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The Monument to Independence as an event:  
*No nos cuidan, nos violan*, they do not protect us, they rape us

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Abstract

On August 16, 2019, protesters arrived at the Monument to Independence in Mexico City. In response to three separate allegations of rape by police in less than a month, demonstrators scrawled 565 pieces of graffiti to transform a historical site of national commemoration into a symbol of state violence against women. *México feminicida* (Mexico is femicide) covered the central plaque that previously read: '[from] the Nation to the Heroes of Independence'. The paper explores this transformation. Informed by Alfred North Whitehead, it argues that the Monument to Independence is an event. It is neither a timeless tribute to the nation, nor is it merely situated along the manicured *Paseo de la Reforma*. Rather, the Monument is continually reproduced in how graffiti connects it up with multiple histories of gender-based violence, in how it is given to meaning through the assembly of female/feminine bodies. From one of the most sedimented artifices of national remembrance, the site is transformed into a monument to patriarchal domination; a transformation that persists despite subsequent restoration work. *Keywords*: Monument, femicide, graffiti, Mexico.

Resumen: El monumento a la independencia como acontecimiento: No nos cuidan, nos violan

El 16 de agosto de 2019, los manifestantes llegaron al Monumento a la Independencia en la Ciudad de México. En respuesta a tres denuncias distintas de violación por parte de la policía en menos de un mes, los manifestantes garabatearon 565 grafitis para transformar un sitio histórico de conmemoración nacional en un símbolo de la violencia de Estado contra las mujeres. *México feminicida* cubrió la placa central que antes decía: "De la Nación a los Héroes de la Independencia". El documento explora esta transformación. Basándose en Alfred North Whitehead, sostiene que el Monumento a la Independencia es un acontecimiento. No se trata de un tributo intemporal a la nación, ni de un mero emplazamiento a lo largo del Paseo de la Reforma. Más bien, el Monumento se reproduce continuamente en cómo el graffiti lo conecta con múltiples historias de violencia de género y le da significado a través del ensamblaje de cuerpos femeninos. De uno de los artifices más sedimentados de la memoria nacional, el sitio se transforma en un monumento a la dominación patriarcal; una transfor-

mación que persiste a pesar de los trabajos de restauración posteriores. *Palabras clave:* Monumento, feminicidio, graffiti, México.

## Introduction

*No nos cuidan, nos violan* (they do not protect us, they rape us). It was shouted by protesters, written on government buildings, and repeated on social media. It came after police in Mexico City stood accused of rape on three separate occasions in less than a month. On July 10, 2019, two officers allegedly raped a 27-year-old woman in a hotel room; on August 3, four police officers were accused of gang-raping a 17-year-old; and, on August 8, a 16-year-old reported that an officer raped her inside the Archive Museum of Photography. Protests immediately followed. *Policía violador* (rapist police) was scrawled on a police station as protesters made their way down *calle de Florencia*, as was: *a mí no me cuida la policía, me cuidan mis amigas* (the police do not protect me, my girlfriends protect me). After confrontations with both police and firefighters, demonstrators then continued towards the *Ángel de la Independencia*, officially: the Monument to Independence. They shouted: *señor, señora, no sea indiferente, se mata a las mujeres en la cara de la gente* (ladies and gentlemen, do not be indifferent, women are killed right in our faces). On arriving, this privileged site of commemoration, of order and national triumph, was transformed into a monument to patriarchal domination, violence, and national shame. On the buttock of the bronze lion said to represent the Mexican people ‘strong in battle and peaceful in fulfilling their obligations’ (Mejorada de Gil, 1990, p. ix), a pink symbol of Venus was painted alongside its celebratory laurels. Immediately below, the entrance to the mausoleum that houses the remains of independence heroes read: *con nosotras no se juega* (with us you do not mess). To the left and beneath the seated sculpture of Peace were insignia from various feminist collectives: RAD (radical feminism), the combined symbols of Venus and anarchy. And, surrounding the remaining statues of Law, Justice, and War were messages from *mata a tu violador* (kill your rapist), to *amigas se va a caer* (girlfriends it is going to fall).

