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Subverting Subversion: Refiguring 1970s Militancy in Recent Argentine Novels and Films (1996-2012)

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

Spanish

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

This dissertation examines recent Argentine novels and films (produced between 1996 and 2012) that take as their subject matter the revolutionary struggles of 1970's Argentina. Focusing on works that include a writer/director figure, the dissertation analyzes how the figure of the writer is depicted as engaging with and/or refuting existing stories—both historical and fictional accounts—of 1970's revolutionary militancy, so-called "subversive" movements. Specifically, the works in question dialogue with an existing storyline about 1970's militants that is predicated on heroism and martyrdom. This broadly accepted storyline serves as the discursive origin story of present-day leftist Kirchnerist leadership in Argentina, a political group that has garnered strength and political support from appealing to the heroism and circumstantial defeat of the heroic militant martyr. In contrast, the works analyzed here introduce militant figures that evince a more ambivalent stance to their presumed ideological affiliations—a stance I term here "ideologically unorthodox." My analyses of five novels and two films engage present-day and historical political thought in order to elucidate the contested versions of 1970's politics as well as of militant subjectivity that have converged in present-day cultural production dealing with recent history. Taking as a point of departure South American cultural critics Nelly Richard and Idelber Avelar's understandings of postdictatorial cultural production, which for their part take theoretical roots in Jamesonian notions of postmodernism, Freudian mourning and melancholia, and Benjaminian ruptures, "Subverting Subversion" uses ambivalent, less heroicized accounts of Argentina's recent history in order to expand our critical notions of revolutionary movements and the modalities of representing these movements within cultural production. In addition to political scholarship on recent and present-day Argentina (such as Beatriz Sarlo), the project engages Bakhtinian heteroglossia, Paul De Man and Hayden White's notions of irony, and Marianne Hirsch's writings on postmemory in order to move towards a new cultural model for considering the place of revolutionary thought within present-day political culture.

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Introduction

Silenced during the tumultuous mid-1970s, in the years leading up to Argentina's most recent military dictatorship (1976-1983), the Peronist Left has enjoyed an unexpected resurgence since 2003, when the late Néstor Kirchner was elected to the presidency; his wife, Cristina Fernández, succeeded him as president in 2007. On October 23, 2011, she gained reelection with an overwhelming majority of the popular vote. Present-day Kirchnerist leadership situates itself discursively in the painful absence and (and subsequent mythification) of disappeared 1970s "subversives," as gleaned through Néstor Kirchner's inaugural address, wherein he proclaimed that he formed part of a "decimated generation."[1] Several years later, a television spot for Fernández's reelection campaign took as its protagonist Victoria Montenegro, one of the famed "nietos recuperados" whose parents participated in the militant movements of the 1970s (specifically, the Trotskyite *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo,* or ERP) and were

[1] The term "subversion" was used by the military to refer to any activities that ran counter to the regime's doctrine and particularly referenced revolutionary groups such as *Montoneros*. Before the military takeover in 1976, the government already sought to eliminate "subversion" through the creation of the paramilitary organization the *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina* (AAA), which was founded in 1973 and gained enormous momentum under Isabel Perón's rule. Under the country's the military junta (1976-1983) and especially during the regime's early years, the persecution of "subversion" became much more widespread.

murdered by the military regime.[2] Now in her mid-thirties, Montenegro's strength ("la fuerza de Victoria") is celebrated in the spot, transitioning seamlessly to "la fuerza de una nación" as we see a close-up of President Fernández de Kirchner. Kirchnerism thus represents itself visually as garnering strength—literally and directly—from the legacy of the radical militants who were defeated by the rise of the military regime. After the success of this reelection campaign, Fernández went on to deliver a victory speech to Argentine youth activist groups in the Plaza de Mayo in which she described herself as "militante," establishing a continuity and a solidarity with the 1970s revolutionaries who demonstrated in the very same public space.

Despite the fact that this campaign has generated a significant electoral following that celebrates *Kirchnerismo* as the continuation of 1970s militant struggles—evidenced by the success of Fernández's aforementioned campaign—many intellectuals have begun to reconsider the 1970s militant revolutionary movements and their cultural legacy, with particular scrutiny to the way in which these are represented vis-à-vis present-day politics. These fundamental analyses of the Kirchners' ideology and political self-identification with 1970s militancy, and the necessity therein of a retrospective critical

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[2]Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, the group of mothers who began demonstrating in protest of their sons having been "disappeared" in 1977, rescued these infants (their "grandchildren") whose parents were disappeared and who were kidnapped by the soldiers at the beginning of the regime. The "nietos" is one of the organization's many human rights projects, which have received increasing worldwide attention in the past decades. In September 2014, the group had reached one hundred fifteen "nietos recuperados."

gaze toward this moment of Argentine history, have opened up a space for a reconsideration of the cultural topoi that have come to dominate our understanding of these moments. I explore these dominant cultural discourses surrounding 1970s Argentine militancy below.

If in the past few years 1970s social radicalism has been revisited not only as a campaign strategy, but also as an effect of the Kirchners' human rights campaigns to indict the extreme right, some prominent Argentine intellectuals have certainly called critical attention to this use of 1970s militancy as political rhetoric. Recently deceased ex-*Montonero* official Héctor Ricardo Leis incited a great deal of controversy when he published his 2013 *Testamento de los años '70*, wherein—in addition to abjuring his own group's violence and tenuous principles—he criticizes the Kirchners farcical appropriation of 1960s revolutionary values and objectives with "scant realism and no authenticity."[3] Leis's book is but one example—albeit somewhat extreme—of a plethora of critical analyses that have been published in the past few years revisiting 1970s political culture.[4] Worth noting is prominent sociologist and director of Argentina's *Biblioteca Nacional*, Horacio González, in his scathing reaction to Leis's text, published in the pro-Kirchner newspaper *Página/12*, a forum which, as Leis would elucidate in a

[3] Leis refers here to the generation of the 1960s maintaining that the 1970s Peronist Left had inherited the revolutionary spirit from the smaller, more organized revolutionary groups of the 1960s.

[4] Others include Claudia Hilb's *Usos del pasado*, Marina Franco's *Un enemigo para la nación*, Miriam Lewin and Olga Wornat's *Putas y guerrilleras*, Graciela Fernández Meijide's *Eran humanos, no héroes,*

response to González published in the center/anti-Kirchnerist *Perfil*, would not allow for Leis's response since it was necessarily ideologically incoherent with *Página/12*'s editorial perspectives.[5]

Likewise, prominent journalist and political pundit Ceferino Reato challenged the Kirchners' understanding of the 1970s as overly simplified. A 2011 panel at the Feria Internacional del Libro on which Reato sat entitled "Pensar los '70s" garnered media attention with the headline in *Perfil* of "Los Kirchner no entendieron a Perón." Reato posited that the Kirchners' view of the 1970s was ultimately predicated on a dichotomy between good and evil divorced from the complexity of historical reality.[6] The viewpoint

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[5] In addition to his frequent interventions in *Página/12*, González also forms part of the pro-Kirchner group *Carta abierta*, along with such prominent intellectuals as Ricardo Forster, who was recently named by Fernández de Kirchner to the newly created position of "Director del pensamiento nacional." *Carta abierta* offers commentary on present-day politics but frequently focuses upon the legacy of revolutionary militancy within Argentina today. It should also be noted that *Página/12* came about in the years immediately following the country's return to democracy and has championed Kirchnerist politics throughout the past decade in which a vitriolic tension arose between the Kirchners' and the media, specifically in the case of the the anti-Kirchner *Clarín* media group and the oft-commented "ley de medios."

[6] Stances such as the one Reato espouses here are often dismissed by the Left as an example of the now well-known "teoría de los dos demonios," which maintains that the 1970s Argentine political circumstances forced the country and its leaders to choose between the lesser of two evils: the violent revolutionary movements or a repressive

of their official storyline, he contends, is that "in the 1970s the bad guys governed and now the good guys are in power" ("Los Kirchner no entendieron a Perón"). Such critiques indicate that intellectuals within Argentina are questioning contemporary political rhetoric that creates a reductive portrait of 1970s militant movements as forces of good that countered inchoate dictatorial evil, and in the process are articulating more complex understandings of 1970s Peronism and the militant Left, thus opening up a retrospective space for the radical reconsideration of postdicatorial politics that disavows any Manichean homology between ideology and morality.

If the Kirchners' rhetoric has sought to mobilize and exploit such a Manichean homology in the sphere of politics, then it is essential to note evidence of an analogous ideological complicity within the realm of literary production. Valeria Manzano affirms that *Montonero* writer Miguel Bonasso's decades-long need to produce what we might call a literature of leftist orthodoxy was obviated in 2003 once the Kirchners' "Peronist" ideals returned to the foreground, "as if he had exchanged the pen for a Congressional seat as a representative of the ruling political coalition" (185). Manzano's readings of Bonasso illuminate his strict and earnest cleavage to the 1970s Peronist Left. This anecdote that she offers of Bonasso's giving up writing posits the use of literature as a placeholder for leftist political action. Bonasso would go on to find himself disenchanted with the country's Kirchnerist leadership and return to writing, publishing his 2009 book

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right-wing dictatorial regime. This term is always employed disparagingly to accuse individuals of equating leftist guerrilla movements with the evils of dictatorship. See Marina Franco's "La teoría de los dos demonios: un símbolo de la posdictadura en la Argentina" *A Contracorriente* 11.2 (2014)

El mal: El modelo K y la Barrick Gold, amos y servidores en el saqueo de la Argentina, an incendiary look at at the Kirchners' rule.

The dominant narrative of leftist politics and its complicit literary sphere creates the following aggregate storyline: first, the quest for social justice and fraternity in the 1970s, a quest interrupted by defeat, spawning immediate mourning and tragedy and a hiatus during the dictatorial period—in which the leftist ideals of social justice were maintained in abeyance, despite the death of many of their champions—and finally a resurgence of these ideals for political purposes in postdictatorship. Yet in the same way that critics have begun to challenge this narrative of leftist orthodoxy in the political sphere, a significant set of voices in the literary sphere has emerged that is in line with a critique of leftist orthodoxy in its contention that the storyline of leftist militancy is much more nuanced than literary production in keeping with the political narrative of ideological orthodoxy. Specifically, the works that I study here explicitly take into account existing modes of narrating this 1970s militancy and the subsequent dictatorship, ultimately considering this subject outside of the ideological and aesthetic framework in which it had most commonly been represented.

Texts of Ideological Unorthodoxy

This contingent of ideologically unorthodox works include Liliana Heker's novel *El fin de la historia* (1996), Albertina Carri's film *Los rubios* (2002), Martín Kohan's novel *Museo de la revolución* (2005), Eduardo Sacheri's novel *La pregunta de sus ojos* (2005) as well as its film adaptation, Juan José Campanella's Oscar-winning *El secreto de sus ojos* (2009), Patricio Pron's *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*

(2011) and Leopoldo Brizuela's *Una misma noche* (2012). All of these works include a self-referential narrator and/or author who attempts to recount a story about 1970s militancy vis-à-vis present-day political culture. I analyze these works in order to elucidate the thematic and aesthetic qualities that evince critical debates regarding the modalities of representing 1970s militancy.

Both structurally and thematically, the seven works I study here constitute a departure from the accepted ideological norms of postdictatorial cultural production, as a brief introduction to their respective plots illuminates. *El fin de la historia* recounts the experiences of an earnest revolutionary, Diana Glass, as she attempts to write the life story—a liturgical and ideologically orthodox diegetic novel—of her disappeared friend Leonora, only to learn later the disturbing and ideologically disorienting truth that Leonora has fallen in love with her captor and collaborated with the regime. *Los rubios* follows director Albertina Carri's search for the truth about her disappeared militant parents and their peers, but does so maintaining a critical distance throughout—even outsourcing the role of herself to an actress—thereby disavowing and critiquing the testimonial genre of filmmaking long associated with leftist orthodoxy. *Museo de la revolución* takes as its protagonist an ERP operative who is disenchanted with his revolutionary group and thus becomes careless during an operation only to be seduced by a woman who later kills him and goes on to appropriate his journal entries that, now in the mid-1990s, are being considered for publication by our narrator who works for a Buenos Aires publishing house.

La pregunta de sus ojos includes the diegetic novel of its protagonist, judicial investigator Benjamín, recounting a brutal rape/murder case in which he was involved in

the late 1960s, while *El secreto de sus ojos* places the crime a few years later, in 1974. Both the film and the novel have Benjamín encounter the fate of the victim's husband (aptly named "Morales") who takes justice into his own hands and keeps the rapist/murderer in captivity for decades. This ethically justified yet extreme inversion of the victimizer/oppressed dichotomy, in Sacheri's novel, leads to Morales's suicide and, in the film, is shown to deprive Morales of his livelihood, as he is represented visually as barely living and decrepit. Benjamin's realization of the harshness of this punishment allows him to break free of his own ideologically rooted, righteous beliefs in justice, inculcated in him in the late 1960s and 1970s, and, some thirty years later, to reconcile himself with his own past as well as his feelings of affection for his boss. *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* recounts its protagonist's efforts to learn more about his father's militancy while he is lying moribund in the hospital and to render a novelistic account of his militant group, Guardia de Hierro. Lastly, *Una misma noche* deals with its narrator's attempts to create a novel about a 1977 break-in to his *Montoneros*-affiliated neighbor's house by the military as well as his efforts to reconcile himself with the way in which 1970s militancy figures into present-day (2010) Argentine society. These texts—though dealing with the atrocities of dictatorship—are markedly ludic in tone and structure, rather than liturgical.

The Creation of a Narrative of Ideological Orthodoxy in Politics and Literature

If we want to trace the circumstance of leftist ideological orthodoxy, we might begin with a consideration of the opposing ideological position embodied by dictatorship. On the twenty-ninth anniversary of the Argentine *coup d'etat*, in a column published in

Página/12, Julián Gorodischer asked several prominent Argentine artists what they considered to be the greatest cultural residue of authoritarianism within their country. Liliana Heker responded by positing that the greatest cultural legacy of authoritarianism was its annihilation of controversy and debate:

> Se hizo desaparecer la polémica real […] Durante la dictadura militar, ante una situación horrorosa, teníamos la obligación de coincidir en lo esencial: la defensa de los derechos humanos y la vida. Pero también generó una culpa respecto de la controversia y la discusión de ideas. Es como si fuera peligrosa la divergencia; eso da como resultado un empobrecimiento en el campo del pensamiento. Desde el siglo XIX nos caracterizamos por tener intelectuales que polemizaban, y hoy hay una pérdida de interés real sobre la obra de otro. (*Página/12*, "Cultura" 24 Mar. 2005)

Heker recognizes an "impoverishment in the field of thought" and the lack of polemical debate as a consequence of dictatorial repression; the political left has reserved a status of exceptionality with respect to such effects of dictatorial ideology. Yet if we contemplate *Montonero* Nicolás Casullo's reconsideration of 1970s militancy we encounter a retrospective analysis that echoes Heker's analysis of its dictatorial counterpart, suggesting that leftist ideology may have suffered equally from such imoverishment and the lack of polemical debate. Casullo's epilogue to the 1997-1998 study of late 1960s and 1970s militant movements in *La voluntad*—this study itself described in a 2006

review as a narrative Argentines "for a long time have not been prepared to hear"[7]—affirms:

> Ese molde [de militancia izquierdista], eso que éramos, fecundó copiosamente en la no verdad sobre las cosas, sobre la realidad, sobre la vida: fecundó en contracara de esta última, antes de que arribaran las muertes irreparables. Este molde fecundó el militarismo, la apologética del arma, la profunda mediocridad política frente a los datos, el abstraccionismo ideológico y el valor secundarizado de la humanidad del cuadro político frente a la retórica del martirio" (III, 468).

With respect to the self-definition of the militants that would become the voice of contestation to the dictatorship, Casullo asserts, taking *Montoneros* as the foundation of the left's own conception of itself, that the leftist cause acquiesced to a rigid ideology that privileged this "rhetoric of martyrdom" over what consequentially came to be understood as the secondary and subordinate value of what Casullo calls "humanity" within the political imaginary—a term that I understand as denoting the possibility of ideological nuance, divergence, and polemics. If Heker asserts that dissidence and divergence have been rendered impossible as a residual effect of dictatorship, then Casullo's position would suggest that the rigidity of ideologically orthodox leftism—contemporaneous with dictatorship—has also foreclosed these voices of divergence.

The challenge that Casullo makes to the orthodoxy of leftist ideology based on a model of militant resistance is echoed in literary representations of leftist political history

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[7] A review of *La voluntad* published online at rodolfowalsh.org dated 30 April 2006 begins: "Durante más de veinte años la Argentina no pudo leer un libro como este: quizás se resistía a escuchar las historias que en él se narran."

and ideology that revisit and rewrite leftist militancy in a similar fashion, questioning the rigid moral binary of good militancy and evil dictatorship by focusing on the nuances and divergences on each side of the binary that would disrupt its logic. Questions of 1970s utopian visions, principles, and values are scrutinized throughout the works included within my study. *El fin de la historia's* diegetic novelist, Diana, is accused of having "too many principles," and is constantly policing the virtues of her *Montonera* friend who is the subject of her novel. Irene's character in Campanella's *El secreto de sus ojos* recalls herself—with mild self-deprecation for her naïveté—in the 1970s as "righteous" and "solemn," just as the film and *La pregunta de sus ojos* question the efficacy of a righteous adherence to morals through their treatment of the aptly-named character "Morales," whose exaggerated goodness and justice cause him to lead an abject existence. Carri's film, for its part, intercalates readings from the sociological writings of the director's disappeared father, Roberto Carri, specifically in his liturgical readings of slain revolutionary Isidro Velázquez, an ideologically orthodox text. Yet, in the final product, through her demystifying gesture of critiquing the testimonies of her parents' generational cohort, Carri disavows their idealization of the past and their belief in the possibility of a utopian outcome. As Gabriela Nouzeilles argues, Carri distances herself from such a stance as Juan Gelman's in *Hijos de desaparecidos* in which children of the disappeared "assume their [parents'] utopia." These works all demystify the utopian aspects of 1970s revolutionary militant movements by suggesting that the moral equation was more complex than leftist orthodoxy would admit.

Breaking away from Ideological Orthodoxy in Literary Aesthetics and Thematics

Just as the revolutionary movements in the 1970s were marked by a strict ideological and hierarchical operating system, critical receptions of postdictatorial cultural production seeking to represent the individuals involved in these movements has, likewise, adhered to a strict set of ideological and aesthetic preoccupations, which we see manifest in a current set of aesthetic preoccupations. Yet the past decade has witnessed the emergence of a critical mass of cultural texts that depart from these orthodox ideological precepts. Within the domain of critical reception—overwhelmingly acting as ideological counterpart to the orthodox production in culture and politics that I have described—one of the only critics to recognize this divergence has been Miguel Dalmaroni. His 2003 article "La moral de la historia: Novelas argentinas sobre la dictadura (1995-2002)," was published just months after Néstor Kirchner's inauguration, before the evocation of the 1970s truly took hold as the dominant political rhetoric in Argentina, and therefore before the critical challenge to that rhetoric began to take shape within the political sphere. [8] Dalmaroni's analysis nevertheless offers a skeletal blueprint for the aesthetic transformation of the ideological shift I propose to analyze; I will expand upon his preliminary observations to include the effects of the Kirchners' political

[8] Dalmaroni inventories the 1994 trial that elucidated the fact of murders and tortures that took place at the *Escuela Mecánica de la Armada* as orders of the military, the 1995 confession of ex-Captain Scilingo, the publications the same year of many testimonies recounting the 1970s, and the emergence of the group H.I.J.O.S (*Hijos e Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia y en contra del Olvido y el Silencio*)

discourse on texts and their interpretations.[9] Most centrally, Dalmaroni identifies the emergence of a cultural current of movement away from ideological orthodoxy and toward what I call ideological nuance:

> "es posible pensar en una nueva novelística sobre la dictadura que contrasta con los rasgos que se atribuían a los modelos previos, identificados grosso modo en las novelas de Piglia y Saer citadas [*Respiración artificial* (1980) and *Nadie nada nunca* (1983), respectively]: ahora (desde—digamos—*Villa* [Luis Gusmán, 1995] en adelante) lejos de la oblicuidad, de la fragmentación o del ciframiento alegórico" (34).

The critical aesthetic characteristic that he identifies of ideological orthodoxy is this "ciframiento alegórico," or allegorical encoding through which the dictatorial experience is rendered.

If Dalmaroni identifies the use of allegory as a central motif in the aesthetics of ideological orthodoxy, then I would propose to trace that motif to fundamental preoccupations of postmodern understandings of literary production, which, I argue, take on an ideological valence through a network of intertextual citations that I will elucidate

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[9] While Dalmaroni asserts that this "new" literature constitutes the accepted literary production in Argentina from 1995 forward, the authors he studies—Liliana Heker and Luis Gusmán—have nowhere near equaled the fame and renown of authors like Piglia and Saer, much less eclipsed them as the new voices of postdictatorship. What would further refute Dalmaroni's assertion is that Heker should later affirm in 2005 that debates—including those evoked in the fictions Dalmaroni analyzes—are not permissible within the field of critical thought.

here. As Dalmaroni and countless others have referenced, Idelber Avelar and Nelly Richard have come to constitute foundational voices in the discourse of Southern Cone postdictatorial critical thought. The seminal points of reference in this postmodern understanding of literature—cited copiously by Avelar and Richard—are Walter Benjamin and Fredric Jameson, who both focus their critical attention on ruptures in historicity and the relationship between allegory and melancholia in which ruptures and allegory work on the side of minoritarian politics and against totalizing and repressive dominant paradigms of meaning in which the literary and the political are understood to be mutually continuous.

Within the field of Latin American and postdictatorial literary analysis, Nelly Richard and Idelber Avelar echo these Benjaminian and Jamesonian affinities. These four figures—Benjamin, Jameson, Richard, and Avelar—overwhelmingly shape the landscape of the critical interpretations of postdictatorial cultural production; one is indeed hard-pressed to find any recent publication on postdictatorial Southern Cone fiction that does not cite at least one, if not all four, of these critics.[10] As such, a corpus of critical interpretations of postdictatorial cultural production has emerged in solidarity with the ideological and aesthetic tenets of these theorists, celebrating ruptures and privileging what I would call a mode of allegorical fracture—that is, the so-called "aesthetics of discontinuity," which, I argue, has come to create its own continuity within cultural production and its critical reception.

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[10] Another case in point is Christian Gundermann's 2007 *Actos melancólicos: Formas de resistencia en la posdictadura argentina*, a study that perpetuates a critical emphasis on melancholia and draws heavily on Avelar's analysis as well as Benjmanian thought.

The Aesthetics of Discontinuity and Ruptures in Historicity

Within the literary and filmic production of postmodernity in general—and of postdictatorship in particular—the primacy of "unofficial" histories interruptive of an official narrative of the nation established by dictatorship is one of the most distinguishing factors of postdictatorial cultural production. Continuity has come to be understood as belonging to the dictatorship, and is therefore regarded as suspect, whereas discontinuity is, in contrast, seen as a countervailing force of positive dissidence, whereby this aesthetics of rupture has become the norm within postdictatorial fiction.

Jameson explains the postmodern affinity for allegory in its capacity to celebrate discontinuities: "the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogenous representation of the symbol" ("Third-World" 73). [11] This idea of allegory's discontinuity in Jameson in particular has appealed to Richard and Avelar. An intellectual affinity with Jameson is to be expected from postdictatorial thinkers, insofar as Jameson—contemporaneously with postdictatorial critics—found himself lamenting the defeat of Leftism at the hands of the neoliberal machine, also perceived to be a totalizing, hegemonic circumstance against which rupture and discontinuity may be deployed as a contestatory strategy. Benjamin, for his part, is a logical precursor to these anti-dictatorial figures due to his circumstance of writing in Germany during the Holocaust itself, an historical moment obviously marked by totalizing hegemony. In this light, it comes as

[11] It should be noted that there were many unfavorable responses to Jameson's article; see Ahmad

little surprise that postdictatorial contestatory thinking should find intellectual affinity with these figures and draw from that affinity a primacy that they will place upon an aesthetics of rupture and discontinuity, given the capability of these aesthetics to contest the totalizing aesthetics of conservative hegemony.

This aesthetic affinity toward rupture and discontinuity maps neatly on the thematics of trauma and melancholia in its repetitious restaging of the experience of dictatorship and, in turn, maintaining the victimized status of the Leftist at the hands of the regime's repression. The era of Richard and Avelar's interventions—indeed an "untimely present"—was one in which the left clearly was victimized, repressed tortured and silenced. In this sense, an identification with Jamesonian and Benjaminian celebration of ruptures and discontinuity was certainly befitting at the time. Now, however, the model of critical interpretation that has maintained the victimized status of the erstwhile leftist martyr through these aesthetics that restage the trauma of dictatorship and the subsequent melancholic existence no longer fits the cultural representation of the political situation because the Left is no longer defeated—at least insofar as the dominant political rhetoric in Argentina touts itself as the vindication of Leftism.

Unhinging some of the underlying binaries that have been reified throughout postdictatorial cultural production, Chilean theoretician Nelly Richard—a monumental figure in postdictatorial critical thought—indicts Ariel Dorfman's 1991 play *La muerte y la doncella* as imitating the forms of logic of the dictatorship, maintaining that the play was predicated upon "the same dualities and oppositions that had been part of the rhetoric created by the human rights agenda: victim/victimizer, harm/reparation, offense/pardon, and so on" (19). Richard inculpates these binaries for their adherence to the same

dichotomies put in place by authoritarianism, and for their consequent reification of dictatorial power. Richard advocates instead for rupture in her explanation of the failures in Dorfman's play: "No enunciative unsettling or significant rupture sought to disorganize the series of figurations by which history and memory were symbolized in accordance with the terms established by the dominant narrative" (19), thus evincing the conviction that only an aesthetics of rupture will undermine these dynamics and thereby effectively contest authoritarianism.

Richard's readings of other recent Chilean cultural production (in 1994) finds that they—unlike Dorfman—"illustrate the Benjaminian idea that 'history's continuity is that of the oppressors,' while 'the history of the oppressed is discontinuous': an unfinished succession of loose fragments unleashed by cuts in meaning, and wandering about, without the guarantee of a sure connection of an exact end" (*Insubordination* 13-14). Avelar, for his part, concludes his *Alegorías de la derrota* affirming the primacy of allegory within the postdicatorial moment in its capacity to respond to "un quiebre irrecuperable en la representación" (316), again echoing Richard, this time her emphasis on the aesthetics of rupture. [12]

More than a decade after both of these theories of discontinuity were posited, however, perhaps the most readily discernible continuity within postdicatorial cultural production is, precisely, this *dis*continuity. This de facto continuity of discontinuity

[12] This 2000 Spanish translation is of the 1999 version published in English as *The Untimely Present*; I choose to cite the Spanish version here and throughout this study for its telling emphasis on allegory and defeat, two key concepts within the theoretical model that are of central importance for my analysis.

would suggest that the unofficial history—an alternative denomination for this Benjaminian history of the oppressed—has replaced the official history—that of the regime—as the dominant discourse. Jo Labanyi echoes the sentiment of this critique, suggesting that Richard's aesthetics of rupture bear an unintentionally mimetic relationship to capitalist logic (not entirely unlike Richard's own assertion that Dorfman imitates the logic of the dictatorship itself):

> In proposing an aesthetics of rupture, Richard explicitly argues for cultural forms that keep open the wounds left by the dictatorship, restaging the trauma rather than resolving the narrative fractures through the production of a coherent narrative. (108)

In Labanyi's analysis, Richard's emphasis on keeping these wounds open restages the trauma rather than resolve it, working constantly on traumatic rupture rather than any kind of resolution. This static irresolution in permanent opposition to dictatorship, I argue, becomes its own dominant narrative even as it resists that category; it is a dominant narrative of contestation, we might say.

Virtually no critical reception has recognized the organizing principle that these aesthetics of rupture and discontinuity have created. Patrick Dove, for example, declares of Avelar's definition of "postdictatorial fiction" that: "far from making the case for some new univocal and monolithic corpus, [it] underscores ambiguities and internal contradictions that characterize writing in the wake of societal disaster. The common thread linking these novels could be described as the attempt to register the occurrence of an event whose only discernible effects fall under the category of fragmentation and rupture" (184). Dove fails to see, however, that the very "common thread" to which he

refers here may in fact be conceived of, precisely, as a "corpus," if not "univocal and monolithic" in its own way. What Dove offers here as an ostensibly negative example does, in fact, exist, and is precisely the organizing principle of postdictatorial cultural production that privileges discontinuity and rupture. While he claims that this definition is far from making the case for some new monolithic corpus, that is precisely what this line of critical inquiry has ultimately done, reifying once and again the primacy of this aesthetics of rupture, the restaging of trauma. In this sense, we see the degree to which rupture has become a leitmotif of postdictatorial fiction. Paradoxically, however, the inherent discontinuity of this aesthetics of discontinuity has protected its proponents from the scrutiny of truly questioning whether it has not become its own exclusionary principle, as we glean from Dove's assertion on Avelar's understanding of the conductive threads within postdicatorial fiction.

With the return to power of the Left, the political ideology of the Left becomes dominant. It is in this space, then, that critiques emerge questioning the Left as a dominant political ideology and narrative. So now, ironically, the very strategies of discontinuity and rupture are being turned on the left by this camp of ideological nuance. What Richard and Avelar have done to dictatorship, these critical voices are now doing to them in precisely creating national histories that are ideologically monolithic. Marguerite Feitlowitz makes a generic attribution in an attempt to delineate between official dominant history of the dictatorship and subversive leftist narratives that she calls chronicles: "art belongs to the chronicle. We are very conscious of history here. Our generation in particular learned early that history is contaminated, it's constantly being rewritten by those in power" (1991, 67), basing this assertion upon the assumption that

"those in power" who are contaminating history are *not* the Left. What I want to underscore here is that what we see here in "texts of ideological nuance" is that the Left itself, in its return to power, has assumed that discursive space of the grand, overarching narrative. It is now these dissident and ideologically undefined voices that are occupying the discursive space that she calls that of the chronicle. In other words, these new critics of ideological nuance are creating this rupture of discontinuity with the narrative that comes before but their manner leads us to understand that the substance of Avelar and Richard has become the dominant voice. These new critical voices avoid melancholia and trauma, but the content of their interventions now is very different than the melancholic stories of trauma that Richard and Avelar propose. In the place of those allegories, now we have self-referential, markedly playful narratives.

