica shakes her head. When the doctor mentions her husband, Jessica doesn’t respond. ‘A lot of people in this town have hallucinations,’ adds the doctor emphatically. Jessica tries to negotiate a Xanax prescription, but the doctor is hesitant. She argues that it is very addictive and it will make Jessica lose her empathy, that she will no longer “be moved by the beauty or the sadness of this world” (Weerasethakul 2021). She then offers her a brochure saying that Jesus is with her. They talk briefly about Salvador Dali, whose painting is hanging in the reception. When the doctor says that Salvador Dali understood the beauty of this world, Jesscia cannot help but ask if she does not think the artist was taking something. The doctor is convinced that it is not the case.

This scene is both humorous and revealing on many levels. The doctor’s remark about people in this town suffering from hallucinations is directly linked to the traumatic history of the town. The variety of traumatic experiences through which the population of Pijao have lived includes natural disasters, political violence, structural violence and the combination of all these (Camia and Braidy-Brown, 2021). It refers both to the precariousness of human life and on the other hand reveals the resilience of humanity and how it is linked to religion and faith.

This scene embodies the complex and paradoxical relationship of Christianity as a dominant religion and the social, cultural and political realities in Latin America. The doctor, who might well have an indigenous heritage herself, is advocating for the religion that potentially caused suffering to her ancestors. The paradox of this situation is amplified by the reference to Salvador Dali and a humorous exchange between Jessica and the doctor as to whether the artist was taking drugs or not.

The scene also establishes the relationship between trauma and empathy, suggesting that the experience of trauma broadens one’s capacity to feel empathy towards other people.

5.27 Monument in Pijao

A wide shot of a sculpture on a small grass field captures the ‘Monument to the Pijao Indian’ by Colombian artist Rodrigo Arenas Betancourt that was erected in 1987 to honor the indigenous people who were native to the region. This metal sculpture features two faces, one above, resembling a ritual mask, and one below, which is split in two. The bottom face is carved on the lower part of the sculpture, covered in gold. The upper part slightly resembles the human body, with two legs, a torso with a golden flower in place of a solar plexus and two hands stretched up, holding the ritual mask. The presence of gold in the monument might be related to the history of gold mining in the region, which is a cause of a lot of environmental degradation.

It is sunny and birds are singing. There is the steady sound of a river flowing and the distant sounds of kids playing. A close-up of the sculpture reveals a little palm tree hidden in between the legs of the sculpture. In the background, there is an old C-band satellite dish, a thing of the past that belongs to the rebellious era of free satellite TV. With such a device, anyone could catch the signals of even pay satellite TV channels that were not encrypted in the early days of the medium (Buckler, 2023).

The juxtaposition of the monument and a satellite dish draws a line all the way back to the colonial past of this land that was ‘free to grab’ for anyone who had good enough ‘devices’. This colonial narrative continues to this day in the department of Quindío, which Pijao is a part of, largely exploited by the open-pit mining in the hands of multinational mining companies. The mining destroys the natural foundation of the region, contaminating water and soil and increasing poverty and social inequalities through corruption and clientelism. The sign in front of the monument reads ‘In Pijao we defend water, territory and life, not megamining’, but it is hardly visible in the film.

The next frame is the view from one of the houses featuring a small bridge across the river, the unfinished houses with naked brick walls and a disintegrating roof. People are walking across the bridge, a black bird is sitting on the roof. Suddenly a thunder strike reverberates through the sky and the bird flies off as if scared by the sound.

It is the second time thunder appears in the film. The first time it was heard was when Jessica left the house on her way to meet Hernan in the sound studio, and now it appears again just before she is about to meet another Hernan, which might be a version of the same person, just 20 years older.

5.28 River

Jessica comes down to the river. Insects are buzzing, scurrying around in front of the camera. There is a brick construction hiding behind the trees, another unfinished house, and a couple of cone-shaped concrete bulks that might be part of the river management system. Water is streaming through the stones, and everything is lush green. Nature has taken over the image. Jessica turns her head in a particular manner then leans forward towards the stream. A swirling sound mingles with the sound of water and she directs her ear towards it. Suddenly she hears a familiar ‘bang’ and shudders. She pauses, then leans forward again hearing the swirling sound and then the ‘bang’. She seems able to control it by changing the position of her body in relation to the ground. She leans even further down making a peculiar shape with her body, when a voice asks her if she is okay. She rises up slowly.

This scene marks the end of the transition from causal listening to reduced listening. Both Jessica and the spectator are now able to experience the sound for what it is without fear and the compulsion to attribute it to something. The sound has also changed by gaining new aspects, like the swirling sound.