Of interest are the 565 pieces of graffiti that adorned the *Ángel de la Independencia* on August 16, 2019 (see Figure 1). Explored are select pieces as a dynamic coming together of protesters with the very material of the Monument, with its decorative motifs and allegorical sculptures. Each piece of graffiti would differentially contract this material to disrupt both the historic and aesthetic sensibility of the *Ángel*. *Estado feminicida, patrimonio nacional* (femicidal state, national patrimony) was one such disruption. The base of a Romanesque column designed to celebrate national Independence was immediately linked to the violence perpetrated by the state and directed at women. Graffiti short-circuited historic commemoration by bringing to the fore those deliberately silenced, those who are objects of institutional violence. The column remains, as do its neoclassical statues and baroque inscriptions. And yet,

on August 16, each would be given to meaning in graffiti. The commemorative column became inseparable from state violence: *si me matan, si me violan, si me desaparecen, destruyelo todo* (if they kill me, if they rape me, if they disappear me, destroy it all); the allegorical figures of Law and Justice were confronted with disgust at state officials: *funcionarios cerdos* (bureaucratic pigs); and, alongside the names of independence heroes were inscribed the failings of state institutions: *la impunidad se ve peor* (impunity looks worse). A site of national celebration became one of national shame, as protesters intervened in the urban landscape to refuse any fixity to the *Ángel*, as graffiti recounted past instances of violence to break with any linear Eurocentric representation of the nation.

Image 1. The Monument to Independence after protests.



Source: Arellano, 2020.

This paper centres on how the *Ángel* is produced in protest, how each piece of graffiti opens up a politics of memorialisation and urban space. It does so by appreciating the *Ángel de la Independencia* as an event. Inspired by Alfred North Whitehead, the Monument is an event insofar as graffiti reworks the very site of the *Ángel* to produce something varied. It is neither a timeless monument to Mexican Independence, nor is it simply located along the highly manicured *Paseo de la Reforma*. Rather, the Monument is continually produced in how it is interacted with: be it, in the portraits of *quinceañeras*, in celebrating the national football team, or, in protest. Focusing on the latter, of interest is how on August 16, graffiti wrote a history of violence against women to make explicit a contemporary landscape of gender-based violence. *México es un país feminicida* (Mexico is a femicidal country) is this reworking of time and space. Written across its base, the graffiti interacts with the very material of the Monument to connect national celebration with a history of gender-based violence, and thereby reveal the deadly exclusion of women in public space. The *Ángel* is less a commemorative site appropriated by protesters than it is given to meaning in protest, inseparable from the 565 pieces of graffiti.

ti. This transformation is explored below through four pieces of graffiti, each indicative of how the Monument was produced in protest to fundamentally redraw the parameters of social memory and urban space.

### **The Monument to Independence as an event**

The *Ángel* as the event moves through the literature on anti- and counter-monuments. Born of critical interrogation into commemorative practices, this literature breaks with the conventional forms and reasons for a public memorial. “Anti-monumental strategies” eschew values typically honoured (Young, 1992), while counter-monuments pay tribute to “darker events” and call for “justice” (Stevens et al., 2012; González Díaz, 2020).<sup>1</sup> A monument as an event is consistent with this literature. It is no less reactionary than the anti-monuments that arose in response to past atrocities and it is no less participatory than the counter-monuments that invite individuals to write on its surface. And yet, the *Ángel* as the event is more dynamic still. This is because it exhibits a destabilising force in excess of both anti- and counter-monuments. Begin with the “dialogic” convention of anti-monuments. As introduced by James Young (1992, p. 274), this is a convention wherein a new monument is erected in proximity to the original in order to contest its meaning. In West Germany, monuments were constructed in proximity to Nazi-era memorials and those of the German wars of unification to commemorate victims and thereby confront the legacy of National Socialism and a patriotic retelling of history (Stevens et al., 2012, p. 962). With the graffitied *Ángel*, however, dialogue is more immediate and divergent. Each piece of graffiti couples with the Monument to produce its narrative. *Cerdos violadores* (rapist pigs) is one such coupling. It not only juxtaposes official sexual abuse with the theatrical celebration of the nation, but it operates alongside 564 additional inscriptions. Dialogue becomes a cacophony of 565 different conversations, beyond any fixed interlocutor.