Here again, I would like to emphasize the self-referential framed narratives that characterize the works that I take up here. In each of the works I propose to study here, the authors employ a self-referential structure that deliberately distances itself from the type of allegorical, melancholic narrative privileged—and, one might even say, asserted in an act of ideological criticism—by Avelar. Within the diegesis of each of these works we encounter an author figure that refuses to be entangled in melancholia, contrasting starkly with Avelar's conclusion that in many of the works included in his study:

> la literatura postdictatorial se encuentra, entonces, perennemente al borde de la melancolía […] se percibe *uno ya no puede escribir, que escribir ya no es posible*, y que la única tarea que le queda a la escritura es hacerse cargo de esta imposibilidad. La pérdida con la cual la escritura intenta lidiar ha tragado,

> melancólicamente, a la escritura misma: el sujeto doliente que escribe se da cuenta de que él es parte de lo que ha sido disuelto. (315)

The diegetic authors who figure within these works diverge from this diagnosis, either in their disavowal from the outset of this type of melancholic literary representation, or in their ultimate coming-to-terms with their own ability to construct a narrative. In other words, these writers do not posit that all writing either stems from or is frustrated by melancholy. One of the texts that I propose to study stages this before-and-after in a way that we can see clearly Avelar's politics and a politics of ideological nuance. In the case of Heker's novel, the diegetic novelist who *does* conform to Avelar's diagnosis proclaims herself incapable of writing the would-be allegorical novel because of her inability to abandon a politics of leftist orthodoxy, whereas a second diegetic novelist who does *not* conform to Avelar's model of melancholia takes over the task of writing the novel that is presented as the one we are reading.

Since the works that comprise the corpus of my analysis ultimately present ways of representing Argentina's recent past outside of the framework of melancholia, Wendy Brown's 1999 essay "Resisting Left Melancholia" is helpful. Here, Brown focuses upon "the revolutionary hack who is, finally, attached more to a political analysis or ideal—even to the failure of that ideal—than to seizing possibilities for radical change in the present" (20). Brown is considering the global Left within the context of the demise of socialist regimes and the aftermath of what she terms "the Thatcher-Reagan right," or neoliberalism. Her diagnosis of the "revolutionary hack" resonates with Héctor Leis's aforementioned indictment of the Kirchners' misappropriation of revolutionary commitment. Moreover, just as Brown posits that left melancholia in opposition to

productive political action in the present, the works that I take into consideration here present melancholia as a category that proves counterproductive, in their case, to the writing process and, ultimately, to reconciliation with their characters' pasts.

From Allegories of Rupture to Ideological and Characterological Nuance

Heker, Carri, Kohan, Sacheri, Campanella, Pron, and Brizuela all create narrative voices that distance themselves from these models of orthodoxy, creating works that are both ideologically and aesthetically nuanced. These nuances open up a space for the reconsideration of recent Argentine history that takes into account the historical truths of dictatorship, both collective and personal, that have not yet been told. All of these deal with dictatorship, but none in a way that is easily circumscribed within the standing binary of dictatorial victimizer and leftist victim. In this regard, they propose that authoritarianism created many different experiences and ideologies. These works thus move outside of the aesthetic and ideological constraints of previous postdictatorial cultural production that would preclude the recounting of such experiences. The characters of these works, moreover, are shown to operate outside of the constraints of political and/or ideological commitment, that is, their affinities and actions do not cleave directly to a prescribed ideological orientation.

These works all focus on interpersonal relationships and how the circumstance of dictatorship affects them, which is nothing new. However, the way in which such Argentine directors as María Luisa Bemberg, Luis Puenzo, and Eliseo Subiela—in *Camila, La historia oficial,* and *Hombre mirando al sudeste*, respectively—portray interpersonal relationships during and/or immediately following dictatorship creates a

model in which affective relationships are formed among the oppressed, or members of a certain ideology, as a contestation to the monolith of the regime. In all of these examples we find a character connected to the ruling class: the young priest in *Camila* to the Church, the housewife in *La historia oficial* to the neoliberal ruling class, and the psychiatrist of *Hombre mirando al sudeste* to the repressive state institutions during the dictatorial period. Since these characters must either subvert the systems to which they belong or have a "change of heart" in order to perpetuate a love relationship or familial ties, the political overtones of all of these films suggest that authoritarianism destroys or impedes love relationships and tears families apart.

This indictment of dictatorship asserts an affective critique along orthodox ideological lines. What is new in the texts of ideological nuance that I propose to consider is the engagement of this affective critique along ideologically unorthodox lines: that is, its deployment as a critique of Leftism itself. We might venture to posit, in fact, that a presupposition of ideological commitment on behalf of 1970s militants precludes an affective bond between any of these figures and an actor of the regime (barring a change of heart on the latter's behalf). This notion that interpersonal relationships should be predicated upon something other than analogs for rational, ideological motives stands opposed to most critical understandings of postdictatorial cultural production, in which a more traditional rationality is presumed to operate. As Patrick Dove concludes in his review of Avelar's *Alegorías de la derrota*:

> The exegetical turn to Critical Theory […] does not avoid the limit of analogy, which emerges repeatedly in the (partial) translations of the post-Kantian critical tradition in Latin America. Postdictatorial fiction seeks insight into the unthought

> ground of modern disciplinary thinking, yet the emergence of tone and affect as important considerations in this literature serves notice that this untimely venture can no longer be grounded through references to reason. (185)

Dove's emphasis here on the emergence of tone and affect, and the necessity therein to broaden our critical scope both to incorporate these and to work outside of the limit of analogy—most often manifest through the adherence to ideological lines when staging out other phenomena, such as affect—highlights the need for a recalibration of our own critical methodology. The emphasis here on affect and tone, understanding both not as analogs for ideological phenomena but as having critical utility in and of themselves, may constitute a move toward this recalibration.

Tone: Irony and Laughter

In the same way that Richard and Avelar reach back for Benjamin and Jameson to ground rupture and discontinuity along the lines of traumatic allegory as contestatory forms of literature, if Heker, Carri, Sacheri, Kohan, Campanella, Pron, and Brizuela were to reach back for conceptual groundings for their works, we might see conceptual affinity for Mikhail Bakhtin and Paul de Man. That is, both Bakhtin and de Man invoke not allegory and melancholia, but play and irony as key tropes in their contestatory projects—de Man writing against French empire at the crucial point in time at which the empire was crumbling and Bakhtin writing against the totalitarianism of Russian monarchy. Unlike Jameson and Benjamin—whose writing is characterized by the circumstance of defeat, Jameson at the heyday of late capitalism and the demise of the revolutionary spirit and Benjamin in the midst of the Holocaust—Bakhtin and de Man's

writings are marked by their celebration of possibility rather than lament of defeat. Hence, like in the authors I propose to study here—whose aesthetics function to challenge the Left as a new form of hegemony—playfulness and irony are privileged over trauma and allegory. While there is no existing theoretical model akin to that created out of Jameson and Benjamin and deployed within current postdictatorial critical thought, I am proposing here that we recall Bakhtin and de Man's positions on laughter and irony as a means of approaching this new corpus of ideologically nuanced authors.

De Man analyzes the interplay between irony and allegory in *Blindness and Insight*, specifically the essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality;" here, he indicts allegory as having been born out of an "act of ontological bad faith" (211) on the grounds that the truth value with which allegory has been vested is always suspect for its hegemonic tendency toward totalizing univocality and monosemy. He goes on to celebrate irony, in contrast, as an unsung tool capable of reaching levels of expression not possible in other modes: "curiously enough, it seems to be only in describing a mode of language that does not mean what it says that one can actually say what one means" (211). While allegory and irony could certainly both be said to be in play in both orthodox postdictatorial texts and their ideologically nuanced counterparts, I would argue that in paradigmatic postdictatorial texts irony is always written away by or absorbed through allegory and, conversely, in the texts of nuance that I propose to analyze, irony and playfulness of plot and structure eclipse any allegorical modality. In this sense, these authors would seem to share De Man's affinity for irony over allegory.

In the sense that these authors are trying to move beyond univocality and monosemy and toward new forms of expression of the political reality, these authors may

seem irreverent at the moment of recounting such historical atrocities as rape, murder, and state terror. This playfulness evokes myriad questions both ethical and political in nature. We may interpret these works as creating a new cultural model for the interpretation of such historical truths as these, positing an ability to perceive this moment from a new lens, namely to do so without taking oneself too seriously and thus breaking from the confines of conceiving of this moment through strict leftist orthodoxy. Specifically, the ludic aspect of these works is fundamental for the possibilities that they create regarding ideological considerations of the postdictatorship. Bakhtin's *Epic and the Novel* affords a theoretical lens on to this playfulness. It celebrates the move from the tragic epic to the ironic novel as a shift that has rendered texts "more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the 'novelistic' layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody" (6-7). This equation that Bakhtin posits between laughter and heteroglossia has crucial implications for the consideration of ideology, for Bakhtin himself famously posits in "The Dialogic Imagination" that a defining characteristic of the heteroglossic or dialogic novel is that each character's speech possesses its own belief system. Within these novels and films, we observe conflicting and competing ideologies narrated through a structure and tone both laden with irony. From the perspective of this Bakhtinian understanding of dialogism, ideology, and humor, these playful aspects of the works would be most productively read as necessary for the ideological intricacies they seek to portray. Ultimately, the playfulness in which the works' most serious of themes and plots are presented serves to challenge questions

of the ethics and ideologies surrounding this historical moment and the ways in which it has been represented.

Toward an Ideologically Nuanced Model of National Memory and Subjectivity?

My analyses here indicate that a space has certainly opened up within the field of cultural production for a reconsideration of understandings of 1970s militancy and its ideology. As I posit in the introductory sections of this study, within the realm of political analysis, scholars have reevaluated Peronist discourse so as to scrutinize and thereby reevaluate the status of this signifier, as well as of this historical moment at-large. A further elaboration of this analysis will move toward a more holistic reading of these characters in which they do not constitute mere synecdoches of revolutionary political commitment, but one that admits other ideological, characterological, and affective nuances. This dissertation explores the new composite cultural and political model suggested by the individual analyses of these works, as well as the feasibility of using this self-same model as a hermeneutic for the interpretation of cultural production.

Chapter Outline

In the first chapter of my dissertation, I focus on Liliana Heker's *El fin de la historia*. My close reading of the novel elucidates the diegetic novel's function as an analog for existing postdictatorial fiction. Heker's *El fin de la historia* posits the figure of a *Montonera*, Leonora, who falls in love with her captor, survives political imprisonment, and collaborates with the regime. This relationship is recounted not as Stockholm Syndrome, and not as rape, but rather as an affective relationship between equals. Even

more upsetting to the ideological orthodoxy of postdictatorial cultural production is Leonora's capacity to understand and to empathize with the ideological rationale that motivates the regime's atrocities. Heker's novel functions as an analog for understandings of the postdictatorial period in its intercalation of another novel written by Leonora's friend that seeks to create a beatified, liturgical reading of Leonora, a novelistic attempt that is truncated when she discovers the truth of Leonora's survival and collaboration. In this sense, we observe that, for a postdictatorial novelist such as Diana, the fact of an affective relationship between a militant and her captor is not admissible within her writing.

Like Heker's novel, Kohan's *Museo de la revolución* also depicts a political operative who betrays his group: Rubén Tesare—*nom de guerre* Dorrego—who is left disenchanted with the ERP after they direct him to stop seeing his *Montonera* girlfriend. As punishment for having transgressed the strict dictums of the ERP, he is assigned to go on a mission to Laguna Chica, during which he meets and is seduced by a woman who later gives him up to be killed. Twenty years later, our narrator, Marcelo, travels from Buenos Aires to Mexico City to consider whether Tesare's notebooks are worth publishing. These writings consist of Tesare's musings on Trotskyist and Leninist revolutionary ideas and are now in possession of Norma Rossi, the very woman who seduced and led him to his death. The novel thus considers, quite literally, the "publishability" of stories such as Tesare's.

The next chapter of my dissertation will focus on Carri's *Los rubios* and Pron's *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*. Carri's intercalation of her father's liturgical readings of a slain revolutionary creates a deliberate delineation between her

father's ideological orthodoxy and the director's own endeavor to upset the orthodoxy of the existing narrative of leftist militancy. The film deals with the question of survivorship, manifest through Carri's survival after her parents' death. Specifically, the film—unlike most recent cultural production—dares to represent a survivor of the regime's repressive violence whose beliefs do not map neatly onto those of the individuals whose death she witnessed. Carri's decision to outsource the portrayal of herself to a professional actress creates a distancing of her own subjectivity from the subjects whom she interviews, thus disavowing the intersubjective affinity that might be expected between herself and her parents' peers on the basis of a presupposed ideological identification between the two. This gesture on Carri's part debunks the myth both of a filial ideological understanding and, subsequently, an intersubjective identification with her parents' compatriots along these purely ideological lines. Perhaps the most experimental in nature of all of the works in my analysis—the director reenacts childhood family scenes with lego-type toys, suggesting an innocence and a playfulness that reinforce the film's apparently depoliticized themes—the film's playful yet poignant visual representation of Carri's return to her own early childhood demystifies the political power that has been vested in testimonial accounts of the dictatorship.

Like Carri's film, Patricio Pron's *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* also revisits its narrator's parents' militant past. Unlike *Los rubios*, however, Pron's novel justifies and, in some instances, glorifies his parents' militant involvement as it seeks to consider what type of novel his father would have written about his militant group had he had the opportunity to do so before lying comatose in the hospital. Thus, like Carri, Pron's novel takes into account the ways that militancy have been recounted

within fiction as our narrator attempts to render his own account of what he has been able to learn about his father's past. Also like Carri, Pron constantly shows that the information he is able to learn about his father is often circumspect, constantly reminding readers of the many layers of mediation that exist within representations of memory and history.

As the next chapter of my dissertation will illustrate, Sacheri and Brizuela's novels also question the ethical and juridical weight of the stories of individuals who were politically victimized in the tumultuous revolutionary years leading up to the dictatorship. Throughout *El secreto de sus ojos* and *La pregunta de sus ojos*, the protagonist finds himself grappling with his own present life due to the inconclusiveness of the investigation into the brutal rape and murder that Morales's wife suffered, as well as the abject existence of Morales himself. This existence proves so inhumane, in fact, that Morales ultimately takes his own life in the novel. We may understand this action on Morales's behalf as a final proclamation that a simple inversion of the good/evil power dichotomy has not only *not* wrought true justice, but has proven deadly. In light of the current political landscape, such a notion would seem to upset the cultural status quo in which the narrative of "the bad guys were in power in the 1970s and now the good guys are in power" has come to predominate.

Like Sacheri's novel and its film adaptation, Brizuela's *Una misma noche* scrutinizes the use of present-day human rights discourse as it relates to 1970s political circumstances. While Brizuela's narrator, Leonardo Bazán, is not a police investigator, he pens a novel that he himself determines will be in the key of Argentine detective fiction in an attempt to uncover the break-in to the house next door to his in 2010 as it evokes

memories of the military's break-in into the same house in 1977 to capture his next-door neighbor, the secretary to "*Montoneros* bankroller" David Graiver's second-hand man. As he attempts to learn more about this break-in, however, he is constantly interrupted and confounded by the litany of discourses surrounding 1970s militancy that abound in present-day Argentina. Ultimately, he discovers that there are factions and fissures within society that prevent him from fully knowing history and, more importantly, from identifying with individuals whose memories and understandings of this historical moment differ from his.

In my concluding chapter, I will focus on articulating the cultural model that I view as being proposed by these works and authors, specifically on the conflicting ideologies, warring allegiances, upsetting affective ties, and irreverent tone that characterize these works. This project will consider whether this new model—in its rejection of the myths of current political culture—is apolitical or whether it is proposing a new form of politics. If so, what is the relationship between this new political model and myth?

Chapter 1: What's Fair in Love and War?: Liliana Heker's *El fin de la historia* and Martín Kohan's *Museo de la revolución*

Both Liliana Heker's *El fin de la historia* and Martín Kohan's *Museo de la revolución* explore the relationship between 1970s militancy and mid-1990s political culture in Argentina—that is, during the Menem years. Heker's novel was published in 1995, while Kohan's came out in 2006, but was set in the mid-1990s. While perhaps not the only reason Kohan should have chosen to set his novel's "present-day" setting in the mid-1990s rather than the early 2000s when he wrote it, it is certainly worth noting that Kohan condemned Heker's novel as politically irresponsible in light of the Left's afflicted status under Menemist rule in the 1990s, as I will later address. Both novels depict militants who betray their causes: Heker's Leonora Ordaz is a captured *Montonera* and Kohan's Rubén Tesare a disenchanted ERP operative. However, *El fin de la historia* concludes that virtuous militant martyrdom does not function as a category in the case of its protagonist, whereas *Museo de la revolución* condemns its protagonist's treachery by having him killed and his journals appropriated by a woman understood to be a paramilitary force.

While these novels' ends are distinctly disparate from one another, *El fin de la historia* and *Museo de la revolución* share a focus upon seduction and betrayal as the organizing principles of their narratives. Crucial to my analysis of both novels is the fact that our militant protagonists engage in an amorous relationship with someone figured as ideologically opposed to these militants' groups. These amorous encounters accompany feelings of disenchantment and/or skepticism towards the protagonists' previous ideological commitments. Such a figuring of seduction and ideology recalls with Mladen

Dolar's 1993 essay "Beyond Interpellation," wherein Dolar dubs the process of falling in love "falling into ideology." In this essay, Dolar expands on Louis Althusser's well-known understanding of interpellation to incorporate Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theories so as to examine the subjective processes of interpellation, hence the special attention paid to the experience of falling in love vis-à-vis ideology and interpellation. Not only do both works' protagonists betray their causes through an act of seduction, but in both novels, as my analysis will show, seduction serves to facilitate the process of writing and/or recounting these stories of seduction and betrayal.

Liliana Heker and *El fin de la historia*

For over half a century, Liliana Heker has been a part of the Argentine literary sphere, publishing fiction and serving as editor of the literary journals *El Ornitorrinco* and *El Grillo de Papel,* popular among 1970s militant circles. In the 1970s Heker somewhat infamously engaged in her so-called "Polémica con Cortázar," a series of journal articles in which the young writer took the great novelist to task for his position that the only truly politically committed individuals were the ones who exiled themselves during the dictatorship. Heker later won the 1986-1987 Premio Municipal de Novela for her first novel, *Zona de clivaje*, in which she recounts a young woman's coming-of-age tale marked by the theme of leftist ideological commitment. Yet in spite of her renown within the Argentine literary field—and moreover, in spite of being a self-identified leftist—Heker's 1996 novel *El fin de la historia* has received little critical attention.

In *El fin de la historia* (1996), diegetic novelist Diana Glass attempts to write the life story of her childhood friend Leonora Ordaz, who is taken as a political prisoner

during Argentina's last military dictatorship (1976-1983). Diana envisions that this novel will have an "un final […] alarmantemente vacío" (14) characterized by Leonora's presumed death.[13] Like many Argentine authors and critics of the postdicatorial period, Diana elevates to heroic status the figure of the leftist martyr slain by dictatorial forces. In most postdicatorial cultural production, the figure of the 1970s leftist militant has been portrayed either as a Christ-like martyred figure—cleaving to the mold of Che Guevara—or, if not executed or disappeared, then cast in the role of victim of the extreme right's brutality. These types have been perpetuated both in cultural production and in its critical reception, consecrating a critical understanding of the militant figure's ideology as completely formidable, precisely due to the circumstantial defeat of the left at the onset of dictatorship. As the title alone of such studies as Idelber Avelar's *Alegorías de la derrota* readily suggests, Southern Cone postdicatorial literature has been marked by defeat. [14] Yet even as writers of this period have sought to convey the stories of the defeated, these stories of victims are not so much stories of defeat as stories indicting the brutality of the right and elegizing the left as heroic victims whose ideological cause lives on in and after their torture and death.

Despite the aforementioned prevalence of the modality of defeat within Argentina's contemporary cultural imaginary, Leonora Ordaz does not die a heroic death in the name of her revolutionary cause, but rather survives her torture and detention *because* she seduces her captor and betrays her presumed cause. This character thus

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[13] This translation and all subsequent translations are my own.

[14] Avelar's model of defeat, mourning, and melancholy has been widely embraced by leftist critics in prticular; see Nouzeilles, 264.

deviates from the model of the martyred militant in two key ways: first, of course, she does not die and, second, she strays from her own presupposed ideological affinities through her intersubjective identification with the regime's agents and their rationale for their actions. Heker's novel thereby poses the provocative question: what is the place of survivors, of those individuals who not only do not die for the cause, but whose cause dies precisely through their act of living on?

Leonora's Sexual Seduction of her Captor

Some well-known cases of *Montoneros*—fictional and non-fictional alike—have involved the sexual relationship between torturer and victim. However, such accounts have tended overwhelmingly to offer their characters agency through a complete inversion of a unilateral authoritarian power structure in which the victimized militant maintains a self-sacrificing commitment throughout. One such text, Luisa Valenzuela's 1983 short story "Cambio de armas," concludes with its protagonist's taking up arms and shooting her lover/torturer at the story's end. This character's sexual relationship has not compromised her ideological orthodoxy, as witnessed in the narrator's reflection: "all she wanted would have been to die alongside the man she loved [her slain *Montonero* husband]" (83). Similarly, real-life *Montonera* Norma "Gaby" Arrostito is reported to have had an amorous relationship with one of her captors, "Delfín" Chamorro, while she was imprisoned. Her life is summarized by her biographer in the following light: "Norma Arrostito was born into a humble '*gorila*' [bourgeois, anti-Peronist] Buenos Aires family; she had been a Marxist, then Peronist, then and forever more *Montonera*" (Saidon 177). In the case of these women seduced by their captors, their actions within sexual

encounters with dictatorial agents are always subordinated to the ends of sacrifice in the name of the revolution.

Heker, in contrast, presents seduction as operating outside of the context of the revolution's means and ends. In *El fin de la historia*, seduction creates a space in which both the political prisoner and her captor distance themselves from and question their political actions.

What is striking about the novel is that it does not posit Leonora's seduction of her captor as purely a betrayal of political commitment, but rather as a dynamic that operates outside of the existing framework of ideological commitment. In a 1998 interview with *Página/12* about her friend Mercedes Inés 'Lucy' Carazo, upon whom Leonora is based, Heker affirmed, "for her it was a marvelous love story, in which they were both regretful of their actions: she of her militancy and he of the tortures" (Meyer par. 4). The author thus posits the militant's "love story" as a space in which both subjects—prisoner and captor—are both led astray from their previous ideological identifications.

El fin de la historia's presentation of seduction also dovetails with Jean Baudrillard's *Seduction* (1979), wherein seduction is a perpetual game with means unto its own ends, rather than a phenomenon that operates within—even subverting or challenging—an existing social dynamic. Referring to Borges's "La lotería de Babilonia" in its ideas of play and chance, Baudrillard posits that seduction—as opposed to production—is a constant and infinite game that does not subvert existing social

paradigms or institutions.[15] Rather, it is vested with its own rules, means, and ends. Hence, even in such a highly socially coded space as a detention center, seduction would offer an alternative power structure. Similarly, Heker's novel creates a representation of the erstwhile militant in which seduction—as an alternative to ideological commitment—comes to the fore as a driving force of motivation and judgment. *El fin de la historia* suggests a story of dictatorship untold—ideologically unorthodox and difficult to reconcile—through its representation of seduction as an alternative power dynamic wherein a character such as a political prisoner retains the capacity to exert power over her captors and over the dictum of her superiors within *Montoneros*.[16] This sexual seduction functions to unhinge the presumed purity of the political prisoner's commitment to her revolutionary cause as much as the presumed steadfastness of a military officer's convictions in the regime's tactics for eliminating "subversion."

Since Leonora's seduction of her captor is figured as a largely extra-political phenomenon, the novel introduces the possibility of a political prisoner who seduces her captor, rather than the other way around. Our protagonist proclaims, "Nobody ever

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[15] Borges's story famously concludes, "Babilonia no es otra cosa que un infinito juego de azares." Given its inherent disregard for existing social structures, it comes as little surprise that Baudrillard's theory of seduction has been met with vehement criticism by feminist scholars (see Jane Gallop. "French Theory and the Seduction of Feminism," in *Men and Feminism*. Ed. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith. New York: Methuen, 1987).

[16] Morello-Frosch: "la víctima retiene ciertos mínimos poderes que le permiten avalar al enemigo para crearse un espacio de indispensabilidad" (309).

seduced me […] I was always the one who seduced" (284).[17] Seduction thus functions as a signifier of this character's agency; her assertion that she was always the one who seduced posits seduction as her recourse for negotiating her survival and for instigating an affective relationship with her captor, el Escualo ("The Shark"). While Leonora's assertion that she was always the one seducing may seem to constitute a defense mechanism caused by a Stockholm Syndrome-like condition, Heker's repeated emphasis on Leonora's strength presents her as a character capable of carrying out this type of seduction even in a situation of such extreme domination.

In addition to Leonora's disclaimer at the end of the novel that she fell in love with and seduced her torturer, the novel's narrator also includes her own authorial meditation on the significance of Leonora's first sexual encounter with el Escualo that also serves to create a definitive contrast between this account of a sexual relationship between captor and captive and other such relationships. Our narrator contemplates Leonora's tone when referring to "the first night we slept together," conjecturing:

> Perhaps she is saying it with a romantic tinge, alluding to a rite initiated in precarious yet nostalgic conditions, as Swan named the cattleys. Or she is simply referring to an objective fact. *The first time we slept together*. An isolated event, the mere product of a drunken stupor that has undone inhibitions and permitted el Escualo to do what he desired; rest his head near the prisoner's body and sleep. A

[17] This sentence is almost identical to what Heker reported to *Página 12* that Mercedes "Lucy" Carazo, said to her in an interview: "It is not true that he seduced me. Nobody seduces me, I am the one who seduces." (par. 4) Adriana Meyer. "La polémica historia de Mercedes 'Lucy' Carazo." *Página 12* 16 November 1998.

> brief parenthesis that then ends when morning arrives, right when they both open their eyes. There is a brief apology from el Escualo, and a wide, welcoming smile from the prisoner. Yet in both there remains a certain sensation of tenderness, a certain fine web that a love story is already weaving. (204, emphasis original)

This moment of the novel, in its presentation of the notion that any sexual encounter between prisoner and captor could possibly constitute any phenomenon other than the former being precisely "permitted to do what he desired" is upsetting to the accepted understanding that a sexual relationship between a prisoner and captor is precisely a function of masculinist desire and domination.[18] It is worth noting, moreover, that Heker's first novel, *Zona de clivaje*, includes an almost identical disclaimer in its presentation of the love affair between a university student and her professor.[19] Heker repeatedly figures seduction as operating largely outside of prescribed notions of conventional power dynamics.

Just as Leonora will later assert that she was always the one who seduced, the novel also represents el Escualo as a weakling who has fallen prey to Leonora's seduction in its narration of "the first night that they slept together" (as Leonora herself calls it). This act of seduction on Leonora's behalf debunks the notion that a soldier and, by

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[18] See Díaz.

[19] "Attention, passersby, who see the thirtysomething man and young lady passing by as if it were a big deal. Turn your head, cover your eyes, blush, be scandalized, envy them. What is beginning now is a love story" (81). This novel has also received some negative criticism due to its ethically problematic presentation of the relationship between its young protagonist and her professor.

extension, the military at-large, should be formidable and monolithic. He comes to her on his birthday, drunken and lamenting the fact that he does not have any children, then places his head on her knee; she caresses his head in a maternal fashion. The interaction between them is shown as an affective one, not as a rape or even as a purely sexual, carnal encounter.

As readers, we understand that Heker's representation of her militant character is an exception rather than the norm. Throughout Hertha's novel, Leonora's character is continually and emphatically represented as both extraordinarily strong and empathetic. In light of these exceptional characteristics, the novel is not an apologia for soldiers who seduced their prisoners during the dictatorship, but rather a tale of one such prisoner whose story differs from those that have previously been told. These two traits account for her ability to survive and adapt as a prisoner within the *Escuela Mecánica de la Armada* (ESMA), the infamous detention center run by the Navy as part of the military junta. Critic Norman Cheadle interprets Leonora's character in the following light: "operates through and by power; she is a woman who never loses, who always comes out winning, who falls infallibly on the winning side of any given historical circumstance."[20] Insofar as these characteristics shed light on the affinity that Leonora feels for her torturer, el Escualo, they also impede an interpretation of the power dynamics within the

[20] Norman Cheadle's unpublished conference paper "Metahistoria y crítica ideológica en *El fin de la historia* de Liliana Heker," delivered at the May 1998 Congress of the Social Sciences and the Humanities at the University of Ottawa, Canada.

novel as unilateral. Leonora's character traits also have crucial implications for the functioning of seduction within the novel.[21]

A further narrative element critical to the novel's polyvalent figuring of seduction are the distinctions vis-à-vis seduction's efficacy that the author creates between her representation of el Escualo and his higher-up, el Halcón ("The Falcon"). These distinctions recognize the complexities of the military and of the interactions between political prisoners and soldiers. El Halcón, represented as much more intelligent than el Escualo, is portrayed as equal to Leonora in regards to both intellect and—given her ranking within *Montoneros*—military hierarchies. During her detention, el Halcón comes to Leonora to tell her that she must convince a *Montonero* acquaintance of hers to give

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[21] Literary critic Elizabeth Hardwick affirms in *Seduction and Betrayal* regarding nineteenth-century female protagonists: "when the heroine's history turns about a sexual betrayal, it matters whether she is the central figure in the plot or a somewhat less powerfully and less fully considered 'victim' on the periphery […] The inner life of the woman matters, what she feels and has felt, the degree of her understanding of the brutal cycles of life" (182). Ana Longoni's analysis of *El fin de la historia* in her book *Traiciones* affirms that Heker overlooks the degree to which this character has been stripped of her ability to resist her torturer's advances as a result of the physical torture that the regime has carried out on her. However, I agree with Cheadle's assertion that Heker is presenting us with a uniquely strong and calculating character who is figured as having maintained some agency even in this extreme situation. Heker has also acknowledged that Leonora's character is in an extreme circumstance that neither the author herself nor the majority of critics can fully understand ("Otoño literario")

them information. Heker narrates this moment in the following manner: "As [Leonora] has observed, at this point he has already realized that she is not as easy to seduce as some others, he just has not resigned himself to not sleeping with her" (219). Even within this literary representation of a man as powerful and dangerous as the ESMA's director, Heker focuses on el Halcón's capacity to seduce prisoners rather than upon his capacity for all-out domination. Yet seduction does not work with Leonora, and he knows it. This immunity to seduction is a testament to her strength and reemphasizes the distinction between dictatorial power and seduction.

