(Re)Collecting Chávez 3

> Just as the living room reappears on the street . . . so the street migrates into the living room.
>
> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*

> Haunting implies places, a habitation, and always a haunted house.
>
> Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever"

A Familiar Sight, Part I

Take 1: Family Portrait

It is a typical family portrait.[1] A young father smiles as he holds a sleeping baby; the mother, also smiling, stands next to them, her cheek gently caressing the baby's fuzzy head. If viewed from a distance, the arrangement of the three bodies evokes the outline of a house or the shape of a heart.

Who are they? Their names have been left off the poster, but that does not mean that they do not have an identity. They are—the poster explains to passersby and to those who, like me, are stuck in traffic and looking at the poster to distract ourselves—"los amores de Chávez": Chávez's loves, Chávez's darlings. It certainly looks that way. Chávez's eyes decorate the

front of the father's gray T-shirt and the baseball cap the mother wears. The mother holds a photograph of Chávez wearing his presidential sash, right hand in a military salute. All three family members are, moreover, accompanied by Chávez's gaze, thanks to the happy coincidence of another poster just beneath theirs, captioned "Viven en nosotros" (They live in us), from which he gazes upward. The third-person plural in this second poster refers to Chávez and Bolívar, both alive inside the all-encompassing *nosotros* that brings together the Venezuelan people, Chávez's darlings, and whoever happens to lock eyes with the posters. It would be difficult to find a more accurate image of "porosity."[2] The private, intimate, and familial now rendered public, exposed, and stately; the state, condensed in the figure of Chávez—who, let us not forget, "lives inside us"—miniaturized, wearable, holdable, lovable. The living room reappears in the middle of the street, hanging from a lamppost; the state slides seamlessly into the family album.

Take 2: The Stubborn Collector

The traffic finally moved, and I was able to arrive at my destination: Plaza Lina Ron, also known as Plaza Andrés Eloy Blanco, in downtown Caracas.[3] I was there on a mission: to find, among the several street vendors, somebody selling the collectible phone cards featuring different moments of Chávez's life.

I had discovered these cards by accident. While waiting in line to pay for a book at the Centro Nacional de la Fotografía, located next to Caracas's Biblioteca Nacional, I caught myself staring at the id holder hanging from the cashier's neck. While the holder itself was ordinary, what was inside took me by surprise. In lieu of the man's id, there was a picture of Chávez as a teenager (figure 3.1), which I recognized because earlier that morning I had seen it in *Cuentos del arañero*, a book where Chávez narrates his life in a format that combines autobiography and children's literature (Chávez 2012). The man noticed me staring and asked if I wanted to see it up close. He took it off and put it on the table, and he told me that it was his amulet and that he had given others like it to his children and nieces and nephews so that they would never be without Chávez's protection. I asked him where I could find those cards, and he told me that everyone always asked him that but unfortunately he did not know and did not think it was possible to purchase them, as they were considered rare and priceless. He did, however, tell me to go to Plaza Lina Ron, where street vendors would be selling all sorts of Chávez-themed objects.

3.1 ID holder.

He was right. I found what I was looking for on the last vendor's table. Amid piles of knickknacks, there was a row of cards that stood out because of how carefully they were arranged, with the first one showing toddler Chávez, followed by teenage Chávez, and so on, until on the last card Chávez appeared at the closing of his 2012 presidential campaign (figure 3.2). I asked the woman if I could buy them, and she said they were not for sale. Her husband, irritated, told her to just go ahead and make the sale, but she refused, arguing that Chávez was her "gran amor" (great love). She then told me that it had taken her a long time to collect all the cards, which were prepaid phone cards that had appeared in July 2014. I thanked her for her time and asked if I could take a picture of her collection, to which she gladly

3.2 The ten phone cards in the collection "Gigante nuestro."

consented, arranging them so I could capture all of them in one shot. As I walked away, two questions lingered in my mind: What would I have done with the cards if she had let me buy them? Why did I even want to own them in the first place?

Take 3: Impressions

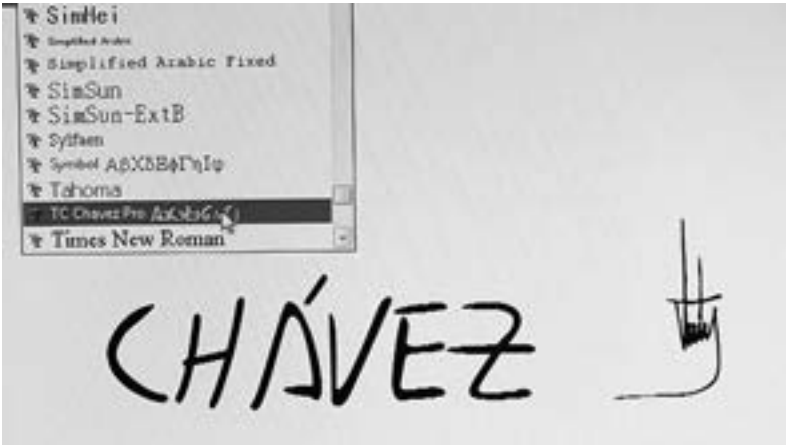
I look up and there it is: the *rabo 'e cochino*, also known as Chávez's signature. Stuck again in traffic, I spend my time trying to find the pig's tail in the squiggly lines. The conditions could not be better for this exercise: the signature is not on a piece of paper, small and difficult to read, but on the wall of one of the apartment buildings constructed by the Gran Misión Vivienda Venezuela (GMVV) (figure 3.3). It is huge, extending across the outer walls of seven floors. How, I wonder, is such a gigantic signature drawn? What sort of tools and expertise are involved in the process? Who draws

3.3 Chávez's signature and eyes on the walls of an apartment building.

it? What does it feel like to be welcomed home by it? And, perhaps more important, why draw it at all?

It is the excess that troubles me—how unnecessary it is, how random it appears when other, more commonplace options are so readily available. "Name the building after Chávez," I think. "Just print his name, or paint the walls in his party's signature red," I tell nobody.

It bothers me. The overlap of familiarity and strangeness, uniqueness and repetition, the miniature and the gigantic, the legal and the domestic. If there is a signature—not yours—on the wall of your house, who owns it? Is it the signature that appears at the bottom of a legal document, or is it the signature that appears on the card that comes with a gift? Are they the same thing? And what happens when someone asks for the signature to be tattooed on their arm, forehead, chest, or neck, not because they are forced, but voluntarily, even lovingly? What do we do when we encounter commemoration



3.4 Font TC Chavez Pro, taken from ABC Internacional's web page. See ABC 2014.

and ownership, pain and love, the living and the dead, "you/yours" and "I/mine," all intertwined, all tangled up in flesh?

Take 4: Whose Hand Is It Anyway?

Can there be citation without quotation marks? Yes, we could answer, but we would call that plagiarism or common knowledge. And, in those cases, while the quotation marks might not be visible, that does not mean that they are absent: there is a void, a quiet interpellation, the intuition of the marks that should or could be there, the silent, always imperfect yet relentless return to the original. Chávez, while alive, fervently cited Simón Bolívar: in and out of context, accurately and inaccurately, with his words and with his body.[4] Maduro, in turn, fervently cites Chávez: the Comandante still has the final word in regard to the country's road to socialism, the future of the revolution, and the anti-imperialist struggle.[5] Copies citing copies, doubles doubling doubles, the original—if there ever was one—waiting on the other side of an endless performance of necromantic mimesis. Given all this, the existence of the app tc Chavez Pro—created by the collective Trinchera Creativa—should not be surprising.[6]

Yet it is—surprising and uncanny (figure 3.4).

The app allows its users to download a font that reproduces Chávez's handwriting, which was "copied" from various documents, most notably the letters he wrote while imprisoned in Yare during the two years following the

1992 coup against Carlos Andrés Pérez and the note he sent while detained after the 2002 coup against him. It is easy to use: after clicking on a link to download it, it appears on Word's list of fonts above Times New Roman. Tempted by the possibility of writing this entire book in that font, I downloaded it and began typing. I typed Chávez's name: it felt like impersonation, plagiarism, and spiritual possession. I typed "hello," "I am here," "I am alive," and wondered: *Who* is here? *Who* is alive? *Who* is the addressee? My words, my thoughts, but his handwriting. Every sentence I typed was like a spell, the hand that first drew the letters hovering above me, engaging me, against my will, in a conversation with the dead. The vast scholarship on citing and citation—with Jacques Derrida and J. L. Austin at the forefront—seems to have missed or, at least, not paid too much attention to handwriting outside the signature. The equally vast scholarship on handwriting, in turn, seems to reduce the topic of citation to the ethical, practical, and philosophical issues accompanying plagiarism. In between them is t c Chavez Pro, messing things up and destabilizing taken-for-granted ontological claims, creating an overlap between technology and incantation, print and trace, hand and screen.

A Familiar Sight, Part II

In the prologue to her analysis of longing, souvenirs, and collections, Susan Stewart describes walking around the city as experiencing

> the disjuncture of partial vision/partial consciousness. The narrativity of this walking is belied by a simultaneity we know and yet cannot experience. As we turn a corner, our object disappears around the next corner. The sides of the street conspire against us: each attention suppresses a field of possibilities. The discourse of the city is a syncretic discourse, political in its untranslatability. Hence the language of the state elides it. Unable to speak all the city's languages, unable to speak all at once, the state's language becomes monumental, the silence of headquarters, the silence of the bank. (Stewart 1993, 2)

This chapter is born out of a similar walk in the summer of 2016 around Caracas that started early in the morning and lasted until late in the afternoon. Like the walk Stewart describes, it was far from an anthropological or ethnographic enterprise. I did not have a list of questions or a preselected group of subjects from whom to gather answers. Objects and people indeed

appeared and disappeared, our encounters for the most part fleeting. It was, as she calls it, "partial vision." As my eyes focused on something, I could feel the weight of everything else that would go unnoticed, that I would miss, but not regrettably so, because the goal was never to see it all and to frame it such that there would be no blind spots, fractures, or missing pieces. It was a walk that was driven by a craving for unexpected encounters and that embraced chance—in other words, what, in the introduction to this book, I called "ghost h(a)unting."

It was with that mindset—or, better yet, in that mood—that I happened to see the poster titled "Los amores de Chávez" and began noticing similar ones hanging from lampposts all over the city. The image of the father, the mother, and the baby, all three embracing and being embraced by Chávez, acted as the lens through which I saw the other objects and images I encountered that day: Chávez's magnified signature on the apartment buildings constructed by the gmvv and the collectible phone cards that captured different moments of his life. If we bring them together, as I have done above, what we get—what we hear—is something very different from the silent and monumental language Stewart attributes to the state. The state in this case, in this walk, is not silent; if anything, it screams as it enunciates words oozing with affect, as it slides into the intimate narratives built by and for family albums, as it takes part in private cell-phone conversations, and as it signs, in red (the red of love, of blood, of Chávez's party), the walls of homes. It is a language of "exaggeration, fantasy, and fictiveness," all operations that Stewart insists are not located in the domain of the authority invested in the state: "If authority is invested in domains such as the marketplace, the university, or the state, it is necessary that exaggeration, fantasy, and fictiveness in general be socially placed within the domains of anti and nonauthority: the feminine, the childish, the mad, and the senile, for example" (1993, xiii). Here, however, these operations are very much the domain of the state, and they are also the domain of the family: inside and outside, the private and the public, the stately and the intimate, all blend together as the state, condensed in the figure of Chávez, stops being familiar to become *familial*.

The interviewees in the documentary *FANtasmo* (Romero García 2009), discussed in chapter 2, had already alerted us to this. Jonás Romero García's decision to introduce Chávez as playing "the role of 'the president'" left a space open for us to consider what he would be, what he would do, outside that role—a space that several of the interviewees filled with fantasies where Chávez was their lover, their grandson, or their father. This familial rhetoric that frames the specter is not just limited to this one documentary in

this one specific place. Derrida, "the father of spectrality," would not let the figure of the father go when developing his theory of hauntology, the "visor effect," and inheritance: "This father comes before me, I who am 'owing' or indebted. . . . The predecessor has come before me, . . . I who am before him, I who am because of him, owing to him" (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 122). Fathers, however, are not the only ones who can become spectral figures; sons, daughters, and grandchildren have been invoked as subversive ghostly figures in Argentina and Mexico, and the figure of the mother haunts the continent through, among other examples, the various popular iterations of the legend of La Llorona (the weeping woman)—a ghost who mourns the death of the children she drowned to punish her cheating husband. Whatever shape the ghost or specter takes, what remains consistent is that ghostly matters seem to always be family matters, as made explicit by the word "familiar"—the ghostly spirit that typically adopts the shape of an animal and that serves a family across generations—and by Derrida himself, who, as the second epigraph of this chapter shows, argued that for haunting to occur, there needed to be "places, a habitation, and always a haunted house" (1995, 55). A haunted house that is/was/will be someone's home.