Literature on counter-monuments is mindful of these conversations. Acknowledged is the monument as a “counter-index” to national commemoration, producing multiple narratives (Young, 1992). In Hamburg, the ‘Monument against Fascism, War, and Violence’ invited passers-by to inscribe their names as a pledge to guard against fascism. As names appeared on the twelve-metre-high monolith, so too did pro-fascist statements and hostile responses, with these ongoing exchanges becoming a defining characteristic of the monument (Vickery, 2011, p. 223). The graffitied *Ángel* is no less participatory, albeit eschewing any fixed interface with the public. Participation is not only more variegated, but each inscription breaks with the original design to essentially produce the Monument anew. *Vivir en México es un asesinato* (to live in Mexico is murder) is this production. It locates the Monument in a violent landscape of murder, with graffiti constituting a deadly spatiality in place of one of national veneration. The Monument as an event is polyvocal and productive. It is made anew as each piece of graffiti produces its own time (histo-

ries of official sexual abuse) and produces its own space (landscapes of murder). The result is a dynamism that goes beyond mere opposition to existing monuments (anti-monument); the *Ángel* is indeed oppositional although it is irreducible to any over-arching logic. And, the monument as event extends criticism through its differential participation (counter-monument); the *Ángel* remains critical despite its meaning being reproduced beyond any particular technology of commemoration. The monument as event continues to register state violence in memorial form, it just operates from below. It operates through commemorative practices forged in protest, through social mobilisations that confront official memorials with their own deadly foundations.

### *The Ángel de la Independencia and ni una menos*

By way of introducing the *Ángel* as an event, take the following graffiti: *ni una menos* (not one woman less). Written on the base of the Monument, *ni una menos* is the dynamic coming together of protesters with the *Ángel*; a coming together that enacts its own form of remembrance and cultivates its own spatiality: a history of violence against the female/feminine form in public space. *Ni una menos* cites a feminist collective of the same name that began in Argentina but has since spread throughout Latin America. “Born of exhaustion with *machista* violence”, *ni una menos* is a declaration on the unacceptability of violence against women (NiUnaMenos, 2021). Its appearance on the *Ángel* both repeats this declaration and forwards an altogether different form of commemoration: it recognises a history of “*machista* violence”, and, it demands an end to such aggression. Not one woman less. The piece connects historical events on its own terms. It speaks to a history of gender-based violence, one in which protesters link July 10, August 3, August 8, and countless other instances. Commemoration is reworked. It is not a single, isolated moment officially reified, but is forged by protesters to encompass multiple events. Yet, more than commemorating past events, the piece also acknowledges the on-going precarity that confronts female/feminine bodies. *Ni una menos* recognises how violence is a condition that immediately strikes women. It acknowledges the violent realities common to the female/feminine form, as everyday targets of “*machista* violence”. Urgency operates alongside commemoration, as historic cases are connected up to the present-day exposure to violence.

*Ni una menos* enacts its own time. It connects a series of historical events and it opens onto a violent present that conditions female/feminine existence. Moreover, these violent conditions of emergence are repeated in calls for a future end to aggression. *Ni una menos* is this complex temporality. Commemoration is not only taken beyond its official moorings, but opens onto a novel temporality: the articulation of past violence, of it presently conditioning life, and of a demand for its future end. The Monument as an event acknowledges this strange temporality. Following Whitehead (2015, p. 23), it appreciates how time works as an abstraction from the passage of events: violence as an all-too-

present condition of female/feminine existence, born of past aggressions and opening onto its future end. And, how time works through an extensive relation between events: *ni una menos* connects limitless, separate instances of violence against women.

*Ni una menos* also produces its spatiality. The *Ángel* cannot be simply located in French planning techniques that saw the *Paseo de la Reforma* modelled on the *Champs Élysées* (Carranza, 2010, p. 5). Nor can it simply be reduced to the pursuit of modernity or the bureaucratic organisation of society; each of which were hallmarks of the Porfiriato period (1876-1911) in which the Monument was erected (more on this below) (Agostoni, 2003, p. xv). Rather, and as mentioned, *ni una menos* evokes a shared space of violence that is continually mediated by female/feminine bodies (Aguirre, 2016, p. 63). Replace ordered universal space with one of fundamental exposure. Exposure begins with how women are inclusively excluded in public space. Yes, the female/feminine form is part of sociality, but it is an abject part whose mobility is circumscribed within rigid parameters: the rapes of July 10, August 3, and August 8 confirm this deadly proscription. *Ni una menos* speaks directly to this violence. It speaks to how the inclusive exclusion of women is sustained by the ever-present potential for violence. Exposure becomes fundamental. It is not just a condition to which women are subjected. It is a cruelty inherent to the reproduction of public space. As Rita Segato (2016, p. 43) maintains, the aggressor who rapes the female/feminine body in public space does so to confirm the territory he controls. *Ni una menos* makes this violent spatiality visible. Protesters do not just interact with a manicured site of commemoration. They open the Monument onto the fundamental exposure of female/feminine bodies, locating it in the deadly realities that confront women.