Leonora's sexual seduction of her captor creates a space that operates outside of the ideological binary created between revolutionary commitment, on the one hand, and the military regime, on the other. While critics—such as Ana Longoni—have maintained that Leonora's prison experiences constitute a trajectory wherein the military breaks her down, stripping her of her mental agency, I argue that Heker is suggesting that while her character's ideological commitment begins to waver, she remains lucid and mentally acute.[22] What she loses, indeed, is her appreciation of *Montoneros'* ends. Once she begins to collaborate with the regime, she is immediately able to recall intricate details concerning strategies and tactics, but, as our narrator informs us, Leonora is surprised to realize that what is most difficult for her to recall is: "why these actions were once meaningful to her, the reason she felt pure and generous by carrying them out, the dream for which so many people her age, or even much younger, had left behind their daily rituals to follow them" (164). This character is coded as having lost her own understanding of the ends of her militant activity. In this way, Leonora's seduction of her

[22] See Longoni's *Traiciones*.

captor is figured as an action that leads her astray from her previous ideological identifications. We see that her process of falling in love with her captor is also a process of falling out of love with her revolutionary cause.[23] Likewise, we observe that el Escualo also begins to distance himself from a staunch and unwavering identification with the military's position through his realization that not all "subversives" are alike.

While her seduction of her captor largely distances Leonora from her ideological identifications, Heker's novel proves that, unlike Baudrillard's figuring of seduction, existing belief systems cannot be done away with entirely, for some trace of these characters' previous commitment is still manifest in the interactions between prisoner and captor.[24] Returning to Dolar's understanding that falling in love is a process by which a

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[23] The tactics of violence themselves have also been figured as having a seductive power of their own, as seen in the 2014 documentary *El diálogo* (released online by *La Nación*) wherein ex-*Montoneros* leader Héctor Leis asserted, "we were all seduced by violence," elucidating the seductive power that *Montoneros*' rhetoric of violence yielded over young revolutionaries. Leis is particularly relevant to my analysis of Leonora's character because, like our protagonist, Leis also was not only a member of *Montoneros* but was a high-ranking official within the group.

[24] This "remainder" might also be understood as "residual." Raymond Williams, in *Marxism and Literature*, defines residual culture: "formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the bases of the residue – cultural as well as social –

subject undergoes a new interpellation, Dolar disclaims that such a process cannot be conceived of as an entirely "clean cut," as Althusser himself has suggested of the interpellation process, but rather, carries along with it a "remainder" that the subject maintains after the experience of falling in love and being interpellated anew. We see such remainders of both the political prisoner and the torturer's previous interpellations within their respective groups through their conversations even after their love affair has begun. While being interrogated about her peers' beliefs and actions, Leonora comments to el Escualo, "in the long run one realizes that everyone has her own truth" (195), to which he counters: "there is only one truth, the thing is that some people […] do not even realize that they are mistaken" (196). In the case of el Escualo, the remnants of his allegiance to the military are still at times manifest. Here, we see that Leonora uses this third space created in her conversations with el Escualo in order to recognize an ideological multiplicity that goes beyond the dichotomy of militancy and state repression.

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of some previous social and cultural institution or formation." (122) "Residue" has been treated widely within the realm of postdictatorial cultural analysis. Idelber Avelar posits that the residue of mourning is allegorized in postdictatorial fiction, so that the residual's literary representation is allegorical. I would argue, however, that Heker's novel—in its move away from a so-called "allegory of defeat"—would correspond, for its part, to Hayden White's *Metahistory*, wherein the ironic mode marks the disappearance of the heroic, drawing on Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*'s position that "irony is the *non-heroic* residue of tragedy" (231, my italics). We may venture to posit, then, that Avelar's notion of allegory would correspond to the heroic residue of tragedy, whereas Heker's markedly ironic novel corresponds to the non-heroic residue of tragedy.

Leonora employs this ideology of multiplicity in order to defend the military, proclaiming to an acquaintance from *Montoneros*: "I try to have my authority. And I truly believe in what I am doing […] they are not criminals, that is the point. They believe that what they are doing is the best that they can to do get rid of subversive activity" (245). In this sense, Heker portrays Leonora as a political prisoner who empathically understands her captors' rationale for the atrocities they are committing, another instance that figures her ideological identifications as being in flux as a result of her love affair with her captor. Leonora's capacity to empathize with the military regime is another element of the novel that renders it markedly different from other postdictatorial cultural production. Her identification with the military's cause and actions dovetails with the affinity that she feels for her captor.

Hertha's Narrative Seduction

Seduction operates both on the level of the novel's plot, wherein Leonora seduces her captor, as well as on the level of narrative structure. The novel contains two diegetic narrators: young physicist Diana Glass and Hertha Bechofen, an older, successful novelist of Viennese origin who encounters Diana as she is beginning to author a novel on Leonora's life. Hertha begins to mentor Diana in order to facilitate the writing process. Throughout the novel, Hertha constantly attempts to seduce Diana into acknowledging and narrating the conflicting truths of Leonora's life story. In both situations, seduction works to create an alternative to strict ideological identifications. The novel attempts to seduce its own author to conceive of this complex historical moment outside of her own viewpoint, creating a diegetic challenge to other authors. This functioning of seduction is

precisely what has rendered *El fin de la historia* controversial within the broader panorama of recent Argentine cultural production.[25]

From their first meeting, Hertha's narrations of her encounters with Diana are couched in terms of seduction: "Seduction. I could see it in my interlocutors' faces each time I spoke […] but today I tried to do the same and in [Diana's] face I only found indignation and surprise […] at another time, at the height of my seduction, I would have, at least, intrigued her. Maybe that is the challenge: to make her stop seeing my wrinkles. Or to make her fall in love with them" (124-5).[26] Hertha—the proponent of crafting a novel that will necessarily break with ideological orthodoxy—is all the while represented through her capacity to seduce. As in the case of Leonora's character, an emphasis upon

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[25] Karen Saban (2013) focuses her analysis of Heker's novel less on *El fin de la historia*'s controversial reception, but on other scholars' (namely Ana Longoni and Miguel Dalmaroni) overlooking Hertha's role as a narrator, mistaking Diana Glass's authorial stance as Heker's own. These previous critical interpretations of the novel are certainly understandable in light of Diana's many similarities to Heker herself. More importantly, however, they also account for the controversy sparked by *El fin de la historia* insofar as Diana's novel, as I go on to analyze, sets up heroic militant martyrdom as its principal category for evaluating its protagonist Leonora. Of course, Leonora does not fulfill these categories; hence, within this mode of interpretation of *El fin de la historia*, the logical conclusion is that Heker (vis-à-vis Diana) condemns her protagonist as an unscrupulous traitor. As I maintain here, however, the creation of Hertha's narrative persona opens up other categories of characterization for Leonora.

the capacity for seduction is found in the same character that deviates from her presupposed ideological commitment, such that Heker repeatedly equates seduction with ideological unorthodoxy. From the beginning, Hertha recognizes that convincing Diana to write a novel about the truth of Leonora's life will not work. Her only recourse in facilitating the production of this ideologically unorthodox novel is to seduce her in some way, for Diana's ideological commitment is unwavering.

As a means of elucidating the complexities of narrating these power dynamics, Heker employs two diegetic authors who represent differing authorial stances: Diana, who is incapable of recounting such conflicting interactions and Hertha, who is capable of doing so. Once Diana learns the disorienting truth of Leonora's life, she is unable to finish writing her novel because, as she laments, this story "is not what [she] had wanted" (282). She goes on to condemn her would-be protagonist's actions of seduction of her captor and betrayal to her cause: "She tore apart my own story […] my own sacred spring. She destroyed it forever" (282-3).[27] Hertha then appropriates Diana's manuscript, interviews survivor Leonora, and finally finishes the novel in Diana's name. Heker thus

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[27] Diana's mention of a "sacred spring" resonates among Peronist youth as a reference to the forty-day presidency of Héctor Cámpora in 1973. Cámpora was Perón's chosen placeholder for himself while he was still proscribed from Argentine politics. Touted as the "primavera camporista," the short-lived presidency came to represent the hope for triumphant Peronist leadership and the fate of Peronist groups at-large. Journalist Miguel Bonasso revisits Cámpora's presidency dubbing him "the president who never was" in his book *El presidente que no fue: Los archivos secretos del peronismo*.

suggests an authorial rigidity on Diana's behalf that does not allow for such a flagrant deviation from the model of the martyred militant as Leonora's character.

Once Hertha's attempts to seduce Diana into writing an ideologically unorthodox novel prove impossible, Hertha effectively betrays Diana through her act of appropriating her unfinished story about Leonora and writing its conclusion herself.[28] Yet I would also argue that Hertha simultaneously maintains a solidarity with Diana in that she does not impose her own authorship on the narrative, but rather cedes her own voice to Diana's

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[28] On the level of the novel's reception, it bears mentioning that Greta Carrasco, Abel Posse's pseudonymous depiction of Lucy Carazo in *Noche de lobos*, exhibits feelings of betrayal by Heker: "Even an intimate friend from school wrote a novel portraying me as a monstrous betrayer. My school and neighborhood friend, Liliana" (267); according to Posse's "Greta," Heker's publishing the novel would add yet another level of betrayal to the text. Likewise, Lewin and Wornat's inflammatory analysis of Heker's novel in their 2014 study *Putas y guerrilleras* affirms that the author took advantage of Carazo's friendship and wrote a novel denouncing her. Of particular importance in Lewin and Wornat's case is that their superficial synthesis of the novel makes no mention to Hertha's character and interprets Diana Glass's disillusionment with Leonora's life story as Heker's own, completely eliding the narrative and ideological struggles that Heker maintains between the two authorial voices. Carrasco's and Lewin and Wornat's reactions to *El fin de la historia* perpetuate a dichotomous understanding of political prisoners as either virtuous (would-be) martyrs or traitors. Since Heker's novel does not fully sympathize with Leonora, it is rejected. Also worth mentioning are Lewin and Wornat's unfavorable words about Posse's novel itself.

narrative throughout, thereby refusing to embody a monolithic authority figure within the realm of writing itself. Furthermore, the text's structure maintains a solidarity with orthodox Marxism insofar as the roles assigned to its protagonists: Diana, the contemplative character who seeks to write about the revolution, and Leonora, the militant who fights actively for it. Hertha's attempt to seduce Diana into writing a different type of novel, however, betrays this orthodoxy. In order for this story of a militant who betrays her cause to be told, an authorial betrayal must take place, whether through Diana's betrayal of her own cause or through Hertha's betrayal of Diana through her appropriation of the latter's manuscript.

It is not only that Heker upsets orthodox militancy and repressive authoritarianism in her representation of the sexual dynamics between Leonora Ordaz and her captor, thus challenging the ideological norms of postdictatorial cultural production. Through her inclusion of a novel within a novel, Heker also creates a novelistic space whose negotiation stages the critical reaction to this upset in the ideologically prescribed models of dictatorial power and leftist victimization. In the passage from one author to another—from Diana to Hertha—Heker posits a challenge to postdictatorial critical reception: to consider a new type of writing about the postdictatorial moment that does not look back on dictatorship through a prescribed ideological lens.[29]

As Hertha observes during a writing workshop: "that story is of evocation, heroism, and tragedy" (144). Diana is so intent on telling a story predicated upon death

[29] This theme of the novel is the central focus of Carlos Hernán Sosa's "Memoria sin condicionamientos: o sobre cómo relee la dictadura *El fin de la historia* de Liliana Heker." *Ciberletras* 38

and heroism that the true story, predicated instead on seduction and betrayal, is a story that she is incapable of telling. Diana tells Garita, Hertha's houseguest and fellow renowned writer who leads the writing workshops: "it doesn't matter how she died […] what matters is our friendship, the moment of that friendship. A very special moment […] Leonora means that moment. A moment too splendid, too full of meaning to let it slip through one's fingers" (145). Hertha then observes Diana as she watches her hands with desperation as though something actually were slipping through them.

It is precisely this melancholic mode of writing that cannot contain the truths of Leonora's life story, such that Hertha must seduce her into a different mode of writing. Diana's overwhelming, melancholic attachment to the past is in keeping with what Idelber Avelar conceptualizes in *The Untimely Present*:

> [P]ostdicatorial literature finds itself, then, perennially on the brink of melancholia […] it is perceived […] *that one cannot write, that writing is no longer possible*, and that writing's only remaining task is to account for that impossibility. The loss with which writing attempts to come to terms has, melancholically, swallowed writing itself: with the effect that the subject who mourns the other finds him/herself to be part of what has been dissolved. (232)

From the beginning of her writing process, Diana describes the novel that she is writing as "alarmingly empty," and includes such reflections in her narrative as "I realize I have lost myself in melancholy but that was not what I wanted to talk about. Or that is not how it was" (22), such that her novel corresponds to the precepts of postdictatorial fiction that Avelar posits here. What is crucial to bear in mind upon considering this model of mourning and melancholia is that this mode is not at all divorced of ideological affinity.

Throughout the novel, Hertha strives to seduce Diana into writing a novel that recounts Leonora's life story and recent decades of Argentine history from outside of a perceived ideological lens. For, although this ideologically orthodox approach may have worked to tell the story of Leonora's death at the hands of the dictatorship's brutality, the truth of Leonora's life cannot be recounted through such a lens. Hertha (and Heker's) move away from a melancholic mode of storytelling anticipates Wendy Brown's "Resisting Left Melancholy," wherein, drawing on Benjamin's own writings, she considers the figure of "the revolutionary hack who is, finally, attached more to a political analysis or ideal—even to the failure of that ideal—than to seizing possibilities for radical change in the present" (20). Brown's analysis bears mentioning here for its thematic as well as temporal relevance to Heker's novel. Published in 1999, Brown is also considering the Left within the context of the demise of socialist regimes and the aftermath of what she terms "the Thatcher-Reagan right," or neoliberalism. Thus Brown's analysis relates to Heker's consideration of "the end of history" in the Fukuyama sense.

As Hertha attempts to seduce Diana into conceiving of a different story about Leonora's life, a different aesthetic approach to storytelling becomes necessary. Inexorable from the nostalgic and romanticized significance that this generation of Argentine culture and writers has vested in the 1970s is Diana's tropic use of synecdoche and metaphor, which, according to Hayden White's *Metahistory*, belong to anarchist and radical ideology, respectively. These tropes are associated with tragedy and the heroic, just as Diana, from the beginning of her novel, repeatedly returns to the characterization of Leonora as "was made to drink life to the bottom of the glass," then asks whether such a trait is a virtue. Diana's characterization of Leonora's character effectively portrays her

as a synecdoche of the revolutionary commitment with which Diana has come to associate her. The final product of the novel, however, is nothing if not ironic in its self-referential structure and unexpected narrative twists and turns. Befittingly, White contends, drawing on Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, that the ironic constitutes the non-heroic residue of tragedy (here again, William's notions of the residual are relevant). Within the circumstances of Leonora's life, the possibility of heroism, as Diana understands it, has disappeared. Hertha thus attempts to seduce Diana into writing what will necessarily be an ironic novel.

As part of this effort to seduce Diana into writing the novel about Leonora's life, Hertha makes a concerted effort to intrigue Diana, either through her cooking or through her reflections on writing, in order to convince her to stay and continue to attempt to write. It is thus that Hertha's capacities for seduction are inexorably linked to her abilities to facilitate the narration of this story. Throughout the workshops in which Diana participates, Hertha, who has already seduced her into attending, is represented as completely silent, often simply facilitating the writing process by nourishing Diana with the dishes she has prepared while her houseguest, Garita, challenges her on her writing.

Throughout these writing workshops, Diana's principles are figured as a constant impeding force in her storytelling process. In these discussions, Garita, whom Diana constantly criticizes for his lack of morals and principles, plays a crucial role.[30] Since he

[30] While not central to my analysis here, it is worth noting that Garita—whom Diana accuses of being unprincipled—is taken as a political prisoner during the diegesis of the novel, so that Heker again posits a distinction between a self-identification with militancy and the circumstance of political disappearance.

is more vocal than Hertha, the task of seducing Diana into writing such an ideologically dissonant novel often falls to him. During a writing workshop, after eight months of coaxing Diana into writing her novel to no avail, he asks her finally to begin her story, at which point she responds, "tengo varios principios," ("I have several beginnings/principles") meaning that she has several beginnings. Garita then puns on her statement, declaring: "that's your problem. Your *principios*" (222).[31] He goes on to tell her to move beyond these principles and begin writing her story at last. Diana becomes frustrated with Garita's pun and counters, "I don't like for people to play with my words" (223), exhibiting a rigidity toward play and ambiguity, whereas a novelist such as Hertha can appreciate the irony of the exchange, evidenced by her inclusion of this wordplay in her novel. In this regard, Heker posits that being highly principled constitutes an impediment, rather than an attribute, in the writing process. The novel equates authorial principles with a lack of play and irony.

Moreover, these "principios" of which Diana conceives in her writing process are all the while connected to a predetermined end within Diana's narration: the aforementioned "alarmingly empty end" of Leonora's death. Mentions of "beginnings"

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[31] In his consideration of principles and ends in the "Means of Realization" section of "The Idea of History and its Realization," part III of *Reason in History, a General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, Hegel remarks the following: "But in contemplating history as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been sacrificed, a question necessarily arises: To what principle, to what final purpose, have these monstrous sacrifices been offered?"

are inextricable from revolutionary discourse, such as Che Guevara's 1967 Message to the Tricontinental wherein he disclaims "the beginnings will not be easy; they shall be extremely difficult." For Guevara, of course, the beginnings are but a means to an end: the successful revolution. A novelist such as Diana, who cleaves to the idealized mold of Che Guevara, has difficulty conceiving of her own story's beginnings because they are always subordinated to the ends. Earlier in the novel, our narrator describes the draft of Diana's novel: "the beginning was bad. And what came next was worse" (152). The diegetic novel's failures thus challenge such a stance as Guevara's, suggesting that an arduous beginning does not flow naturally into an idealized end of heroic martyrdom (and, by extension, successful revolution). Since Diana's writing continues to worsen, Garita and Hertha must seduce her into a new form of storytelling.

What Hertha and Garita are ultimately seeking in their narrative seduction of Diana is for the young author to be able to view Leonora's story from a different perspective. As Diana first observes Leonora, the narrator (Hertha) clarifies that Diana is severely near-sighted and that she, in this moment, refused to wear glasses. Within an authoritarian regime such as Argentina's during the dictatorship, this myopia functions inversely with Foucauldian concepts of panopticism, a disciplinary system predicated upon "a perfect eye which nothing would escape and a center toward which all gazes would be directed" (*Discipline and Punish* 173). In this sense, the question of who sees and who is seen is inexorably linked to questions of power and authority (let us recall that the nickname of el Escualo's superior is el Halcón, who has a "bird's eye view," as it

were).[32] During a workshop with Garita and Hertha, Diana defends her myopia: "after all, was Van Gogh not nearsighted? His brilliant stars, are they not the stars that a nearsighted person sees?" (247). As an author, Diana privileges her myopia as an ideal perspective for a narrator, cleaving to ideals of minoritarian authorial subjectivity.

As Heker's novel emphasizes repeatedly, seduction facilitates the process of writing such an ideologically unorthodox novel as the true story of Leonora's life. The prevalence of both sexual and narrative seduction within the novel recalls Soren Kierkegaard's *Diary of a Seducer*, which, like *El fin de la historia*, consists of two narrative personas who may or may not be the same person. As has been noted regarding Kierkegaard's *Diary of a Seducer*, Kierkegaard's role throughout the text is largely to fulfill a maieutic function through which the author serves as midwife as the reader gives birth to a knowledge that s/he already had yet was previously unable or unwilling to recognize.[33] In this vein, Diana realizes that her friend Leonora has not been killed only when—following Hertha's advice—she puts on her glasses and sees Leonora in the street right in front of her. The novel thus serves to seduce its own narrator into giving life to

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[32] Heker maintains that Diana's myopia constitutes an autobiographical reference, for she also felt quite deceived when she first saw the night sky with glasses, losing its impressionistic effect. With respect to this character's myopia, it must also be noted that Marguerite Feitlowitz, in her book *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the legacies of torture*, refers to dictatorial Argentina as "The House of the Blind," asserting that, "The Dirty War occurred, at least in part, because Argentines were too terrorized to look each other in the face" (192).

[33] Berthold, Daniel.

knowledge that she has previously refused to see. Likewise, *El fin de la historia*'s seduction-laden narrative complexities serve as a vehicle through which to seduce its readers into bringing to light a storyline of which many people are already partially aware yet have been reluctant to acknowledge.

In order for Hertha's narrative seduction of Diana to take place, however, Diana must be seduced into a new way of seeing. Heker describes Diana as wanting to narrate "from an almost limitless imagination, as if the world had been created by some exaggerated impressionist" (14). This impressionistic narrative that Diana seeks to construct also purports to constitute a totalized account of Leonora's life. As a narrator, she attempts to create such a coherent narrative that the necessary dissonance of the outcomes of a narrative that includes the truth of Leonora's betrayal is impossible for her to write. Hayden White contends in *The Content of the Form* that "what is 'imaginary' about any narrative representation is the illusion of a centered consciousness capable of looking out onto the world, apprehending its structures and processes, and representing them to itself as having all the formal coherency of narrativity itself" (36). Diana's narrative is so highly pervaded by its own myopic outlook that her own viewpoint comes to the fore of the text as its organizing principle. Crucial to Diana's narrative's 'centered consciousness' is its own teleology, present from her attempted novel's very beginning in its emphasis upon "an alarmingly empty end." As a narrator, she must be seduced into being able to conceive of the world around her from outside of her own myopic consciousness in order to give birth to her knowledge of Leonora's survival and betrayal.

Diana's insistence on the benefits of her highly subjective perspective are countered by one of the imprisoned *Montoneros*' utterances toward the end of the novel:

"there exists an intimacy of actions, a complex network of reasons which, judged from a conventional lens, may seem repulsive yet, through the light of an unprejudiced intelligence, can be understood perfectly" (224). The author's use of terms such as "optic" and "light" emphasize the possibility of different ways of seeing; Heker's positing of such ideas preempts many of the adverse interpretations that the novel would receive, cautioning her readers to leave their precepts aside. This concept remits to Leonora's utterance that "in the long run one realizes that everyone has her own truth." As elucidated most clearly by these two utterances, *El fin de la historia* constitutes a Bakhtinian dialogic novel par excellence, insofar as each character's speech possesses its own belief system. Heker herself has alluded to Bakhtin and called her novel "dialogic," affirming that, when creating el Escualo's character, she saw herself obligated to do so "from his own truth."[34] Hertha's successful seduction of Diana into finishing her novel effectively seduces her into dialogism. In this regard, the novel's structure is a space of ideological multiplicity, just as Leonora's seduction of el Escualo opens up a space for the consideration of differing creeds.

Writing beyond the Revolution's Ends

When the narrator interviews Leonora at the end of the novel, she notes that she was, in fact, made to drink life to the bottom of the cup, but then adds that this characterization does not matter much, for it is not always a virtue. Indeed, this story's only definitive resolution is that the categories for evaluation that its author Diana had originally set out: virtue, ideology, and martyrdom, cannot be used on Leonora. Rather,

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34 My interview with Liliana Heker, Charlottesville, VA, March 2009. My translation.

as Hertha observes in this final interview, Leonora "often uses the verb love." Our narrator tells us this not as a celebration of love, but in a tongue-in-cheek tone through her enumeration of the various men that Leonora has "loved" in her life, tellingly through the preterite tense and thus highlighting this character's fleeting—and, of course, ethically questionable—affective identifications. The "end of the story" concludes that virtue has nothing to do with this character, that her own motivation has come from ever-changing personal identifications.

The narrator's conclusions from the final interview with Leonora speak to the disillusion of an entire generation. We as readers are told that the categories of virtue and ideology set up in the novel's beginning—the heyday of revolutionary fervor—not only are no longer relevant but, in the case of the particular character of Leonora, never were relevant. This character was not simply led astray from a predetermined outcome of heroic leftist martyrdom, but rather would never even have been capable of dying heroically for the cause with her ideological and virtuous purity intact. These forms of purity never existed in this character. Hence the controversy sparked by Heker's novel: the notion that an individual revolutionary presumed to have died for the cause could have died—as Leonora very easily could have within the ESMA—without purity of ideological commitment. The ends of her story of militancy are not the creation of a utopian society, but rather a means of bringing her to the next stage of her life: yet another love affair with yet another person. Her seduction of her captor, thus, does not merely signal her deviation from a storyline of heroic martyrdom, but posits that this storyline never existed for this character. A new storyline had to be created. To this end, a new authorial ethos was also necessary.

Such an authorial ethos, of course, is embodied in Heker's creation of Hertha's character. Heker began to write the novel in 1987 and found herself frustrated and unsatisfied with a draft in 1996 that consisted of the portions of the novel understood to be narrated by Diana. At this point, she had the idea to create Hertha's character and maintain an authorial struggle between the two narrators. Thus, Heker finally conceived of a new way to recount militancy and dictatorship: "another story," as she phrases it in an interview with literary critic Gwendolyn Díaz. To Díaz's query, "What led you to write this novel several years after the dictatorship?" Heker responds:

> I felt the need to write a novel that bore witness to the ideology and the conflicts that marked my generation. I wanted to bring to light another story about the effects of the repression and persecution on the youth of that time. We believed that we could change the world, that we could improve the conditions of the poor and create a more just and egalitarian society. The rhetoric of the left seemed to offer a better solution to the social and economic problems we experienced in Argentina. We were inspired by the Cuban revolution and hoped to lead Latin America toward a more hopeful future. However, the result was devastating. We ended up in a horrifying bloodbath instead, in which thousands of young people were tortured and murdered. (192-3)

This mention of the "devastating result" speaks to the generational disillusionment that characterizes dictatorial and postdictatorial Argentina, a tone that pervades Diana's novel. This devastating result also dovetails with the novel's title, again emphasizing that the end of the story does not map onto Diana's authorial or ideological expectations. Heker's use of "result" and "ended up" posits this bloodshed as the disappointing end of this

revolutionary struggle rather than as a means to reach the revolution's desired ends. This position counters Che Guevara's aforementioned "Message to the Tricontinental" in which he figures "each spilt drop of blood" as constitutive of the liberation of any one country, which in turn liberates all countries. For Guevara—and the *Montoneros* who followed him—blood shed was, of course, a means to a political end. For Heker, however, the "horrifying bloodbath" was the end of the story.

Martín Kohan's *Museo de la revolución*

Unlike Heker, Martín Kohan—novelist and professor of literary theory at the Universidad de Buenos Aires—was a small child during the tumultuous years of political struggle and violence of the early 1970s. Despite his age at the time, Kohan engages questions of state repression and 1970s militancy throughout his *oeuvre*—and does so in a style all his own. In his 2002 novel *Dos veces junio*, he examines state repression from the perspective of one of the military's own, thus—like the other novels I seek to analyze in here—nuancing our cultural understanding of the right. Kohan inserts himself directly into the field of debate regarding how the politics of memory and militancy may be rendered through literature (it bears repeating here that he conceived of *Dos veces junio*'s prisoner character in direct opposition to Heker's protagonist of *El fin de la historia*, seeking to narrate the story of a militant who is good and loyal to the cause through-and-through, one who does not break). He also addressed questions of power during the Malvinas conflict (1982) through his 2007 novel *Ciencias morales* (later adapted into the film *La mirada invisible*), a fictionalized account of the power dynamics inherent to Buenos Aires's renowned *Colegio Nacional*—a sort of microcosm of Argentina at the time. Suffice it to say that dictatorial power relations have pervaded his novelistic production. Kohan's 2006 novel *El museo de la revolución* in particular takes as its central focus the very themes that constitute the core of my study: a militant who betrays the revolutionary cause, the struggle between militancy and love, seduction, the ethics and politics of the armed struggle, the generational inheritance of militancy's legacy, and the status of the writerly figure in the postauthoritarian period.

Set in the mid-1990s, the novel takes as its narrator and protagonist Marcelo, who works for a publishing house in Buenos Aires and has traveled to Mexico City as a literary scout seeking out manuscripts. There, he meets Norma Rossi, who tells him that she is in possession of both the personal diaries and meditations on Trotskyist revolutionary ideals belonging to Rubén Tesare. A member of the ERP (*Ejército Revolucionario Popular*, the armed branch of the Trotskyist *Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores*), Tesare was sent by the ERP in 1975 to a small town in the province of Córdoba after having been coerced into breaking up with his *Montonera* girlfriend as a result of the differences between the two groups.

It is thus that Kohan sets out to tell a provocative story of militancy: one that recalls and is even predicated upon the discrepancies between various revolutionary groups in the period leading up to the 1976 military coup. It is worth noting that Kohan's depiction of a militant who betrays his cause can ultimately be seen as a moralizing tale. As we learn from Norma's readings, Tesare is killed for not having followed the rules of the ERP. In this sense, Kohan's tale of a militant who betrays can ultimately be interpreted as participatory in a specific ideological project. While Kohan does indeed create a highly problematized representation of a militant figure, in many ways his novel constitutes more of a counterpoint to the other works I seek to study here than a case study in the phenomenon of ideological nuance for which I argue here. My reading of the novel seeks to analyze Kohan's simultaneous vindication of the ERP and condemnation of individual action; that is, his retrospective gaze towards 1970s militant action would suggest that the only shortcomings of the movement were individuals such as his novelist's protagonist. Notably, Kohan sets his novel not in 2006, when he was writing it,

but in 1995, whereby he writes directly against the politically and economically repressive years of Carlos Menem's administration, rather than reckon with the shifting tides of the 2006 political climate in Argentina. This opposition to 1990s neoliberalism can be understood largely as a continuation of the same ideological affinities of 1970s militancy.