In this chapter, I examine the haunting that occurs in the overlap of the state, the public, and the official with the familial, the private, and the intimate. I explore this overlap by analyzing two objects/traces that, just like the eyes in chapter 2, act as Chávez's spectral remains. In the first section, I discuss the collectible phone cards that narrate and re-present his life in the worn-looking, nostalgia-evoking, family-friendly aesthetics of sepia. In the following sections, I look at his handwriting, which has experienced different afterlives as a tattoo and as an addition to the walls of apartment buildings constructed by the gmvv —in the case of his signature—and as a computer font—in the case of the application tc Chavez Pro. These objects exemplify the porosity that occurs when, as Walter Benjamin and Asja Lācis observed, the living room appears on the street and the street migrates into the living room. The cards render Chávez pocket-size, wallet friendly, and family-album worthy, while also suturing his image and his afterlife to the money that allows people to make phone calls and send text messages. The afterlives of Chávez's handwriting, in turn, allow the dead president to "sign" skins and walls of homes and to shape people's thoughts. Making, selling, and purchasing Chávez's collectible phone cards thus means making a piece of the living room—a piece of a family album—appear on the streets; typing on a personal computer with Chávez's handwriting means bringing the street—understood as part of the state's material language—into the living room.

While each of these objects could be given its own chapter or be put in dialogue with other remains from other chapters—Chávez's eyes could, for instance, be productive interlocutors for both the cards and the signature—analyzing them side by side brings to the fore certain operations that shed new light on the conceptualization of spectrality I have developed so far. In chapter 2, I explored the links between haunting, vision, and the power of a temporally dislocated form of surveillance; in this chapter, I look at haunting in relation to affect and excess, and to acts of collection and recollection, miniaturization and amplification, inhabitation and habituation. In the course of this analysis I will revisit the relationship between memory and the market and between the state and the archive, both relationships complicated by the liminal nature of the cards and of Chávez's handwriting. I will conclude by turning to Derrida and to the invitation he extends, in *Specters of Marx*, to future scholars: the invitation to learn to live with ghosts, talk to them, and give them back their speech. I will ask: What happens when we take this invitation at face value? What if living with specters becomes the *only* way of living available to us? What happens when being haunted becomes habitual and the relationship with the specter becomes intimate? When considered alongside the spectral remains analyzed here, the answers to these questions lead us to the realization that accepting Derrida's invitation might, in fact, come at a very high cost.

Family Matters

Though discussions regarding Chávez's legacy—and, specifically, who should be considered his true and lawful heirs—became heated and prominent after his death, the rhetoric that transformed Chávez from a political figure into a familial one had existed long before and was central to his political performance. The people Romero García interviews in his documentary *FANtasmo* make that clear: Chávez was the president, but, in their view, he was also their lover, grandchild, father, and brother (Romero García 2009). While all these roles were products of the interviewees' imaginations, spoken about jokingly or wistfully, they found resonances and, to a degree, confirmation, in Chávez's own words and in his public performances, which in several cases portrayed him participating in various family dynamics. Two episodes are particularly noteworthy, both featuring children.

The first one is an anecdote Chávez shared in a 2005 episode of his television show *Aló Presidente*, where he recounted a conversation with his youngest daughter, Rosinés Chávez Rodríguez. Rosinés, sick with a fever,

asked her father why the white horse in the national coat of arms—which symbolizes the country's fight for independence—seemed to be looking back and standing still. Her question, he said, encouraged him to ask the Asamblea Nacional to revise the country's national symbols and "fix" the horse, which since 2006 appears running to the left—a left that is both literal and ideological. The decision to change the coat of arms—and to add another star to the national flag—caused outrage and inspired well-known humorist Laureano Márquez to publish a short article titled "Querida Rosinés" in the digital journal *Tal Cual*, where he proposes a series of questions for Rosinés to ask her father on behalf of the opposition (Márquez 2018). The journal, as a result, was fined for having violated Rosinés's intimacy, privacy, and integrity, according to the verdict by the district attorney of the state of Lara and the Consejo de Protección de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes—the government entity in charge of protecting the rights of children and teenagers.[7] The story of Rosinés and the horse has primarily been discussed in relation to the restrictions Chávez's government placed on the media's freedom of expression and in relation to the president's insistence on performing, repeatedly, the founding of the nation through the manipulation of its symbols.[8] For the purposes of this chapter, however, I would like to focus on the family scene that Chávez's anecdote evokes: Chávez, the caring father, watching over his sick child, changing the nation's symbols—demanding a new horse be drawn—just for Rosinés.

The second, less controversial, family scene was also part of an episode of *Aló Presidente*, this time in 2008.[9] In it, Chávez asked a child who had been sent away by his security team to return, quoting Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew: "Let the little children come to me." The three-year-old approaches and stands near Chávez's lap, and when Chávez asks him what he is doing there, he says he is there to bring him cookies, to which Chávez responds: "Okay, so give me a cookie." What happens next sets off effusive applause and laughter from the audience: the child takes part of the cookie he was chewing from his mouth and feeds it directly to Chávez, who chews it and then wipes the gooey crumbs from his lips and the child's lips as he comments on the innocence of children and how it is later perverted by the selfishness of capitalism. What stands out in this scene is not Chávez's ideological rhetoric and denunciation of capitalism, but the child's saliva: the primal mouth-to-mouth feeding, the intimacy of an act meant to bond parents and children, which has now entered the public and political sphere, transforming Chávez from a distant authority figure into a father unafraid of a child—someone else's child, now his child—and his spit.

These are far from the only two instances in which Chávez's fatherly nature was publicly displayed for everyone in Venezuela to see; in fact, several *Aló Presidente* episodes feature children, and Chávez's daughters often accompanied him during his public appearances. I highlight them, however, because they render visible the crumbling of the boundaries separating the family, the nation, and the state. The symbol of Venezuela's fight for independence is transformed into a toy for the president's child; Chávez becomes not just the father of his children but of any child who lands on his lap; his political agenda and the fight against capitalism are condensed in a toddler and his willingness to share his cookie with the president. The Bolivarian Revolution is thus retold and reinterpreted as a family matter, and Chávez is reimagined as a father watching over his children.

The relevance of the family to the Bolivarian Revolution transcended Chávez's publicly performing his fatherhood. For instance, in 2001, the Ley Orgánica para la Protección del Niño, Niña y Adolescente was passed to protect and defend the rights of children. Through presidential decree, Chávez ordered the creation of the Misión Madres del Barrio—a social program designed to help homemakers from the barrios by providing them with social assistance, political activities, and microcredit—and the inclusion of article 88 in the Constitution, the first constitutional article in the world to recognize the value of housework for society.[10] The protagonism that the Venezuelan family acquired in the social and political agenda of the revolution accompanied the protagonism that Chávez's own family had on the political stage. Chávez's brother, Adán Chávez Frías, was governor of the state of Barinas from 2008 to 2017; before him it was Chávez's father, Hugo de los Reyes Chávez, who occupied the role from 1998 to 2008. Chávez often spoke of his grandmother, Rosa Inés (Mamá Rosa), with whom he had lived until he left to join the military, and he underscored his familial links to the country's revolutionary history by paying homage to Pedro Pérez Delgado, popularly known as Maisanta, a nineteenth-century Venezuelan revolutionary and politician who was also Chávez's great-great-grandfather.

The question of the family acquired new relevance and urgency after Chávez's death, when the decision regarding who should succeed him and be responsible for keeping his legacy alive became a family matter that resulted in several of his most fervent supporters claiming to be his rightful and only heir. Maduro, whom Chávez had named his successor months before his death, often referred to himself as "Chávez's son" (Michelutti 2017, 244). Opposing him was a subgroup within *chavista* officialdom that called itself "Los verdaderos hijos de Chávez" (The true children of Chávez) (Barráez

2017) and who proposed María Gabriela Chávez, Chávez's daughter, as his rightful successor.[11] As the months went by, more "children of Chávez" appeared. During carnival celebrations, children would dress like him and wear a sash with the words "Yo soy Chávez" (I am Chávez); there were also rumors regarding Chávez's extramarital affairs and the potential illegitimate children the president might have around the country.[12] Then, as Maduro proved to be a less-than-adequate substitute/heir, more members of Chávez's family began occupying positions of power, their presence a reassurance that Chávez was still alive and relevant in spite of Maduro's failure to convey the power and charisma of his predecessor. Jorge Arreaza, Chávez's son-in-law, became the country's vice president in 2013; his daughter (Arreaza's wife), Rosa Virginia Chávez, became the head of the Misión Milagro that same year; and his brother, Argenis, became governor of the state of Barinas in 2017.[13]

It was amid these debates regarding family, legacy, and the claim to power that the collectible phone cards featuring moments from Chávez's life began circulating in July 2014. While initially presented as a homage to Chávez (who would have been sixty years old that year) from cantv—the state-run telephone and internet service provider in Venezuela—and the graphic designer and cartoonist Omar Cruz, who created the drawings featured on them, the cards, I propose, do more than just honor the dead president's memory.[14] They make Chávez "part of the family" by giving him a place in the family album. The album is a familial object that, as we will see in the following sections, demands physical, emotional, and mnemonic labor; imposes cohesion and relationality; collapses individual and collective time; and triggers acts of revival and animation that enable both the dead and their ideology to have a politically active, socially relevant afterlife.

A Market for Chávez

Omar Cruz first proposed the creation of the cards to cantv on Twitter. He had started making drawings of Chávez the day his death was announced as a way to mourn him. However, drawing the president was something he had been doing for years, to the point where, he said, "I basically know it by heart" (vtv 2021a). Cruz's proposition was accepted by cantv, and, on July 31, 2014, it put over two million cards in circulation. The cards were also displayed in an exhibit open to the public in cantv's headquarters in Caracas, where visitors could see the drawings signed by Cruz next to an enlarged version of the cards. There are ten cards in total. In addition to the

drawings, each of them shows how much they are worth (five or ten bolívares), Cruz's name, a caption ("Chávez comandante en jefe," "Chávez niño," "Chávez pensador," etc.), and the name of the series, "Gigante nuestro"—one of the many titles given to Chávez by his supporters after his death.

The first time I saw one of these cards—the one captioned "Chávez adolescente"—it was in the id holder of the man who saw it as an amulet offering protection he felt compelled to share with his children, which is why he did not keep the cards he had collected but instead distributed them among the youngest members of his family. The second time I saw them, they had been arranged in chronological order and displayed among an explosion of knickknacks (figure 3.5). A collection of marbles, pendants featuring Chávez's eyes, a wooden dolphin and anchor, seashells, resin rings, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the Venezuelan flag, the Virgin Mary, all side by side, piling on top of each other, forming what Jacques Rancière calls a "co-belonging": a "shared world where heterogeneous elements are caught up in the same essential fabric, and are therefore always open to being assembled in accordance with the fraternity of a new metaphor" ([2007] 2009, 57). There was no organizing logic, at least not an immediately visible one; there were also no prices displayed, which meant only the vendor knew what each item was worth, a number that—as tends to be the case in markets and among street vendors—was open to negotiation. The only objects that appeared "in order" were the phone cards, the order being the chronology of Chávez's life. Thus, they seemed to offer the "fraternity of a new metaphor," in Rancière's words. As if imbued with gravitational force, the cards appeared to attract all the other objects, to hold them together, and to provide the link between them—the link being, of course, Chávez. Chávez + Che Guevara, Chávez + the Virgin Mary, Chávez + marbles, Chávez + flag: all connections that never settled, that were never articulated but only insinuated or suspected, and that, therefore, granted Chávez an animation that emerged from the incompleteness, from the forward momentum of a yet-to-be-discovered link, and from the force of the random and the arbitrary.