*Ni una menos* makes manifest the dynamism of the *Ángel* as event. It brings into view a deadly terrain that inclusively excludes the female/feminine form, all the while calling forth an indeterminate future: the possible end to such violence. For Elena Lacruz Alvira and Juan Ramírez Guedes (2017, p. 90), this temporal indeterminacy evident in calls for not one woman less, is itself characteristic of incomplete, malleable spaces. This is because indeterminacy opens up a world of possibility, beyond officially prescribed commemoration or socially proscribed gender-based segregations. Instead, it reveals the uncertain and contested nature of public space. The changing character of a place over a period of time is precisely what Whitehead (2015, p. 35; 1948, p. 74) means by the event. It is how each piece of graffiti produces space as it interacts with the Monument, how it abstracts time in the ascription of meaning.

### *September 16, 1910, and la patria es asesina*

On September 16, 1910, General Porfirio Díaz inaugurated the Monument to Independence. Standing 45 metres tall, it was made up of five basic components: a mausoleum, a white granite terrace with an obelisk at each corner, a

base with four bronze figures also on each corner, a column adorned with laurels and the names of twenty-four independence heroes, and atop it all, a gold-plated bronze statue of winged victory. Like those to Cuauhtémoc and Benito Juárez already erected, the latest monument of the Porfiriato sought to confirm its historical legitimacy. Each was a visual homage to the nation, a celebration of both historical figures and events to ensure that certain names and dates were never forgotten. As Claudia Agostoni (2003, pp. 91, 93-94) claims, this was a period in which history was written into the urban landscape; albeit a select history. To commemorate the nation under General Díaz was to break with its monarchic past, to celebrate its secular figures was to sideline the Church, and to publicly display its progress was to relegate political and economic instability to a distant past.

The *Ángel de la Independencia* was forged in this modern image. Its column and bronze figures of classical origin gave the Monument a universal and therefore timeless appeal, while winged victory was itself the epitome of republican liberty throughout the nineteenth century (Agostoni, 2003, pp. 91-92, 106). The third attempt at a monument to national Independence (after 1843 and 1865), the 1901 call for proposals stipulated two conditions: that “the monument must consist of a commemorative column”, and that it “must be erected in the fourth *glorieta* of the *Paseo de la Reforma*” (Mejorada de Gil, 1990, p. vii).<sup>2</sup> The first condition would see the commemorative column become the transcendent object of Mexico City, visible from anywhere in the city at the time of its construction. Higher than any Church steeple, the Monument demanded reverence to the nation, while its elevation above eye level was to inspire respect. Moreover, the second condition meant that the transcendent Monument was both to stand in relief to, and yet complement, the flattened space and linearized time of the *Paseo de la Reforma*. The *Ángel* stood aloft on the *Paseo* to enhance a cosmopolitan, civic culture that drew on European currents of urban planning; currents designed to tame inhabitants with open boulevards as socially acceptable areas of communal interaction (Trillo, 1996; Smith, 2021, p. 126).<sup>3</sup> The *Ángel* became an educational device to reinforce civic lessons. It retold the history of the nation from on high, the foundations of which were to be found in the 1857 Constitution and the triumph of liberalism over conservatism; a triumph supposedly led by General Díaz on having secured what he believed to be social peace.