The next frame shows the origin of the voice, a man that slightly resembles the Hernan she met in Bogotá, only he is about 20 years older. He sits down on a bench outside and takes a fish out of the bucket. Jessica walks along the river to come closer. One can hear the sound of the man scaling fish.

When Jessica is in front of him, he tells her that he knows where she is staying. He mentions the name of the man and says that his father used to run a cinema and his brother is a detective. He pulls out a bottle of potion and places it next to the table. Jessica sits down on the bench next to him. He says that he never left the village because of his uncanny ability to remember everything. For the same reason, he does not watch movies or TV, believing that experiences are harmful. Jessica thinks he is missing out on something, mentioning sports, news, cooking shows and Miss Universe.

He believes there are plenty of stories around them already. Apparently he can read the vibrations stored in objects and the tissues of the human body. He picks up a stone and tells her what he is sensing by reenacting a story of a man being attacked while eating his lunch.

The wide shot of the two of them is followed by a close-up of his hands scaling the fish. His voice explains that he can hear vibrations stored in his own body, including from the food he ate on any given day, the weather, the movement of his hands scaling the fish. He says that experiences “unleash a violent fury” in his memory, so instead of traveling he works the land and scales fish (Weerasethakul, 2021).

Jessica points at the bottle and the man offers her a drink. She winces from the bitterness of it, then smiles and says her name. The man introduces himself as Hernan. Jessica looks at him in slight disbelief. Can it be that it is the same Hernan she met in Bogotá? Besides the appearance, the name and a heightened ability to listen, they share something more. They both assist Jessica, in their own way, in finding what is ‘hiding in the loss’, or the memory that has been obscured or erased from the psyche. The final dialogue between them supports the assumption about the collective aspect of trauma and feeds into the idea that trauma is stored in the body, or that it has a corporeal dimension.

Animal screams are heard in the distance. Hernan says that these are the howler monkeys and he can understand their language. He also has memories from before he was born. He remembers being in space with others, searching for a couple of lovers that would become his parents. Jessica takes out the package of Xanax that she got from the doctor in the village and offers it to Hernan, saying that it might help him, which he refuses.

The episode with Xanax refers to a similar moment in *Syndromes and a Century*, where the monk tries to get a prescription medication for other monks and people in the village who cannot come to the hospital themselves, but the doctor refuses. Eventually the monk says that he can sense a feeling of uncertainty in the doctor’s heart and offers her some herbal remedy that can heal it, although it does not help for everything. A sudden reversal of the roles in the doctor's office is both a reminder that doctors are people too and how traditional and alternative medicine exist side by side in rural areas of Thailand.

The memory Hernan is referring to apparently belongs to a real person whom the director interviewed during his research. The book does not tell much about who he is, just providing the notes from the conversation and some quotes. “[H]e was at a party and he could hear all the conversations at once, and he could see each person’s life up until that point. He could tune in like a radio. He could ask questions from the universe. He could see the Earth’s movement and the reasons behind all events” (Camia and Brady-Brown, 2021, 4 April 2017 Talk with Joseph).

Jessica tells Hernan about the mysterious sound that has been haunting her. She says that she wants to hear it again. The buzzing of cicadas intensifies. Suddenly Jessica remembers a scene from her childhood, the blouse of her mother, some loud noises that made her cry and that her nose was burning. Hernan is done with the fish, so he rises to wash off his tools in the river and put them in the sun to dry. Jessica covers her face with hands. She asks Hernan if he also remembers his dreams. He answers that he never dreams: there is just emptiness. Jessica asks him to demonstrate, which he does. Jessica brings her hand towards his face, then places her palm on his stomach in order to check if he is breathing. A long close-up of his face and chest reveals no sign of breath or movement, his eyes and mouth slightly open, his hand resting on his torso. Only the grass next to him is moving in the wind. Essentially, he appears to be dead.

Sitting on the grass beside Hernan, Jessica seems very peaceful. She listens to the sounds of the river, the leaves in the wind, howler monkeys, birds and insects. Nature seems to have opened up to her. We see another close-up of Hernan's legs, lying completely still with two flies scurrying on the surface of his jeans. The frame shifts to his face again, which appears lifeless, until he blinks his eyes and takes a breath. Jessica turns towards him and asks how death was. He answers that it was okay, that he just 'stopped'. A white butterfly flies by and Hernan turns onto his side. Jessica seems a little confused and moved by this experience.