What stood out in the case of the man's id card holder and in the collection displayed among the knickknacks was that, in both cases, the cards seemed to be living all sorts of afterlives that took them beyond their basic function as disposable phone cards. For the man who worked at the Centro Nacional de la Fotografía, they were an amulet and a document that rendered his identity visible and legible. For the woman who displayed them in her tent, they were priceless, not for sale yet shown alongside things being sold; most important, they were hers and only hers, a collection built as an act of

3.5 Phone cards on a vendor's table.

commemoration and as an act of love. For Cruz, the cards were a homage to his beloved Comandante; for cant v, a product that would bring in money. For everyone else, they were a means to an end; merchandise that could be turned into souvenirs; disposable things that could be kept, collected, and cherished. For me, they were reproductions of drawings of photographs taken of Chávez, the result of the act of turning a giant into a miniature, new things that looked like old things, ten family photographs in search of a family album. They were, thus, not (just) phone cards, but something else, something beyond, something better (or worse, depending on whom you asked).

If we take a step back, we will notice that they are also part of a growing market of Chávez-themed objects whose production, circulation, and consumption invite us to revisit the relationship between memory and the market, one that, in the case of Venezuela the year the cards started circulating, had to face the 2014 drop in oil prices that marked the beginning of an economic crisis that has only worsened with the years (Key and Villarroel

2018; McCarthy 2017; Weisbrot and Sachs 2019). In the context of the Latin American countries that emerged from authoritarian state repression in the 1980s and 1990s (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay), the relationship between memory and the market has been studied and theorized extensively, with the concept of the "memory market"—a term coined by Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh A. Payne in "Time Is Money" (2011)—driving scholars to develop multiple understandings of memory narratives, practices, and goods. In this context, memory sometimes resists the logic of the market but at other times allows people to benefit from it, as the logic of memory and the market seamlessly blend. Central to these reflections is the link between memory and terror: the commodification, transaction, exchange, advertisement, and consumption of atrocity, sometimes in order to advance the fight for justice, reparations, and human rights, sometimes in order to move on and erase the traces left by state violence.

In the case of the "Chávez market"—the term I am using to refer to the Chávez-themed objects that circulated and were consumed in Venezuela and abroad after Chávez's death—terror and atrocity are not part of the equation, though this does not mean that the Venezuelan state has not repeatedly engaged in acts of violence that qualify as such.[15] The memory of Chávez does not oppose or disrupt the logic of the market; instead, it relies on it to acquire strength and relevance, and to circulate and become ubiquitous. The relationship between memory and the market thus operates more in the way Andreas Huyssen describes it—that is, memory providing comfort and the market rendering that comfort accessible. For Huyssen, however, this understanding of memory is tied to the "slow but palpable transformation of temporality in our lives, brought on by complex intersections of technological change, mass media, and new patterns of consumption, work, and global mobility" (2003, 21), which, in his view, make us desire the past in the first place and respond favorably to memory markets. While a case can be made for the relevance of these changes in Venezuela and in Latin America as a whole, in the years following Chávez's death, the transformation of temporality—which I have called an "afterglow"—also had to do with the uncertainty regarding the country's future in light of Chávez's absence and, as stated above, with the economic crisis that loomed on the horizon after the 2014 drop in oil prices. The desire for memory in this context thus was not, as Huyssen proposes, a "displaced fear of the future" (23), or anxiety regarding the speed of change and shrinking horizons of time and space, but rather the displaced fear of not having a future *at all* as a state, a movement, and a people. This widespread fear represented a threat to the legitimacy

and authority of Maduro's government, and, more broadly, of the Bolivarian Revolution, which had to face economic restrictions that did not exist while Chávez was in power and the oil economy was healthy and booming. To assuage that fear, I argue, the market was saturated with Chávez, whose image appeared both in knickknacks like keychains and necklaces and on basic goods like milk and disposable phone cards.

This reference to milk is not an exaggeration. In 2015, the Asociación Cooperativa Empacadora Bolívar Vuelve R. L. produced the government-sponsored milk brand Bolívar Vuelve. The packaging declares that the milk is "hecha en socialismo" (made in socialism) and rich in vitamins A and D. It features Bolívar himself, drawn in red, who, the plastic bag states, "vuelve" (returns). *Vuelve* is also the imperative form of the verb, demanding that Bolívar come back. Already while Chávez was alive, there had been an increase in the "Bolivarization" of food, following the change to the name that took place months after he became president, from República de Venezuela to República *Bolivariana* de Venezuela. As Elías Pino Iturrieta points out, Bolívar went on to baptize everything from social programs ("misiones bolivarianas") to food products ("cultivos bolivarianos," "caraotas bolivarianas," "plátanos bolivarianos"), thus rendering the metaphor "el héroe está hasta en la sopa" (the hero is even in the soup) literal, for Bolívar was in fact in the ingredients used to make soup, "and we consume him every day with the help of our ordinary spoons" (Pino Iturrieta [2003] 2006, 249).

What exactly does one drink when one drinks this milk? Saying "just milk" feels like an oversimplification; saying "Bolívar/Chávez" feels too close to transubstantiation. Dismissing it as political propaganda—one more eccentricity of the government—does not undo the fact that it remains there, inside the home, the combination of Bolívar, Chávez (present in the red of the logo), ideology, and calcium rendered banal, desirable even, amid widespread hunger.

I rehearse in my mind hypothetical answers to the question: What did you drink today?

The government's milk.

Bolívar's milk.

Chávez's milk.

Bolívar comes back.

Bolívar, come back!

These imagined answers underscore how acts of consumption that occur on a daily basis, almost mechanically, might become forms of sociopolitical participation, even among those who strongly oppose the government yet

must drink Bolívar's milk because it is the only affordable option. This lack of choice, the imperative to live with the specter shut in a cupboard, waiting to be poured into the morning's coffee, has become more pressing with the worsening of the economic crisis, which has led the government to be even more adamant in branding the things people consume—and the oil that makes their production and distribution possible—with Maduro's name or a reference to Chávez.[16]

Consuming the specter also takes place in the space of television, a space that has been progressively monopolized by government-sponsored channels such as Televisora Venezolana Social (TVES).[17] Chávez appears throughout TVES's regular programming both in shows and in advertisements and public service announcements. His face adorns the sets of the shows (figure 3.6), which during the summer of 2016 included several talk shows discussing his legacy along with daily contributions by Maduro talking to people while surrounded by pictures of Chávez and Bolívar. His voice also erupts during commercials, sometimes disembodied, other times in excerpts from old episodes of *Aló Presidente* that the channel keeps replaying, and other times in the messages delivered by artists and public figures who dialogue with the audience and remind them that they must remain loyal to Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution. He is thus at once the topic of conversation and the product advertised in between conversations; his excessive televised presence is not only an insistent denial of his death but also a good to be consumed amid the scarcity of all other goods. Maduro associates this scarcity with what he calls the "unconventional economic war," a term that refers to intervention by a foreign country by means other than weapons of war, including instead political, economic, and social measures.[18] The shows dedicated to discussing this unconventional war spend little time detailing what those measures are and more time talking about how to respond to them. The most efficient solution, other than videos of Maduro in factories encouraging more production, is Chávez: it is the love shown for Chávez that will pull the country out of the crisis.

This message echoes in the stores that sell Chávez-themed objects, which often have a television or radio set tuned in to one of the government-sponsored channels. Inside these stores, both kinds of Chávez commodities—the material and the visual—coincide, reinforcing each other's value. Some of these stores are owned by the same people who make the objects that are for sale. This is another side of the process of commodifying Chávez: his direct intervention in the livelihood of the people who depend on making and selling him to survive (figure 3.7).

3.6 Chávez displayed on the set of the show *La hojilla*.

The need for the past to circulate in the market thus reveals itself to be twofold: not only are Chávez-themed objects necessary for Chávez to keep on living and, through his afterlife, ensure people's loyalty to the revolution and Maduro's administration, but they are also necessary for some people to make money to support their families. The woman *not* selling Chávez's collectible phone cards is a noteworthy exception to this more utilitarian approach to making and selling the Comandante. The man storing the phone card in his id holder is also resisting the cards' (and the market's) disposable logic. Before turning to the cards in the next section though, it is important to recognize that the Chávez market has expanded beyond Venezuela. In September 2014, Labiofam, a Cuban laboratory, announced the creation of two perfumes: Ernesto (inspired by Che Guevara) and Hugo (inspired by Chávez). When applied to the skin, "'Ernesto' is woodier and sweet with fresh notes, while 'Hugo' is softer, with notes of tropical fruits, and less penetrating" (Voz de America 2014). As of March 2022, a number of stores on Amazon sold T-shirts featuring Chávez, and vendors on Etsy offered small busts and hand-painted dolls of him.

The creation and circulation of these objects—just a few examples in a market that grows as contemporary politics and governance lean more

3.7 Chávez figurines sold in a store in Caracas.

and more toward spectacle—point to a form of commodification of the political figure that seems to have become more intimate, moving from political posters and pins to T-shirts to scents that are absorbed into the skin. They offer a productive point of comparison with other forms of memory commodification—such as the objects made and sold by or on behalf of Argentina's Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo—and other ways of understanding the afterlives of commodities in different kinds of memory markets.19For the purposes of this chapter, however, I would like to stay with an understanding of the memory market as an afterlife space where the past can be animated rather than obliterated, infused with the energy spent making, selling, and buying, empowered by the intensity of nostalgic cravings and by the need for comfortable familiarity amid a lack of futurity that acquires a very concrete shape in the Venezuelan context.20There, after Chávez's death, the memory market finds itself in a paradoxical state of perpetual mourning that responds to Chávez's absence by turning him into a commodified presence subject to circulation, production, and consumption. The past is thus brought to life by the market, where it acquires a spectral quality that arises from the transformation of remains—Chávez's remains and Chávez as remains—into raw material used to fabricate goods, and from

the hypervisibility and excessive accumulation of those goods. This excess, rather than being sterile and unsignifying, physically grounds Chávez in the present and gives rise to memory narratives that reflect the different ways that subjects/consumers establish a relationship with the spectral power they consume through the possession of Chávez-themed merchandise. These narratives are as varied as the people who choose to make, sell, and buy Chávez, and as those who choose not to do any of these things and nevertheless find themselves with Chávez in their home. The following analysis is not meant to flatten or condense all those potential narratives into one; further scholarship could productively pursue each narrative and give an ethnographic account of Chávez's lingering in individual and collective memories. What I offer instead is a reading of the commemorative phone cards that underscores the familial narrative invoked by their aesthetic and by the acts of collection and recollection that they seem to demand from those who purchase them, a narrative that, I argue, anchors the cards at the intersection of the gazes, encounters, and temporal gestures performed by the family album.

Family Album

In *On Longing*, Susan Stewart offers the following definition of a collection:

> In contrast to the souvenir, the collection offers example rather than sample, metaphor rather than metonymy. The collection does not displace attention to the past; rather, the past is at the service of the collection, for whereas the souvenir lends authenticity to the past, the past lends authenticity to the collection. The collection seeks a form of self-enclosure which is possible because of its ahistoricism. The collection replaces history with *classification*, with order beyond the realm of temporality. In the collection, time is not something to be restored to an origin; rather, all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection's world. . . . The collection presents a hermetic world: to have a representative collection is to have both the minimum and the complete number necessary for an autonomous world—a world which is both full and singular, which has banished repetition and achieved authority. (Stewart 1993, 151–52; original emphasis)

This understanding of collections illuminates how time functions within the individual cards and in relation to their configuration as a collection.

Though this particular collection does privilege the past—Chávez's biographical past being the central topic of the collection—it also severs that past from its own linear temporality and folds it into itself, making it into its very own hermetic and autonomous world where death has been permanently banished. In fact, looking at the different stages of life depicted on the cards, we see there are no photographs of a sickly Chávez; the collection ends with a healthy-looking Chávez smiling at the closing event of his 2012 presidential campaign (figures 3.8 and 3.9). Thus, the world that the collection constructs is one where Chávez is meant to continue living, achieving eternal life not only through the promise of permanence in the immutability of each individual photograph, but also through a controlled passage of time that follows Chávez's growth across the cards and "freezes him" right before his death. This temporality imbues the collection with organic movement and vitality while also arresting time so that Chávez avoids encountering his own death.