*La Patria es asesina* (the fatherland is killing) revokes any triumph. From a monument to national Independence and social peace, the graffitied *Ángel* opens onto death at the hands of the state. *La patria es asesina* does not contest state authority, only its claim to reverence: it remains transcendent in monumental form, just no longer benevolent. The fatherland is killing, breaks with any civilising mission. It shatters the secular triumph of liberalism by replacing civilisation with barbarism, veneration with disgust. If the Monument was designed to subordinate the spectator, to encourage respect and civic virtue as she looked upon winged victory, then it now operates on a different plane. That the

state is directly implicated in killing, promotes less filiation to the nation than a shared precariousness: today it could be you, tomorrow it might be me. *Atacan a una y nos atacan a todas* (you attack one of us and you attack all of us) is a better way of putting it. Emphasised is solidarity not in revering the nation, but in the face of its killing. Subordination gives way to active discontent, and respect to empowerment in the face of gender-based violence. Graffiti appropriates the putative power of the state, the magic of its bronze and granite, only to build solidarity in the face of such unchecked power. Remember not official names and dates, but that the state is death.

*La patria es asesina* evokes a different kind of rupture, beyond any break with the Church or monarchy. It is a rupture with rule itself, as the fatherland is killing undercuts any national project. This is no politics of death wherein state-perpetrated or sanctioned violence takes on a constitutive function that allows for government. *La patria es asesina* is a testament to the limits of such killing. The fatherland is killing is not the deadly use of force to ensure rule, what Michel Foucault (2003, pp. 239, 241, 246) calls sovereign power; it is not a violent moulding of female/feminine bodies both docile and useful, what he calls disciplinary power; nor is it violence serving a regulatory purpose within the population, what he calls biopower. No. *La patria es asesina* is how the state makes die (it is directly implicated in death) and how the state lets die (it is indirectly implicated in its complicity, negligence, and indifference). It is a killing that ruptures life and rule alike by perpetuating the death and displacement that the state purportedly guards against. *La patria es asesina* is the state making women killable beyond any pretence to rule or to social peace.

#### *February 17, 1867 and nunca más tendrán la comodidad de nuestro silencio*

The modernisation of public space in Mexico City began well before 1910. No site better demonstrated the desired cosmopolitan ideals than the *Paseo de la Reforma*. Inaugurated on February 17, 1867, the Boulevard had a length of 3,435 metres and a width of eighteen metres, in addition to its nine-metre wide pavement.<sup>4</sup> Inspiration came from the boulevards in Paris and the Ringstrasse in Vienna, the latter constructed by the brother of then-Mexican Emperor Maximiliano (Carranza, 2010, p. 5; Agostoni, 2003, p.79-80). Although created during the French Empire (1864-1867), the *Paseo de la Reforma* would become the site for public display throughout the Porfiriato. Indeed, if the Boulevard was originally designed to connect the Castle of Chapultepec to central Mexico City, then under General Díaz it became the visible heart not just of the city, but the nation. The *Paseo* was the site for tribute. Each state of the Republic was asked to donate two life-size bronze statues, thereby confirming the centrality of the Boulevard in retelling national excellence (Agostoni, 2003, p. 96).

The *Paseo de la Reforma* was the epitome of modernist urban design, a celebration of order and progress. It was not just national heroes and events

that were on show along the Boulevard. It was the material progress of the nation. Promoted was an image of modernity that accompanied innovations in planning; an image described by Carlos Monsiváis (1985, p. 171) as the homogenisation of appearances. Although the *Paseo* created a novel boundary that cut through the orthogonal grid of the city, its design was very much homogenising. It continued to draw over the natural terrain as if on a blank piece of paper, thereby complementing the spatially open-ended system of an abstract Cartesian grid (Agrest, 1996, p. 58; Agostoni, 2003, p. 88). The *Paseo* fed into the regulation of space and populations. It further solidified the formal controls designed to counter the exposed, ill-constructed nature of everyday reality. The Boulevard confirmed the division of the city, making sure that certain areas were more valuable and prestigious than others. Indeed, successive governments went so far as to offer tax exemptions to property owners along the Boulevard if their buildings contributed to its “beautification and cleanliness” (Mejorada de Gil, 1990, p. iii).