The act of sitting beside Hernan in this lifeless state is also an act of bearing witness, perhaps to the thousands of people whose bodies were never found as a result of the dirty war. This moment can be seen as a reenactment through which the souls of the disappeared could find peace.

5.29 Hernan's house

In a view from the porch of Hernan's house on a green mountain, a few banana trees are flapping softly in the light wind. There is a little bench next to the wall. The next frame is a wide shot of Hernan in the kitchen washing the fish in the sink. Jessica is in the middle of the room, looking around. She comes closer to the table and looks out of the window onto the foggy mountain and green banana leaves, with the curtain fully open. The ambience of the room is soft, with the occasional sound of birds singing outside. Jessica picks up a round object and holds it in her hand. Hernan says that this story is his favorite and reaches his hand forward. Jessica apologizes and hands him the object. He never tells her the story.

Hernan says that he made this liquor with his own herbs and it is something that brings him into a state close to dreaming. He fills up two shot glasses and they drink. ‘Another great human invention’, says Jessica, ‘even made by you’, as if emphasizing that Hernan is not a human being.

Jessica discovers a strange box with metal blades on it. She comes closer and the metal blades start spinning when she touches the wooden surface of the box. Hernan asks her to be careful, as he once cut himself on the blade, leaving a blood stain on the corner of the box.

The trace of blood is a recollection of the experience, a reminder that all experiences make imprints on us.

Jessica looks at the old pictures of Hernan on his desk, then sits on the bed partly covered with a blue blanket. She starts to tell a story of when she was hiding under the bed with others, as if she was describing a vision that came to her at that moment. She says she has been here and the cover on the bed was also blue. Hernan tells her that she is reading his memories. Jessica starts crying. Hernan says that he is like a hard disk and she somehow acts like an antenna. This makes no sense in practical terms, as the hard disk is a digital medium and the antenna is analogue, however, mysteriously, it does work. He continues the story, where she left off to prove his point.

On a contextual level, this memory is real, it belongs to Martha Morales, who survived a guerilla attack in Pijao and shared this story with the director during his research time in Colombia. “She hid under the bed with her daughter and three other people, from 8pm to 8am the next day” (Camia and Brady-Brown, 2021).

Jessica asks Hernan if the sound she keeps hearing is also part of his memory. She puts his hand on top of her left hand, allowing him to read the vibrations stored in her body. He says it was before their time. Suddenly the rain starts, bringing the sound of the raindrops hitting the roof and the banana leaves. The sound intensifies, but when Jessica puts her right palm on the right side of her head, suddenly the ambient sound disappears.

The sudden disappearance of the ambient sound is a technique designed to create suspension. “This creates an impression of emptiness or mystery” (Chion, 1994, p. 132). The brief moment of silence marks the departure to the realm of memories. She can now hear the story that Hernan told her by the river, followed by a sound of waves crashing by the shore and some other disjecta membra. In a close-up of Jessica’s face immersed in Hernan’s memories, the

sounds continue until the ‘bang’ appears again. Jessica looks at Hernan attentively, then gently removes her hand and comes towards the window. There is a reflection of her face on the surface of the glass. She opens the window and leans forward with her right ear as if letting the forest speak to her. She hears a few short ‘bangs’, similar to the sound she has been hearing by the river. Her face expresses attention and curiosity, and a brief smile appears on her face as she recognises the familiar sound.

Jessica is channeling Hernan’s memories as if they were her own, until she is told that they are not. She realizes that the sound she has been hearing is not hers either. She embraces her ability to receive and the distant memory of a forest begins to unfold in front of her. “The moments when memory returns and stories can finally be told are moments when a collective can find its voice. Later, perhaps, these newfound stories will harden into discourses of identity; but for the moment they are cause for celebration” (Marks, 2000, 64).

The next scene depicts a lush green forest from prehistoric times. There is a hum from a swarm of insects and a mechanical sound, coming from a strange rounded object, which looks huge in comparison to the coconut tree. It rises above the ground producing some ‘bangs’. One can recognise a spaceship, shaped like a whale, which seems to be made of metal. It takes off, producing a loud ‘bang’ with an echo that reverberates through the forest, producing a ring of blue light that dissolves in the air as the spaceship disappears into the distance. The sounds of birds chirping and the humming sound of the spaceship are followed by a moment of complete silence which extends into the following scene.

The spaceship embodies an experience that is beyond human scale, which trauma certainly is. The source of the haunting sound is finally revealed and the acousmêtre ceases to exist. The traumatic memory has been disarmed by letting it run its course. After it has been witnessed fully, silence is restored.