Chávez's afterlife is further fueled by the logic of the collection itself. To collect is to agree to be driven by the obligation to keep hunting for the next piece—in this case, for the next Chávez. Thus, for those who collect these cards, Chávez exists in an anticipated future, not a long-lost past. Moreover, the cards challenge the "out with the old, in with the new" logic of the market because the value of collectibles encourages a different approach to consumption that protects them from being easily discarded. The cards thus stick around even after the money on them has run out, which means Chávez stays too as a valued and valuable remainder/reminder, exiting the disposable and public world of the market and entering the intimate and private spaces where personal collections and treasures are held. We saw this move from the public into the private in the id holder, where the card with Chávez's teenage portrait served both as a sign of an assumed identity and as a talisman, and on the red tablecloth in the vendor's tent, where the card collection stood out as being above—both literally and figuratively—all the other small objects that were for sale.

The move from public to private is also represented by the miniaturization of the gigantic, which occurs in the phone cards in two ways. First, in the phrase printed on all of them, which gives the collection its title: "Gigante nuestro." In it, we see a relationship of ownership being established over Chávez, who goes from being an unreachable public figure to someone "possessed" by—someone who is part of—those who own the cards. Second, we see the process of miniaturization in the actual size of the card, which makes Chávez's image—typically displayed on huge posters and wall-sized

3.8 Display of the first five phone cards in the collection "Gigante nuestro."

3.9 Display of the last five phone cards in the collection "Gigante nuestro."

graffiti—pocket-size, thus encouraging its owners to place it in private spaces such as the id holder, a wallet, an altar, and so on.21 The combination of these two processes brings to mind Stewart's conceptualization of the miniature as "that which can be enveloped by the body" (1993, 137). Compressed by the dimensions of the phone card, Chávez is "enveloped" by the hands of those holding it, and as a result he acquires a tactility that the design of the card itself evokes through the use of sepia tones suggesting something worn and cherished—a feeling that is strengthened by the borders, designed to look like they have lost little bits over time. Stewart associates this "worn" quality with a type of souvenir—the personal memento—that speaks of individual experiences that, taken together, construct an autobiographical narrative:

> Such souvenirs are rarely kept singly; instead they form a compendium which is an autobiography. Scrapbooks, memory quilts, photo albums, and baby books all serve as examples. It is significant that such souvenirs often appropriate certain aspects of the book in general. . . . Yet at the same time, these souvenirs absolutely deny the book's move of mechanical reproduction. You cannot make a copy of a scrapbook without being painfully aware that you possess a mere representation of the original. The original will always supplant the copy in a way that is not open to the products of mechanical reproduction. . . . The acute sensation of the object—its perception by hand taking precedence over its perception by eye—promises, and yet does not keep the promise of, *reunion*. Perhaps our preference for instant brown-toning of photographs, distressed antiques, and prefaded blue jeans relates to this suffusion of the *worn*. (Stewart 1993, 139; original emphases)

The cards are designed to not only resemble but actually function like a memento; their "worn" quality and the intimate nature of the photographs erase their reproducibility, creating a feeling of uniqueness and familiarity that transcends mere acquaintance with and recognition of the cards and the person whose biography they represent. The copy thus reverses its own process of reproduction and becomes an "original" whose history is simultaneously biographical *and* autobiographical: it narrates Chávez's biography while also establishing a link between Chávez's life and the lives of the card collectors.

The biographical element of the cards is self-evident: they capture Chávez's growth from a baby into the fifty-nine-year-old man who won

the presidential elections in 2012. Understanding their autobiographical nature, however, requires a more careful look. On one hand, there is the "worn" design, which conjures up a temporality constructed by the cards passing from hand to hand and from generation to generation, and by the feelings that materialize in that passage: the love and devotion that bring family members together, even those who might have never met and who nevertheless reconnect when one of them holds what was once in the pocket/wallet/nightstand/album of the other. We already saw how this hypothetical passage becomes real when the owner of the id holder mentioned he gave similar cards to his children and nieces and nephews. This "family history" that the cards both evoke and construct also draws on the personal investment required not only by the act of collecting but also by the act of organizing the collection, which involves (re)constructing the narrative of Chávez's life by placing the cards in the proper chronological order, just as one would the photos of one's own children. Furthermore, the primary role of the cards—to provide people with money to make calls and send text messages from their phones—establishes a direct connection between them and the people who connect through them. Mothers talking to their children, aunts talking to their nieces, spouses talking to each other—all these intimate forms of communication among family members are made possible by the cards and the equally intimate and familial engagement with Chávez's life that they perform.

The cards thus blur all kinds of boundaries—between past and present, private and public, old and new, original and copy—and in the process articulate the promise of a reunion that reproduces all the elements of family reunions: a palpable and shared history, the physical and affective intimacy between bodies, the rituals that bring everyone together, and the exchange of looks that locates the individual within a family unit. This familial aspect of the collection is also accentuated by the cards' hybrid nature. As I mentioned, the images on the cards are reproductions of real photographs of Chávez, some well known, like the one where he appears wearing his red beret or the one at the closing of his 2012 campaign, and others less so, like the photograph of him as a toddler. Cruz used all these photographs to create his drawings, where the impersonal camera is replaced by the much more personal touch of the hand that draws the body, producing it while reproducing it. This overlapping of the photograph and hand-drawn portrait in the cards heightens the feeling of intimacy and interconnection that allows the Chávez of the cards to "stay in the family," not just as a recognizable image but also as the trace left behind by a body that was once

there, sharing spaces and gazes as it actively participated in the handmade reproduction of its image.

A familial body thus materializes in the cards, its familiarity evoked not only by the familiar-turned-familial images of Chávez they capture but also through the recollections and behaviors that they trigger. This familial body calls to mind a quote by Roland Barthes that Marianne Hirsch returns to repeatedly in *Family Frames*:

> The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed. (Barthes, quoted in Hirsch [1997] 2012, 5)

Hirsch argues that through the image of the umbilical cord, Barthes makes photography "inherently familial and material, akin to the very processes of life and death" (5). Furthermore, she points out that photographs, "as the only material traces of an irrecoverable past, derive their power and their important cultural role from their embeddedness in the fundamental rites of family life" (5). Before discussing those rites in more detail, let us stay a bit longer with the image of the umbilical cord and examine how it dialogues with the images displayed in the phone card collection. The umbilical cord is an instrument for Barthes to emphasize photography's role as a material emanation of the past; rather than being just a representation of the past, photography is a real, tangible link to it that burdens the present with the truth of what "has been" (Barthes's well-known "ça a été"). In the case of the cards, we saw how that link was visually incorporated in their design, through the yellowed surface and worn edges that make the truth of the past represented in each card as tangible as the card itself. But in Barthes's metaphorical description, that materiality is intrinsically tied to a sense of biological familiarity contained in the umbilical cord itself, a connection that in his case was inspired (and authenticated) by the Winter Garden picture of his mother that he is referring to, and the "mother/son/daughter" relationship that he reads in it (5).

In the cards, the umbilical cord as a biological thing is not as easily detectable, since there is no preestablished familial connection between the

collector and Chávez. However, the cards seem to perform that familial connection both individually and as a group. Individually, their size, the close-ups, and the poses Chávez adopts make them *just like* the family photographs one carries around in a wallet, specifically those that parents have of their children, taken to mark their most important life events. Collectively, they are the (hi)story of a life told in the "family album" format, as exemplified by the captions that read: "Chávez bebé," "Chávez adolescente," "Chávez cadete," "Chávez deportista," and so forth. These inscriptions remind us of the narratives we construct when we choose, organize, and label photographs as we are putting together our own family albums. This performance of family results not in a spectacle to be watched but in a ritual to participate in through the act of collecting, which the cards turn into an act of *recollecting* that enables Chávez to descend from the gigantic posters, graffiti, and banners and move into the private spaces of the family circle and into the private stories of family life.

Photos like the ones we see on the cards thus not only capture snapshots of family life, they make that life and that family possible. As Hirsch points out:

> Now, more than one hundred years later, photography's social functions are integrally tied to the ideology of the modern family. The family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness; it both chronicles family rituals and constitutes a prime objective of those rituals. Because the photograph gives the illusion of being a simple transcription of the real, a trace touched directly by the event it records, it has the effect of naturalizing cultural practices and of disguising their stereotyped and coded characteristics. As photography immobilizes the flow of family life into a series of snapshots, it perpetuates familial myths while seeming merely to record actual moments in family history. At the end of the twentieth century, the family photograph, widely available as a medium of familial self-presentation in many cultures and subcultures, can reduce the strains of family life by sustaining an imaginary cohesion, even as it exacerbates them by creating images that real families cannot uphold. (Hirsch [1997] 2012, 7)

This "imaginary cohesion" derives not only from the photographs holding people together inside their frame and in the contexts where photos are shared—at family gatherings where albums are passed around and commented

on—but also from the look of recognition that allows those who view the photographs to see themselves connected to the people and the events captured there. In Hirsch's words,

> when I visually engage with others familially, when I look through my family albums, I enter a network of looks that dictate affiliative feelings, positive or negative feelings of recognition that can span miles and generations: I "recognize" my great-grandmother because I am told that she is an ancestor, not because she is otherwise in any way similar or identifiable to me. It is the context of the album that creates the relationship, not necessarily any preexistent sign. (Hirsch [1997] 2012,53)

In the case of the cards, this familial look is constructed through the combination of two different narratives. On one hand, there is the narrative that makes Chávez recognizable as the figure repeatedly glorified in public and private spaces and that falls in line with the sort of memory practices promoted by Maduro's regime and Chávez's party—practices that include making Chávez a hypervisible and constant part of the landscape through posters, banners, statues, and so on. On the other, there is the more personalized narrative that the collection evokes and that is recognizable because it reproduces the kind of rituals families practice—such as looking at photographs together, making an album—along with the affiliative/parental feelings that are awakened by witnessing a little boy growing into a man. Together, they allow for the collectors and keepers of the cards to go from seeing Chávez's images as familiar to seeing them as familial: he becomes a member of the family and part of the family's history.

This familial look cast upon Chávez leads to his insertion in the family narrative and thus makes him part of the recollections that bind family members together and position them in relation to one another. This does not mean that Chávez necessarily acquires a predetermined role within those relations, but rather that he is an active part of the history that shapes them, occasionally filling in familial gaps. This transition from a state-endorsed, public, official memory narrative to the private, personalized memory narrative of the family is mediated by acts of creativity and imagination inspired by the cards themselves. In this way, the narrative that the cards construct and that keeps Chávez "in the family" is tangentially related to Hirsch's conceptualization of "postmemory" as "a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation"

([1997] 2012, 22). It is important to note that Hirsch defines this term in relation to the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives belonging to previous generations shaped by traumatic events that cannot be understood or recreated, which is clearly not the context surrounding the collectible phone cards. Nevertheless, the concept illuminates both the distance between the biographical narrative in the cards and the autobiographical narrative of the collector, and the processes that bridge that distance. Those processes entail a creative and affective engagement with the cards that makes them familial and, as a result, burdensome.

This familial burden is one of the points Hirsch repeatedly emphasizes in her analysis, which sheds light on that burden and on different ways that photography allows for it to be alleviated. The burden that family pictures impose is tied to the "familial look," which is at once affiliative and surveilling:

> The familial look, then, is not the look of a subject looking at an object, but a mutual look of a subject looking at an object who is a subject looking (back) at an object. Within the family, as I look I am always also looked at, seen, scrutinized, surveyed, monitored. Familial subjectivity is constructed relationally, and in these relations I am always both self and other(ed), both speaking and looking subject and spoken and looked at object: I am subjected and objectified. (Hirsch [1997] 2012, 9)

The familial look becomes a "gaze" once the camera intervenes. In distinguishing between these two, Hirsch draws on Jacques Lacan and differentiates "a noninstrumental, embodied, situated, and mutual maternal look from the gaze-effect created by the conjunction of the mother and the camera, coextensive with the workings of ideology and with the ways in which society imagines authoritative vision" (156).

In chapter 2, I discussed the surveilling gaze in the context of Chávez's disembodied eyes. Now, with the cards, we encounter that gaze once again. If we look at the objects right next to the card collection on the vendor's red tablecloth, we will see a small pile of Chávez's eyes in bead form, waiting to be turned into charms for bracelets or pendants for necklaces. The proximity between the collection and the eyes, incidental but unsurprising given the ubiquity of the eyes, sheds light on the ideological narrative concealed underneath the family story told in the cards. With the familial recognition and affective identification with the little boy who grows into a man comes a familiarity with the state that imposes, on one hand, a set of demands and

expectations—loyalty, behavior that would make Chávez proud, a sense of conformity tied to the confines of the family structure—and, on the other, a commitment to keeping Chávez alive within the personalized and private space reserved for family members.