The Novel's Genesis

Kohan's decision to recount the story of a Trotskyist who is reprimanded for having a *Montonera* girlfriend was based in part on Beatriz Sarlo's real-life anecdote of having been party to the decision to force a member out of her own group because he had a girlfriend belonging to a different militant group. Sarlo felt ashamed of having forced such a decision onto another individual and abjured her having done so, while Kohan condoned her having made such a decision, celebrating her commitment to the cause in having the man ousted from the group. Subsequently, he used *El Museo de la revolución* as a forum through which to condemn betrayal to one's revolutionary cause through fraternization with members of opposing revolutionary groups.[35]

The novel shifts chronologically between narrations set in 1995 in Mexico City of Marcelo's encounters with Norma Rossi and 1975 in Laguna Chica, the latter narrative not only tells of Tesare's operation here, but also consists of his lengthy meditations on Lenin and Trotsky's theories of time and revolution. Kohan has stated that he set out to write an essay on these theories at the same time that he wrote a novel and found himself

[35] My interview of Martín Kohan, June 25th, 2012. Buenos Aires, Argentina

collapsing the two. In this regard, he ultimately creates a diegetic novel—ideologically coherent with Trotsky and the ERP, authored by Rubén Tesare—in addition to the novel narrated by Marcelo.

A fundamental aspect of Tesare's writings is the fact that they even exist in the first place. For, of course, according to orthodox Marxism, revolutionary action is prescribed in two parts, to be executed by two different people. Marx, of course, dictates that one person fight in the name of revolution and that another contemplate the revolution. Tesare's writing about Trotsky's theories of revolution while he is simultaneously on a mission fuses the two roles that Marx infamously assigned to revolutionaries, thus furthering the nuances that Kohan offers here to our understandings of militant subjectivity.

ERP and *Montoneros*

Kohan assigns Tesare—*nom de guerre* Dorrego—to the ERP in no small part because the author himself defends and supports the ERP's actions during the revolutionary struggles for they, unlike the *Montoneros*, killed only one person who was not supposed to have been killed.[36] While Kohan indicts *Montoneros* for the senseless violence that the group committed in the early 1970s, the author maintains an ideological and political solidarity with the ERP for the group's more tightly organized structure than *Montoneros*'. *Museo de la revolución*'s distinction between the violence committed by

[36] Interview with author, 15 June 2012, Buenos Aires.

the ERP and that of M*ontoneros* contradicts Oscar del Barco's "No matarás" (his open letter published the same year as *Museo de la revolución*) wherein he asserts that "all of us who sympathized with or participated in some way in the *Montoneros*' movement, in the ERP, in the FAR, or in any other armed group are responsible for their actions" (115). Del Barco then goes on to indict Santucho, leader of the ERP, alongside *Montoneros'* Firmenich and even Videla and Massera themselves. This distinction that Kohan makes, then, does not contribute to the move toward recognition of the violence committed by both sides for which del Barco advocates. But this type of mutual recognition is not Kohan's goal. More than anything, Kohan's endeavor here seems to be a vindication of militancy. Specifically, he seeks to reclaim the ERP's action while simultaneously depicting *Montoneros* as having compromised the ERP's members.

What Kohan does oppose is senseless violence of the variety committed by the *Montoneros* throughout the revolutionary struggle. Kohan's own representation of militancy, however, would suggest that this differentiated inheritance of the ideals of revolutionary thinking is not a possible endeavor, that revolution demands violence and militarization. In fact, it is because Tesare defies the hierarchy of the militarized structure of the ERP that he is assassinated. In this sense, the novel can be interpreted as a retrospective cautionary tale, the moral of which is to forego one's affinities toward an individual of a warring camp in the name of solidarity with one's own political group. In other words, ideological affinity must always precede interpersonal connections.

Another element of the ERP that Kohan continues to praise to this day is the

group's rigid ethical requirements for its members, most notoriously the requirement that members be faithful to their spouses, as adultery was grounds for expulsion from the group. In this regard, the ERP defined itself in part by its own ability to govern the interpersonal responsibilities of each of its members. This element of the group's protocol would negate a clear distinction between interpersonal relationships and militant commitment, for the former required an ethical and thoughtful consideration of the latter, a conflation which is significant in light of the conflict between the two that Tesare's experience creates. Furthermore, the ERP prided itself on its division from its non-armed party, the PRT, such that the group has also been understood as being more tightly-organized than such a group as *Montoneros*.

Within the novel, the predominant rift between *Montoneros* and the ERP is the former's popular support of Perón, of whom the ERP was often skeptical, dismissing him as a populist. Our narrator, Marcelo, reflects upon Gabriela, Tesare's girlfriend who belongs to *Montoneros*: "Tesare no podía ignorar que Gabriela incurría en ciertos desvíos ideológicos desde todo punto de vista inadmisibles. Las trampas del populismo la encontraban desprevenida siempre, y en sus caídas caía también en las equivocaciones de los enfebrecidos por Perón. Para decirlo sin medias tintas: era Montonera" (59). Tesare thus represents the majority of the ERP, who were opposed to Perón on the basis of his relationship to workers and, moreover, because of his populist appeal. Unlike *Montoneros* and several other militant groups at the time, Argentine Trotskyist groups had exhibited an extremely skeptical stance towards Perón and what to make of him:

"After the military coup d'etat of June 4, 1943, which ultimately resulted in Juan Perón coming to power, the most divisive ideological issue among Trotskyists was how to interpret the Peronista phenomenon and how to determine what attitude the Trotskyists should take toward it" (Alexander 59).[37]

Despite Tesare's level of engagement with and commitment to the ERP's cause, however, it must be noted that he is represented throughout the novel as somewhat naive and inexperienced, most importantly regarding his own understanding of the militant cause and his role in the revolutionary struggle. The narrator tells Norma at one point that something seems strange about Tesare's notebooks. When she asks what exactly seems strange, he answers: "Sé que son notas de lectura, y nadie más que yo puede entender lo que son las pasiones de un lector. Pero no deja de llamarme la atención lo poco que entra la realidad concreta en lo que escribe. Es como si fuese impermeable al escribir" (111). Kohan thus suggests that Tesare is somewhat out of touch with the realities surrounding him. Marcelo then comments, "es como si hubiese estado partido en dos" (111), remitting again to Tesare's combining the two separate categories of writer and fighter prescribed by orthodox Marxism. Moreover, Marcelo's observations create an interpretation of Tesare's writings such that any shortcomings that militant thought and/or action might have can be readily attributed to Tesare's being distracted from the cause by his feelings

[37] Robert J. Alexander is one of the leading historians of Trotskyism throughout Latin America. The above citation comes from his seminal 1973 book *Trotskyism in Latin America*.

for his girlfriend, rather than any shortcomings of militancy itself.

Militancy vs. Love

We learn that Tesare is disillusioned with his peers throughout his operation in Laguna Chica: "De Tesare es importante anotar que viaja aquejado por cuestiones sentimentales" (58). While he is able to recognize that the ideological differences between him and Gabriela—namely *Montoneros*' support of Perón that Tesare himself terms populism (59)—are substantive, he is incapable of overcoming his affinity for Gabriela as well as his resentment toward his group. Marcelo's summary of Tesare's situation informs us that, while Tesare appreciated the ideological differences between the ERP and *Montoneros*, he continued to see Gabriela even after a peer of his advised him to end his relationship with her. They then held a meeting and voted that Tesare be forced to stop seeing her, a mandate which he heeded. While he has complied with the wishes of the majority of his group, he has done so reluctantly and full of resentment. This resentment, we understand, is what leads him to act carelessly on this operation when he meets the young lady who turns out to be Norma Rossi and leads him to his death:

> se entiende que en el camino corto hacia el hotel de los textiles, distinga un poco más adelante a la chica de la otra mesa del bar, que es también la chica del otro asiento del micro, y se ponga a conversar con ella. No lo habría hecho en otras circunstancias, sin estar imbuido de tanto fastidio y tanta frustración, porque sabe bien que tiene que pasar desapercebido en este lugar, eludiendo en lo posible todo contacto que no sea imposible de evitar. (61)

Where this initial attraction towards Fernanda Aguirre is planted as a result of his disenchantment with his party, once Tesare is certain that he and Fernanda are going to kiss for the first time, he thinks first of Gabriela and then of the vindication that he is certain to feel once he kisses Fernanda: "lo que siente Tesare no es que va a traicionar a Gabriela; lo que extrañamente siente es que ellos dos, Gabriela y él, los dos juntos y no solamente él, valiéndose de la divina ligereza de Fernanda Aguirre, van a vengarse en secreto de lo que los compañeros le dictaminaron. Lo que ahora llega es una pequeña venganza de la que nadie (ni Gabriela […]) sabrá" (87). Tesare thinks, then, that his indiscretion (an indiscretion against the ERP, not his girlfriend) with Fernanda will vindicate the orders with which the group has enjoined him.

Tesare's disenchantment with his peers over their decision to force him to break up with his girlfriend elucidates the increasingly pervasive notion that militant commitment precludes interpersonal identification. Ex-*Montonero* Héctor Robert Leis posited earlier this year in his *Testamento*:

> Aristóteles […] utilizó el concepto de philia (amor, amistad) para referirse a lo que cimenta la comunidad política. En este sentido, la Argentina es un país extremo, son pocas las comunidades políticas donde la philia se encuentre más ausente. Esta no es una percepción intuitiva sino un hecho. Cualquier observador neutral puede comprobar fácilmente dos cosas: la primera, que la distinción de amigo-enemigo atraviesa prácticamente cada nanomilímetro de la vida pública y privada; la segunda, que los actores orientan su acción enfatizando mucho más el lado "enemigo" que el "amigo". El conflicto de los años 70 muestra de forma dramática la ausencia de philia. (42-3)

This lack of a cultural appreciation for Aristotelian philia accounts, at least to a certain degree, for some of the violence committed during the 1970s militant struggles. The notion that one's ideological and political affinities should inform her action more so than love or friendship is precisely the source of friction that serves as the impetus for Tesare's story of his involvement with the ERP. Leis's assertion here that militant actors informed their decision-making based more on their enemies than on their friends dovetails with the trajectory of Tesare's mission to Laguna Chica, throughout which he is constantly focused on vengeance—even against his own group.

Seduction

Through the narrations of Tesare's actions in the 1970s, we learn that, once coerced into ending his relationship with his *Montonera* girlfriend, he encounters another woman while on a mission to Córdoba. Finding himself jaded and incredulous regarding the ERP's rules on fraternizing with those outside of the group, he abandons all caution and allows himself to be seduced by this woman, who, we learn later, is in fact a military operative who betrays his trust and has him killed. Finally, we learn that this woman and Norma Rossi are one and the same, whereby the text figures sexual seduction and narrative seduction as being carried out by the same person.

In addition to this element of seduction between a militant and a military member in the mid-1970s, the narrative is also largely predicated upon the seduction that takes place between Norma Rossi and Marcelo. Like in Heker's novel—wherein seduction facilitates the writing process—Kohan sustains a narrative tension through the theme of seduction in order to allow for the reading of Tesare's notebooks. The narrator has

already vetted a few other manuscripts that his editor is considering for publication and now spends a number of days listening to Norma read from the pages of Tesare's journals. At several points, he phones his boss to tell him that he is unsure as to whether the manuscript is worth publishing, but that he wants to continue listening in order to be certain. Both at these moments and in his dialogue with Norma, it is unclear whether he is interested for reasons of publication or because he is being seduced by her. This collapse between an ideological or historical interest on Marcelo's behalf in Tesare's notebooks, on the one hand, and his sexual attraction towards Norma on the other, is the driving force of the novel.

Insofar as we learn that Norma is the same woman who seduced Rubén Tesare two decades earlier, Norma at once seduced Tesare into betraying his cause and would also seduce the publishing industry, through the conduit of Marcelo, into publishing an account of such a problematic militant figure as Tesare. In other words, while 1975 Norma entices Tesare into his own death, 1995 Norma seduces Marcelo with her reading of Tesare's notebooks. Her seduction of Tesare in 1975 and her later seduction of Marcelo are narrated in a similar light; during her reading aloud to Marcelo from Tesare's notebooks, the narrator is constantly wondering whether or when she is going to give him the notebooks as well as whether she is going to sleep with him. Similarly, Tesare meets "Fernanda Aguirre" who, upon checking into the hotel at which they have both planned to stay, is coy with the desk clerk as he gives them one double room rather than one single room, beguiling Tesare. Throughout both instances of sexual seduction, we are

constantly reminded that she has the upper hand.

Marcelo's first encounter with Norma—in which she first reads aloud from Tesare's journals—is a lunch meeting in Mexico City that leaves Marcelo perplexed and intrigued as to Norma's interest and intentions with him. He narrates the meeting's end: "Dudo otra vez acerca de cuál sería la manera correcta de interpretar esta circunstancia: si como un signo de desinterés (Norma Rossi cumple y acude a la cita, pero se va antes incluso de ponerse a negociar nada) o como un signo de interés (Norma Rossi hace las cosas de manera tal que tendremos que encontrarnos otra vez, y quizá varias veces)" (21). From the beginning of Marcelo's narration of his meetings with Norma, he contemplates her motives and level of interest with him in a way that evokes the intrigue of an incipient love affair more so than a perfunctory business meeting in the publishing industry.

Throughout their meetings, Norma uses the sexual overtones of Tesare's encounter with Fernanda Aguirre to garner and to retain Marcelo's interest. Once the narrator is truly intrigued by Tesare's notebooks, he begins to ask Norma questions about them, giving up his attempts at seeming disaffected towards Norma and the narrations. Norma responds to him, "Yo podría decirte cómo fue que cogieron" (134), then repeating "yo podría decirte…" to describe different aspects of this sex act. She then reassures him that, although she could tell him these details (which she, in fact, has just done), he can read them all for himself in Tesare's personal diary (which does not, in fact, exist). Norma's rhetorical strategy of recounting the sex act between Tesare and Fernanda Aguirre thus divulges everything about this encounter while simultaneously leading the

narrator to believe that there is more to be told when, in fact, such a notebook does not even exist. In this sense, she gives him everything yet still leaves him wanting more, so that the narrator constantly struggles to maintain his wits about him, much as a lovesick person would do.

During one of their meetings in which Norma is reading aloud from Tesare's notebooks on Trotskyist thought, the two are seated in an abandoned patio area of a hotel as two employees enter the area. Norma immediately stops reading the notebook as the two men sprinkle ant poison around the patio. Even before discovering the truth of Norma's identity, Marcelo sits with her as he contemplates the insect repellant that the hotel workers have just spread: "el secreto del buen veneno es que tiene el poder de atraer a la víctima, en vez de repelarla. No responde al principio de la agresión, sino al principio de la trampa bien tendida" (110). This reflection on poison and attraction immediately follows a moment of the novel in which Marcelo finds himself, to his own surprise, jealous and longing for Norma. Once Norma has stopped reading, he finds himself wanting to beg her to pick up where she left off. In this sense, Norma is represented as having captivated the narrator in more ways than one; his reflection on the use of attraction as a way of poisoning, then, remits to the betrayal that Fernanda commits against Tesare as well as prefiguring Marcelo's later realization that Fernanda and Norma are the same person. Shortly after the narrator's reflection on poison and seduction, Norma follows him back to his hotel room and kisses him passionately, completing her process of having seduced him. She then continues to read from Tesare's notebooks and

suggests that they visit the Trotsky Museum together, where they are fully surrounded by and immersed in Trotsky's legacy. This consideration of the functioning of seduction as poison, then, emphasizes the important role that seduction plays in the novel as the driving force of both the sexual relationships and the ideological considerations of revolution and militancy. That is, Norma is seducing the narrator sexually as much as she is seducing him into the unexplored world of Trotsky's legacy in the 1990s.

Betrayal

In tandem with the operative functions of seduction throughout the novel, much of the characters' interactions with each other in the novel are mediated through elements of betrayal. Like seduction, betrayal also becomes a driving force of the novel, for the novel would not exist if not for the characters' acts of betrayal. Tesare betrays the ERP first through his relationship with his *Montonera* girlfriend, secondly by sleeping with Norma Rossi, and lastly through his writing about the revolution. The novel's overt themes of betrayal, coupled with its setting in Mexico City and Tesare's belonging to a Trotskyist party, remit to Tesare's reflections on Trotsky's 1937 *Revolution Betrayed*, in which he explores the status of the revolution in the Soviet Union from his exile in Mexico.

As we learn through Tesare's notebooks and his meditations on Leninist and Trotskyist thought, he conceives of his role in the revolutionary struggle quite seriously. The only regard in which he does not take his task seriously is when forced to choose between his affection and/or attraction towards women and his duty to the ERP. Tesare's

potential promiscuity—irrespective of whether his sexual encounters involve extra-ERP figures—may in and of itself threaten to undermine his loyalty to the ERP in light of the strict ethical standards that the ERP maintained for its members.

Norma also betrays Marcelo by leading him to believe that there are two sets of manuscripts: one being the notebooks including his writings on ideas of revolution and the other telling the story of his love affair with Fernanda Aguirre. Marcelo tells Norma that he is interested in both Tesare's writings and what happened to him and she responds incredulously, telling him that Tesare's writings on Lenin deserve to be published, but not his diary chronicling what happened in Laguna Chica. The narrator responds, "no sabía que Tesare dejó también un diario íntimo" (65). Norma then acts as though she has not heard Marcelo, furthering his belief that there are two separate notebooks. In addition to furthering the element of betrayal associated with this character, her leading him to believe that Tesare authored two manuscripts when he in fact he wrote only one further blurs the lines between political action and his personal life, confounding once again the themes of love and militancy.

Marcelo takes a while to realize that Norma is the same woman who led Tesare to his death in 1975. After visiting Trotsky's house, Marcelo asks Norma about it, who admits that, although she has lived in Mexico for two decades, she has only been to the house two times; he then wonders, "en qué agrupación habrá militado en los años setenta en Argentina, cuándo y cómo concretamente se tuvo que exiliar" (58), but Norma quickly changes the subject back to Tesare. Once he discovers the truth about Norma, it is clear that he has assumed all along that she was a companion of Tesare, or that, in some way, she was in ideological solidarity with him. Her constant evasion of talking about herself

emphasizes the degree to which she leads him on by allowing him to believe that she was involved in 1970s militant movements.

Generational Inheritance and Legacy

Throughout *Museo de la reolución*, questions of inheritance and legacy are constantly at play. Tesare's notebooks are passed to Norma's hands, who transmits their contents aloud to Marcelo, who then recounts them—in his narration—to the reader. Given the overtly dogmatic content of Tesare's reflections on revolution, a special ideological pact of sorts is established with the reader. As Martín-Cabrera has observed in the novel, "lo que está en juego en esta reciente novelística argentina no sólo es la reconstrucción del pasado militante como pasado, sino también el problema de la herencia de estas expriencias revolucionarias para las generaciones que no vivieron la época" (305). Cabrera attributes this problem of heritage to the fact of the neoliberal Menemist years whose aftermath would have evoked in this younger generation an interest to revisit a past they either did not live or experienced as very young children. Novelists such as Kohan have, in turn, been enjoined to make sense of this recent history as best they can.

This interest among younger generations of writers in 1970s history would correspond directly to what Marianne Hirsch famously described as "postmemory:" "a 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 recreation" (22). Kohan, in this and many other of his novels, takes up this generational inheritance in an attempt to make sense of his own country's recent past and to explore the present-

day legacy of revolutionary struggles in Argentina.

Perhaps most immediately relevant to the novel's reception is its consideration of the generational inheritance of a legacy of violence. Where a 1970s militant character of author Sergio Bufano reflected on his generation "Somos una generación engendrada en la violencia" (16), Kohan does not explicitly proclaim his own generation's stance on violent struggle.[38] However, Martín-Cabrera concludes his analysis of *Museo de la revolución* in the following way:

> esta concepción de la política revolucionaria corre el riesgo de ser entendida como pura mimesis de lo peor de ese pasado: la militarización del pensamiento revolucionario y el culto a la muerte. Por eso, para mí la clave de la herencia, la traición, pasa por una desmilitarización del pensamiento revolucionario que no renuncie a la revolución. Esta traición implicaría, entre otras cosas, renunciar al propio vocabulario que utilizamos para referirnos a este pensamiento emancipador, empezando por la propia palabra 'militante.'" (321)

Martín-Cabrera's resolution here between betrayal and inheritance would call for an abjuration of militancy at-large, for, as he goes on to explain, the pure semiotics of militancy necessitate violence, a violence which can be subverted through a differentiated inheritance; that is, a betrayal of the previous generation's embrace of armed struggle.

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[38] This utterance comes from the militant protagonist of the story "Los juegos de Luciana" container in Bufano's 1983 *Cuentos de guerra sucia*. Bufano would later return to contemplate questions of 1970s militancy in the periodical he began publishing in 2005, *Lucha Armada*, dedicated to rethinking the ethics and implications of armed struggle.

While Cabrera's notion of a demilitarized revolutionary thought might sound quite appealing, the novel itself does not seem to advocate for this same type of thinking. Kohan makes a deliberate distinction between the senseless violence practiced by the *Montoneros* and the calculated, organized violence practiced by the ERP in which, as the author maintains, only one person who was not 'supposed' to have been killed was killed.

Reflections on 1990s Argentine Publishing Industry

Marcelo's occupation as a literary agent and his reflections upon whether the notebooks that Norma is reading to him merit publication ultimately constitute a sort of self-referential contemplation of the 1990s status of testimonial-type accounts of 1970s militant figures. These meditations allow Kohan to explore the place of militancy within literary production; the narrator's sustained interest in the notebooks and attempts to convince the publisher of their merit would connote that this story is indeed worth publishing. Tesare's status as a rogue party member—evidenced through his disenchantment with his party and his fraternization with a non-party member—are likely the elements that most intrigue the narrator to continue listening to the manuscript and to suggest its publication. The manuscripts are also suspenseful in the almost cloak-and-dagger tone, a suspense that culminates in Tesare's being overtaken by the woman.

Kohan's placing Marcelo in the position to choose whether to publish the notebooks also casts Marcelo—and the publishing industry at-large—in the ethical role of witnessing state repression and publishing those tales of violence for a new generation to read and witness. Curiously, the narrator exhibits little—if any—compunction in attempting to appropriate the story of Rubén Tesare. This lack of guilt or self-doubt may

be attributable to the novel's ironic tone or to a lack of ideological seriousness for which Kohan may be indicting the current publishing industry.

Marcelo explains his reason for traveling to Mexico City to meet with Norma Rossi, an encounter arranged by another man in the publishing industry, Sebastián Gallo: "A Sebastián le arrimaron la historia, hace cosa e dos o tres meses, de la exiliada argentina que tenía en su poder un manuscrito tal vez interesante. Precisiones no había: se trataba de una especie de ensayo, más o menos disperso o más o menos orgánico, que había quedado de un desaparecido, y que se ocupaba de la revolución y del tiempo, o de la revolución en el tiempo" (21). When he calls Sebastián Gallo to go over the details of his first meetings with Rossi, Gallo quickly changes the subject. The narrator reacts: "tomo conciencia, o me acuerdo, de que este asunto en verdad nunca se planteó como prioritario" (37). The novel thus suggests that this topic of revolution and time is not immanently of interest to the publishing industry of the time, but simply worth exploring while in Mexico City scouting other manuscripts for publication. Kohan thus subverts his own narration by suggesting that his own novel might not be worthy of publication. Particularly in light of Kohan's own focus on questions of time and revolution, we cannot but question whether this status regarding the "publishability" of such a narration as Tesare's notebooks that Rossi is reading might have changed over the eleven years that passed between 1995 and 2006.

During one of Norma's readings, Marcelo wonders to himself: "Me pregunto qué razones podrá tener Norma Rossi para ceder estos textos a la publicación, y qué razones

podrá tener para negarse a hacerlo" (51). Once he finally brings himself to ask her this question, once she has finished reading, has driven somewhere and is parking the car, she answers him and explains her equivocation in agreeing to give him the notebooks to be published: "Me dice que vacila por una razón muy concreta: porque no está segura de las reacciones que un texto así puede despertar en circunstancias como las presentes" (51). Norma's planting of this notion is crucial, for here Kohan ventriloquizes this voice that represents perhaps either a vindictive avatar of the antisubversive forces who wants to brag about her bringing to justice of subversive operative, or perhaps one who repents her having led to this young man's death. Regardless of which one Norma ultimately represents (probably a little bit of both), she is the one who is concerned about reawakening a certain consciousness through the publishing of these manuscripts. Marcelo, for his part, does not reflect on the meaning of Norma's utterance here, perhaps because he does not truly understand the implications of such thought.

A crucial part of the novel's consideration of the 1990s publishing industry is the necessary consideration of the books that Tesare read that informed his subjectivity as an operative and—to a great extent, theorist—of the ERP. Despite the text's many suggestions that Tesare's notebooks do not merit publication, the narrator becomes increasingly intrigued by the texts throughout the novel's trajectory. He tells Norma that he wants to know more about Tesare: what he was really like, how Norma met him and came into possession of his notebooks, how he became a militant, and what books he read. Norma then explains, "todo el mundo tenía leído su Fanon, su Sartre, los clásicos

del Marxismo de Marx en adelante, las novelas de Cortázar […] probablemente no había leído al Che Guevara, pero sí a los que escribían sobre Flaubert inspirados por Lacan" (112). Norma thus represents herself as well versed in militant thought, which suggests that 1970s revolutionary thought has been subsumed by such figures as Norma herself. That is, those who were responsible for killing off revolutionary figures in the 1970s have now appropriated themselves of their thought, rendering it no longer a threat to their own ideology. Despite having commandeered Tesare's writings and being abreast of what he was reading, however, she still feels threatened by the type of reaction that the publication of the text might have.

Another crucial element surrounding whether this manuscript merits publication or not is the marketability of the sexual overtones in the narration of Tesare's encounter with Fernanda Aguirre. As previously mentioned, Norma informs Marcelo that he is not interested in the apocryphal second notebook chronicling Tesare's mission to Laguna Chica and his tryst with Fernanda Aguirre. After she tells him this, Marcelo reflects: "a mí sí me interesa el diario personal de Rubén Tesare. La historia del viaje a Córdoba, contada en primera persona, puede interesarle también a Sebastián Gallo, más incluso que estas notas que Tesare tomaba para impartir cierto orden a sus pasiones de lector" (72). The narrator's mention here of readerly passions, specifically referring to the narration of Tesare's sexual encounter with Fernanda Aguirre, reinforces the previously mentioned nexuses that the novel creates between storytelling and seduction. Throughout the narrator's encounters and dialogue with Norma Rossi, there is a constant reflection on the

interplay between Tesare's journals on Trotsky and the alleged personal diary. These considerations serve to explore the place of revolutionary thought, on the one hand, and love and sex, on the other, within the 1990s publishing industry.

Once Marcelo learns of the personal diary belonging Tesare, he calls Sebastián Gallo in the middle of the night to share the news of its (alleged) existence with him. To this information, Gallo responds that the narrator should stop wasting his time with Norma because the publishing company does not have money for the notebooks on revolution or for the personal diary. This response would indicate, as Marcelo has suspected earlier, that the meetings with Norma and the notebooks that she has in her possession are not a priority for Gallo or, by extension, for the publishing industry in general at the time.

Revolution vis-à -vis Museum

Throughout the novel, Kohan recurs to comparisons to museum spaces as well as direct representation of Trotsky's House (now preserved as a museum) and the Museum of the Revolution, both in Mexico City. Apropos of Trotsky's home/museum, Argentine sociologist and director of the Biblioteca Nacional Horacio González recently wrote the following:

> Ninguna museística ni el indudable atractivo de la apenas sospechaba cotidianidad en ese espacio trágico nos pueden desviar de la noticia sombría incrustada en esas paredes, esa biblioteca con libros sobre todo en ruso, pero también en inglés y

> francés. Todo sugiere infortunio, inminencia del desenlace, un puesto dramático de observación del universo, un cierto aleph del siglo XX […] especialmente las vitrinas con sus pequeños objetos cerámicos– sigue condensando una conmovedora tensión entre novela y Estado, poesía e historia ("Casa, museo, estado" ¶ 4)

González's mention here of the tension between "novel and state, poetry and history" "condensed" within the space of Trotsky's home presents this locale as an analog for the political imaginary, for the possibilities of history and politics that can only be rendered through fiction. Of course, these same preoccupations are at the heart of Kohan's novelistic account of Trotsky's home.

Of course, it would be difficult to theorize revolutionary thought in twentieth-century Latin America without considering Cuba. Antonio José Ponte, in his essay "La Habana: Un paréntesis de ruinas" compares the historical center of Habana the historical center of post-1959 Habana to a museum. He posits the following: "En [las calles restauradas] nada duerme. Detrás de las fachadas parece residir lo hueco que proponía aquel plan ideado en los cincuenta por Sert. El triunfo revolucionario de 1959 logró, más que impedir tal proyecto, postegarlo" (75). As in Kohan's novel, Ponte figures revolutionary thought not as necessarily defunct, but as latent, having been delayed to a later date. Similar to Mexico City, Havana serves as home to one of the twentieth century's purportedly successful revolutions and, yet, simultaneously serves to highlight the shortcomings of said revolution. However, Ponte's essay also augurs the resuscitation

of some of the latent ideals of the once revolution: "Y cabe suponer que algunas radicalidades contenidas en él habrán de ser aplicadas en La Habana del futuro" (75).

On an afternoon in which Norma has postponed their encounter from lunch to a dinner meeting, Marcelo decides to use his newfound free time to visit either Frida Kahlo or Leon Trotsky's house. Deliberating between the two, he reflects: "tres veces sobre cuatro yo habría optado por la casa de Frida Kahlo, pero la vez restante es la que ahora se impone, por razones evidentes" (55). We understand that Marcelo has chosen to visit Trotsky's house due to the connection between the manuscript that he has been reading (or listening to Norma read) in the previous days and Trotsky himself. This interest for Trotsky on behalf of someone who, as this previous quote elucidates, would not usually find himself drawn to such a figure, may indicate that Tesare's writings have done exactly what Norma augured that their publication might do: incite and revitalize interest in the type of revolutionary thought that many believed was defunct in this time period.