A man and a woman look out of the window, and a young military man stands by the side of the road, all of them are shown from the back. There is complete silence and a sense of anticipation in the air. Next, there is an image of Agnès, the archeologist, sitting at her desk in front of the window. She is writing a report about the quakes registered at the volcano, 10 km away, and the tomb with the remains of two people found in the tunnel. Unfortunately one of the skulls was crushed by a tunnel machine. As her voice continues, the image depicts Hernan, sitting by his house. He squints and shakes his head several times as if trying to shake off a

painful memory. He puts his left palm on the side of his head and holds it, as if his head were exploding, then slowly removes his hand and shakes his head again with his eyes closed. When he slowly opens his eyes, he breathes deeply, coming back to himself.

He seems to be reexperiencing a traumatic memory. Perhaps the quakes from the volcano nearby released the memory of the earthquake that hit Pijao in 1999, or the subsequent guerilla attacks. This image is followed by a sequence of images of Pijao of a forest next to a school yard, the metal feet of a bench with no wood in between, the sky, a valley, clouds, the darkening sky above Hernan's house as the day draws to a close.

There is a deep sense of calm in these images. A silence is followed by the random sounds of a TV show, then the sound of something moving through the sky, like distant thunder, the cicadas and the birds. The sounds of a TV are heard as a materialized broadcasting signal of a TV that Hernan never watches. It echoes the humorous conversation they had by the river, when Jessica said that Hernan is missing out on something good. Three birds appear flying into the frame, before the screen goes dark and the credits start to roll, while the sound continues in the background, revealing more thunder and rain.

This final scene is where some journeys end, but others continue. Nature has almost entirely taken over, with the exception of a broadcasting signal that envelops these mountains like an invisible blanket, an imprint of modernity.

6 Conclusion

The analysis of the film revealed several theses on trauma that are implicit in the film. These theses form a subliminal trauma theory, which challenges some of the existing views on trauma defined as a construct. Instead, this theory views trauma as a phenomenon with tangible manifestations, which is illustrated through the use of sound as an expression of trauma in the film. It emphasizes the ubiquitous quality of trauma that is omnipresent, not in the sense of being present everywhere at the same time, but being present in various degrees in people and places. By equating trauma to sound, with its frequency, vibration, and ability to travel through matter, the film underscores the materiality of trauma. This conceptualization resonates with Freud and Bauer's early definition of trauma as a persistent force akin to a foreign body.

This subliminal trauma theory posits that memory and trauma operate within the field of the collective consciousness. Individuals can tap into this collective field and experience memories that exist independent of their conscious recollection. Within this collective field, individual memories intersect and interact with the collective, blurring the distinction between personal and collective trauma. The film vividly portrays how collective trauma influences individuals and how personal trauma reverberates within the collective, offering a rather different way of understanding collective trauma.

Furthermore, this theory suggests that collective trauma is intricately connected to the body. Just as individual trauma can be stored in the body, collective trauma affects the social body, resembling Deleuze's concept of the 'body without organs.' This social body provides an environment for trauma to exist, as the body of the orchid in the film becomes home for the mysterious disease that afflicts Jessica’s flowers. Despite its vulnerability, the body also holds the potential for healing and reconciliation, due to its intimate connection with the present moment. While the mind can wander off and be in a different place and different time, the body is always in the here and now.

The film also illustrates the possibility of integrating trauma through presence and bearing witness. Rather than viewing trauma as a permanent affliction, it portrays trauma as a memory longing for acknowledgment, even though it is brought about by experiences that defy conscious comprehension. In doing so, the film offers a new perspective on trauma, highlighting its complex relationship with memory, collective consciousness, and the embodied experience.

Limitations and further research

This theory is not rooted in empirical evidence, at least not in a rigorously scientific way. It is based upon philosophical assumptions and observations of the phenomena of memory and trauma and their interaction in the context of a society in the aftermath of violent conflict. This theory adds to the understanding of collective memory and trauma and offers new avenues for healing and reconciliation, which are based on presence and bearing witness.

Trauma is an incredibly widespread phenomenon, which has negative implications on society. It manifests itself in various ways across different generations. Finding ways to acknowledge the presence of trauma in the collective social field is the first step towards healing and reconciliation that, in the case of historical trauma, can take a long time. Multiple transitional justice processes have been set in motion in Colombia and across the world, for more recent conflicts as well as for deep-seated wounds left by colonization. This process begins with acknowledging the truth, letting the stories be told. What the reconciliation process is going to look like is still an open question. It provides rich ground for investigation and the development of reconciliation processes based on various trauma theories, including this one.

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