Unlike the surveilling gaze associated with Chávez's disembodied eyes, however, the gaze in the context of the phone cards emphasizes tactility and reciprocity. In fact, through the textures mimicked in the cards' design, the specter becomes something to be *handled*; he (after)lives through the buying, selling, exchanging, touching, folding, rubbing, dirtying, and passing on of the cards, which then become more than images meant for mere observation. They become personal treasures that insert Chávez into the dynamics of familial inheritance. Furthermore, within those dynamics, the spectral gaze becomes reciprocal: not only is meeting the specter's gaze a possibility, but it is a familial duty that is fulfilled by creating the narratives that frame the collection and that make Chávez part of the family. Chávez's spectral authority then stops being associated with the impersonal command of the state and the law and becomes tangled with the affective burden of family obligations, which, as Hirsch suggests, are both hard to pinpoint and even harder to resist.

It is precisely this irresistible—though not unchallengeable—nature of family obligations that drives the state to create narratives and perform rituals that appeal to familial duty and love as it looks for ways to ground its legitimacy and authority. After all, blood, the saying goes, is thicker than water, which is why it was so central to Chávez's rhetoric. Chávez was all about blood. Not the blood spilled in battle—he, unlike Che Guevara, did not fight imperialism on the ground, with his body, holding a gun—but family blood, the blood that allowed him to insert himself, ex post facto, in revolutionary history and the nation's long tradition of insurgency. Hence his appeal to his great-great-grandfather, Maisanta, the outlaw who was converted into an epic hero thanks to the publication of José León Tapia's *Maisanta: El último hombre a caballo* in 1974. This lineage allowed Chávez to claim a place in a family history of revolutionary men, a link he repeatedly performed by wearing and exhibiting Maisanta's scapulary of Our Lady of Perpetual Help around his neck.22His own blood, in turn, externalized and re-presented in his party's signature red T-shirt, served as a unifying locus of identification for the people, *his* people, people dressed in red who, gathered around the president—also dressed in red—would vow to help him fight his illness, sometimes going as far as sacrificing their "real" family members to cure him, as we saw in chapter 1.

In Chávez's absence, the phone cards perform this connection through their invocation and evocation of family and, particularly, of the family album. The family album, we have seen, does not look back, at least not with the same intensity and stubbornness with which it looks around and looks forward. Creating, preserving, and sharing it are all forms of copresence, a "being with" that gathers people, alive and dead, old and young, and puts them always in relation to each other, always for and in each other, temporal and physical barriers collapsing as the family is brought into being over and over again. The photographs that belong in a family album—photographs like those adapted for the phone cards—thus function as a form of what Stewart in her exploration of longing calls "appurtenance": "an addition to the body which forms an attachment, transforming the very boundary, or outline, of the self" (1993, xi). The shape and size of the cards make them such an addition: the "missing bits" along the edges crave something (another card, another body) to complete them, and their pocket-size form seems to demand proximity to the body, which, as we discovered with the id holder and the seller's collection, alters identities and generates new affective bonds. Furthermore, the cards capture a kind of Chávez that does not come with preconstructed and thus exclusionary narratives. The words in the captions are "raw" in that they can be used as building blocks in the personal narratives of the collector/family member: "bebé" (baby), "deportista" (sportsman), "café bendito" (blessed coffee), and "llovió en verano" (it rained in summer) are just the beginning of the story, not the whole of it.

Chávez afterlives in that narrative impulse, in that jump to the future where the family will carry on—and Chávez will carry on with it. He afterlives in the animating labor that goes into a family album: the energy that awakens the limbs and activates memory as photographs are gathered and held, as pages are written on and turned, as gazes—loving, authoritative, judging—are cross-temporally exchanged. The evidence of that labor, the proof that it is ongoing, is sweat: the kind that yellows images and that materially sutures past to present. *Sweat and not dust*—dust being the sign of a past preserved but forgotten, sweat being a symptom of animation, the secretion that alerts us to a past that haunts.

Chávez, the giant, thus afterlives as a miniature.

The reverse, too, allows for spectral lingering. In the next section, we will see how making the miniature gigantic can also conjure up a specter. First, however, one last thing about the family album, or rather, one last warning: it hides things. In a way, this is inevitable. In the name of harmony and the survival of the family, the album glosses over conflicts and absences, losses

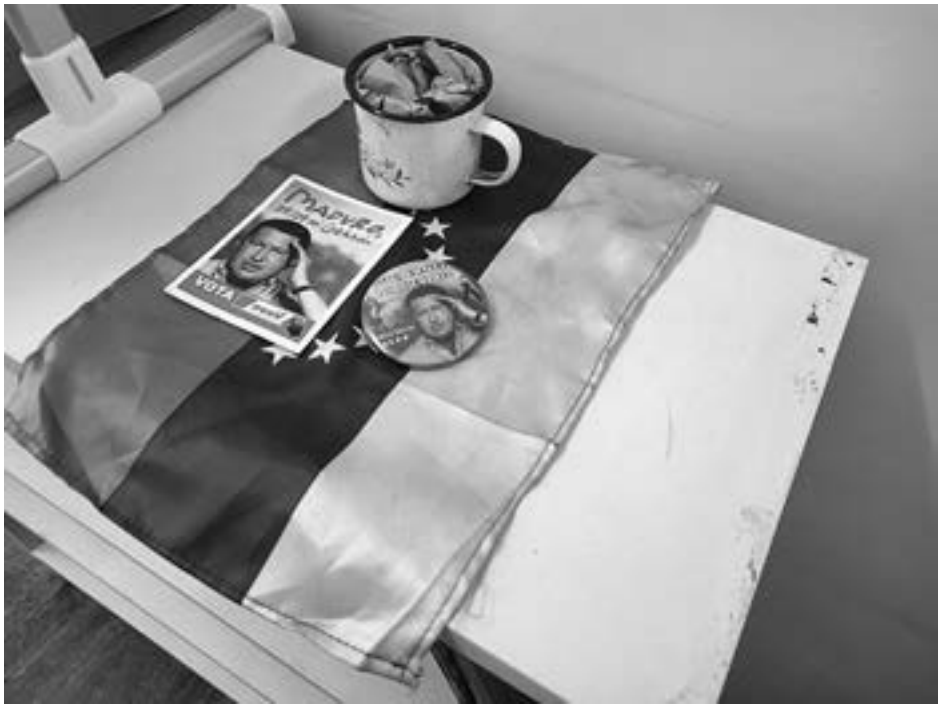
and fractures. In the context of Venezuela, however, what these cards hide, what they distract from, is the country's deteriorating telecommunications system. The cant v that made the cards is the same cant v that regularly fails to provide fast internet service, that carries on with malfunctioning infrastructure, and that has created a significant geographical divide in internet access.[23] The cards both conceal and reveal this reality. They conceal it by appealing first to the collector, then, maybe, to phone and internet users, and they reveal it by doing the same thing: the "Gigante nuestro" collection is just that, a series of collectibles, a gift from/for the Comandante. Why would we expect anything else from it? What better task for cant v to undertake than honoring Chávez's memory? What more can a telecommunications company achieve than putting us "in touch" with the dead?

Parenthesis: Chávez and Me

I, too, collect Chávez (figure 3.10). In my office, a tattered box holds:

1. A small Venezuelan flag missing its plastic pole that someone once waved during a march in support of Chávez.
2. An old rusty pin with the words "¡Viva Chávez por siempre!" and "(1954–2013 qepd)" (May Chávez live forever, 1954–2013 rest in peace) accompanying the portrait of a young Chávez doing a military salute.
3. A pamphlet featuring the same Chávez that appears on the pin, surrounded by the words "Maduro, desde mi corazón" (Maduro, from my heart), the slogan of Maduro's 2013 presidential campaign.
4. A plastic keychain displaying a smiling Chávez.
5. A large poster of Chávez with the words "Con Chávez siempre lealtad absoluta. ¡Socialismo o Nada! Mérida Gobierno Socialista. Lealtad con Chávez" (Always with Chávez, absolute loyalty. Socialism or nothing! Socialist government of Mérida. Loyalty with Chávez).
6. A chipped tin coffee cup: the twin of the one Elizabeth Torres sets out every day for her Comandante to spectrally drink his coffee in the Santo Hugo Chávez del 23 chapel.

I did not purchase or ask for any of these objects, and, up until the moment I received them, I did not want them. "Collecting" then might not be the right word for what I did: they are perhaps not a collection and I am not



3.10 Flag, pin, voting card, and coffee cup.

a collector. True collectors, faithful ones, hold their breath as they imagine the delight and pride that comes with finding "the next one." They carefully build their collection a home: they polish wood and shine metal for the collected objects to be housed the way they deserve, properly displayed as the treasures they are. They invest time and money, their limits on both vanishing when they encounter the marvelous and the priceless. True collectors, faithful ones, gladly coexist with their collection and, in certain moments, give in to it, become part of it, and inhabit it.

Me? I did (and do) none of that.

I did, however, hold my breath when the aforementioned objects were placed in my hands by their previous owners. People—generous, kind people—who gave them to me because they could afford to do so, because they had many more objects that were similar and thus could spare these redundant pieces, because they were instructed to give them away, or because they wanted to end our conversation with a gift. I first politely refused to take them, but they refused my refusal. I then offered to pay for

some of them, but that too was met with a strong no. So, I kept them. The box that holds them—previously, they were contained in a paper bag—has traveled with me from Mérida to Caracas to New York City to Ithaca. I often think of throwing it away. It would be so easy, I tell myself, as I look at the trash can and consider its tempting proximity. Easy, and yet impossible, completely out of the question. I feel indebted, infinitely so, to the people who owned them before me, people I will never see again, people who probably forgot we ever met and would likely not care what happened to these few objects, people whose loyalty to Chávez radiates from the objects themselves, making me perpetually uncomfortable. The discomfort never translates into surrender, though: I cannot give them up, a realization that hits me tangled up in Marcel Mauss's warnings about gifts and the strings attached to them ([1925] 2011).Warnings I ignored, consciously or not. Therefore, here we are, and here they stay.

Colleagues, family, friends, and acquaintances who happen to enter my office when the collection is on full display look at it, look at me, and look back at it. I can hear the question before they formulate it, sometimes angrily, sometimes not: Are you for or against Chávez? Or, more commonly, are you *chavista* or *opositora*? It is the question every Venezuelan and every Venezuelanist has to answer. Option A: *Chavista* (What does it mean to be *chavista* if Chávez is dead? I often wonder). Option B: *Opositora* (What exactly are we opposing anymore? And in the name of what?) Option C: *Nini* ("neither one nor the other"—and by far the answer that triggers the strongest rejection, the most deeply felt indignation, *plain old disgust*).

It sounds inconsequential, but it is not. For a scholar, A, B, or C might determine the publication of an article, an invitation to give a talk, the inclusion in a special issue. For everyone else, it is a personal matter: the beginning, the continuation, or the end of a relationship, of a family gathering, or of a friendship. Also, a work issue: being hired, being fired, being fired *and* sent to jail. And, a survival issue: receiving a box of food or necessary medicine.

A, B, or C.

When asked in the context of my Chávez collection, I always marvel at how strongly the question speaks of the bond between collector and collection. Whatever mastery the collector might believe they have over their collection is fictional: in the collection's proximity, the collector is one more object, the last object and the first, the only part of the collection that cannot truly leave it.

While Chávez was alive, I dutifully answered the question. Easily, heatedly, decisively, repeatedly, the way I, as a Venezuelan, was supposed

to: pulse racing, no blinking. Now, Chávez is dead, and the question needs reformulation. While waiting for it, for a different question that I know will take its time to come—if it ever comes at all—I look at the Chávez on the keychain, frozen in a smile that does not reach me but that passes by me, a subtle gesture that speaks of the not so subtle persistence of his stubborn anachronism. Life and death neatly wrapped up in plastic, the shadow of a life that abruptly disrupts the present and burdens it with the weight of a past that, being spectral, weighs nothing and yet encompasses everything.

How long, then, until a new question is articulated? How long until Chávez, *deceased*, ceases to be part of the equation? The waiting, I realize, marks the lifespan of the specter—Chávez's specter—and of my collection as it stands now: something other than a pile of unwanted souvenirs, something in between a coffin and a Ouija board.

Yours, Chávez

What does a giant's signature look like? The answer is on the wall, more specifically, on the walls of housing complexes and apartment buildings built by the Gran Misión Vivienda Venezuela (gmvv).