Once Marcelo decides to visit Trotsky's house, he contemplates its current condition as being no longer a home, but a museum: "La casa de Trotsky es hoy un museo, y antes fue una fortaleza. La casa es también una tumba, o un cementerio entero con una sola tumba, un cementerio entero para una sola persona. En el patio, bajo unas ramas, está enterrado Trotsky. Esa tumba sin otras tumbas es la imagen misma de la soledad" (55). Given Tesare's own focus upon Trotskyist thought, and the relevance of Trotskyism in the revolutionary cause to which he belonged, the text creates an explicit connection between Tesare's notebooks containing his thoughts on revolution and this

museum for Trotsky. In this passage, Marcelo describes the museum as a house, a tomb, and a cemetery with only one tomb. The notion that the novel puts forth of the current status in Mexico of this keystone of revolutionary thought, Trotsky, is that he is both on display and entombed in this space, just as revolutionary thought itself is both on display and entombed through Kohan's novel. Maybe visiting a space such as the Trotsky museum or reading a novel such as Kohan's revitalizes a revolutionary conscience. Or maybe these acts of visitation and reading serve merely to reify this defunct status of such thought.

In addition to the descriptions of Trotsky's home, the narrator and Norma also visit the Museo Nacional de la Revolución. There, Marcelo observes: "en la imagen que muestra a Zapata de frente, con las pistolas enfundadas pero las manos a los costados, se presiente la inminencia de la acción: un segundo más […] y este hombre recio va a desenfundar y a disparar. Es el año 1910. En Argentina, en ese momento, se conmemoraba el centenario de la Revolución de Mayo" (77). What stands out particularly about this observation is the change in tenses: Mexico's revolution narrated in the present and Argentina's in the past. These different tenses remit to the status of revolution in the respective countries; whereas Mexico's revolution has been institutionalized (and memorialized, to boot), the revolution in Argentina for which individuals like Tesare were fighting in the 1970s never actually occurred, so that the narrator's only point of comparison between the Mexican revolution and his own country is the 1810 independence movement.

Throughout the novel's mentions to museum spaces and the status of revolution within 1990s Mexico and Argentina, the narrator is figured as neutral to any ideological identification, but, as suggested through his choice to visit the Trotsky house rather than Frida Kahlo's "for obvious reasons," his listening to Norma reading Tesare's notebooks has incited a certain interest in Trotskyist thought. The day after he visits the Trosky house, he meets with Norma who has forgotten to bring with her the notebook of Tesare's thoughts on revolution. As such, she recounts the story of Tesare's encounter with Fernanda Aguirre. Once she finishes, she promises to bring the other notebook the next time they meet, to which the narrator adds, "Dado que estuve en el Museo Trotsky, dice Norma, yo creo que con ironía, seguramente me va a interesar mucho" (88). Marcelo's aside here "yo creo que ironía" signals the diminished amount of interest that Trotsky's legacy would hold in the 1990s for an individual such as Marcelo.

Later in the novel, Marcelo and Norma visit the Trotsky Museum together and are the only visitors to the museum. The museum's near emptiness suggests a further defunct status of Trotsky in 1990s Mexico. While there, they sit in silence for a long while after Norma has stopped reading aloud from Tesare's notebooks, again suggesting a pause in this process of potential resuscitation of Trotskyist thought. Marcelo narrates: "El guardia ya casi no aparece. La afluencia de visitantes ha mermado hasta detenerse: el museo está próximo a cerrar. Nadie verá como un sacrilegio que Norma y yo nos sentemos sobre el mármol funeral que protege el descanso del héroe de la revolución rusa. No si aprecia el contenido de lo que estamos leyendo" (143). His proclamation that their sitting on the

marble is not a sacrilege conjures again the notion of breathing new life into Trotsky, turning his museum back into a space not only for memorialization but also for living, that is, back into a house. He posits their doing so through Norma's returning to her reading aloud of Tesare's notebook, specifically, his musings on Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*. Once the museum's closing time arrives, the narrator looks at the guard, who peeks into the room, looks at him and Norma reading Tesare's notebook, but does not say anything; Norma continues reading aloud. The text thus suggests a certain understanding between the guard and Norma's reading, thereby creating a nexus between the museum's guard and Norma, both of whom have the responsibility of guarding the revolution in one way or another. After she finishes reading, the two sit in silence in the museum. Norma is no longer reading, no longer resuscitating Trotskyist thought from Tesare's notebooks; instead, the pair sit silently contemplating the museum, while the guard, for his part, has left: "El guardia determina que no tiene nada más que vigilar y nos abandona, como esos perros celosos que olfatean, insistentes, a las visitas de la casa, hasta que de repente dan el examen por concluido y las olvidan" (149).

Museums are also figured as having a particular relationship to time and memory. During Norma's second reading from Tesare's notebooks, Marcelo reflects upon her condition of exile: "Su memoria ha de ser […] una memoria que, al igual que la de los museos, es capaz de fijar precisiones justamente porque ha tenido que sustraerse del paso del tiempo. Para ella, esos matices, los del pasado distante, han de funcionar como un pasado inmediato: lo que venía siendo, más de lo que fue" (25). This equation that

Marcelo makes between the memory of an exiled individual and the memory contained in a museum emphasizes the simultaneous distance and closeness that a museum or an exiled person has to the past; the past is relived as if no time had passed at all, then abandoned when one leaves the museum, rather than remembered in a more realistic fashion.

The Current Status of Revolution

An integral component of Kohan's reflections on the relationship between revolution and museums is his consideration of the status of revolutionary thought in the 1990s. The novel's geographic setting mirrors its temporal setting in regards to the relationship of both to the revolution. If the 1990s constituted a decade in which the revolution had succumbed to the particularly unamenable environment of Argentina's neoliberal heyday, then Mexico would, for its part, embody the degradation and decline of what had once been the twentieth century's most successful revolution in Latin America. *Museo de la revolución*, then, is a polyvalent title that refers both to a monument or homage to the revolution at the same time that the title signifies the death of the revolution. Kohan thus questions the meaning and function of a museum: can an event that is still ongoing be memorialized? Is revolution really an eternal struggle, or has the struggle ended? The narrator's answers to these questions are neither hopeful nor optimistic, but rather ironic and polyvalent. Tesare's reflections, however, augur a perpetual revolution, a permanent revolution of the Trotskyist/ERP tradition. These notions of perpetual revolution, however, are articulated by a deceased person, furthering this paradoxical exploration of the status of revolution.

The novel takes both a deferential and playful approach to its treatment of the legacy of the revolution. Trotsky, Lenin, Marx, and Emiliano Zapata are depicted on the cover of the novel recreating the poses of the Beatles on their *Help!* album, both a playful and atavistic visual framing of the novel. Tesare's references to these thinkers and to their writings, however, are anything but playful. He conceives of his role in the revolutionary struggle quite seriously, as we are constantly reminded through his writings.

Marcelo's narration's reflection on the "museumified" status of revolution in the 1990s is countered by Tesare's notebooks in which he proclaims, synthesizing several quotes from Trotsky: "Así como la burguesía engendra a sus propios sepultereros, la revolución (definida por Marx como la partera de la historia) engendra a sus propios parteros. Los hace nacer para que la hagan nacer. Hay que alterar el sentido del transcurso del tiempo para que semejante cosa pueda ser posible" (109). Kohan thus captures the changes that have occurred in the cultural status of revolution in the years since the mid-1970s, when revolution was understood and celebrated as a birth, whereas it is now conceived of as, while possibly being capable of resuscitation, largely defunct. In a later reading of Tesare's notebooks, he writes on Trotsky and proclaims that revolution is succeeded by revolution: "Es un principio y no un final. Precisamente porque se plantea la necesidad de una revolución después de la revolución, con la toma del poder nada termina: todo empieza" (119).

Tesare's writings clarify, through references to Trotsky, that while the revolution may seem dead, it lives on through resistance: "La resistencia es la clave de su persistencia. La Revolución de Octubre todavía es. Se ha visto traicionada, pero no está muerta. Todavía es. Por eso puede, y debe, renacer en el futuro" (123). Norma's reading

aloud from the notebooks, however, would seem to revitalize these ideals anew. Before discovering that she is the same woman who seduced and betrayed Tesare, ultimately causing his death, the reader might wonder whether her reading these notes aloud to Marcelo constitutes an effort to reenergize revolutionary thought. Once we discover this truth of her identity, then, is her reading Tesare's notebook a vindication of her involvement with the anti-subversive forces that eliminated Tesare, or a recognition of the validity of revolutionary thought? Undoubtedly, her readings of the manuscripts are continually represented as fervent and passionate, such that, even if she does not agree with the ideas contained therein, she certainly finds them intriguing. Moreover, these manuscripts become the vehicle for her seduction of Marcelo.

Also fundamental to the novel's consideration of revolution is its representation of the fetishist aspect of the consumption of revolutionary thought, evinced through a late-night phone call that Norma makes to the narrator. Marcelo is excited to hear that she has something especially for him, not for the object itself but to be able to glean what her impression of him is that would lead her to believe that a particular object might interest him: "vos venís siempre con cuestiones de libros, en pose de intelectual consumado, como si fueses un sacerdote de la alta cultura. Norma ajusta la definición que ha dado: un fetichista, mejor dicho, pero de la cultura" (75). Given that this phone call takes place in the middle of the night and the narrator's titillated anticipation of Norma's finally telling him what she thinks of him, this moment of the novel also evokes questions of seduction as a vehicle for the exploration of revolutionary ideology. The immediacy with which Norma delves into reading Tesare's writings on Lenin emphasizes the ferventness that the narrator has come to acquire for Tesare's thoughts on revolution and the seduction that

Norma is able to wield over him through these writings.

Returning to the moment at which Norma explains that she is hesitant to give Tesare the notebooks because of the possible reactions that such a text might elicit; his narration of Norma's reflection on the possibility of publishing such a text continues:

> Un texto así […] en circunstancias como las presentes, puede, eventualmente, reactivar cierto tipo de conciencia política, sacudir cierto apagamiento y cierto escepticismo que son todo un signo de los tiempos, puede interesar y hasta motivar a quienes en otro tiempo creyeron en un futuro de cambio o a quienes desconocen por completo lo que es tener en la vida ese tipo de perspectiva. (52)

The obvious implication of this possibility that Norma posits here of reactivating a certain political conscience is that such a political conscience was defunct in mid-1990s Argentina.

Considerations of mid-1990s Argentine Political Culture

This understanding of the mid-1990s as a period in which culture and society were largely depoliticized is a common notion in critical understandings of Southern Cone post-dictatorship. Kohan's implicit injunction to reactivate this political consciousness corresponds, then, to such critical stances as those proposed by Nelly Richard in *Masculino/Femenino* and Luis Martín-Cabrera's *Radical Justice*; Martín-Cabrera uses this term "radical justice" as his own critical mandate to contest the depoliticized status of contemporary culture through arguing for a radical distinction between dictatorship and democracy. In addition to dovetailing with these recent critical projects, Kohan's assertion, through the voice of Norma Rossi, that such a text as

Tesare's may reactivate a certain political consciousness, and the notion that such a political consciousness counteracts a certain skepticism and disengagement that are a sign of the times may be interpreted as a diegetic indictment of 1990s culture as not sufficiently politically engaged to Kohan's mind. Such an interpretation would be supported by the author's own assertion of his dissatisfaction with Heker's having published *El fin de la historia* during the mid 1990s due to the novel's lack of contribution to the very project for which Tesare's notebooks would seem to argue: literature that reactivates the political ideals of 1970s militancy. In this sense, Kohan not only rewrites 1970s history through killing off a militant for betraying his camp, but also revises 1990s history through creating an authorial voice that—had Tesare's notebooks in fact existed and been published in the mid 1990s—would have reactivated these very same revolutionary ideals. Kohan's diegetic mention that writings such as Tesare's may reactivate the political conscience that, according to the aforementioned critical stances of Nelly Richard, was defunct in the mid-1990s Southern Cone, might elucidate some of his rationale for setting the novel in 1995 rather than in 2006. While other critics (Martín-Cabrera) have focused on the novel's setting in the 1990s as a critical way of studying the Menem years (as does Kohan himself, to be sure), it must also be noted that setting the novel during the 1990s allows Kohan to elude having to grapple with the complexities of twenty-first century political culture.

Once Marcelo realizes that Fernanda Aguirre and Norma Rossi are the same person, he calls Sebastián Gallo in the middle of the night demanding that he tell him who gave him Norma's name and what information he knew about her. Specifically, he wants to know what militant group she belonged to in the 1970s. To this query, Sebastián

responds that none of this matters: "Ya viste que los peronistas ahora se abrazan con el almirante Rojas. Y viste que Galimberti ahora trabaja para Jorge Born […] Ahora que el cambio es favorable, cualquier poligrillo tiene aires de grandeza y se va a tomar sol a Cancún. Alguien supo y contó que una argentina que vive en México tenía un libro inédito de un desaparecido" (174). Sebastián's mentions here to Galimberti—once an integral part of the *Montoneros* group who now works for the Born brothers—and the Peronists' embrace of Rojas show the degree to which the revolution has, indeed, been betrayed. Moreover, his glib assertion that someone—due to the favorable exchange rate of the Menem economy—took a light-hearted trip to Cancún and found out about a woman in possession of the manuscripts of a desaparecido elucidates the predominant cultural values of 1990s Argentina.

Moreover, Rossi's assertion that Tesare's notebooks may interest and even *motivate* those who once believed in a future of change remits again to Kohan's assertion that literature in the mid-1990s, due to the static—if not defunct—condition of revolutionary thought at the time, should serve to resuscitate such ideals and revitalize militant action.

As Kohan was writing the novel in 2006, the country found itself in its third year under Néstor Kirchner's rule. However, Kohan chooses to set the novel during the mid-1990s, during the Menem years and to reckon with that time period. As has been pointed out (Rodríguez), the 1990s presented a particular challenge to revolutionary thinking in Argentina, due to Carlos Menem's infamously neoliberal administration. Kohan himself has alluded to this difficulty when asked about the novel's temporal setting. Placing the novel squarely in the era of democratic repression of militancy eschews the complexities

of the contemporary political situation and allows Kohan to participate in a project of political solidarity in which he was not actively participating through producing literature in the 1990s. Kohan has also stated that he disagreed wholeheartedly with Heker's decision to publish such a problematic representation of a militant figure as *El fin de la historia* at the time at which she did due to Menem's demonizing rhetoric surrounding *Montoneros*, which Kohan believes Heker's portrayal of Leonora Ordaz to have reified. In this sense, Kohan's depiction of the treacherous female figure in *Museo de la revolución* as an avatar of the right allows a certain vindication of the left.

Moreover, the question of what legacy the generation that was very young during the 1970s revolutionary struggles bears on the analysis of the political climate of the 1990s and today. What Martín-Cabrera elides in his 2009 study of *Museo de la revolución* alongisde Alan Pauls's 2007 *Historia del llanto* is the post-Menem political climate (aside from his repeated emphasis on the 2001 crash) that also might have elicited this interest in younger generations. While Kohan himself, like Martín-Cabrera, repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the Menem years and the 2001 crash upon current trends in politics and culture alike in Argentina, the effects of Kirchnerism—particularly the phenomenon of the group La Cámpora—upon younger generations must also be taken into account. That is, the generation of Argentines today who were either very young children or not yet born during the tumultuous years of the 1970s has been inundated during the past decade particularly with political and literary references to this moment in recent history.

Mediating Past and Present through Writing

When asked about the close relation that his fiction maintains with his country's history, Kohan responded:

> Resuelvo esa relación entre historia fáctica y literatura en términos de una mediación de lo más fuerte posible. En un punto, en lugar de acercarme a ese lugar, es como si para mí lo importante fuera aprovechar la distancia y por lo tanto subrayar la mediación. En ese sentido me parece que hay una diferencia entre la literatura que yo escribo en relación a cualquier clase de pasado, ya sea San Martín que está muy lejos o la dictadura que está más cerca, y la literatura de testimonio. En mi caso no existe una voluntad de recuperar los hechos tal como fueron o el pasado como presente. No busco esa inmediatez de la experiencia, para la cual el transcurso del tiempo es sin duda un problema. Como no creo escribir ni en clave testimonial ni en clave realista, para mí el transcurso del tiempo es una ventaja. Mi objeto no es la realidad fáctica que tendría que recuperar a pesar del tiempo sino el cúmulo de significaciones o la sedimentación de sentido que se fueron dando a través de la distancia temporal. (Saban 166)

Kohan's notion of resolving the relationship between history and literature through an emphasis upon the mediation and distance between past and present is palpable throughout the novel, in which he constantly seeks to consider what has changed and what has remained the same during the decades since the tumultuous revolutionary struggles of the mid-1970s. Moreover, he posits—through Marcelo's narration and reflections on publishing and literature—that literature may productively reconcile past with present. While the excerpts of Tesare's notebooks that we read may constitute a

direct revisiting of that historical moment, the many layers of narrative and the constant reflections on changes over the past decades remind us that such a return to the mid-1970s is not possible. At the end of the novel, once he realizes that Norma was Fernanda Aguirre and confronts her, she cedes the manuscript to him, and he has succeeded in finally attaining the manuscript that he has been attempting to wrest it her throughout the novel.

Marcelo's final gesture toward the manuscript, however, would suggest a further distancing from his country's past. Rather than read through it fervently as soon as he comes into possession of it, he sets it aside and watches the sun set over the city, asserting that, regardless of what may be contained in Tesare's writings, he does not want to miss the sunset taking place right then and there. Unlike Tesare, then—whose writings the narrator describes as seeming out of touch with the world around him—Marcelo chooses to focus on the reality surrounding him rather than ponder history or ideals that are far removed from him. This end to the novel would dispel Norma's earlier concern that recovering such a notebook as Tesare's could incite interest anew in the revolutionary ideals of the 1970s. Marcelo, though he has flirted with Trotskyist thought and kissed Norma passionately, does not take up the same struggle that Tesare left off uncompleted in 1975. As readers, we cannot but wonder, however, if an individual such as Marcelo would not have a different reaction to such a manuscript now, in 2012, or when the novel was written and published, in 2006, than the character does at the time of the novel's setting in 1995.

Chapter 2: "Resulta que soy hijo de mis padres:" Albertina Carri's *Los rubios* and Patricio Pron's *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*

A fundamental element of current-day cultural production in Argentina is the relationship between 1970s militant figures and their children's generation today. One need look no further than the political and cultural momentum that the group *Hijos por la identidad y la justicia contra el olvido y el silencio* (H.I.J.O.S.) has gained within Argentina since its inception to discern a widespread cultural and political emphasis upon 1970s disappeared persons' relationship to their children. In many such cases, an identification with one's disappeared parents' party affiliation has been a central component of the process of discovering one's parents' identities, as though ideological affinities were genetically determined and thus readily traceable through the *Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense* (EAAF), the group that has compiled DNA of disappeared persons to match them to their children. In such representations of these individuals as Cristina Fernández's 2011 campaign spot featuring Victoria Montenegro, daughter of two disappeared ERP members, an ideological continuity is created between militant parent and the children who cannot remember them. Of course, this relationship is rendered problematic when one takes into account the tension that can arise between militant commitment, on the one hand, and devotion to one's family, on the other. Adding further nuance to this notion of a direct ideological inheritance from one's militant parents are children of militants who scrutinize the ethics and politics of their parents' revolutionary groups.

Both Albertina Carri's 2003 film *Los rubios* and Patricio Pron's 2011 novel *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* take as their central theme the

relationship between 1970s militants and their children thirty years (give or take) later. Despite the significant differences in the two works' media and content, both depict an intradiegetic author figure who attempts to reckon with his/her parents' militant involvement, the legacy of that generation's revolutionary ideology, and the ethics and aesthetics of recounting these militants' stories thirty years later.

In light of the fact that both diegetic authors figures' parents were involved directly in the militant struggles of the 1970s, these works both dialogue with the phenomenon of "postmemory" operative in present-day Argentine cultural analysis, as Nouzeilles (2005) has signaled regarding Carri's film. Carri's on-screen director (portrayed by actress Analía Couceyro) and Pron's narrator both constitute fictionalized depictions of children of militants who seek to narrate their retrospective journeys through their own childhoods. As such, these characters are forced into an arduous process first of investigating their parents' beliefs and actions and then of identifying with or rejecting these beliefs and actions. Ultimately, this process creates a meditation on the legacy of 1970s militancy among the generation of these militants' children and within twenty-first century Argentine culture and society at-large.

Carri's on-screen version of herself and Pron's narrator take quite different stances in their respective treatments of their parents' militant legacy. Albertina Carri's parents, Ana María Caruso and Roberto Carri, were—first and foremost—renowned intellectuals in the 1970s whose involvement in *Montoneros* rendered them famous among disappeared leftists. Pron's narrator, in contrast, seems to be unaware of his parents' involvement with the Peronist left during the 1970s until, upon returning from Germany to his hometown of *Osario to attend to his ailing father, he discovers his

father's notes regarding a disappeared peer from his days of militancy. Moreover, Carri's film serves to scrutinize—if not wholly disavow—her parents' militant cause, whereas Pron's novel would seem to vindicate his own parents' involvement, if only because, to our narrator's knowledge, they chose to ally themselves with a group that did not practice armed violence and terminated their allegiance to the cause once Perón passed away, accepting their cause's shortcomings rather than submit to death.

My predominant interest in my analysis of Pron and Carri's works is the relationship that each establishes to the modalities of cultural production and political commitment set forth by their parents' generation. In both works, the narrator figure establishes an explicit meditation on the previous generation's writings in conjunction with the ideological affinities depicted in these writings. Moreover, both works maintain an interextuality that serves to question the compendium of literature that the authors' parents read, thus further elucidating their parents' ideological affinities in addition to suggesting the shortcomings therein. Inexorable from the intertextuality present in each work, both *Los rubios* and *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* emphasize the various forms of media that have influenced the authors' production process as well as that which has served as a vehicle for each of the authors to come to know his/her parents. We are constantly reminded of the artifice of narrative and of memory and this artifice is figured within both works as the mechanism for a process of identification with their parents' generation.

Marianne Hirsch's notions of "postmemory" serve as a relevant theoretical framework to my analysis here of both Pron and Carri's explorations of their parents' experiences. Hirsch defines postmemory:

> "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up […] Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors.

Since both Carri and Pron's works, as I show, are imbued with "overwhelming inherited memories" and "narratives that preceded one's birth," postmemory is a useful term to consider the memory work that both *Los rubios* and *El espíritu* recount.

The diegetic accounts of this generation's relationships to its parents' militant commitment in turn creates a meditation on the cultural legacy within today's culture of 1970s militancy. Throughout both Carri's film and Pron's novel, the authors reflect upon the relationship between present-day (21st-century) political culture and the way in which Argentine society at-large currently grapples with its own recent history. Specifically, both works interrogate the status within today's culture of 1970s revolutionary ideology and armed struggle through their narrators' return to their own childhoods and their relationships with their parents.

In this consideration of the generational relationship between the 1970s militants and their children, Leis's aforementioned *Testamento* is relevant once again. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Leis focuses on Argentina's political community's lack of *philia* as its organizing principle. This lack of *philia* can also be discerned in

Carri's parents' commitment to the revolutionary struggle preceding, in Carri's view, their commitment to their own family. In addition to this missing element of interpersonal relationships as a privileged category, Leis explores the various generations of recent Argentine thought and political action, positing a cyclical structure in its trajectory and concluding: "La palabra 'vuelve' tiene ecos profundos en la Argentina, el pasado siempre está volviendo" (74). The ex-*Montonero* lays out a map of political culture that is overdetermined by its own past. This overdetermination of present political culture by its own past—coupled with the absence, in Leis's view, of a cultural premium on interpersonal identification—is manifest is both Carri's film and Pron's novel, in which the protagonists' processes of identification with their parents are rendered more difficult due to the latter's own previous political commitment.

Albertina Carri and *Los rubios*

Albertina Carri has solidified her stance as a highly controversial filmmaker within Argentina. With such films as the 2001 *Barbie también puede estar triste*—which can only be described as claymation Barbie doll pornography—and her critically-acclaimed yet disquieting 2005 film *Géminis*, dealing with an incestuous pair of twin brother and sister, Carri's *ouevre* is more than a little provocative. In keeping with this reputation for inciting polemics and significantly disrupting the status quo, her film *Los rubios* has garnered a significant amount of critical attention—negative and positive alike—since its release in 2003. Like the film itself, the majority of this criticism has focused predominantly upon themes of the affiliative relationship between 1970s militants and their children's generation. In the film, Carri goes so far as to bring into

question the very validity of militancy itself. It is fundamental to note that, in this aspect, Carri is the only author studied in this dissertation project who takes her criticism of militancy to such an extreme as to subvert the very premises of militancy itself. She achieves this criticism of militant ideology through her completely irreverent approach to her own early childhood (during which her parents were disappeared) and the movements in which they were involved. Glossed as a "Brechtian" filmic endeavor (Kohan 2004a; 26), Carri's film is predicated more strongly upon a ludic and playful approach to the recounting of 1970s militancy than any of the other works I analyze here. For this very reason—and for the controversy of the first-person, largely autobiographical perspective's subjectivity—the film has been received with a considerable amount of heated debate.

Whether negative or positive, the majority of critical responses to the film have recognized it as a significant contribution to the memory politics of recent cultural production dealing with 1970s militancy and state repression. Existing criticism has focused upon the film's expansion of modalities of cultural memory (Kohan 2004, Macón 2004, Garibotto and Gómez 2006), the operative elements of "post-memory" in the film (Macón 2004, Nouzeilles 2005, Sarlo 2006), and the forgetting and oblivion in the film as a function of neoliberal policy (Martín Cabrera 2011). No critical analysis, however, has taken into account the differences between other films produced around the same time as Carri's that still cleave to testimonial-type filmmaking and are thus very different from Carri's approach. My analysis of the film serves to expand the critical understanding of the relationship of the film to its literary and filmic antecedents within Argentine cultural production (Livon Grosman 2008, Ciancio 2012); specifically, my

reading of the film is predicated upon the relationship that Carri explicitly creates between her own filmic production and her parents' ideological commitment as well as their generation's cultural production characterized by the revolutionary struggles of the late 1960s and the 1970s.

Los rubios is characterized, above all, by the layering of levels of reality and storytelling that Carri creates and emphasizes throughout the film's diegesis. Most notable about the film's structure is that the director chooses to outsource the portrayal of herself to actress Analía Couceyro. Where all of the other individuals interviewed and depicted in the film are actual friends, family, and colleagues of her parents, the person who "directs" the film, interviews these individuals, and recounts Carri's testimony is not Carri herself. Also striking about Carri's approach to telling her own story is her repeated use of stop-motion animation using Playmobil figures to create a markedly non-heroic narration of her family: home scenes, driving scenes, individual characters disappearing from the scene, etc. While Carri's choice to use this type of animation may correspond more than anything to her already proven expertise in stop animation through her earlier film *Barbie también puede estar triste*, these scenes in particular highlight both Carri's structural playfulness in her approach to her exploration of her past as well as the prominence of a childlike approach to this historical moment. Despite the myriad explorations of the very adult world that her parents inhabited in the 1970s, Carri repeatedly positions herself as the child figure in relation to her parents. That is, what comes to the fore in this film and its considerations of the ideology and struggles of 1970s militancy is not an exploration of these themes through the perspective of an adult's own ideological or political precepts but rather the memories of a child and the

ways in which this individual's childhood was affected by her parents' choices to partake in a certain political project. Crucial to this childlike perspective that Carri takes to the storytelling is the emphasis that she creates upon the familial and interpersonal ties that, to her mind, her parents should have privileged above their commitment to this cause.

In light of the previous chapter's focus on Martín Kohan's novelistic production, of particular relevance to this study are Kohan's widely cited and debated 2004 analyses of *Los rubios* published in the Argentine journal *Punto de Vista*—the first his own reading of the film, the second, his response to Ceclia Macón's rather negative response to his analysis. Kohan's adroit interpretations of Carri's work are not altogether flattering, but are certainly relevant in their signaling of some of the most heated controversies surrounding the representation of 1970s militancy within twenty-first century cultural production. Countering Macón's response piece, Kohan raises the particularly provocative point: "Me llama la atención, eso sí, que Macón sólo pueda imaginar a los padres de Albertina Carri como objeto de la represión […] y no como sujetos activos de la militancia política, que es precisamente aquello que *Los rubios* está a un mismo tiempo planteando y apartando continuamente" (48). Kohan points here to an important missing component of critical understandings of recent Argentine history: 1970s militant subjectivity, which has been eclipsed by cultural accounts of these figures as victims of state repression. Of course, Kohan's aforementioned *Museo de la revolución* provided a fictional representation of a 1970s militant that brought this figure's subjectivity to the foreground, just as his assertion here of Macón's critical blind spot serves the same function within the realm of critical analysis. Roberto Carri's agency as *Montonero* certainly should not be overlooked: the prolific academic—once Trotskyist and,

eventually, *Montonero*—published several sociology books on violence, revolution, workers' unions, and imperialism (Couceyro reads aloud from one of these books, *Isidro Velázquez: Formas prerrevolucionarias de la violencia* in the film). In addition to his work as a sociologist, he was also in charge of the *Montoneros* group's *Columna Sur*, a publication which included strategies for improving the group's tactical efficacy as well as its political infrastructure.

In addition to a thorough recognition of her parents' 1970s militant subjectivity, missing from all existing analyses of *Los rubios* are the present-day political activities in which the 1970s militants referenced in Carri's film—peers of Carri's disappeared parents—are now involved. Revisiting these key figures—including revolutionary 1960s filmmaker Fernando 'Pino' Solanas and sociologist Alcira Argumedo, both of whom would go on to become keystone members of today's anti-Kirchner Proyecto Sur political party—elucidates the continuities as well as the ruptures between Carri's parents' militant involvement of the 1970s and current-day political culture. Specifically, Carri creates a peculiar relationship between herself, her own past, and her parents' peers' memory of events that serves to question the politics of memory and of popular understandings of militancy. At the same time that she debunks the validity of testimonial accounts of her parents' militant involvement, she creates an inventory of many of the key figures of 1970s militancy as well as of 21st-century memory politics. While many critical analyses have emphasized the neoliberal policies of the Menem administration as the political background of the film, no interpretation of Carri's film has taken into account the legacies and the 21st-century political activity of the very individuals whom Carri interviews and to whom she alludes in her filmmaking.

Carri was only two years old at the time of her parents' disappearance, placing her among the generation of Argentines whose early lives were marked by the military dictatorship that took from them parents whom they could scarcely even remember. Far from positioning herself squarely within such political and social commitment as that exhibited by the members of the group H.I.J.O.S., Carri explores the aesthetic modalities of the ways in which recent Argentine history has been told and distances herself from her parents as far as their political commitment yet seeks to recover them as individuals and parents.