*Nunca más tendrán la comodidad de nuestro silencio* (never again will you have the comfort of our silence) redraws the homogenised relations between the Boulevard and its subjects. The graffiti critiques both the violent underside to the order of modern urbanism and forwards its own urban landscape. First, it challenges the previous complicity of female/feminine silence in the urban inscriptions of space. Such complicity was a central pillar of modern urbanism, wherein the mechanistic appropriation of space ‘implicitly sanctions the repression/suppression of women’ (Agrest, 1996, p. 60). To apply the principles of modern urbanism was not just to negate nature, but women. Women became extensions of the male gaze, or, in the case of the *Paseo*, objects in the construction of bourgeois femininity in the nineteenth century (Torre, 1996, p. 241). *Nunca más tendrán la comodidad de nuestro silencio*, breaks with this negation. It acknowledges previous exclusionary practices, only to disrupt them. The *Ángel* is no longer a communicative vessel for a modern, regulated society, but is enactive of an altogether different type of space. It is a symbol of female exclusion and the present-day refusal of any restricted status. As Whitehead (1948, p. 94) might say, the modernist ideals of the Monument remain as an aspect in the now contested location of the *Ángel*. Never again will you have the comfort of our silence.

Second, and further contrary to modernism, the female/feminine form is less transformed by space, than it actively transforms space. The negated female/feminine form is in violent distinction to the appropriation of a historic site of commemoration. Yet, appropriation might be inaccurate. It incorrectly assumes that public space is already given, that the Monument is already public and merely seized in protest. *Nunca más tendrán la comodidad de nuestro silencio* goes beyond by revealing the constructed nature of public space: it is produced on the exclusion of women, and such exclusion is now contested. Space is less appropriated than it is in dispute. It is in dispute in the act of protest, in the coming together of female/feminine bodies to reconfigure the mate-

riality of public space. This reconfiguration is no less written into the urban landscape. The graffitied *Ángel* writes an active, far from docile female/feminine form onto one of the most concrete artifices of national commemoration. And, more significant still, it is those formerly excluded who write “their own stories into the urban palimpsest” (Torre, 1996, pp. 242, 243). These stories challenge any celebration of order based on the regulation of public space. Instead, they render space polyvocal (Cerva Cerna, 2020, p. 192). Space speaks not just of the state, of its homogenised, modern imaginaries. It is also constituted in the continual inscription of meaning that is produced as female/feminine bodies lay claim to a site of national veneration, as they rework it with their very presence.

*August 16, 2019, and yo sí te creo*

So far it has been demonstrated how each piece of graffiti is a unique inscription that produces the Monument. Each is a particular abstraction of time: *ni una menos*, as past, present, and future; and each is a particular reworking of the urban landscape: *nunca más tendrán la comodidad de nuestro silencio*, as alluding to, and breaking with an exclusionary spatiality. In each instance, graffiti acts as a unique capture of prior events: September 16, 1910, February 17, 1867; a capture that endures in its relation to the present act of writing on the Monument. However, once attention turns towards the act of writing, it becomes apparent how graffiti also operates against a wider background, beyond the capture of past events. As is demonstrated below, this is because each piece of graffiti is dependent on an additional series of conditions that allow for its expression. Put awkwardly, each graffitied contraction of time and space is itself the result of additional, more immediate contractions.

Take a final inscription: *yo sí te creo* (I for one believe you). Following the lines of argument so far developed, *yo sí te creo* abstracts its own time and produces its own space. It brings into relation the countless instances in which women have reported sexual abuse and have not been believed, thereby evoking a shared history of distrust and violent impunity. This history was undoubtedly fresh in the minds of protesters. On making an official complaint regarding her alleged rape by four police officers on August 3, 2019, the allegations of the 17-year-old were leaked to the press. For the collective *Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Feminicidio*, this was an attempt to discredit the adolescent that essentially amounted to her re-victimisation (Xantomila, 2019). *Yo sí te creo*, not only connects re-victimisation with other similar instances but it can also be read as reproducing the violent spatiality already documented. It repeats the deadly inscription of the female/feminine form in public space and, at the same time, it promotes a different basis on which to forge solidarity. In place of spatial exclusion, it forwards one of inclusion and trust: I for one believe you.

Yet, rather than repeating the spatio-temporal contractions already explored, of interest is how graffiti also detaches from its contracted past. *Yo sí te creo* remains a unique contraction of time and space. However, it also opens onto the present insofar as it expresses the conditions that are apparent in the event of its writing. That is, to come into expression, the graffiti must navigate its immediate surroundings; a navigation which it no less expresses in its written form (Whitehead, 1967, p. 281; Debaise, 2017, p. 49). Contraction now operates twice: first retrospectively as a capture of past events, and second prospectively as a capture of the present field that will allow for the graffiti to be written. Each piece of graffiti operates against this wider background, both historic and immediate, thereby carrying a trace of past events and present potential (Massumi, 2021, p. 190-191). Or, to use language consistent with Whitehead (1978, p. 226-7), each piece “bears on itself the scars of its birth”.