Chávez proposed the gmvv program in 2011with the goal of providing dignified housing for the homeless, the poor, and those living in geomorphological high-risk areas that often endure floods and mudslides. Like other *misiones* in Venezuela, the gmvv was funded in large part through Petróleos de Venezuela, the state-owned oil company, and like every plan Chávez proposed as he announced the epic transformation of Venezuela into a socialist society, the gmvv 's task was extraordinarily ambitious: the construction of three million houses in ten years.[24]These houses could be individual units that, together, would form "villas socialistas" (socialist villas), or they could be apartment buildings of ten or more floors.[25]

Chávez's construction dream came true in 2020. The three-million milestone was televised on *Jueves de vivienda*, a show that films the "handing over" of the housing units, broadcast by the government-sponsored channel Venezolana de Televisión. In December 2020, the channel's web page posted the video, featuring the historic landmark of constructing over three million homes and showing the handing over of ninety housing units in La Gran Villa housing development.[26]Though the event was supposed to also highlight the commemorative plaque and plaza built in homage to Darío Vivas—governor of Capital District who died due to covid- 19 complications—Chávez remained, in rhetoric and in the space itself, the

central figure. As the reporter, the mayor, and the family that received the first house thanked Maduro and Chávez for it—repeating the slogan "con Chávez y Maduro el pueblo está seguro" (with Chávez and Maduro the people are safe)—the camera showed the stencil of Chávez's eyes on the yellow walls of the buildings and on top of the gigantic billboard announcing the 3.3 million houses, a small poster of his face overlooking every house's living room, and a metal cutout of him near the entrance to the villa. The spectacular nature of the event was further intensified by repeated allusions to the United States' sanctions on the country, the pandemic, and the "fascist oligarchy": all factors that made reaching 3.3 million homes appear nothing short of heroic.

The spectacularity of this particular moment—and the spectacularity and monumentality of the task undertaken by the gmvv of building so many houses so quickly—can be read alongside similar projects carried out throughout Venezuela's history, particularly during the dictatorships of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908–35) and Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952–58) and during the first term of Carlos Andrés Pérez's presidency (1974–79). Taken together, these projects constitute the visual and material manifestation of what Fernando Coronil called Venezuela's "magical state": a state that, fueled by the country's seemingly infinite oil reserves, "astonishes through the marvels of power rather than convinces through the power of reason," and manufactures "dazzling development projects that engender collective fantasies of progress" (1997, 3). In the years following Chávez's death, however, the state's magic underwent a transformation: it acquired a necromantic hue. The number and size of the buildings were only half of the magical act; the other half was the conjuring up of Chávez, whose spectral presence became visible, part of both the inside and the outside of the buildings. Inside, we see him in the living room, in between a poster of Simón Bolívar and one of Maduro, a layout that reproduces the way the three figures must appear in official buildings and public offices. Outside, he lingers on the walls, in the magnified reproduction of his signature.

We have seen Chávez's signature before. In chapter 1, we saw how, as part of the commemorative events following the announcement of Chávez's death, a number of people chose to have it tattooed on their bodies, which then became fleshy graves where the Comandante could carry on living. Now the signature reappears, drawn in red on the walls of apartment buildings where it spans seven floors. Its dimensions "decompress" the giant miniaturized in the phone cards: Chávez, "gigante nuestro," exits the family

album and grows in our imagination until his hands can grasp a pen big enough to draw such a signature.

Whereas the miniature awakens in us the impulse to create an environment for it, the gigantic, as Stewart argues, "becomes our environment, swallowing us as nature or history swallows us" (1993, 89). And the signature does contain us, as part of the environment and as the environment itself, both because its gigantic dimensions and its location deny us the opportunity to truly confront it, and because behind it people have made homes: homes that the signature on the wall simultaneously certifies (legally speaking), hides, points to, protects, and, we could argue with Stewart, swallows. Though just a metaphor, the idea of Chávez's signature "swallowing" the homes underscores the subtle violence that permeates the choice to draw it where it cannot be reached and thus erased. In fact, while strikingly visible to passersby, the signature is not what the inhabitants of the buildings see when they stand on their balconies or look outside their windows. It is only when coming home, when standing in front of the building or passing by it on the street, that the signature occupies their field of vision—a "welcome back" they can soon leave behind. The signature thus is and is not there, and it is that liminality—the conjuring up of a presence that lingers without becoming too disruptive—that guarantees it is forgotten and, once forgotten, routinely accepted.

Accepting its presence also comes easily because it is not a foreign, unrecognizable image but one that is familiar and effortlessly recollected. In fact, before it landed on walls and skins, the signature had already become a recurring feature of the Bolivarian Revolution's visual rhetoric. As Lisa Blackmore points out, the ceremonial signing of documents during televised meetings and events "became a common part of the repetitive syntax of *cadenas nacionales* . . . that were a commonly used media platform during Chávez's government" (2014, 242). Moreover, when it came time for Chávez to activate his encrypted electronic signature, he did so on live television, sharing with the audience the password he had chosen to activate the card he received as part of the process: unsurprisingly, "maisanta2021."[27] A few minutes before the activation occurred, Chávez had signed a document by hand and the camera had zoomed in for a close-up of the signature, which appeared drawn in red ink next to the words "máxima eficiencia" (maximum efficiency) that he had also scribbled on the page. With enough practice, anyone could reproduce Chávez's signature, and that seems to have been the point. Instead of keeping it hidden, afraid of identity theft, Chávez

chose to repeatedly show himself drawing it, the power contained in it seemingly put at the service of anyone and its referential nature blown up to encompass no longer just Chávez but everyone else too. Chávez's signature was the people's signature: both the people and Chávez could, technically, sign "Chávez."

It is thus not surprising that the signature outlived the signer, that it kept being drawn long after Chávez's death was announced. That is, after all, what signatures are for. Drawing them, Derrida reminds us, implies the "actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer" (1988, 20). But why draw it on the walls of the gmvv apartment buildings? Buildings that all share the same design and leave little room for confusion regarding who was responsible for their construction—Chávez, Maduro, the government, the Bolivarian Revolution—thanks to spectacular inauguration events, commemorative posters, the names given to them (like Villa Socialista Hugo Chávez), the *Jueves de vivienda* episodes, and Maduro's frequent reminders on live television. Moreover, why Chávez's signature and not something else, like his name printed in big red letters or a blown-up reproduction of his face? The answer, I propose, has to do with the signature's inherently spectral nature: the temporal juggling that allows it to conjure up a presence, to invoke rather than evoke, and to conflate past, present, and future.

Signatures, like all forms of handwriting, are distinctively intimate. As Sonja Neef points out, in spite of digital writing equipment,

> handwriting holds its own within the bastions of private and personal correspondence—as formal condolences or (even still) as intimate love-talk—as also in the manifold practices of signing, from signing one's name in an autograph, via the engraving or tattooing of one's skin as a mark of authenticity, through to spraying on walls: everywhere it is a matter of establishing or maintaining one's unique identity. Now as much as in the past, handwriting . . . remains the means of writing for the *aide mémoire*: one's diary, shopping list and a quick note on the phone. (Neef 2011, 25)

In her work, Neef, following Derrida, problematizes the signature's claim to uniqueness by highlighting its iterability: the fact that, for a signature to be a signature, it has to be reproducible. Before addressing that argument and its implications for Chávez's spectrality though, let us stay a bit longer with the intimacy that the signature exudes regardless of how many times it is drawn. This intimacy is not tied to the signer's unique identity—which

the signature (re)presents and reaffirms—but rather to our understanding of the signature (and of handwriting generally) as a *bodily* gesture, as the mark that materializes when a body (hand) presses an object (pen) onto a surface. While the eye moves easily across typed letters as it reads the words they form, it gets "stuck" in the twists and turns of a signature both because the signature is not to be read but to be decoded and because the eye cannot help but notice the (now invisible) signing hand that hovers above it. Put differently, the signature never appears by itself: it always drags with it the hand that created it. Hence why love letters and condolences, as Neef points out, tend to be handwritten, at least in part: while the message conveyed is important, it is not as important as the *presence* of the sender, the need/demand to be *with* the message's addressee. Not only does the handwriting and, specifically, the signature, convey the message "I am with you, here, accompanying you, from a distance," it performs the message by being the proof of presence, the imprint left by a hand that is too, to a degree, trapped in the imprint.

In the case of Chávez's signature, this intimacy is further emphasized in two ways. First, in the process of recollection that the signature, being well known and widely reproduced, triggers. Encountering it on the wall is not a surprise but a form of déjà vu: we recognize it, we have seen it before. This familiarity intensifies precisely because the signature has been enlarged, rendered excessively legible to leave no room for confusion. Thus, like Chávez's eyes discussed in chapter 2, the signature does not appear as exceptional or eventful but as ongoing: one more link in an infinite chain that makes clear that it was already there and will be there again. The ordinary is blown out of proportion so that its ordinariness is noticeable but not shocking, so that it pulsates with a familiar hum that has the potential to transport us to that moment when Chávez activated his electronic signature and the camera recording the event was angled so that we—the viewers—would be *right there*, close to Chávez, as close as a child sitting on his lap, his signing hand almost our hand too. We thus know the signature as if our very own hand had drawn it; that is, we know it intimately.

The intimate nature of Chávez's signature is intensified by the color it is frequently drawn in and the associations that come with it. While the signature has been drawn in black and in white—a palette that reproduces that of Chávez's eyes—it is often also drawn in red, the color of Chávez's party, evoking blood. What Neef calls the "somatic dimension of writing" (2011, 19)—a dimension underscored by the comparison between the flow of ink and the flow of bodily fluids—becomes even more evident as the red

gives the impression that the signature could have been drawn in ink or in blood. The blood, of course, could only be metaphorical—no one would believe that Chávez's signature on the walls would ever be drawn using actual human blood—but that does not make the association any less powerful. As Thomas Fechner-Smarsly argues, compared with ink, "blood seems much more auratic, even frightening, because blood is directly related to the body, either to the body of someone who voluntarily gives blood or has a blood test, or someone who has been wounded" (2006, 200). In the case of Chávez's signature, it is the presence of the body (rather than the state it is in) and its authenticity that the ink/blood highlights. It is not only a form of handwriting—and an appeal to the intimacy that it evokes—but also a *hand, writing*: a hand containing blood vessels, one of which could have accidentally broken and thus allowed for ink and blood to mix and leave a biological trace, a trace containing a bit of body in it.

This "bit of body" comes back to us with each iteration of Chávez's signature and the differences that make them unique. The differences are subtle: they stand out only if you look for them. They are an assault on the original and, simultaneously, a confirmation of its power and proof of its authenticity. When placed side by side, Signature A (figure 3.11) and Signature *A* (figure 3.12) do not engage in a battle between the genuine/original and the false/copy. The differences in the spacing, in the sharpness of the *V*, and in the ninety-degree angles on the top and bottom, are not evidence of forgery, of a different hand, a non-Chávez hand, tracing a fake signature. It is always his hand, and always his signature, as confirmed by the fact that many of the signatures also have the word "Chávez" in printed letters separate from the cursive flourish. Whatever irregularity catches the eye is precisely the proof that the signing hand is, in fact, human: vulnerable to the impossibility of drawing each letter identically each time. The relationship between the two then, as Neef argues, cannot be "covered by the dual concepts genuine/false, original/copy, individual piece/series, but integrates these oppositions into a dialectic third term, 'which connects the same kind with the different and the different with the same kind'" (2011, 51).

This "dialectic third term" also does something else: in going beyond the binaries Neef identifies, it allows us to focus on the physicality of the signatures, the heat that radiates from the brushing of hand, pen, and paper/wall against each other, tied to the suspicion that something of the signer remains, trapped in the twists and turns of his signature, vibrating, agitated, bearing witness to and also completely disregarding the irrevocability of his absence. Each signature—a copy and an original in its own right—can thus

3.11 Chávez's signature in red ink on the wall of an apartment building.

be thought of as a preserving jar conserving the "auratic here-and-now of the physical touch emanating from the 'original'" (Neef 2011,208), a touch that reaches out, stretching across past, present, and future, anticipating an always imminent and intimate encounter with the eyes of a reader who comes to it from the future present. In the case of Chávez's signature and its recurring appearance on the walls of gmvv constructions, however, the preserving jar is more than that: it is a genie's lamp, and the genie inside it, the *specter* it holds, is the kind powerful enough to make houses appear seemingly out of thin air.