Structure of *Los rubios*

Carri's film begins with a Playmobil stop-motion depiction of a rural scene. The voiceovers include individuals laughing and discussing how to ride horses. This scene is juxtaposed with shots of "el campito," a rural area to which, we later learn, Carri and her sisters moved after her parents' disappearance. Throughout the film, Carri juxtaposes Playmobil stop-motion, depictions of Couceyro interviewing her parents' peers and editing their testimonies, and black-and-white shots of herself making the film. Her inclusion of her directorial self breaks the fourth wall and occurs at key moments that allow the film to offer its meditations on film production and militant memory even more explicitly. These black-and-white scenes consist predominantly of footage of Carri (portrayed by Couceyro) and the crew discussing how to film scenes as well as their reaction to the letter that Carri receives from Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA) declining to support the film. Through her use of black-and-white footage of the making of the film, Carri creates separate layers of fiction/reality

within the film. However, the director also includes footage of herself on-screen talking to Couceyro and the rest of the crew that is *not* in black and white. In this regard, the film's diegesis creates a third space between fiction and reality. We must ask, then, if Carri is Carri in this footage that is not in black and white, who is Couceyro? In the black-and-white footage, Carri is the director and Couceyro is the person who will be representing her in the realm of fiction and in most of the scenes she is a fictional representation of Carri. When both are on-screen in the color scenes, there is an excess of representation. These metafilmic moments call attention to the artifice of memory and representation, a structural element of the film that resonates throughout its diegesis with the thematics that Carri seeks to portray.

Throughout the film, Carri contests the validity of testimonial filmmaking through her irreverent inclusion of her parents' peers' testimonies. She includes these obliquely through the use of voiceovers, off-screens, and their presence in the background of shots of Couceyro reading and editing. During one of these editing scenes, Couceyro writes in big black letters on a sheet of white paper, "Exponer la memoria en su propio mecanismo," an injunction that she follows throughout her filmmaking process. Carri's use of memory and testimony is consistently undermined—if not negated—by her own assertions of her mistrust of memory through elucidating the discrepancies between individuals' memories of specific people and events. In fact, the film's title "Los rubios," is an ironic choice of title that speaks to the discrepancy between the memories of the family's neighbors who said that they were blonde and a friend of Carri's parents who said that they were not (in addition to signaling important sociopolitical dynamics, as I later explore). Moreover, Couceyro as Carri interviews children who all appear to be

under the age of ten when she returns to the neighborhood in which she lived with her parents and asks them what they remember about different neighbors; Carri includes the many disagreements and discrepancies in these children's different accounts of what happened to various neighbors in order to underscore the unreliable nature of memory, creating thus an equivalence between these children's inventive stories about what happened to neighbors and the testimonies recreating her own family's past.

This use of children's memory also signals the operative element of "post-memory" within the film. In addition to the memories of her parents and of the 1970s passed down to Carri by those who were adults at the time of her parents' disappearance, Couceyro as Carri also affirms that she has inherited some memories from her two older sisters, and that it is impossible for her to parse out her own memories of her childhood from those that her sisters have imparted upon her: "en realidad, muchas de las cosas no sé si me las acuerdo o si también me las fui construyendo con las cosas que se acordaban mis hermanas." In this way, Carri's own memories of her childhood are stylized much in the same way that her recreation of this moment of her life is stylized through her use of Playmobil animation. Both this medium of representation and her assertion regarding her sisters' having instilled certain memories in her emphasize the artifice of memory and the historical inaccuracy therein.

Generational Inheritance in *Los rubios*

Little existing criticism of the film has emphasized the pervasive role that questions of influence play throughout. The majority of these influences are generational: influences stemming either from her parents' generation or from previous generations of

Argentine writers and filmmakers with whom Carri's film is dialoging. Despite the time that has passed and her own very young age at the time of her parents' disappearance, Carri (played by Couceyro) remarks when she visits for the second time the detention center where her parents were detained. "La generación de mis padres, los que sobrevivieron una época terrible, reclaman ser protagonistas de una historia que no les pertenece." Carri's provocative affirmation here emphasizes the discrepancies between her parents' experiences as disappeared persons and the horror that they must have experienced, on the one hand, and the testimonial accounts of her parents provided by friends and neighbors, on the other hand. Couceyro utters this observation toward the end of the film as she is shown wearing a blond wig and walking through the Sheraton, where her parents were detained; the blond wig serves as a parodic representation of their neighbors' memories of the family, while the outer walls of the detention center emphasize the only certainty about her parents: their disappearance. The assertion that her parents' generation claims to be protagonists of a history that does not belong to them offers an answer to an affirmation that Couceyro (as Couceyro and not as Carri) has made earlier regarding the INCAA letter: "hay algo como heroico de decir 'yo viví esta época, yo fui de los buenos y pertenecí al bando del cual se está hablando". Through the interplay created between these two assertions, one made by Couceyro as herself and the other part of Carri's script for her, the film recognizes the cultural validity and perceived heroism of having been party to the revolutionary movement and survived, only later to undermine this very stance. These contradictions within the film's diegesis characterize Carri's relationship to her parents' generation and the cultural production as a dialectical one in which Carri is constantly reckoning with the generation that precedes her.

Throughout the film's diegesis, Carri reckons with what we may productively term a type of "anxiety of influence" of the Harold Bloom variety. Carri is constantly aware—and constantly reminds the viewer—of the literary and filmic antecedents that her parents' generation left for her, as well as of the ideological commitments that characterized this generation. In keeping with Bloom's assertion concerning weak talents who idealize their precursors, while strong poets are "major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death" (1797), Carri makes reference to her most renowned precursors but does not idealize them. Tellingly, the film's final scene is set to the soundtrack of Charly García's 2002 "Influencia." Carri chooses a song not about memory, nor family, nor disappeared persons, but a song titled "Influencia." The song is in fact a translation into Spanish of Todd Rundgren's "Influenza."[39] García translates all of the lyrics yet leaves the title word phonetically almost the same but with an entirely different meaning. García's song thus posits influence as pathology: "pero es muy difícil ver / si algo controla mi ser / puedo ver, y decir y sentir / mi mente dormir / bajo tu influencia." Carri's use of "Influencia" at the end of her film thus dovetails with the director's diegetic consideration of and grappling with the legacy and influence of her parents' generations as well as previous generations of authors and filmmakers. Just as García's lyrics suggest, influence is posited in the film as inescapable. Rather than choose one of García's many songs released during the 1970s, Carri chooses one that was just recently released, again evading an identification with her parents' generation at the same

[39] Uncannily, Bloom in fact includes in *The Anxiety of Influence* the sentence "Influence is influenza--an astral disease. If influence were health, who would write a poem? Health is stasis" (1805).

time that she alludes to them through her choosing Charly García—a paradigmatic figure within 1970s popular culture. Throughout the film, Carri includes references to members of her parents' generation who have served as models for her—both in their thought and in their artistic production—in such a way that neither identifies with them wholly nor rejects them entirely, but rather recognizes them and arrives at her own conclusions about their thoughts as well as their aesthetic conventions. Like in García's song that Carri chooses to include in the film's final scene—the song itself indebted to another songwriter—many of the allusions that Carri makes to her influences are themselves markedly indebted to a yet another artist, such that Carri creates and develops throughout the film's diegesis a veritable mise-en-abime of references to filmic and literary predecessors. These myriad allusions to previous influences again highlight the artifice of narrative and filmmaking—remitting to the films' "Brechtian" qualities and, at the same time, dovetailing with Carri's aforementioned intent to "expose memory in its own mechanism."

After Carri's parents were kidnapped by the military regime, her childhood was marked by a number of their friends and colleagues committed to the revolutionary movement. Among these adult role models was none other than famed filmmaker Fernando "Pino" Solanas credited—along with Octavio Getino—for setting in place the so-called "tercer cine" movement of the late 1960s. Solanas and Getino's touchstone revolutionary film, 1968's *La hora de los hornos*, hinges visually on the imagery of cows in a slaughterhouse, multivalent animal images that signal both the brutality of the ruling classes and the national patrimony of the beef industry. Carri, for her part, also uses bovine imagery throughout the film in a varying instances to signal different ideas. The

film includes several shots of the countryside populated by cows grazing. A specific series of shots juxtaposes cattle and blond wigs; I will later explore the issue of the blond wigs, but, given that they are so central to the film that it is titled *Los rubios*, this juxtaposition between cattle and blond wigs would suggest that cattle are also a fundamental image to the film. Ana Amado even begins the section on *Los rubios* in her chapter "Ordenes de la memoria y desórdenes de la ficción": "¿Qué decir de una película que muestra una manada de vacas con mayor frecuencia y nitidez que la que concede a la figura de unos padres, cuya desaparición y ausencia se mencionan como núcleo de la propuesta?" (70). This imagery of cows is certainly central to the film's visual structure.

This importance, I posit, is a generational one that allows Carri to dialogue explicitly with the modalities of cultural production that precedes her film. As Ernesto Livon Grosman has pointed out in his 2008 analysis of *Los rubios*, the film establishes a distant, although explicit, connection with this imagery in *La hora de los hornos*:

> más lejana sería la conexión con la secuencia del matadero en *La hora de los hornos* (1968) de Fernando Solanas y Octavio Getino, en el que se muestra un matadero de vacas en el momento mismo del sacrificio mientras se acompaña estas imágenes con un arreglo musical jazzístico. Y, claro está, la referencia última sería la que nos remite a "El matadero" de Esteban Echeverría, cuento que se considera fundante de la literatura argentina. (116-7)

A fundamental difference between Carri's bovine imagery and that of both Solanas and Getino's film and Echeverría's story is that the cattle in Carri's film are being herded through the countryside, in the first shot, and through a cattle chute, in the second, while

in the "El matadero" and *La hora de los hornos* the images are of cows being massacred or of cow carcasses, respectively.

Carri intercalates in this series of shots a direct quote from General Hardindeguy, one of the architects of the military's repression of its citizens: "Primero mataremos a los subversivos. Luego a sus colaboradores. Luego a sus simpatizantes. Luego a quienes permanezcan indiferentes. Y por último mataremos a los indecisos." She juxtaposes this written text flashed across a blank white screen with the image of an innocent cow. In this sense, Carri's use of bovine imagery dovetails with the previous generation of filmmakers—the *tercer cine* movement—in their use of cows to make a statement about the government's injustices. However, Carri's choice to use *living* cows, rather than decomposing carcasses, creates a representation of this space as bucolic and idyllic.

Of particular note within this sequence of scenes is the fact that this countryside being filmed is the place to which Carri and her older sisters moved after their parents' disappearance. As Beatriz Sarlo has noted in her reading of *Los rubios*, this choice of location emphasizes that Carri's return to the 1970s constitutes more of a retrospective gaze upon her own childhood than a search to recover the memory of her parents, since her parents never formed part of this space (148-9). Rather than speak of this space as a melancholic space where she felt orphaned, Carri focuses her narration in this moment on "Me enamoré fácilmente de las vacas y los caballos," such that her use of this imagery can ultimately be seen as a return to her own childhood rather than a primarily political use of this image.

At a later moment in the film, Carri shows herself (Couceyro) looking at a photograph hanging on the wall. She then narrates in a voiceover a conversation that she

had with a friend of hers about a photographer. She affirms in this narration, "No me gustan las vacas muertas. Prefiero las arquitecturas bonitas." This utterance further distances her own filmic production from that of her parents' generation of which the image of the cow carcass in the slaughterhouse can be understood as a certain metonymy. Her disavowal of the aesthetic use of cow carcass imagery central to such a seminal film in the Argentine revolutionary movements of the late 1960s and 1970s dovetails directly with her disavowal of the premises of these movements. As journalist María Moreno posits in a 2007 note in "Las 12," "Con desparpajo desechaba el discurso de los derechos humanos que homologa verdad y justicia, dejaba de lado las 40 horas de testimonios que ya había grabado, elegía representar el secuestro de sus padres con muñequitos de Playmobil y ponía como mentores de su obra, no *La batalla de Argelia* o *La hora de los hornos* sino las películas de Chris Marker y Jean-Luc Godard." Moreno's specific mention of Carri's identification with Marker and Godard as mentors rather than Pontecorvo or Solanas and Getino signals the director's search for models outside of the context of her parents' own militant thought and the modes of representation of their experience as seen in revolutionary film of the 1960s. It is important to note here that, in addition to Solanas's having been a friend of Carri's parents, *La hora de los hornos* is the paragon of revolutionary filmmaking in 1960s Argentina, and was extremely influential over such militant groups as the *Montoneros* with which Carri's parents were affiliated.

Carri's diegetic disavowal of the modalities of documentary film—manifest through her layering of realities and scrutinizing testimonies—would counter Solanas and Gettino's privileging of documentary film in their 1969 manifesto "Hacia un tercer cine" wherein the pair posit the following:

> El cine conocido como documental con toda la vastedad que este concepto hoy encierra, desde lo didáctico a la reconstrucción de un hecho o una historia, constituyen quizás el principal basamento de una cinematografía revolucionaria. Cada imagen que documenta, testimonia, refuta, profundiza la verdad de una situación […] cine panfleto, cine didáctico, cine informe, cine ensayo, cine testimonial, toda forma militante es válida. (48)

Solanas and Getino's notion here of "militant forms" associated with documentary stand antithetical to Carri's portrayal of her parents—militant subjects—through a cinematic approach that, despite being autobiographical, is far from being a documentary. In fact, she proclaims to the rest of the crew after receiving INCAA's letter that the film for which the institute has called is a film that another person would have to make and that its injunction to exercise "un mayor rigor documental" reflects a need for this type of film that INCAA has, but that is not reflective of the filmic endeavor that Carri is carrying out here. Moreover, the letter from INCAA indicates that, not unlike Solanas and Getino's inclusion of "cine testimonial" in their enumeration of militant forms of film, Carri's film "requiere una búsqueda más exigente de testimonios." We can thus trace a trajectory from Solanas and Getino's call for documentary film as *tercer cine* par excellence to INCAA's letter also enjoining more documentary-type rigor. From 1969 to 2002, then, we see that documentary is the preferred form for approaching themes of militancy. We observe Carri's irreverence toward this established corpus of filmic production within Argentina through her reading aloud of a letter from INCAA declaring that the Institute has declined to support the film's production. Her choice to include the reading aloud of this letter within the film highlights her diegetic challenge against the accepted modalities

of producing a film about militants in Argentina. *Los rubios*, then, constitutes a filmic endeavor that distances its director both from the established modalities of film production dealing with this theme at the same time that it creates a rift between the director and the real-life parental figure to her embodied in Pino Solanas.

While an alternative explanation for these differences between Carri's filmmaking and Solanas's would be the thirty-plus years that passed between *La hora de los hornos* and "Hacia un tercer cine" and Carri's production of *Los rubios*, one need look no further than Solanas's *Memoria del saqueo* (2004) to see that the difference is not a temporal one. Like *Los rubios*, *Memoria del saqueo* has been interpreted as a film whose central theme deals with memory; it is a film in which "the narration reconstructs the linearity of collective memory. This collective memory is announced to the viewer through the images and through Solanas's way of making statements" (Ciancio 110). Carri's film, of course, insofar as it even really is *about* memory (I contend that a more precise way of categorizing the film is, as Carri herself asserts, that it is about the *mechanism* of memory), certainly does not present a continuous or linear structure of memory. As María Belén Ciancio's 2012 intervention comparing *Memoria del saqueo* and *Los rubios* concludes, "Obviously, there is a generational difference between the two documentaries, and Carri's documentary is a constant, uncertain seeking because memory moves in the space of that vast difference" (111). Ciancio's assertion here that the difference between the two films is "a generational one" highlights the discrepancies between the aesthetic and political project of Solanas's filmic production—itself, as Ciancio posits here, a film predicated on themes of memory—and that of Albertina Carri as a function of the age difference between the two. To a great extent, as I have shown, Carri's filmic production

can be seen as a contestation of Solanas as much as of her parents' revolutionary involvement, particularly insofar as the two are mutually imbricated.

While Livon Grosman has focused on the intertextuality between the bovine imagery in Carri's film and Solanas and Getino's, Ciancio has analyzed the generational difference between filmmakers of Carri's generation and Solanas's, and Moreno mentions that Carri looks to Godard for inspiration more so than Solanas, Gabriela Nouzeilles has been the only critical voice thus far to analyze *Los rubios* in terms of its explicit diegetic rejection of the revolutionary filmmaking, although does so without naming Solanas directly (she does, however, reference Gettino). Nouzeilles affirms in her analysis of *Los rubios* that the film "casts doubt on, and ultimately rejects, two fundamental assumptions of the same school [of revolutionary cinema]: the identification of the popular as a primary theme and motive of filmmaking, and the political alliance among artists, intellectuals, and popular classes that it entails" (273). I have sought to show in this section, however, that Carri's diegetic intertextuality with her predecessor—Solanas—serves ultimately as a rejection of the modalities of revolutionary film as well as to distance herself from a peer of her parents.

In addition to the film's allusions to Solanas and Echeverría, Carri also includes lines from Olga Orozco's collection *También la luz es un abismo*: "no creo que mi familia sepa nada / y lo más probable es que seas hija de tus padres / yo también creí ser hijo del rey Salomón / de Rasputín / de Mata Hari / y nada / ya lo ves / resultó que soy hijo de mis padres." Here, Carri's intercalation of Orozco's verses creates a veritable mise en abisme of references to past influences and origins. The director pays homage to another poet whose poetics, here, are also predicated upon an uncertainty of their own

origins and the author's influences. As I will expand upon later, the first testimony that Carri includes of her parents' peers is Alcira Argumedo's assertion that Carri's father was "un poco Rasputín," so the director's later inclusion of these verses by Orozco "yo también creí ser hijo […] de Rasputín" suggests that Carri has found another poetic voice capable of expressing her particular situation. The later "y nada" would either signal a linguistic filler or, more likely, that the poetic voice believed she was the son "of nothing." This notion of being the children of nothing is a common theme throughout cultural production since the beginning of the last military dictatorship, when, in fact, many people's parents were disappeared—such as Carri's, of course. It is important to note, of course, that Olga Orozco was never identified primarily by political or militant activity. In this regard, Carri's use of her verses would suggest an identification with a poetic precursor who, unlike Solanas and Gettino or Echeverría, is not renowned predominantly for the political commitment inherent to her work.[40] The lines that Carri chooses to cite in her film, accordingly, focus not on the militant thought that would have informed her parents' thought, but upon the difficult process of identification with one's parents: "resultó que soy hijo de mis padres." Not unlike García's notion of the pathology—and thereby inescapability—of influence, Orozco's verses here that Carri includes in the film highlight the inescapability of one's own parental heritage, as well as the childlike imagination of being the son or daughter of someone other than one's actual parents—the Freudian "family romance," as it were.

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[40] Curiously, Orozco's 1999 obituary published in *La Nación* closes with poet and critic Cristina Piña's remark that Orozco's work "trasciende influencias."

Roberto Carri and His Militant Sociologist Group

In addition to the oblique references to Solanas and Gettino's revolutionary filmic production of the 1960s, Albertina Carri enters into dialogue with her father's writings on sociology and with his peers, including renowned sociologist Alcira Argumedo. In a wonderfully symmetrical trajectory, Argumedo and Solanas continue to be political allies to this day: both form the backbone of sorts of the *Proyecto Sur* political party. Where the references to Solanas are through a refiguring of his visual tropes, Alcira Argumedo is portrayed directly in the film through her testimony describing María Caruso and Roberto Carri. Throughout the film's diegesis, Carri is in constant dialogue with her parents and their peers. However, just as her representation of herself is always mediated and distanced through various filters and narrative levels, her approximation to her parents is repeatedly problematized by similar layers of language and media.

The film's title sequence includes shots of Couceyro reading aloud from Carri's father's book *Isidro Veláquez: Formas prerrevolucionarias de la violencia* (specifically the 2001 reprinting of the book with prologue by Roberto Carri's fellow UBA sociologist and Biblioteca Nacional director Horacio González). After the initial Playmobil scenes and shots of "el campito" voiced over by Couceyro and others discussing how to ride horses, etc., Couceyro's reading aloud from Roberto Carri's book provides the voiceover for the title "Los rubios" flashed across the screen. This collapsing of Couceyro's reading aloud and the visual presence of the title would suggest a centrality to the film of the legacy of Carri's father. Despite Carri's reading from her father's book, however, consulting the book itself tells us that the passage that Couceyro is in fact reading was written not by her father but rather is the study's epigraph from Juan Díaz del Moral's

1967 *Historia de las agitaciones campesinas andaluzas* (Carri 27). As Kohan notes in "Apariencia celebrada" concerning this scene, "a fuerza de distancia y de apartamiento del pasado, en la escena de lectura de la hija sobre el padre, falta nada menos que la escritura del padre" (29). Carri's choice to include in the script her father's citation of another writer rather than her father's own words signals the difficulty—if not impossibility—of recovering her father's legacy. In keeping with Carri's not directly adopting her parents' beliefs and lifestyle, the director chooses—in the one moment of the diegesis that Couceyro is shown reading from Roberto Carri's book—to defer the identification with the father to another author's words.

Carri later shows her father's book a second time as the voiceover exhibits Couceyro's phone call to the EAAF in which she informs the agency that she is looking for information about her parents. As the phone call continues and she offers her parents' names to the person on the other end of the line, the camera pans across Carri's disorderly desk from the 2001 edition of *Isidro Velázquez: Formas prerrevolucionarias de la violencia* to an earlier edition of her father's book, now faded and falling apart. From this visual sequence, Carri shows that her father's book has been revitalized in its new edition published in 2001. If Carri chooses to include two copies of *Isidro Velázquez*, we must wonder, then, why she does not include copies of any of her father's other writings in the film. The most logical explanation for her choice to include this book of her father's rather than any of the others is twofold: first, the aforementioned reprinting of the study in 2001 solidifies its place not only among 1970s militant thought, but among the 21st-century revisiting of that moment of thought. Secondly, while his previous studies focused on workers' unions (*Sindicatos y poder en la Argentina*, 1967)

and anti-imperialism (*Imperialismo y las ciencias sociales,* 1973) *Isidro Velázquez* constitutes a celebration not only of the political platform of the revolutionary movement, but also of the tactics of violence and operating outside of the law. While the book's epigraph that Albertina Carri reads aloud in the film is not the words of her father himself, they set the tone of the book as a celebration of the uprising of the oppressed masses:

> La población es la masa, el banco de peces, el montón gregario, indiferente a lo social, sumiso a todos los poderes, inactivo ante el mal, resignado con su dolor. Pero, aun en ese estado habitual de dispersión, subyace en el espíritu de la multitud el sentimiento profundo de su unidad originaria; el agravio y la injusticia van acumulando rencores y elevando el tono en su vida afectiva, y un día, ante el choque sentimental que actúa de fulminante, explota ardorosa la pasión, la muchedumbre se hace pueblo, el rebaño se transforma en ser colectivo; el egoísmo, el interés privado, la preocupación personal desaparecen, las voluntades individuales se funden y se sumergen en la voluntad general; y la nueva personalidad, electrizada, vibrante, se dirige recta a su objetivo, como la flecha al blanco, y el torrente arrasa cuanto se le opone. (del Moral in R. Carri, 27)

Carri's choice to read aloud from this epigraph emphasizes her father's role as an influential thinker and strategist of the revolutionary struggle.

Horacio González, in his introduction to the 2001 edition of *Isidro Velázquez: Formas prerrevolucionarias de la violencia* specifies that, while the personal details of Carri's life can be found in CONADEP's *Nunca más*, "parecía oportuno, esta vez,

rememorarlo en sus pasiones políticas, sociales y literarias" (21).[41] Thus, González, unlike the Carris' peers whom Albertina Carri interviews in the film, makes a distinction between the personal biography of Carri and his political, social, and literary passions. However, like the individuals whom Carri interviews in *Los rubios*, González's "testimony" of Carri is predicated upon his political, social, and literary passions and not on any more personal or private details of him. That González should collapse political and social passions here in the introduction remits to Carri's own assertion within his 1968 prologue to *Isidro Velázquez*: "Esa antigua división ideológica entre sociedad civil y sociedad política, permite considerar a los 'delincuentes' en el plano de la sociedad civil, mientras los críticos actúan en otro 'sector' de la sociedad" (33) after previously stating, "Toda política tiene una ideología, Velázquez es una forma política de la rebeldía y el sentimiento popular es en cierto modo la ideología" (32). This assertion characterizes Roberto Carri in his role: a sociologist such as himself was to fulfill his duty of providing the theoretical and ideological infrastructure for the political and tactical movement that would ultimately effect the revolutionary outcomes that he and his peers sought. However, his daughter does not read from these lines of his book, but rather from his epigraph penned by another author.

Immediately following Couceyro's reading aloud the epigraph to Roberto Carri's book is her visit to Alcira Argumedo, who is not named in the film and whose testimony of Carri's parents, as she disclaims, is anecdotal: "Lo que te puedo contar son anécdotas."

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[41] Apropos of CONADEP's *Nunca más*, it is worth noting that Carri mentions that, when she and the crew are confronted by guards at the "Sheraton," she hides the copy of *Nunca más* that she had brought with her.

Like in the distance that Carri creates between herself (Couceyro) and her father's writings through having Couceyro read aloud the epigraph rather than his own words, the majority of Argumedo's testimony is transmitted as a voiceover while the film shows Couceyro walking through the Buenos Aires botanical garden, sitting on a bench, taking out a cigarette, and lighting it. Carri then cuts to Couceyro writing while another of her parents' friends' testimonies plays in the background. We then see what Couceyro is writing: "Exponer la memoria en su propio mecanismo. Al omitir, recuerda," so that Carri shows, this time explicitly, what she has already suggested through her mediated transmissions of these testimonies: that her intent is to reveal the artifice of memory and not the object of memory itself. Her assertion, "al omitir, recuerda" dovetails with her two previous strategies of reading from the father's book but not reading the father and including Argumedo's testimony but making sure to include her disclaimer that the information she is able to offer Carri is anecdotal (in fact, this is the only part of Argumedo's testimony that we hear clearly before she is relegated to the voiceover). Argumedo describes Carri as "muy avanzado, muy sutil para el análisis político." The accounts of her parents that Carri gleans from Argumedo, with whom she herself (through Couceyro) is shown to have a great deal of familiarity and rapport, is far from being the type of account of one's parents that a child would want to hear: what a loving person s/he was, how much s/he cared about his/her children, etc. Juxtaposed in this scene in which Couceyro visits Argumedo are the familial (almost maternal seeming) interaction between Argumedo and Carri and the politicized account that Argumedo offers of Carri's parents, suggesting a certain surrogate parent that Carri has found in

Argumedo in the absence, first of her parents, and, subsequently, of an affective identification with them through their peers' testimony.

In the letter from INCAA declining to support the film's production, the academy affirms that Carri's parents were two important intellectuals of the 1970s and that their "destino trágico" necessitates the making of the film. In this sense, we glean that the status quo of film production in Argentina—represented here through INCAA—dictates that films be made about important intellectuals who ultimately succumbed to a tragic fate. INCAA's rejection of Carri's film, then, hinges on the fact of her obfuscation of these elements of her parents' past and focuses instead on the operative elements of memory itself and upon the discrepancies of the way in which her parents are remembered by others.

Carri Scrutinizes Testimony

In addition to this highly politicized vision that Carri affirms that her parents' peers such as Argumedo create of their past, of note in the case of Alcira Argumedo is the particular place that she now occupies within memory and politics in Argentine society. Not only was Argumedo affiliated with Roberto Carri when both were prominent sociologists in the 1970s, but the interview that Couceyro has with her would have taken place just two to three years before her being appointed in 2005 to the board of directors of "Espacio para la memoria" at ESMA. In this sense, Argumedo is not merely another militant, but rather a metonymy herself of memory politics in her capacity as member of the board of directors for the most infamous detention center of the last military dictatorship now transformed into the paradigmatic space of memory in Argentina.

Moreover, Argumedo was Proyecto Sur's nominee to presidential candidacy in the most recent elections (2011). As such, Carri's interviewee here is a highly visible individual within the Argentine political scene today. Within the person of Alcira Argumedo, Carri has found a figure who encapsulates both the public and the private, the personal and the political, the past and the present. This person not only embodies the memory of 1970s militancy at the time that Carri interviews her in 2002 or 2003, but would later go on to occupy a (largely symbolic) position that solidifies her as carrier of militant memory and later to form a key part in the national Congress and her party's presidential nominee. The film's treatment of this character's testimony—almost always mediated through either off-screen voiceovers or relegated to the background in Couceyro's editing space—thus undermines politics and memory alike. Moreover, Carri's treatment of testimony and memory equates these with politics. Thus, the film, more so than depoliticizing memory, reveals the inherent politics therein. The film's treatment of the "mechanism of memory" elucidates that, at least within the economy of contemporary Argentina, all memory is mediated through politics.

Couceyro's voiceover immediately after going to visit Argumedo asserts: "los amigos de mis padres estructuraron el recuerdo de una forma tal que todo se convierte en un análisis político." Carri includes this line in the film as the visual narrative shows Couceyro looking somewhat frustrated and the voiceover of Argumedo's account of her parents continues. We understand, from this juxtaposition of sound and images, that Carri is not satisfied with the account of her parents that Argumedo is able to offer her. She yearns to know more about her parents than, as Argumedo informs her, that her father was very astute in his political analysis. The film's notion that Carri's friends' parents

have structured memory in such a way that everything is ultimately a political analysis counters Argumedo's own assertion that all that she has to offer Carri are anecdotes about her parents. Carri implies, through these contrasting assertions, that her parents' friends are unaware of the politicized nature of their own recounting of history. In addition to showing the screen on which Couceyro is reviewing her parents' peers' testimony off-center, Carri also includes shots of these testimonies being fast-forwarding, quite literally heeding her own injunction to "expose memory in its own mechanism."