*Yo sí te creo*, not only carries its scars, but these scars remain open. It not only contracts a more immediate field of potential, but it continues to operate in potentiality. On the one hand, graffiti expresses an immediate potential that energises each piece. *Yo sí te creo* operates against this energising background suffuse with the #MeToo movement and the multiple forms of solidarity generated online; solidarities that have become a hallmark of fourth-wave feminism in Mexico (Aránguez, 2019; Cerva Cerna, 2020; Cobo, 2019; Valera, 2020). The piece expresses this wider solidarity, animated by the social media campaign *#NoMeCuidanMeViolan* and by countless other examples of solidarity, both on- and off-line. I for one believe you, operate between a series of different elements that set the conditions for it: not just past cases of impunity, but also the felt solidarities of fourth-wave feminism that were no less apparent on August 16. *Yo sí te creo* becomes an event in its own right. The act of its writing is a complex phenomenon, a coming into the relation of a multitude of different parts that themselves are increasingly accompanied by a shared conviction on overcoming institutionalised distrust. The graffiti expresses this energising tension (Massumi, 2011, p. 20). *Yo sí te creo*, expresses a field of potential, from frustration at official impunity to disgust at the reproduction of patriarchal violence, that is integral to its writing on the *Angel*.

On the other hand, graffiti continues to operate amid the potential from which it emanates. *Yo sí te creo*, reveals this persistent potentiality in its promised inclusivity. So far, inclusivity has been intimated as replacing a violent, exclusive sociality with one of female/feminine solidarity. I for one believe you, constitutes a space of trust and mutual support. However, more than a site of coming together in acts of solidarity, this can also be read as a kind of inclusive potential. For clarity, this potential is called sorority. Sorority is a relational field of belonging, of trust and mutual support, which carries the potential to inform future instances of protest. It is not an act of solidarity itself, but the formative potential that informs such acts, both now and in the future. The potentiality of sorority is the felt coming-into-relation of women in the different processes of challenging an oppressive, patriarchal system. I for one believe

you, enacts this relational force. It enacts a shared potential of transformation; a potential opposed to the disempowering effects of impunity. These oppressive effects linger in how impunity discourages women from reporting acts of violence, which, in turn, only further perpetuates violence. *Yo sí te creo* lingers in an altogether different potential. It lingers as sorority, as a space of inclusion to come. From an atmosphere of discouragement, there is one of encouragement. Sorority opens onto a time of future emergence: should something happen to me, I know I will be believed. *Yo sí te creo* is potentialising. It operates both across and within multiple events. It is capable of informing countless episodes: from reporting abusers to Internet campaigns, to the appropriation of national monuments. And, it is a conditioning force capable of contouring each particular event: I will not be ostracised in reporting, I will be supported when online, and I will be accompanied in protest. *Yo sí te creo* expresses a sorority of mutual modification, an ability to inform different processes of emergence as a shared orientating potential (Massumi, 2021, pp. 185-186). It expresses a propensity to act, which despite its different manifestations, will on each occasion be conditioned by a belief in women. *Yo sí te creo*.

## Conclusions

The *Ángel de la Independencia* is an event. It is neither a timeless commemoration of the nation nor situated in a static urban landscape of order and progress. No. It is dynamic. The *Ángel* is made anew in commemorating not a single, historic event, but multiple incidents of gender-based violence; it is made anew in confronting a modernist spatiality with its deadly underside; and, it is made anew in expressing a potential for solidarity that is felt now and in events to come. This is not to refuse the material of the Monument, nor its physical location along the *Paseo de la Reforma*. Rather, this material is itself integral to the production of meaning. The commemorative column, the bronze statues, and the baroque inscriptions, each are a part of the production of meaning, in the connections forged between events.<sup>5</sup> *La patria es asesina* is one such connection. The fatherland is killing, maintains the transcendent quality of the Monument that informed its initial construction, only to render such transcendence presently oppressive. A particular event, awkwardly labelled September 16, 1910, is contracted to bring its patriotic ideals into relation with a second event: the state-perpetrated violence of August 2019. *Nunca más tendrán la comodidad de nuestro silencio*, similarly produces connections. It links the silencing of women on February 17, 1867, with its refusal in 2019. In each instance, graffiti contracts a prior event in such a way as to make it endure in the present act of writing on the Monument.