Though Chávez visibly haunts the reproduction of his signature—in the handwritten "Chávez" lingering above the long line trailing below the vertical scribble—all signatures are spectral, performing the sort of temporal juggling that wraps presence and absence around each other and drags both past and future into the here and now. Derrida argues as much in "Signature

3.12 Chávez's signature in white on the brick wall of an apartment building.

Event Context." He defines the signature as implying "the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains his having-been present in a past *now* or present [*maintenant*] which will remain a future *now* or present [*maintenant*], thus in a general *maintenant*, in the transcendental form of presentness" (1988, 20; original emphasis). This temporality of the signature, the continuity it establishes between past and future, both coexisting in "a general *maintenant*," is tied to the

signature's paradox: the fact that while it must retain its absolute singularity, which evinces the uniqueness of the signer, it must also be reproducible. As Derrida argues, in order to function, "a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, by corrupting its identity and singularity, divides its seal" (20).

Derrida's conceptualization of the signature underscores a form of temporality contained in the *maintenant*, which can be translated into English as "now," "already," and "henceforth." This suggests a multidirectional temporality that is also spectral because it projects the past into both present and future, and because it animates the past, making it seem alive thanks to the ongoingness—the *maintenant*, the "transcendental form of presentness," the promise of iterability—that the signature performs. At the same time, the signature repeatedly points to the singularity of the signer who simultaneously asserts their presence and ensures that their presence will be unnecessary at a later time, the signature both signaling that they were there and guaranteeing that their words will carry on without them in the near and distant future.

Taken together, these characteristics illuminate a compelling argument for the reproduction of Chávez's signature on the walls of the gmvv buildings. While a historically relevant date or simply Chávez's name on the buildings would be forms of commemoration looking back to a past that has already passed and therefore is no more, using Chávez's signature gives him an afterlife, the possibility of an "ongoingness" that is spectacular—the spectacle of the gigantic, of the impossible made possible—and relational. Relational because, while the signature is a seemingly inconsequential (yet gigantic) "final touch" added to the buildings, it is embedded in the process of creation of a site that will become a home. This process is represented by the signed document that commands the apartment building or housing complex be constructed; once the document is signed, construction begins and, after a certain amount of time, a house will be built and delivered. However, this sequence of events is collapsed by the act of placing the signature on the outer wall of the house or apartment. The authorization, the construction, and the final product are made to overlap and become simultaneous; power, represented by Chávez, appears twice as powerful because its promises are fulfilled immediately.[28]

This temporal collapse is accompanied by a spatial collapse that, Blackmore argues, turns the residential buildings into archives and, consequently, into sites for commemoration and memory:

> The buildings, decorated with the giant signature, proffer a testimony (document) of Chávez's authority to have them built, while this *commandment* and, by extension, the commencement of more dignified life that these buildings were tasked with are returned to the domestic scene. What this gesture thus seeks to imply is a direct link between power—via the personalist iconography of *chavismo*—and *el pueblo* (the people) who inhabit the building/document/monument that is proposed as a stimulus for commemoration. (Blackmore 2014, 245)

For Blackmore, the coming together of the archive, the document, and the monument through the reproduction of the signature on the buildings allows for an act of "capturing life" that enables Chávez to keep on living as that "original auratic object" that the building/document/monument promises to bring us closer to. For that capture to occur, however, the archive, the document, and the monument have to be tampered with so as not to succumb to the monumental stillness that would deactivate Chávez's power, understood as an ongoing, compelling, and effective act that demands more than commemoration precisely because *it is not done and over with*. Hence why the signature in particular is essential: its multidirectional temporality animates the monument just as it "completes" the residential building and promises the construction of a new one, making Chávez—the signer, *always*—a political and social actor who continues performing his official duties after his death.29

Furthermore, there is something "nonofficial," "unstately," pulsating in the signature as it is reproduced on the buildings' walls, an aesthetic element that takes it away from the document and the archive and aligns it more with graffiti, with the irreverence of a form of writing that is less about communication and meaning production and more about marking territory and producing an act of address directed at a second person, a "you" that the graffiti, like an unruly—and gigantic—hand, shamelessly touches. This marriage of the irreverent and the stately, authority and disobedience, archive and home, and document and graffiti staged by the signature injects it with a vibrancy, a liveliness that transforms Chávez from an object of commemoration to the subject of an address. The link that Blackmore argues is implied in the signature thus does not just tie together power/Chávez and the pueblo but puts them in touch in a form of relationality that, cherished or not, desired or not, comes with a burden that disguises itself as gratitude.

This gratitude is an act of ongoing remembrance that does not look back—at a dead Chávez, anchored in the past—but instead stays in a temporally

dislocated present, directed at a Chávez who is right there, always on the wall, a potential family member and co-owner of the house for, as Yaneira Wilson Wetter in her study of the gmvv points out, many inhabitants of these buildings refer to them as "Chávez's houses" (Wilson Wetter 2020, 14). And because he is right there, that gratitude demands loyalty, gets lost in loyalty, and reaches beyond Chávez to the current government whose survival partially depends on the strength and endurance of that loyalty.

This gratitude grows loud at events such as the celebration of the construction of three million homes, discussed above. Outside those televised, spectacular, and highly advertised events, it carries on as what Jon Beasley-Murray calls the "unseen and barely audible hum of micropolitics that pervades our daily routines; it is like background noise in that we are almost oblivious to its ongoing importance, the ways in which it structures our all too familiar, endlessly repeated quotidian activities" (2010, 180–81). Habits, according to Beasley-Murray, drive and are driven by this "barely audible hum," which, in the context of Chávez's signature and the gratitude that it aims to trigger, is in fact boomingly loud, reproduced in space with a frequency that makes it too banal to be noticed, its presence accepted not (or not only) because of political allegiance to Chávez and the revolution, but because it does not cause any violent disruption. Yet, as Beasley-Murray reminds us, what is habitual is rarely inconsequential. Habits form our sense of time and place, our being in the world; they reproduce "our corporeal assent to power's legitimacy" (192), which, in the post-Chávez era, depends, among other factors, on Chávez's ongoingness, on him *still* being there, *still* engaging with people, guaranteeing the fulfillment of the promise of the Bolivarian Revolution. Living with his signature, accepting (actively or passively) its thereness, is thus consenting to live with the subtle yet incessant imperative to be grateful to the (not-so-dead) man who allowed the house to be built and to share with him the right to own it.

Chávez's signature, then, acts as the signature at the bottom of an official document, as graffiti, and as the signature on the card accompanying a gift, reminding the recipients, kindly but firmly, whom they need to thank for it.30We cannot think of gifting in this context and not think of Marcel Mauss and his widely cited argument regarding the obligations that come with receiving gifts: "The obligation attached to a gift itself is not inert. Even when abandoned by the giver, it still forms a part of him. Through it he has a hold over the recipient, just as he had, while its owner, a hold over anyone who stole it" ([1925] 2011, 9).31 This "hold" becomes visible in the Chávez haunting the signature, and, less explicitly but perhaps more strongly felt,

in the "invisible hand"—his hand—that hovers above it. A giant's hand, a *giant hand*, one that, large as it is, does not just have a hold over those living under it: it enfolds them, wrapping around them, holding them up, and, most important, not letting go.

I feel the impossible weight of this invisible hand as I drive past the apartment building where it lingers. Who owns these apartments? Legally, the inhabitants, once they finish paying the mortgage. But that straightforward answer does not seem sufficient, at least not while Chávez's signature remains on the wall. Perhaps the uncertainty, the inability to identify a single owner, is the point of the signature, one aligned with the socialist goals of the gmvv and the Bolivarian Revolution: to encourage us to consider private property and collective ownership outside the individualistic, capitalist framework we have grown used to. Or, it might be a subtle form of subjugation and control: the transformation of a right—to dignified housing—into a gift, which produces a sense of obligation, demanding the sort of blind loyalty that would keep an increasingly unpopular government afloat. It might easily be both. The question though remains unresolved, the "who" split into two: an I and a you, a people and a spectral giant, living under the same roof. This form of co-ownership and copresence, the doubling of the I, reappears in two more afterlives granted to Chávez's handwriting: the app tc Chavez Pro and the signature-turned-tattoo. We will look at them together in the final section of this chapter, where we move away from the miniature and the gigantic to focus instead on the average-sized body trapped in between, enveloping one and enveloped by the other.

The Flesh, the Screen, and All the Hands In Between

The fo nt tc Chavez Pro was born from a tattoo. Marcelo Volpe, its creator and designer and part of the collective Trinchera Creativa, developed the idea when he had the slogan "Hasta la victoria siempre" (Always to victory) tattooed on his body in a font that reproduced Chávez's handwriting, which he described as transmitting "urgency and haste with a rather unusual asymmetry, which makes it a good choice for efficiently spreading a message" (Aporrea 2014).32The font became available for download in July 2014 as a gift for Chávez and the people on his birthday, a gift that expanded the commemorative pile of presents that included the collectible phone cards and that were shared with Venezuelan audiences during the televised transmission of the birthday party Maduro organized for Chávez. To create the font, Volpe used the letters Chávez wrote while imprisoned in

Yare after the failed coup against Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992 and the note he sent clarifying that he had not renounced the presidency during the 2002 coup against him. In addition to imitating Chávez's handwriting, tc Chavez Pro offers keystroke shortcuts that produce a number of Chávez's signature phrases—like "Por ahora y para siempre" or "Hasta la victoria siempre"—and, if one clicks on the @ key, Chávez's signature appears on the screen (*Diario Extra* 2014). While the app would be most appealing to people who self-identify as *chavistas*, it is, Volpe clarifies, for everyone, *chavistas* and *opositores* alike, to be used by graphic designers and anyone interested in making art about—and, we could add, with—the Comandante.

Before words were typed instead of handwritten, and barring acts of forgery and cowriting, the traces forming the letters written by a hand as it pressed against a surface were interpreted as being unique to the writing individual. So unique, in fact, that an entire field of handwriting analysis emerged with the promise of catching criminals by reading the traces they left behind in their writing, and books were written with the exclusive task of preserving the (sacred) handwriting of kings and queens.[33] Then digital technologies arrived and called this uniqueness into question by allowing us to write electronically, the choice between fonts a matter of preference rather than proof of an identity. Now comes tc Chavez Pro to put the question of uniqueness and identity back on the table/screen. My thoughts, but Chávez's handwriting, as interpreted and designed by Volpe. Our writing (Chávez's and mine), which is also everyone's writing (or at least everyone who uses the app). Not a sui generis font but one that migrated from a document without fully leaving it and that therefore is here and there (and there, and there, and there). A punctured archive bleeding out not content but form.

It only takes one element of this sequence to set heads spinning.

The implications of the tattoo of Chávez's signature (figure 3.13) are equally noteworthy. Though people had already had Chávez's signature tattooed on their bodies before his death (Blackmore 2014, 243), the practice became an official act of commemoration when, from April 1 to April 5, 2013, the *chavista* youth organization Fundación Fuerza Integradora de la Juventud (fiju) organized sessions where people could get a tattoo of Chávez's signature for free, with the option of getting it in the president's signature red ink (243). Commenting on the reasons the interviewees in fiju 's promotional video gave for getting the tattoo, Blackmore argues that there are three key factors that explain the perceived resonance of the signature: "First, the tattoo is presented as an internalisation of Chávez and his

3.13 Tattoo of Hugo Chávez's signature on a woman's arm. Taken from ABC News web page. See Rueda 2013.

enduring presence through its inscription on the social body. . . . Secondly, the authority connoted by the signature is presented in a positive light. . . . Finally, the tattooed body is presented as an extension of the writing of history" (243). She concludes that the practice of tattooing the signature on one's body "posits the body as a living archive by virtue of the enduring temporality of the tattoo/document, tasked with stimulating collective, 'living history' by incorporating citizens' bodies into the act of inscription" (244).