With all of these hours of recorded testimony that Carri uses to analyze memory, is her only purpose to proclaim that her parents' politics did not matter? This negation of political categories altogether seems unlikely, for her choice of the film's title, in addition to highlighting the failures of memory, also suggests a failure in her parents' political stance, specifically, their belief that a couple of academics with upper-class backgrounds would fit in perfectly in a neighborhood such as the one to which Carri returns in the film, where, as Couceyro tells us, "era evidente que no éramos de allí […] y me imagino que sería parecido a lo que pasaba en su momento con mis padres". Carri thus suggests the fallacies of her parents' beliefs. Since being blond is considered a trait of the upper classes—if not the oligarchy—in Argentina, that the neighbors should remember the Carris as a family of "rubios" signifies the failure of Roberto Carri and Ana María Caruso's attempts to blend in with the neighbors despite the disparity of their backgrounds. The director's parents' failure to assimilate into a lower-class neighborhood signals the greater failure of revolutionary politics in its attempt to appropriate Peronist culture precisely through positioning itself as the champion of the lower classes. Their daughter's choosing not only to emphasize the neighbors' account that they were blond

but to make this point such a central factor in her film that she titles it "Los rubios" scrutinizes the lifestyle and beliefs to which her parents subscribed in the 1970s. Moreover, Carri's return to this neighborhood and her emphasis upon her family's having been visibly out of place in that neighborhood elucidates the degree to which the Carris' family life was overdetermined by their ideological beliefs that dictated such decisions as where Albertina and her sisters lived and the children's lifestyle as well.

In addition to remembering the family as blonds, the neighbors also remember that Roberto Carri had typewriters that were audible from the street. Couceyro's narration in response to the neighbors' recollection of Carri's typewriter informs us that one of Albertina's older sisters had told their father that the typewriter made them more than a little conspicuous: "¿Quién iba a tener una máquina de escribir en ese barrio?" Here, Carri creates almost a caricature of her father: the militant academic, who believed that he could pass unperceived in this neighborhood despite the obvious class differences between himself and the neighbors and the fact that all of the neighbors could hear his furious typing on the typewriter when no one else in the area would have had a typewriter.

The aforementioned series of shots in which Carri goes to a wig shop, tries on a few blond wigs, and returns to the neighborhood where she lived with her parents that the crew visits earlier in the film creates a parodic representation of testimonial film. Carri, the subject of her neighbors' memory, changes her own physical appearance in order to conform to the memory of her family that these neighbors have created. Moreover, Carri's visit—while still wearing the blond wig—to the Sheraton where her parents were detained juxtaposes history and memory. Here, we see the state repression come into

direct contact with the subjectivities of memory. This scene's voiceover tells us, as previously mentioned, that people of Carri's parents' generation who survived the military dictatorship claim to be protagonists of a (hi)story that does not belong to them. This theme is doubly represented here: both through this voiceover and through Carri's subversion of their memory through her parodic act of donning a blond wig

As previously mentioned, what Carri's fim ultimately exhibits is not so much a binary between politics and memory, but rather the mutual imbrication between the two. Carri seems to search for her parents' memory and, once she discovers that the only memory available to her is predicated mainly upon anecdotes of political involvement, she seeks to explore the functionalities of that memory. Given the necessary political tinges of revolutionary film, as mentioned previously in the citation to Nouzeilles, Carri rejects the documentary and testimony of *tercer cine* as well as the "political alliance among artists, intellectuals and popular classes" inherent to revolutionary cinema as well as to her parents' lifestyle.

Patricio Pron and *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*

Patricio Pron was a promising young voice in the Argentine literary sphere until he began to fear he had nothing worth writing and moved to Germany for graduate studies. There, he wrote a doctoral dissertation on Copi, biding his time until he could finally be taken seriously as an Argentine fiction writer, which, to his mind, cannot happen before one is forty years old. Published when he was thirty-six, however, his 2011 novel, *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*, has received a significant amount of critical attention. Critics have focused on his particular place within contemporary Argentine culture in light of his having lived in Europe for almost two decades (González 2012, Hax 2012, Zunini 2012). Similar to many critics' analyses of Carri, much of the novel's reception has focused upon the post-2001 political and economic climate as manifest in Pron's novel (Hax, Tala, Zunini), whereas my main interest in Pron's novel is in the direct dialogue that Pron maintains throughout his novel between his generation, on the one hand, and his parents' generation—those involved directly with 1970s militancy—on the other. His parents' generation is understood as having left an indelible legacy both within literary production and within political thought and culture. Moreover, these two spheres—the literary and the political—are figured in the novel as being mutually imbricated. Thus, the narrator's search for how to represent

his parents' past elucidates some of the key modalities of political culture within Argentina today. Pron's novel explores the place of militancy, human rights, and memorial culture through various media: literature, journalism, museums, and television.

Like Carri's film, Pron's novel is also largely autobiographical. His narrator-protagonist is living in Germany yet is from *Osario, understood as a fictionalization of Pron's factual hometown of Rosario. The narrator returns to *Osario to visit his ailing father who is likely to pass away very soon. He reflects upon his return to Argentina: "mi regreso no era al país que mis padres habían querido que yo amara y que se llamaba Argentina sino a un país imaginario para mí, por el que ellos habían luchado y que nunca había existido" (195). Throughout the beginning of the novel, Pron's narrator recounts the many psychotropic medications that he is on, which serve both to circumscribe this narrator within a typical generation-X lifestyle and psychological composition at the same time that his dependency upon psychotropic medications, we later learn, dovetails with the many memories from his own childhood that he has repressed throughout his adolescence and adulthood.

These repressed childhood memories serve to create a certain solidarity between the narrator and his parents, all of whom, in these memories that he has repressed, are figured as possible victims of state repression. Such a representationof his own childhood creates an implicit solidarity between the narrator and his parents. Unlike Carri's wholly irreverent approach to her own parents' militant past, Pron's narrator is more sympathetic to his parents' involvement with militancy. Crucial to this understanding, however, is a recognition—if not celebration—of his parents' lack of participation in armed violence

and of their withdrawing from staunch militant involvement once Perón died and the cause seemed too far-stretched.

The narrator's return to his hometown and his father's impending death prompt him to explore his own childhood as well as his family's past. Specifically, the narrator looks into his journalist father's recent folders, wherein he finds his father's copious archives on the recent disappearance and death of Alberto Burdisso, a real-life case in El Trébol, also in Santa Fe, that garnered a great deal of media attention in 2008. Through his father's notes, the narrator discovers that his father's interest in the Burdisso case was not only because he was a journalist, but also because he had known the victim's sister, Alicia, and had encouraged her to join the militant cause in the 1970s. Rather than celebrate her death as a martyr for the cause, the narrator imagines that his father's obsession with Alberto Burdisso's death is a manifestation of the guilt that his father feels for having, in part, led to Alicia's death in his encouraging her to join the militant cause. As such, the novel creates a uniquely qualified celebration of militancy; that is, Pron accepts and celebrates only militant action that embraces neither the killing of the enemy nor the loss of life for the cause and a militant cause that recognizes its own limitations.

Guardia de Hierro and "The Straight Record"

El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia creates a particular dynamic between history and fiction. Many parts of the novel are comprised of direct citations from *El Trébol Digital* and other local newspapers recounting the disappearance and death of Alberto Burdisso in 2008. In addition to Pron's intercalation of excerpts from *El Trébol Digital* and other newspapers, the novel creates a particular relationship between

fact and fiction in Pron's subsequent publishing, on his blog, of his father's response to his novel: "The Straight Record: La versión de mi padre." Pron's choice to publish this response by his father on his website highlights the exchange of ideas and beliefs between the generation of 1970s militants and their grown children. In stark contrast to Carri, however, Pron's novel—as my subsequent reading elucidates—constitutes a child's attempt to vindicate and celebrate his parents' involvement in the revolutionary struggles of the 1970s, despite his recognition of the shortcomings therein.

Pron's narrator's parents were part of the group *Guardia de Hierro* in the 1960s and 1970s, a group about which the narrator knows little before exploring his parents' notebooks. Once he revises the group's tactics and organization in his parents' study, the narrator accepts—even celebrates—his parents' militant involvement for two crucial reasons. Firstly, as far as he knows, *Guardia de Hierro* disbanded after Perón's death, rendering them more sensible than other militant groups. More importantly, the narrator tells us that the group rejected armed violence, such that his celebration of his parents' commitment to their cause does not connote an inherent acceptance of violence as a means to an end. As the narrator informs us, though his parents found themselves attracted to *Montoneros* at a certain point in their militant involvement, they never joined the group because they disagreed with its embrace of violence. As the narrator describes, after learning that his parents had been involved with the Guardia de Hierro and looking into this group: "La otra diferencia sustancial [de Montoneros] fue su rechazo a la vía armada; tras un período de discusión [8], la organización decidió no recurrir a las armas excepto con fines defensivos y supongo que esto es lo que salvó la vida de mis padres y de una buena cantidad de sus compañeros y, de forma indirecta, la mía" (197). In tracing

his parents' party's organization and decisions after the death of Perón, the narrator acknowledges that, unlike ERP or Montoneros, *Guardia de Hierro* recognized that the Peronist party no longer had a leader. He reflects: "¿Adónde va un ejército cuando su general ha muerto? A ninguna parte, naturalmente" (200). As Humberto Cucchetti's recent sociological analysis of the group, *Combatientes de Perón, herederos de Cristo: Peronismo, religión secular y organizaciones de cuadros* asserts from its outset, Guardia de Hierro's trajectory following Perón's death elucidate some of the crucial phenomena and political dynamics of the second half of the twentieth century.

In a recent interview in *Página/12*, Pron was asked, "Cuando empieza a investigar sobre la organización a la que pertenecieron sus padres, Guardia de Hierro, se percibe que siente un gran alivio al comprobar que, a pesar de que estuvo a punto de fusionarse con Montoneros, algunos militantes, como sus padres, cuestionaron la lucha armada. ¿Es así?" (Friera ¶13). To this query, Pron responds: "Sí, es cierto. El saber que mis padres no mataron es muy reconfortante porque se aducua más a mi propia visión de la política. Quizás este libro hubiese sido muy diferente si hubiese descubierto que mis padres participaron en acciones armadas. Pero por fortuna no lo hicieron; es consolador saber que mis padres no cargan con muertos" (Friera ¶14). Pron's feelings of relief and comfort upon learning that his parents did not engage in armed violence suggest the author's psychological need to know that his parents were not responsible for the taking of human lives. Moreover, the storyline that Pron's novel creates of Guardia de Hierro emphasizes that the group not only did not kill people, but that his parents and their peers, unlike many other militant groups, considered joining *Montoneros* and considered engaging in armed struggle but prudently decided not to.

Despite this revisionist history that Pron and his narrator create in which their Guardia de Hierro parents are nobly figured as more respectful of human life than other Peronist groups, we observe through Pron's father's response to his novel that the resolution and ease that the narrator finds in his parents' militant past is a bit of an exaggeration. As "The Straight Record" indicates, "la vía de las armas nunca fue algo realmente discutido como posibilidad, ni tampoco descartada." This affirmation on Pron's father's behalf is crucial, for it debunks the image that the novel has sought to create of *Guardia de Hierro* as more sensible, responsible, and respectful towards human life than other militant groups were. Pron's novelist's exaggeration of these qualities of *Guardia de Hierro* suggests a psychological longing for his parents to have been responsible and respectful of human life in their youth. His father's account, however, indicates that the question of armed violence was merely never really explored, such that it was simply a coincidence that *Guardia de Hierro* did not take lives. Cucchetti's analysis, for its part, indicates the following: "Parece plausible que, mientras que Guardia de Hierro construía redes territoriales e incorporaba paulatinamente sectores medios, el concepto de insurrección armada fuera elborándose cada vez con más fuerzas" (97). He later nuances this assertion with a direct quote from a former GdH member's testimony: "'Perón nos decía: 'Para ustedes la lucha armada no. Yo necesito que sean la retaguardia.'" (99). From this particular militant's point of view (and other almost-identical accounts included in Cucchetti's study), we discern not necessarily the reverence for human life that Pron's narrator attributes to his parents, but a particular understanding of what this group's function needed to be within a broader panorama of the Peronist cause. Crucially, though, unlike Pron's narrator's implication that his parents

were too virtuous to have participated in armed violence, these accounts evince a complicity with the armed struggle insofar as *Guardia de Hierro*, in this view, is a necessary component to the same movements that included violence as a political strategy.

Another tension that arises between the novel and Pron's father's account of his militant group is *Guardia de Hierro*'s ideological identification. Where Pron's novelist asserts "en realidad, su cúpula continuó siendo una minoría paranoica de tipo leninista" (202), in "The Straight Record," his father corrects the novel:

> GdH nunca fue marxista leninista; tenía raíces en la resistencia Peronista. El FEN (Frente Estudiantil Nacional) que a comienzos de los 70 se unió a GdH junto a otras agrupaciones de distintos lugares del país para conformar a la OUGT (Organización Única del Trasvasamiento Generacional), sí había tenido una adolescencia marxista, que había abandonado para adentrarse en un difuso <<socialismo nacional>> de donde encontró salida en el peronismo. (¶17)

Again, Pron's father's account of *Guardia de Hierro* actually seems to make his own militant past less honorable than the narrator's fictional description of the group through his mention of a "difuso socialismo nacional," signalling a lack of concrete ideological organization or sense of desired outcomes.

The Novel's Consideration of Literary Modalities

Pron's publishing of his father's response on his blog notwithstanding, the author's relationship to his literary and cultural antecedents are clearly manifest throughout the novel's diegesis. His diegetic narrator constantly reflects on his own

literary influences, his parents' library, and how best to make use of these antecedents in order to recount his parents' story and to make sense of his own childhood. As with his parents' militant ideology, the narrator is constantly pressed to identify with, reject, or qualify the literary and cultural antecedents that past generations of authors—first and foremost, those within Argentine literature—have provided him.

Asked in an interview what his affective relationship with his native country is and how this relationship affets his literary production, Pron responded, "Me gusta creer […] que participo en una tradición específica de las letras argentinas, que es la de aquellos autores que escribieron afuera. Pensando, sin embargo, en los efectos que iban a crear en la Argentina. Esa tradición es muy rica, por razones políticas posiblemente…Yo me considero parte de esa tradición. O aspiro ser leído como parte de esa tradición" (Hax ¶5). We see, then, that Pron's primary identification with Argentine literary production is with authors who wrote from outside of the country, a tradition that is very rich, as he posits, tellingly, "possibly for political reasons." Whether exiled directly for political reasons or simply because the condition of exile allows for a dialectical understanding of the political situation of one's own country, Pron asserts that his writing from outside of the country creates a rich tradition that he identifies as politically implicated, and is his primary self-identification as an author. It comes as little surprise, then, that Pron should have written his doctoral dissertation on Copi, also a native Argentine who wrote novels while living in Paris. As I later analyze, Pron identifies with author Laura Alcoba, who was also exiled—from a very young age—in Paris.

Like Carri's film, Pron's novel is filled with considerations of existing modalities of recounting recent Argentine history. As Pamela Tala has posited in her article on *El*

espíritu, "Son escritores que […] ya no son contemporáneos del *boom* de la literatura latinoamericana (por lo tanto no hay en ellos ninguna necesidad de "matar al padre"; más bien se han reconciliado con los grandes abuelos) y también han crecido en un contexto en el cual los grandes relatos épicos del siglo XX se encuentran ya casi desmantelados" (117). Despite Tala's assertion here that in Pron's generation of novelists there is no need to "kill one's father"—that is, the same type of Bloomian anxiety of influence previously discussed in Carri's film—Pron and his diegetic novelist are certainly conscious of the existing modalities of literary accounts of recent Argentine history. Throughout the novel, Pron's narrator reflects upon these literary conventions, contemplating what genre and form his father's novel would take on were he ever to write it. This reflection is largely a process of disavowing each of these common literary precepts, enumerating what his father's novel would *not* be more so than what it would be:

> una cosa estaba clara: la novela que hubiera escrito mi padre no habría sido una novela alegórica ni una ficción doméstica ni una novela de aventuras o de romance, no hubiera sido una alegoría ni una balada ni una novela de formación, tampoco una ficción detectivesca ni una fábula ni un cuento de hadas ni una ficción histórica, no hubiera sido una novela cómica ni épica ni de fantasía y tampoco una novela gótica o industrial; por supuesto no hubiera sido una novela naturalista o de ideas o posmoderna ni un folletín o una novela realista a la manera decimonónica y, claro, tampoco una parábola o una obra de ciencia ficción, de suspenso o una novela social, tampoco un libro de caballerías o un romance, ya puestos a ellos, mejor que tampoco fuera una novela de misterio o de terror, aunque lo que resultase de ella diera miedo y pena. (161-2)

That this diegetic narrator created by Pron, who has a doctorate in contemporary literature, should assert first that the novel that his father would have written would not be allegorical and, moreover, his repetition in the next line that it would not have been an allegory—connotes the primacy of allegory as the most common modality to recount such an experience as that of his parents. We then understand that Pron—along with his diegetic novelist—is deliberately not creating an allegorical novel in his own literary account of his parents' and their peers' past. To this end, the novelist includes reflections such as, "cómo narrar lo que les sucedió [a mis padres] si ellos mismos no han podido hacerlo, cómo contar una experiencia colectiva de forma individual, cómo dar cuenta de lo que les pasó a ellos sin que se piense que se intenta convertirlos en los protagonistas de una historia que es colectiva, qué lugar ocupa en esa historia" (201). Specifically, Pron's narrator's wondering here "cómo contar una experiencia colectiva de forma individual" constitutes a diegetic resistance against his novel's classification as an allegory; this affirmation runs counter to Jameson's infamous theorization on third-world national allegory in his assertion that all third-world texts are necessarily allegorical because in them "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (69). It also runs counter to, within Argentine novelistic production, authors such as Piglia and Saer whose novels dealing with themes of recent history have often been classified as allegorical (Avelar 1999, Dalmaroni 2002). In this regard, Pron's narrator seems to be grappling with the great masters not of the 1960s Boom novels, but more directly with his immediate predecessors in recent Argentine novelistic production.

In addition to his deliberate distancing of his diegetic novel from an allegorical approach to storytelling, Pron expands upon his previously cited enumeration of what his father's novel would not have been with an extended diatribe against crime fiction as the genre of his father's story: "narrar su historia [la de su padre] a la manera de un relato policial apenas contribuiría a ratificar la existencia de géneros, es decir, de una convención, y que esto sería traicionar sus esfuerzos, que estuvieron dirigidos a poner en cuestión esas convenciones, las sociales y su reflejo pálido en la literatura" (170).[42] Pron's assertion here that writing within a certain genre contravenes any effort to scrutinize social conventions as reflected (though palely, in Pron's view) in literature speaks directly to the central question of this dissertation project: how does literature serve as a placeholder for social, political, and ideological conventions? Here, Pron offers the answer that writing within a specific genre connotes a conformity to social conventions which, given the efforts that the narrator's father is making, would indicate a lack of resolution of or reconciliation with the truths of the recent past and, conversely, the perpetuation of the existing myths and misconceptions of recent historical events. As such, Pron's diegetic novel—like the others included in my analysis—consciously blurs

[42] For a recent consideration of the inherent politics of the police genre—specifically within the sphere of postdictatorial Argentine fiction—see Patrick Dove's "Literary Futures: Crime Fiction, Global Capitalism, and the History of the Present in Ricardo Piglia," (*A Contracorriente* 10.1) wherein Dove posits that, after multiple decades of publishing novels featuring protagonist Emilio Renzi, Piglia finally, in his recent novel *Blanco nocturno*, broaches the theme of the erosion of the political self in the character of Renzi.

the lines between genres (grafting, in Derridean terms) in order to conceive more holistically of the 1970s and its lasting effects on Argentine politics and society.

Within his own generation of Argentine authors, Pron likens himself to Laura Alcoba and Félix Bruzzone, along with Chilean novelist Alberto Fuguet (González 393). Bruzzone and Alcoba are both children of disappeared persons. Not unlike Pron's having lived in Germany to complete his doctorate and now living in Madrid, Alcoba and her mother fled to Paris toward the beginning of the last military dictatorship and have lived there ever since, thus remitting to Pron's aforementioned identification with Argentine authors who write from outside of the country. With respect to Alcoba, however, Pron differentiates his novel from her use of the child's perspective due to his own use of an adult child of militants' narrator. Unlike Carri's use of Playmobil toys to illustrate episodes from her childhood and the necessary child-like perspective therein, Pron avoids using the child's perspective to approach his own past. Explaining this difference between his novel and Alcoba's: "Mi interés estaba centrado en procurar averiguar qué pensaba yo de los hechos trágicos que vivió mi familia y que me tocó presenciar a una edad en la cual yo soy mayor que mis propios padres en el momento de los hechos" (González 393). This difference between Pron's novel, on the one hand, and Alcoba's novel and Carri's film, on the other, remits to a fundamental contrast between Pron and Carri's works: where Carri constantly evades the political and focuses on her own childhood, Pron seeks to reconcile his narrator's childhood experience with his ideological perspective on his parents' militancy now as an adult. Precisely due to Pron's avoidance of a child-like perspective, the novel is laden with an adult's meditation upon the legacy and the ethics of 1970s militancy. Moreover, his mention that he and his

narrator are now older than his parents were during the time of their militant involvement emphasizes the youth and ingenuity that characterized these militant movements.

A Militant's Library

As part of Pron's avoidance of a purely childlike narrative point of view, the narrator makes visible his consideration of his family and his parents' home from a different perspective than that of a child, of himself before he left for Germany. Specifically, shortly after arriving at his parent's home in *Osario, the narrator contemplates the way in which his own perception of his parents' bookshelves in their living room has changed: "eran los libros de la juventud de mis padres […] aunque conocía bien aquellos libros, quizás era también mi percepción la que hacía que aparecieran nuevos a mis ojos, y una vez más me pregunté qué había cambiado realmente de aquel entonces en que yo los había ojeado a ese entonces en que yo los miraba sin curiosidad y con un poco de aprensión bajo la luz nocturna" (38-9). This contrast that the narrator creates between his once childlike interest in these books and his current lack of curiosity towards them elucidates a process of maturation that has rendered him apprehensive towards his parents' beliefs and the thoughts that influenced him where once he had exhibited a childlike curiosity in perusing his parents' library. The protagonist then narrates that he took two pills and went to sleep after staring at his parents' bookshelves for a few minutes, evincing thus a need to drown the legacy of his parents' beliefs and actions associated with 1970s militancy.

Despite his assertion that he took two pills and went to sleep, in the next section of this chapter the narrator notes that the shelves' authors include Borges, Cortázar, Eva and Juan Perón, Che Guevara, Arturo Jauretche, Vladimir Lenin, Jorge Abelardo Ramos, David Viñas, Mao Zedong, Milcíades Peña, and Rodolfo Walsh, among others. The narrator's enumeration of the authors housed in these bookshelves creates a compendium of the keystone thoughts that influenced the revolutionary movements of the 1970s. Tellingly, his parents' library is comprised of a myriad of both Peronist and non-Peronist thought alike, exemplified through the Trotskyist writings of Milcíades Peña and Jorge Abelardo Ramos. Unlike, as Norma Rossi signals in *Museo de la Revolución*, ERP operative Tesare's not being likely to have read Guevara, Pron's narrator's parents have read Che's diary. Pron thus creates an account militants whose library is more expansive and includes thoughts that informed the strategies and platforms of virtually all of the major revolutionary groups in the 1960s and 1970s.

The narrator's creation of this inventory counters his attempt to go to sleep and ignore his parents' library, elucidating the persistence that the thoughts contained in this library have had over his family and himself. This persistence, we now understand, has necessitated an analysis of and reconciliation with these thoughts and their legacy today. The presence of these authors would indicate that his parents inculcated themselves in their youth in all of the texts that were foundational to Peronist thought of the 1970s (Borges notwithstanding, as I address presently). That these books should remain to this day in their library indicates the longevity of this thought.

In addition to enumerating which authors are included within his parents' library, the narrator makes special note of those who are absent from these bookshelves: Bullrich,

Silvina; Guido, Beatriz; Martínez Estrada, Ezequiel; Ocampo, Victoria; Sabato, Ernesto. (40-1). After noting that the general state of these books is bleak, he repeats this list in terms of which authors his parents have chosen to read and which ones they have not, concluding: "Uno podría quedarse horas pensando en esto" (42); despite affirming that one could ponder the composition of his parents' bookshelf for hours, he makes no further direct mention to his parents' bookshelf, only to the novel that his father could have written about Alicia and Alberto Burdisso. We understand, then, that the narration that the protagonist creates about the Burdissos and his own parents, cross-referenced throughout with modalities and influences of other authors, constitutes its own diegetic contribution to the existing library of recent Argentine fiction. Crucial, though, to a thorough analysis of this novel is the fact that those authors not included within his parents' bookshelves were most likely not included for reasons of discrepancies between the authors' class and/or political affiliation and Pron's narrators' parents. As such, Pron evinces the ideological privileging of thought that dovetails with the various Peronist movements and authors who are not from the upper class, such as Ocampo.

The novelist's father's reaction includes thirty-four direct responses, with page numbers, to specific points posited in his son's novel. Specifically, he responds directly to the novel's meditations regarding his bookshelves and its missing volumes:

> Leí a Silvina Ocampo, Beatriz Guido, Ernesto Sabato. En todos los casos muy poco pero lo suficiente para decidir que no ocupen lugar en la biblioteca. *El túnel,* por ejemplo, debe haber quedado en El Trébol, lo mismo que alguna obrita de las mencionadas autoras. De Victoria Ocampo no leí nada, por prejuicio de clase, y

> de Borges lo que leí—*El Aleph*, entre otros—no me interesó. Tal vez no elegí la producción adecuada. (¶4)

Pron's father's assertion that Borges did not interest him cannot but conjure up the much-heated debates in the 1960s and 1970s regarding Borges's politics, specifically whether he should continue to be touted as such a great literary master when his politics proved unamenable to the majority of other Argentine writers at the time (I will revisit this issue in my conclusions).

Pron's narrator's asserts after contemplating his parents' library that the books therein are in disrepair and, in some cases, "fatal." This observation would suggest that this library needs to be updated and thus revitalized. The protagonist's subsequent compilation of his father's notes and exploration of his parents' past—a story of militancy that certainly differs from Rodolfo Walsh's *Operación Masacre*, contained in these bookshelves—for its part, is its own act of revitalizing the bookshelves of Argentine fiction.

Pron's diegetic novelist's inclusion here of Rodolfo Walsh in his parents' bookshelves dovetails with Pron's own assertion elsewhere concerning Walsh; in 1998 the author delivered a talk entitled "Rodolfo Walsh y el género policial: El relato de los hechos." In this analysis, Pron would assert "una politización de su pensamiento [el de Rodolfo Walsh] que es característica también de la politización del género policial" (362). This characterization that Pron posits regarding the politicized nature of police fiction anticipates his narrator's position regarding the dynamics between police fiction and the perpetuation of social conventions. That the narrator's parents' bookshelves should include Walsh's book, then, would inscribe them within a certain group of belief

systems, according to Pron's own assertions regarding Walsh in this critical intervention, as well as in keeping with what his narrator has asserted regarding the detective novel.

After inventorying all of the authors included in his parents library, the narrator goes on to observe that the most frequent colors on this bookshelf are white, light blue, and red, representing—like the authors contained on the bookshelf—ideas of the Argentine nation as well as the communist movement. He then enumerates the words that appear most in these books: "táctica, estrategia, lucha, Argentina, Perón, revolución" (41). Pron's narrator, then, represents an ideological compendium—his parents' library—that is limited through colors and keywords to tactics and strategies of the Peronist (armed) revolutionary struggle.

Though much less irreverent toward his parents' cause than Carri, Pron also would be difficult to categorize as having wholly adopted his parents' ideological identifications. Rather, he maintains throughout the novel a critical distance from his parents' beliefs and their past. Even in this narrator's positive descriptions of his parents' militancy, his revisionist storyline that *Guardia de Hierro* did not condone armed violence and that the group came to its senses once Perón died evinces a level of practicality that distinguish Pron and his narrator from this group of children of the disappeared who identify with the same utopic thinking as their parents did.[43]

As part of this differentiated inheritance of his parents' past, Pron's narrator, like Carri, considers his father's own writings—his notes on the Burdisso case—and ponders

[43] We recall Nouzeilles's aforementioned distinction between Carri's film and Juan Gelman's analysis of children of disappeared militants who "assume their parents' utopia."

the ways in which his father would have written his own account based on the information contained in his files about the Burdissos. In this regard, the narrator's novel—the intradiegetic novel within Pron's novel—is a gesture of reverence to his father insofar as the narrator is considerate of the type of literary modalities to which his father would have adhered had he ever had the opportunity to write his novel. However, Pron's narrator remains skeptical toward his parents regarding both their literary predilections and their ideological commitment. This critical distance indicates that he has received a certain legacy from his father—his militant past—but that he has altered this legacy in some ways in order to make sense of it, just as Pron asserted in an aforementioned interview that he was relieved that his parents had not killed people because it was amenable to his own worldview. That is, Pron posits his own worldview as taking precedent over any ideological affinities that he might discover his parents to have.

Children as Repository of Their Parents' Militancy

The main tension created within the novel between familial connections, on the one hand, and militant action, on the other, is explained as an acceptance of defeat on behalf of the narrator's parents, for whom having children Pron figures as a sort of consolation prize. His narrator describes: "Me gusta preguntarles a las personas que conozco cuándo han nacido; si son argentinos y han nacido en diciembre de 1975 pienso que tenemos algo en común, ya que todos los nacidos por esa época somos el premio consuelo que nuestros padres se dieron tras haber sido incapaces de hacer la revolución" (199). This provocative reflection on the narrator's behalf, in the parity that it equates

between parenthood and revolution, figures parenthood as an alternative to revolution in its ability to leave behind another type of legacy.