And yet, the *Ángel* as an event is more than a contraction of events, more than a particular composite of time and space. Or better, it is this and so much more. It is so much more because on August 16, the *Ángel* could have been composed with any previous event, and could have been realised in any par-

ticular contraction. The anti-monuments along the *Paseo de la Reforma* are informative in this regard. Protesters could have connected the absence of indigenous iconography in the original design of the *Ángel* with the ongoing non-recognition and present-day kill-ability of indigenous persons, as per the anti-monument to the 43 *normalistas* killed in Ayotzinapa. Or, nonrecognition could have been extended to the violence committed against migrants, as per the anti-monument to the 72 migrants killed in San Fernando. Consistent with the language of Whitehead (1978, p. 21), the *Ángel* is eventual because it could have contracted the entire antecedent universe. Protesters could have brought into relation any past instance, could have abstracted any time or produced any space. To appreciate this antecedent universe is not just retrospective, not just a question of what could have been. It is prospective. Yes, it recognises how graffiti expresses an antecedent universe in a singular, contracted form: how *la patria es asesina* connects the patriotic ideals of 1910 with the state-perpetrated violence of 2019; or, for Whitehead, how the many became one. But, at the same time, it also acknowledges how each particular expression remains part of the universe. It remains part of the universe insofar as the meaning produced can itself be composited in future events: how *la patria es asesina* may become a future rallying call for protesters; or, returning to Whitehead, how the many are increased by one.

The *Ángel* as the event is not just the particular contractions of August 16. It is also how each contraction returns to the many, one by one. Or, more practically, it is how each of the 565 pieces of graffiti remains part of the universe, and how their meanings will inform future acts of protest. Whitehead (1978, pp. 226-227) might go so far as to say that each piece of graffiti will shadow those in the future, as traces of all possibilities that will accompany future contractions. This is the *Ángel* as an event. It is not just graffiti as a capture of past events, not just as a contraction of present potential. It also persists. It persists in the coming into form of future pieces of graffiti, in future protests. No matter how thorough the restoration work, *no nos cuidan, nos violan*, will endure – see figures 2 and 3. It will endure despite official whitewashing because the *Ángel* will be given to meaning against a background now inseparable from the activities of protesters on August 16, 2019.

Image 2. Post-restoration. *Mexico Feminicida, Patrimonio Nacional* (still visible).



Source: María Fernanda Suárez Olvera.

Image 3. Post-restoration. *Vivir en México es un asesinato* (still visible).



Source: María Fernanda Suárez Olvera.

\* \* \*

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## Notes

- 1 In Mexico City, there are eight recognised ‘anti-monuments’: to the disappearance of 43 students (normalistas) in Ayotzinapa, to the children who died in the ABC Nursery, to the disappearance of David and Miguel in Guerrero state, to the mining disaster of Pasta de Conchos, to the student protesters of 1968, to the victims of the Halconazo, the Anti-monument in front of Bellas Artes, and another to 72 migrants killed in San Ferdinando.
- 2 It could be argued that the first commemorative monument to Independence was in 1822, albeit in the city of Celaya, Guanajuato. For more on the 1843 version, see Rodríguez Moya (2008).
- 3 The civilising logic was made explicit when the Minister of Development, Vicente Riva Palacio, issued a decree in 1877 that launched the design of monuments: “Public monuments exist not only to perpetuate the memory of heroes and of great men who deserve the gratitude of the people but also to awaken in some and strengthen in others the love of legitimate glories and also the love of art, where in those monuments one of its most beautiful expressions is to be found. To create recreational areas or boulevards is to distract members of society with licit diversions within reach of all and allow them to mingle while avoiding the isolation and the vices which are common in populations which lack those means of communication” (cited in Agostoni, 2003, p. 93).
- 4 Originally, the Boulevard was called *Paseo del Emperador*, then after the restoration of the Republic, *Calzada Degollado*, and finally, *Paseo de la Reforma* in 1872.
- 5 For Whitehead (2015, p. 101), this material persistence can be either inferred or directly perceived.

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