Blackmore's analysis of the tattoo presents it as a document as understood by Jacques Le Goff—that is, as a vehicle that captures life and can be transmitted via sounds, images, or other means (Blackmore 2014, 236). I would like to push this argument further by taking a closer look at the act of tattooing itself—the injection of ink, the escaping of blood, the replacement of blood by subcutaneously injected ink—and by reflecting on the identity issues that arise when what is being tattooed is someone else's signature. The latter point brings us back to Derrida and complicates his understanding of the signature by dismantling the assumption that a signature lives on outside the body and that it is this split between the signature and the signer that guarantees the power of the former and the spectral return of the latter. In the case of the tattoo, the signature not only reattaches itself to the body—though not Chávez's body—but actually *penetrates it*, blood and

ink corporeally merging in a way that was only metaphorical in the reproduction of Chávez's signature on the walls of buildings. Viewed in this way, the process brings to mind the final scene of Franz Kafka's 1919 short story "In the Penal Colony," the law actually carving the body as it becomes part of it and punishes it, as well as other instances of power tattooing bodies—slaves tattooed by Roman and European colonists, or the tattooed prisoners of Nazi Germany's concentration camps. These resonances recede, however, in light of the testimonies of the tattooed, who see the process as a way of inserting themselves into the living history embodied and inaugurated by Chávez and who voluntarily chose to have his signature become part of their bodies, *as a scar*.

The tattooed signature, like regular tattoos but unlike regular signatures, is, in fact, nothing more than a scar. Getting tattooed is to have one's skin "simultaneously divided and united, pierced and repaired, wounded and healed," operations that involve two bodies: one's own body and the hand of whoever holds the tattoo gun (Neef 2011,244). In the case of the tattooing of Chávez's signature though, we see more than two bodies. Two hands (not a pair), one skin: Chávez's spectral left hand (he was left-handed), the tattoo artist's tattooing hand, and someone's skin, all three choreographed into a *danse* that is no longer *macabre* but *vivante*, with Chávez folding into a body split into three. All of this times four hundred, perhaps more. In her analysis of the tattoo, Blackmore mentions that an article published by the Agencia Venezolana de Noticias announced that an estimated four hundred tattoos of Chávez's signature existed worldwide, though it did not provide the source for that information (2014, 243). Four hundred tattoos: eight hundred hands (half of them spectral), four hundred scars, four hundred flashes. "Flash" is the term for predrawn tattoo designs: it is also a word that allows us to briefly revisit Walter Benjamin's thesis that "the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again" (2006, 391). The tattoo is in fact the successful seizing of the flashing image, but it does not stop there: it seizes the flash and turns it into injectable ink, the ink then becomes blood, the flash turns into a scar, the dead is safely folded into the living. The past is thus not only recognized by the present as being one of its own concerns—to go back to Benjamin's point—but as being present, copresent, a growth on the skin that interlaces old and new tissue and that vibrates with the movement of the blood/ink pumping through it.

Tattooing Chávez's signature on one's body thus shatters the unity and self-containment associated with the autographic signature and complicates

the understanding of the tattoo as a technology of the self. What comes out of it is a specter that haunts from within, one that, wrapped up in flesh, ink, and blood, makes oblivion irrelevant and recollection redundant. And what about the subject? The one with the skin where the enfolding of the inside and outside is performed? As time goes by, the itching, the redness, and the pain that follows a freshly inked tattoo subside and the bumpiness progressively disappears, leaving the skin as smooth as it was before. Smooth yet changed by the permanence of a blended-in other that remains present though undetectable by a caress. This subject is thus mostly themselves, but not completely, growing a scar tissue that alerts them to a foreign trace, which connects them to the living history Blackmore talks about, one whereby "Chávez's presence (real or reproduced) is a prerequisite for the continuation of history, or at least for the narrative that accounts for the Bolivarian Revolution" (2014, 243–44). Continuation: a flow that started before, elsewhere, with someone else, and that the tattoo—and the Chávez in it—provides access to. Another entry into this flow is tc Chavez Pro and the way it toys with archives and citation.

A citation is a bracket, a frame, a cut. A bloodless yet rarely clean surgical removal that takes away as much as it repeats and that can invoke—and thus confirm—the power of the cited original, transform it into something slightly or vastly different or entirely new, or subdue it so that it becomes, in our minds, an inconsequential or repulsive carcass.[34] It thus intentionally looks back, at least in contexts outside plagiarism or accidental repetition, and, in doing so, it makes us look back too, to something we see as if through a glass that always distorts it a bit. On the other side of the glass we find words, images, and behaviors, all available to be claimed and put to use in the present. However, tc Chavez Pro does not show us any of these. It shows us lines, letters drawn in a certain way; it shows us the urgency behind those letters, and the moment that demanded that urgency: not Chávez's writings, but the writing of Chávez's hand, at a point in history when what mattered most was the promise of his return. That is what we cite when we download and type anything with tc Chavez Pro: a potentiality, a bodily readiness, a moment of holding our breaths because something different—and arguably better—is about to happen. This is Chávez's famous "por ahora" (for now) and the hope that materialized with it.[35]

While Chávez's "por ahora" was first articulated in the televised speech he gave on February 4, 1992, after the failed coup against Carlos Andrés Pérez, the two words reappeared in the letters he sent while imprisoned in Yare and became relevant once again during the 2002 coup against him

that ousted him from office for forty-seven hours before he was restored to power.36That Volpe chose letters written during these moments to create tc Chavez Pro means that the app gives us access not only to a creative way of commemorating Chávez but also to an atmosphere of anticipation that translated into the urgency that Volpe says he reads in Chávez's handwriting at those times. The app thus does not capture the relief and the certainty of a victory—the first time Chávez was elected president in 1998, for instance, or the moment he returned to power after the 2002 coup—but what comes before, a moment of doubt, uncertainty, and hope that, because of its partly unactualized state, becomes an invitation, a living history people can take part in, are eager to take part in, in spite of now knowing the outcome, or precisely because they do.

The intimacy that has been at the core of Chávez's spectrality as we have seen it operate throughout this chapter reappears there, in the reliving of the hypothetical, in the reanimated corpses of butterflies from the past that find themselves fluttering around in a stomach in the present, in the recollection of half-formed trajectories that, Kathleen Stewart argues, are ultimately the most compelling because in them the body is still unanchored, and, therefore, feels "most intimate, familiar, and alive" (2007, 212). In her words, "when the body is beside itself, it pulses in the mutual impact of dream and matter, hesitation and forward thrust. It wants to be part of the flow. It wants to be in touch. It wants to be touched. It flexes its muscles in a state of readiness, hums like a secret battery kept charged, registers stress in a back spasm or a weak limb" (212).

"A body pulsing in the mutual impact of dream and matter." Isn't that the body that lives in the gmvv buildings where Chávez, the man who collapsed dream into matter, also lives? "A body that wants to be part of the flow." Isn't that the body of the collector chasing after the next Chávez phone card, and also the body of Chávez, chasing after a family album? "A body that wants to be touched, and that wants to be in touch." Isn't that the body of the possibly more than four hundred people that had Chávez's signature tattooed on them? "A body that flexes its muscles in a state of readiness." Isn't that the body typing with tc Chavez Pro?

It all comes down to intimacy, to the familiarity born out of the encounter of two bodies that do not occupy the same temporal dimension. Two bodies, both anchored in the present, touching each other, is an intimate act, no doubt; it is also the very picture of fleetingness. Two bodies (or more), one anchored in the present, one in the past and also the future, in touch with each other, is also an intimate act, one that, cross-temporally, always

delayed, and always postponed, promises to last forever. In the encounter, one body (or more) holds its breath in excitement/anticipation/doubt, and the other enters death backward, so that what lies before him (Chávez) is the past, so that what the future promises us all is what (he, Chávez) has been, seen, and done. Venezuelan poet Eugenio Montejo, though thinking about Bolívar, said it better: "no one remembers if all of us were him or if we will be. . . . His life becomes a horizon" ([1976] 1988, 90).

Spectral Intimacies

In "Space and the State," Henri Lefebvre asks: "Is not the secret of the state, hidden because it is so obvious, to be found in space?" (2003, 87). The state and the territory, he then argues, interact in such a way that they can be said to be mutually constitutive. For Lefebvre, the state binds itself to space through a series of complex relations that pass through critical points, one of which is the creation of what he calls "social space":

> During the course of its development, the state binds itself to space through a complex and changing relation that has passed through certain critical points. Born in and with a space, the state may also perish with it. The moments of this relation can be described as follows: . . . (2) The production of a *social space* as such, an (artificial) edifice of hierarchically ordered institutions, of laws and conventions upheld by "values" that are communicated through the national language. This social architecture, this political monumentality, is the state itself, a pyramid that carries at its apex the political leader—a concrete abstraction, full of symbols, the source of an intense circulation of information and messages, "spiritual" exchanges, representations, ideology, knowledge bound up with power. (Lefebvre 2003, 84; original emphasis)

As it produces this social space, the state imposes a rationality of its own that regulates social relations among individuals, groups, and classes, and that privileges the identical and the repetitive, generating a homogeneous geography that is "the same throughout" (86), which ensures that natural differences and particularities are abolished. Though Lefebvre's analysis focuses on capitalist states and the capitalist spaces they produce, his arguments also shed light on the spatial transformations that took place after Chávez's death, transformations that, as we have seen throughout this

chapter, focused on rendering the state, condensed in Chávez's spectral figure, intimate. This intimacy demanded the creation and repetition of a familiar language and the mobilization of familiar spaces and family rituals as the social space was reimagined as a living room and as the walls of living rooms all over the country were made porous enough to let the state seep in, find a place in the family album, take over computer screens, and penetrate deep into the skin. Are these operations not concrete proof of what it means, as Derrida put it, to learn to live *with* ghosts "in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts" (1993, xviii)?

We could answer, "No, they are not," and point out that Derrida, in spite of his constant revisiting of ghostly fathers and attention to Marx, did not mean for the specter to become *this concrete*, for the conceptual metaphor at the center of hauntology to become *this literal*, for ghostly matters to go beyond temporal disruptions and demands for justice and actually materialize in specific spaces inserted in specific political, social, cultural, and historic contexts—spaces like Venezuela where, as we have seen, metaphors have the bad habit of becoming shamelessly literal. We could also answer, "Yes, they are," and point out that while Derrida was certainly not envisioning a Chávez tattoo, the lingering presence of the Comandante on skin, walls, and everywhere else is a reminder of the need for justice and responsibility and the sort of ethical demand that, in Derrida's reading of spectrality, must keep pressing onto us in order to stay relevant and to continue fueling the revolutionary struggle that, in the case of Venezuela, created Chávez and that Chávez, too, created. Both answers end the conversation too soon and somewhat disappointingly. Instead, we might consider that, whether or not this is what Derrida imagined when he invited future scholars to learn to live with ghosts, this is still one way that living with ghosts—with a specter in particular—might happen, and it is one where the relationship with the specter moves beyond Derrida's "visor effect" and the simple act of talking with the specter and letting it talk back, and into the realm of intimacy.

In this chapter, we have seen how living with the specter—when habitual, almost mindless—can become an intimate affair. This intimacy became visible and palpable in the narratives that inserted the specter into the family album through collectible phone cards, in the possibility of being enveloped by the gigantic, invisible hand that signed the walls of houses and thus made homes possible, in the tattoo that turned the specter into ink and then into a scar, and in the temporally dislocated act of cowriting that tc Chavez Pro enabled. Less explicitly, but central to these examples, intimacy appeared

in the incompleteness, in the blurred boundaries and unresolved issues, in the unanchored and split subjects, in the anxiety and the expectation that materialized as part of the encounter with these spectral remains and the promise they carried: the possibility of becoming part of living history.

Which history? Chávez's and the Bolivarian Revolution's, both wrapped around each other in these spectral remains that made the past—his past, what he did, how he did it—a future we can return to, again and again, relishing it with excitement, imagining it as something simultaneously familiar and new. The collectible phone cards, the signature on the skin and on the wall, and tc Chavez Pro thus fold time onto itself, with two consequences. On one hand, Chávez lingers in the present as a presence that is socially active, politically relevant, familial, and intimate. On the other, future and past overlap so that the future appears as déjà vu and the past can be remembered not with nostalgia but with anticipation, as something yet to come. We hold the phone card featuring baby Chávez and think of the man he was/could be. We look at his signature on the wall and think of the home that was/will be built. We do not obsessively look at the tattoo because we know it is there, always, waiting. We type with tc Chavez Pro and imagine the changes made possible by Chávez, who will/did return. Was, is, and could be. A multidirectional form of time travel embedded in the banality of the everyday, imagination and memory collapsing into each other in the routine repetition of an anticipatory response that the cards, the signature, and the app want to trigger, and that has the potential to make us forget that, if the future is the past, *if everything is déjà vu*, then perhaps there is no future at all.