It is worth noting, however, that while the narrator's parents' Guardia del Hierro may have renounced its staunch militant struggle after Perón's death, other groups such as Montoneros and the ERP only became more active in the turbulent years of Isabel Perón's leadership. For those involved with these groups, of course, having children might not have constituted a "consolation prize" of the variety described by the narrator here; rather, they were a guarantee that their revolutionary ideals may live on through their children. Ana Amado's analysis of the relationship of the children of the disappeared to their parents addresses this exact issue: "La militarización de la vanguardia armada durante los años más duros de la década de los sententa prolongó sus efectos en el teatro de la vida privada, donde los descendientes de los militantes formaban de alguna manera parte, no de las prácticas, pero sí del logos de la violencia: su existencia llegó a pensarse como garantía contra una posible—en determinado momento, segura—derrota. 'Los hijos son nuestra retaguardia'—decía Mario Firmenich, entrevistado por García Márquez a fines de los setenta" (Amado 52). This proclamation on behalf of Firmenich—leader of *Montoneros*—signals the cultural concept of children as carriers of the legacy of revolutionary thought who serve, as Amado posits here, as assurance against defeat. Pron's narrator even makes reference to Firmenich's assertion: "Alguien alguna vez había afirmado que los hijos serían la retaguardia de los jóvenes que en la década de los 1970s habían peleado una guerra y la habían perdido y yo pensé también en ese mandato y en cómo ejecutarlo" (219). That is, even if these militants die for the cause, the cause will not die, for it has been inculcated in their children and will live on

through them. The narrator has earlier reflected on the generational legacy that his parents left him: "tuvieron hijos a los que les dieron un legado que es también un mandato, y ese legado y ese mandato, que son los de la transformación social y la voluntad, resultaron inapropiados en los tiempos en que nos tocó crecer, que fueron tiempos de soberbia y de frivolidad y de derrota" (199). The narrator then goes on to answer his own question about how to "ejecutar" this legacy that his parents' generation has left them by stating that writing is his way of responding to this injunction for his generation to be the depository of his parents' generation.

In the case of parents such as the narrator's, however, who have renounced their militant struggle in favor of protecting their own lives and those of their children, the fact of having children constituted, for some, its own assurance against death. As Pron's narrator posits, in addition to having children constituting a sort of "consolation prize" for 1970s militants after Perón's death, having children made once militants less likely to be persecuted by the state for the appearance of conformity and conventionality that having children afforded them: "en aquellos años, un hijo era una buena pantalla, una señal inequívoca que debía ser interpretada como la adhesión a una forma de vida convencional y alejada de las actividades revolucionarias; un niño podía ser, en un retén o en un allanamiento, la diferencia entre la vida y la muerte" (199-200). Here, unlike in the equation that Pron earlier creates between family and militancy, the author creates a dichotomized relationship between the two in the eyes of the state's repressors; for the conformity with hegemonic values embodied in parenthood suggested at least the appearance of one's having renounced militancy. Again, this understanding that Pron posits about the relationship between militancy and family is really relevant only to the

small contingent of militants such as his narrator's parents, who did renounce their militant action before having children and elected their immediate protection in favor of "fighting to ensure a better world for them," as groups such as Firmenich's chose to do.

Despite the narrator's deference in many instances of the novel to the validity and heroism of his parents' beliefs and actions, he also presents his own generation as the heir to its parents' senseless involvement in the struggle:

> ¿No era terrible el imperativo ético que esa generación puso sin quererlo sobre nosotros? ¿Cómo matar al padre si ya está muerto y, en muchos casos, ha muerto defendiendo una idea que nos parece acertada incluso aunque su ejecución haya sido indolente o torpe o errónea? ¿De qué otra manera estar a su altura que no sea haciendo como ellos peleando una guerra insensata y perdida de antemano y marchando al sacrificio de la juventud desesperada, altiva e impotente y estúpida, marchando al precipicio de la guerra civil contra las fuerzas del aparato represivo de un país que, en sustancia, siempre ha sido y es profundamente conservador? (213)

Pron's narrator's cynical tone—evinced in his description of his parents' generation as "desesperada, altiva e impotente y estúpida"—creates a marked difference between his own understanding of militancy and that of his parents in their youth. Moreover, his categorization of his home country as "un país que, en sustancia, siempre ha sido y es profundamente conservador" criticizes his parents' generation in their inability to see the political realities that surrounded them. In this sense, the narrator posits that the "ethical imperative" imposed by his parents' generation was born out of this same generation's

having been completely out of touch with reality. Nonetheless, this legacy of militancy—an "ethical imperative"—continues in existence.

Given the staying power of this legacy, Pron's narrator elucidates the use of this legacy of the generation of 1970s militants as a means to incite militant action toda. Most notably, the last page that the narrator discovers in his father's folder on Alberto Burdisso's disappearance is a transcript of his father's remarks at Burdisso's funeral in which he posits that the commitment of such individuals as Alicia is precisely what allows others to speak freely today. He proclaimed:

> Sin aquellos jóvenes como fue Alicia, no podríamos hoy decir lo que pensamos, obrar como creemos que hay que hacerlo, elegir nuestro destino. No se hubiera podido hacer, por ejemplo, la marcha a la plaza para pedir por la aparición de Alberto. Ni tampoco las manifestaciones con que en los últimos días unos y otros pueden expresar sin temor a ser secuestrados y desaparecidos qué país se quiere (148).

The narrator's father thus posits 21st-century activism as the cultural and political legacy of 1970s militancy. Moreover, the juxtaposition of this assertion to Pron's narrator's own musings on the "imperativo ético" left by his parents suggests not only that his parents' generation's militant action not only facilitated later generation's activism to effect social change, but also this same revolutionary commitment among his parents' generation *requires* Pron's generation to participate in the same type of struggle.

Pron's inclusion of assertions such as the narrator's father's proclamation at Burdisso's funeral have led to such questions to the author as "¿El narrador encontraría en La Cámpora y en la militancia kirchnerista una continuidad con los estandartes del

padre? (Zunini ¶12). If Pron's narrator's father seems proselytizing or moralizing in his vindication of Alicia Burdisso's militancy in his positing of a direct legacy between her role in the revolutionary struggle and the possibility of militancy today and, moreover, Pron's narrator recognizes an onus upon himself due to his parents' struggles and sacrifices, the author himself disavows such a clear connection in his answer to this question:

> Esta novela no tiene un final proselitista, si acaso tiene la finalidad de fungir como hoja de ruta para todos aquellos que, como yo, en algún momento quisieron hacer una pesquisa intentando determinar la responsabilidad de sus padres en los sucesos trágicos del pasado argentino. Esa es la voluntad de la novela. Antes que proponer respuestas que se articulen con un proyecto político o social específico, intenta arrojar una serie de interrogantes o invitar a realizar pesquisas (Zunini ¶13).

Pron's affirmation that his novel does not seek to posit answers articulated from a specific social or political project would seem to contradict his aforementioned effort to exaggerate the benevolence and sophistication of his father's group. We surmise, then, that Pron is less proselytizing about the present than he is about the past. That is, where he recognizes valor and prudence in his parents' past militant involvement, he does not share in his fictional father's implicit celebration of present-day militancy, posited by this very character as a continuation of his 1970s militant involvement.

Public and Family Histories in Museum Spaces

In addition to the narrator's considerations of his parents' library and of his father's notes, his recuperation of his parents' past is also mediated through museum spaces at one point in the novel. Like in many of the other works included in this analysis, the presence of museum spaces and the versions of history contained therein plays an important part in *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*. The diegetic narrator, who, as previously mentioned, does not remember much about his childhood due to his having repressed many of his memories, rediscovers his father and his own past not only through his perusal of his father's notes regarding the Burdisso case, but also through a visit to a local museum where his father is on display as a prominent journalist. Pron's inclusion of these scenes in which his narrator visits the museum emphasizes the degree to which Pron and his narrator's process of identification with the generation of their parents is mediated through the ever-growing presence of memorial cultures within Argentina, just as this process is also figured in *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia* as mediated through writing, history, and politics.

During a visit to their father in the hospital, the narrator asks his sister why his father was so interested in searching for recently disappeared persons. His sister responds to him, "lo has visto en el museo," which the narrator does not understand and responds asking for further clarification: "A quién, pregunté yo," commenting that his sister is speaking in this moment as if she were continuing a conversation that she had begun earlier with another person. Finally, the narrator tells us that his sister clarifies: "Mi hermana dijo el nombre de mi padre. Lo entrevistan en una exposición que hay en el museo de la ciudad; deberías ir a verlo, agregó, y yo asentí en silencio" (157). Pron's locating this conversation precisely in the hospital where his father lies unconscious

emphasizes that his narrator's visit to the museum serves as a substitute for having a direct conversation with his father, again highlighting the levels of mediation and storytelling through which this character's process of identifying with his parents must always pass.

The narrator then heeds his sister's advice and visits the city museum, where he finds an exhibit dedicated to local press that has a video playing on loop and a single chair. He sits in this chair, where he is inundated with various forms of media: "escuché datos y cifras y vi portadas de periódicos hasta que apareció mi padre en la pantalla. Estaba como lo recordaba en los últimos años" (158). This immediate recognition of his father suggests an affective identification with his ailing father, whom he is now able to see as he remembers him having been in the last few years. What is narrated subsequently, however, shift away from a personal identification with his father and onto a focus on the local press and the political climate therein: "Mi padre contaba su historia, que aparentemente era también la de la prensa de la ciudad donde había decidido vivir" (159). The narrator then goes on to mention "periodistas formados por él y que a su vez me habían formado a mí" (159). Pron's narrator posits here that his father's influence in his life was not only directly as a father, but also obliquely through these other journalists whose formation came largely from his father and who, in turn, had informed him. That this recognition of this chain of legacy should take place as he is watching his father on screen in a museum creates, like in Carri's film, its own mise-en-abyme of influences and formative figures.

While Pron's narrator's search for his parents is heavily mediated through various influences and sources that would serve to distance his narrative from a direct

identification with his parents, the novel never explicitly rejects the premises of his parents' militant involvment. Despite his adult narrator's point of view and his direct reflections upon his parents' beliefs and politics indicate a critical stance, his ultimate recognition is, as the novel's title's inclusion of the word "espíritu" suggests, that they were young and fervent about the cause. To this end, the last section of the novel reflects: "su espíritu, no las decisiones acertadas y equivocadas que mis padres y sus compañeros habían tomado, sino su espíritu mismo, iba a seguir subiendo en la lluvia hasta tomar el cielo por asalto" (221).[44] In this assertion, we glean that Pron's narrator's novel has ultimately sought not to evaluate the efficacy or righteousness of his parents' militant involvement, but to capture the spirit of his parents, whereby he disclaims the shortcomings and fallacies of this movement yet gazes retrospectively in admiration of his parents' passion and commitment to their beliefs.

Through both Carri and Pron's works, we discern semi-autobiographical representations of their respective authorial voices that seek to distance these author figures from their parents' militant pasts. Both works' heavy reliance on other authors and thought as intertexts for their intradiegetic narrations serve to emphasize the complexities and paradoxes of the militant legacy that they have received from their parents. As *Los rubios* and *El espíritu* indicate, these various forms in which their memory of and relation to their parents are mediated are inextricable from the ideological

[44] Pron's use of the phrase "el cielo por asalto" is an allusion to Karl Marx's description of Parisians "dispuestos a tomar el cielo por asalto" (quoted in Massot 17). The phrase "tomaremos el cielo por asalto" was a common battle call among Marxist guerrilla groups in 1970s Argentina.

underpinnings of the militant movements in which their parents were involved in the 1960s and 1970s as well as the continuities of this thought and these groups within the predominant Argentine political sphere today.

Chapter 3: Detective Fiction as a Means of Exploring 1970s Militancy: Eduardo Sacheri's *La pregunta de sus ojos*, Juan José Campanella's *El secreto de sus ojos*, and Leopoldo Brizuela's *Una misma noche*

The legacy of detective fiction and police thrillers within Argentina is a particularly strong trend within fiction from the past few decades. Several renowned authors—Soriano, Giardinelli, and, most paradigmatically, Piglia—became famous in the period during and immediately following the last military dictatorship for their novels recounting police investigations. More often than not, these investigations are set against the backdrop of state repression and terror. On these and other occasions, the protagonists' attempts to discover the truth of a crime case are fuddled by the corruption and inefficacy of the government due to the residual effects of the dictatorship. In more recent years, Eduardo Sacheri's 2005 novel *La pregunta de sus ojos* and its film adaption, Juan José Campanella's Oscar-winning 2009 *El secreto de sus ojos* (the novel and the

film together referred from here on simply as *Ojos*), as well as Leopoldo Brizuela's Premio Alfaguara winner, *Una misma noche*, have all incorporated elements of the hard-boiled crime novel—more specifically, the distinctly Argentine *novela negra* in order to depict the figure of an author who attempts to reconcile himself with the realities of the past few decades.[45]

In addition to their incorporation of detective fiction and their protagonists' act of writing a diegetic work, these works have in common their skepticism towards extreme justice as a means of social reconciliation. This extreme justice takes the form of "human rights" discourse that simultaneously vindicates armed violence in Brizuela's novel and vigilantism in *Ojos.* These texts thus all caution against a mere inversion of the oft-commented victim/oppressor binary that has long existed within the political and cultural imaginary of postdictatorial society. These representations correspond to the aforementioned Kirchnerist storyline of "in the 70s the bad guys were in power and now the good guys are in power," put forth by Ceferino Reato. Moreover, Héctor Leis once again proves relevant in—in his 2006 essay "Los límites de la política" wherein he asserts:, "la 'reconciliación' era algo impuesto por el vencedor al derrotado […] Cuando los lugares se intercambiaban y el derrotado pasaba a vencedor y viceversa, la cosa continuaba igual, apenas cambiaba de signo. La experiencia internacional muestra que, sin el espíritu de reconciliación, la verdad nunca llega y los actores continúan reivindicando su propia verdad-identidad".[46] All of these works further elaborate this line

[45] Novela negra…
[46] This essay was published in Sergio Bufano's *Lucha Armada* in 2006, specifically in response to Oscar del Barco's much-contended letter "No matarás."

of thinking in their suggestion that these winner/loser and victim/oppressor dynamics have continued throughout the decades since the end of the military dictatorship, inculpating the Peronist Left both in the years leading up to the military dictatorship and in the years of the Kirchnerist leadership since 2003.

Moreover, both *Una misma noche* and *Ojos* focus primarily upon the interpersonal relationships—whether familial or romantic—that have been problematized due to the political climate of the 1970s and the characters' recognition of and reconciliation with that moment of recent history. However, at the same time that these works represent these political tensions as having upset interpersonal relationships, they also depict the formation of solidarity resultant of the tumultuous political climate. Importantly, like the other works I study here, these lines of solidarity do not run purely along ideological or political group lines. Rather, these works depict solidarity across class and party lines, such that they further nuance the established binaries of postdictatorial culture.

The predominant logic for including these two works as a side-by-side analysis, though, is the predominance of the modalities of detective fiction in both works as a means of exploring human rights policy. While they may seem disparate, detective fiction and human rights literature have in common the inclusion of specific character roles: perpetrator, victim, and, often, a humanitarian aide of some sort. Moreover, in keeping with my specific focus on works with diegetic authors, human rights literature more often than not also includes a writer character whose role is to recount a human rights violation. Both *Ojos* and *Una misma noche* ascribe these varied roles to different characters at different moments in order to nuance the understanding of the aforementioned

victim/oppressor binary, implicitly contesting this kirchnerist storyline of "now the good guys are in power."

With respect to the tradition of detective fiction in Argentina, these works continue the line of debate previously posited in the last chapter in my analysis of Pron's novel, specifically in his contention—that is, both his narrator's contention and Pron's own analysis of Walsh—that the detective genre perpetuates a certain ideological project and that writing within that genre connotes an adherence to specific ideological precepts. It is noteworthy, then, that—like Pron's novel—all three of these works include a diegetic author figure whose final product includes modalities of detective fiction yet also would suggest that this mode of narration does not wholly lead to the reconciliation that the protagonists seek. As such, each of these works intercalates aspects of other types of narration in order so that these protagonists may yet reconcile the conflicting versions of history with which they have been presented.

These works' use of detective fiction as their skeletal framework for recounting the past few decades of recent history are not at all divorced of their focus on current political culture and foregrounding of intersubjective identifications. Rather, both politics and intersubjective ties have been understood by such renowned literary figures as Mempo Giardinelli and Ricardo Piglia in their analyses of Argentine crime fiction. Piglia affirms, in *Crítica y ficción*, that the Argentine *novela negra* differs from its English precursor precisely in the former's emphasis on subjectivity and individual experience as its narrative thread:

> Porque mientras en la policial inglesa todo se resuelve a partir de una secuencia lógica de presupuestos, hipótesis, deducciones, con el detective quieto y analítico,

> en la novela negra no parece haber otro criterio de verdad que la experiencia: el investigador se lanza, ciegamente, al encuentro de los hechos, se deja llevar por los acontecimientos y su investigación produce fatalmente nuevos crímenes; una cadena de acontecimientos cuyo efecto es el descubrimiento, el desciframiento (68).

Piglia thus affirms the centrality of individual experience and subjectivity as the driving force of the Argentine *novela negra*. As we observe through all three of these works, the writer figure who attempts to pen a police novel comes to discover truths about the mystery before him predominantly through an affective identification with other individuals involved in the case.

Where Piglia foregrounds the individual subjectivity of the investigator character in its centrality to the *novela negra*, Giardinelli affirms the efficacy of the same genre of fiction in inventorying the current political climate of the country: "la literatura negra es una radiografía de la llamada civilización, tan eficaz y sofisticada como inhumana y destructora. Es un medio tan bueno como cualquier otro para comprender, primero, y para interrogar, después, el mundo en que vivimos" (173). We understand through Giardinelli's assertion that the use of police fiction as a means of narration readily lends itself to a critique of an author's immediate social climate. Sacheri, Campanella, and Brizuela's works all use these modalities of storytelling as a means through which their writer characters come to learn about the world around them and, ultimately, to question the ethics and politics of these surroundings.

In addition to their police-thriller qualities, these three works, in keeping with the focus of this dissertation, all include an author figure who reflects constantly upon the

best ways in which to tell his story. These diegetic novelists all move away from a romanticized notion of the past and toward a holistic recognition of the chaos and terror that pervaded the late 1960s and early-to-mid 1970s in Argentina. Such a recognition implicitly disavows a vindication of the militant struggles that characterized this time period, insofar as it depicts the chaos and tumult that these movements caused rather than an idealized nostalgia for the valor and honor and these struggles.

While Sacheri's novel is set in the late 1990s with flashbacks to the late 1960s, Campanella's film adaption—which he worked on in close consultation with Sacheri—is set in the mid-1970s. Brizuela's novel has flashbacks to 1976. Thus, unlike the other films and novels I have analyzed in previous chapters that focus on the years leading up to the latest military dictatorship, *Una misma noche* revisits the months just after the military coup. Despite his novel's being set in 1976—in the midsts of dictatorship—his representation of that time period and the power dynamics therein nuances the victim/oppressor binary through his own then-child protagonist's simultaneous representation as victim, witness, and semi-accomplice to the military government's actions. Moreover, the actions that occurred in this year, like the struggles that characterized the earlier years of the 1970s, planted the seeds of a certain ideological legacy that will return to play a key role in his protagonist's life decades later.

All three of these works, of course, include a protagonist who attempts to write his own story of the past few decades of his life. In *Una misma noche* as well as in both versions of *Ojos*, we are presented with a character who has a particular irresolution in the present that reawakens his curiosity in a past moment of his own life, a challenge to which he responds through the process of writing as a means of making sense of the

conflicting versions of history with which he has been presented. This use of the writing process and reflecting upon the ways in which these protagonists may recount their own histories offers a meditation upon the stories that have hitherto been told about Argentina's recent past. In this regard, Sacheri, Campanella, and Brizuela create their own critiques and judgments regarding the existing historical imaginary of recent Argentine history.

La pregunta de sus ojos* and *El secreto de sus ojos

Eduardo Sacheri's 2005 novel *La pregunta de sus ojos* and its 2009 Oscar-winning film adaptation, Juan José Campanella's *El secreto de sus ojos*, are both set in the late 1990s with flashbacks to the late 1960s and mid-1970s, respectively. Like Kohan's *Museo de la revolución*, these works take as their present temporal setting the

years of Menem's presidency rather than being set contemporaneously to their productions. Nonetheless, we may read the novel and film's themes of vigilantism as a cautionary tale against precisely the type of extreme vindication of human rights that has characterized recent Argentine culture and politics. Moreover, Sacheri and Campanella's disenchanted and disaffected characters evince the impossibility of a die-hard adherence to one's ideological affinities of youth: the film and novel's characters are shown as having been solemn and righteous in the 1960s/1970s but have, over the decades, conformed to a system of justice in which such righteousness is no longer viable. Despite this climate, they are able to strive, as the female protagonist Irene proclaims in the film, for "*una* justicia," if not "*la* justicia."

Sacheri's novel narrates the attempts of its protagonist, Benjamín, to author a novel recounting the atrocious rape and murder whose investigation he led in 1968, while Campanella's film adaptation centers on this same character (although with a different last name) in his attempt to do the same, yet pushes the year of this crime back to 1973 (I later discuss the implications of these temporal discrepancies). Both of these works' plots are tripartite, predicated upon this crime's investigation as much as the writing about this investigation and the affinity that Benjamín feels for his boss, Irene, feelings that are brought to the fore throughout the considerations of the writing process as well as the investigation. Like in Kohan's and Heker's novels, amorous feelings are figured as crucial to the figuring of both the process of authoring a novel as well and that of a reconciliation with one's own principles of justice. Moreover, as in my previous analysis of Pron's novel and Carri's film, and as I later discuss in this chapter in my analysis of

Leopoldo Brizuela's *Una misma noche*, interpersonal identification is figured as the central impetus for an exploration of events that occurred in the 1970s.

In both Sacheri's novel and its filmic adaptation, Benjamín's empathetic identification with Morales—the husband of the brutally raped and murdered Liliana Coloto—is the predominant reason that this case continues to haunt him throughout decades and the impetus for him to revisit the case in hopes of resolving it. Both the novel and the film repeatedly equate Morales's feelings for his wife with Benjamín's feelings for his boss. Moreover, in a quite disturbing fashion, we understand that these same feelings on Benjamín's behalf are what allow him to discern the convoluted desire that drove Isidoro Gómez, the perpetrator of the rape and murder, to commit these crimes.

While neither the film nor the novel specifically addresses the issue of the military dictatorship's human rights violations, both works include characters that serve, respectively, as victim, perpetrator of violence, a humanitarian aid, and a witness/writer who will give testimony to these crimes. In this regard, both the film and the novel resonate within the climate in which they were produced that was marked by the ongoing truth commissions into the military dictatorship's crimes against humanity. As such, the novel and the film's divergent endings have crucial implications for the moment of their respective audience's reception. The novel ends with Benjamín's receiving a letter from Morales right before he dies at his own hand (though the narrative is ambiguous as to whether this suicidal act is psychologically motivated or a sort of euthanasia preempting a terminal illness) leading him to the place where he has captured and kept Gómez in captivity for the past decades. There he discovers the corpse of Isidoro Gómez.

Campanella's Benjamín goes to visit Morales seeking resolution to the mystery of the case and discovers there that he has kept Gómez captive, both of these characters still alive at the moment at which Benjamín arrives on the scene.

The novel's Gómez is granted amnesty in 1973, along with perpetrators of political terror and human rights violators, such that Sacheri makes explicit the lack of justice that has been reached in this case and the political climate that has impeded justice. In this sense, we understand that Gómez may be categorized as a perpetrator of the human rights violations committed by the state, insofar as he is granted amnesty alongside these actors of state repression. In the film, Gómez is granted amnesty during the beginning of the military junta's dictatorship because he offers up information about leftist subversives. Gómz is thus figured as having escaped prosecution because of the governmental and political instability, and is later shown to be part and parcel of the very corruption that both caused and rationalized state violence of the 1970s.

In his exhaustive analysis of both *La pregunta de sus ojos* and *El secreto de sus ojos*, Hugo Hortiguera focuses on the political discourse that has characterized both Kirchners' presidencies as formative over both the novel and its film adaptation. Specifically, he emphasizes the vindication of 1970s militant action that is at the very core of the Kirchners' rhetoric: "desde el incio del gobierno de Néstor Kirchner en 2003 […] se ha observado una reivindicación elemental del pasado setentista, obviándole toda posible contradicción" (section 3). As Hortiguera evinces in his note, the time of the novel's publication and the film's production cannot be divorced from our interpretation of both works. Rather, this timing speaks directly to Kirchnerist discourse that repeatedly revisits the 1970s and vindicates what this political camp conceives of as "militancy."

Again recalling Ceferino Reato's assertion that the Kirchners have created a storyline in which the bad guys were in power in the 1970s and now the good guys are in power, Hortiguera focuses his analysis of *La pregunta de sus ojos* as well as *El secreto de sus ojos* on the political climate of the Kirchners' respective administrations in which both works were produced.

As I will analyze in my analysis of the film and novel's divergent endings, Sacheri and Campanella's different endings suggest a move towards less resolution of the nation's recent past, evoking the complexities of these very processes of truth and reconciliation. Hortiguera asserts in his analysis of the two works:

> Así, mientras la narración de Sacheri encapsulaba el pasado, siguiendo una lectura que la acercaba mucho más a un modelo causal de la violencia estatal basada en la teoría de los dos demonios, que se contraponía casi caprichosamente a la visión estilizada del contexto de estreno de la película, el discurso fílmico de Campanella reconoce quizás una marca interpretativa distinta. Ya no es la estilizada imagen de un pasado idealizado kirchnerista ni la certeza confortable de dos demonios atrapados mortalmente y para siempre en una relación nefasta. (Section 4)

As Hortiguera asserts here, the differences have telling implications for the moments at which the two works were produced and would be received by their respective audiences. While the Kirchners were already in power by the time the novel was published, as well as during the moment of the film's production, we might venture that the full force of kirchnerist 1970s myth—the ESMA, La Cámpora, Néstor's death, to name a few events

that have been mythologized within kirchnerist camps—had not yet crystallized within political culture to the degree that it had by the time of Campanella's film's debut.

Political Backdrop of the Novel and Film

In addition to the novel's having been published four years prior to the film's release, the works' diegesis are also set several years apart. La pregunta de sus ojos includes sets the rape and murder of Liliana Coloto in May of 1968, during the years of Juan Carlos Onganía's dictatorship, a time period that figures less prominently into the historical imaginary than the military junta's dictatorship of 1976-1983. El secreto de sus ojos, for its part, revisits the mid-1970s and the years of Isabel Perón's rule. During this time period following Juan Perón's death, his third wife had assumed the presidency amidst the growing violence and chaos of revolutionary movements and the paramilitary endeavors to subdue these movements. As the film's plot suggests, this time period was in many ways, like the Proceso itself, a period marked by corruption and an overt lack of justice, in addition to having been an epoch of extreme senseless violence. Despite this difference in the timing, both sets of flashbacks describe a political climate in which justice is unattainable. Crucially, both of these works depict such a climate before Argentina's most recent military dictatorship officially began. Thus, Sacheri and Campanella alike avoid falling into clichés of the promise of the social movements and struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s and the heart-wrenching repressive years of the military dictatorship. Rather, they show the social, political, and legal chaos that characterized this time period even before the onset of the military junta. As Larry Rohter asserts in his review of the film published in the *New York Times*:

> when an Argentine film is set in the 1970s, it is usually a signal that the nasty

> politics of the era will be driving the plot. In this case the investigating team discovers that dark forces have taken control of the judicial system even before the March 1976 coup that overthrew an elected Perónist government and put the military in control for seven bloody and repressive years. (¶ 4)

As Rohter points out here, the film and novel's temporal setting emphasizes the injustices that already afflicted the country, thus troubling a storyline that would glorify the ideals and utopian vision of the revolutionary struggles.

Though the 1970s sections of the film are set shortly before the military dictatorship, as Campanella points out, "the dictatorship merely organised and institutionalised the kind of repression that was already happening. People were already being shot on the streets by paramilitary groups formed by people like the villain in my film. Many of the murders were not only political, they were personal. And they could carry them out with impunity."

The Genesis of *La pregunta de sus ojos*

Where Campanella's film leaves ambiguous whether Benjamín is actually the one who is "authoring" the final version of the film that we see, Sacheri's novel narrates in third-person Benjamín's attempts to write a novel. Therefore, unlike the other works that I have analyzed, while this novel includes a diegetic novelist, thediegetic novelist is not writing the same novel presented to the readers. Nonetheless, the novel constitutes Sacheri's own process of rewriting his earlier short story "El hombre," in which the nameless husband of a rape/murder victim keeps his wife's aggressor captured in a cage on his property. In light of Sacheri's having previously published a story focusing on the

husband of a rape victim who holds the rapist captive, coupled with his having worked in the Buenos Aires justice system in the late 1980s, Benjamín is an obvious alter-ego of this author.

Sacheri thus creates an intertextual connection between this novel (his first) and "El hombre," included in his collection *Te conozco, Mendizábal*. The short story narrates the everyday life of the husband of a rape victim who has trapped his wife's aggressor in a cage. Moreover, Sacheri's development of "El hombre" into a novel-length narrative evinces the author's own dissatisfaction with his existing short story as a means of recounting such an extreme inversion of a victim/oppressor binary. The short story includes only two characters: "el hombre" and Gómez; "el hombre" will become "Morales" in the novel. Much more telling is the layering of fiction and reality that will be added to this story when it becomes a novel. This ironic framing that characterizes the novel—as well as Campanella's film adaptation—serves as a constant questioning of the ethics of an extreme vindication of brutality. Moreover, the short story completely elides any historical or political context, so that the layering of narrative levels in *La pregunta de sus ojos* and these commentaries on politics and society are co-constitutive in this novel. Moreover, "El hombre" is not at all narrated like a police story, so Sacheri's expansion of this short story into a novel also incorporates allusions to the prevalent modes of storytelling within recent decades of Argentine fiction. Again, this recognition of existing modalities of fiction may be understood as part and parcel of the novel's framing and the reflections upon the current political context that pervades this textual evolution from story to novel. Where "el hombre"—or Morales—in such a short story as this one may constitute a national allegory or a synecdoche of moral purity, Sacheri's

move from this short story to a markedly playful and ironic novel creates an interplay between form and content that nuances such a character as Morales and even inculpates him in the atrocious brutalities committed in the past decades.

It is this expansion of the story into a novel that simultaneously adds layers of narrative, different perspectives, and the diachronic narrative structure that includes both the late 1960s and the late 1990s as its dual settings. Sacheri's novel thus allows for the interchange of different viewpoints, characters, and temporal perspectives. Fundamental to these additions is the crime scene itself, wherein we encounter the mutilated corpse of Morales's wife, Liliana Coloto. Like the captive rapist/murderer, this raped and murdered body may, on the most basic level, constitute an allegory of the Argentine nation at the time. However, such an interpretation is problematized by the layering of narrative perspectives that serve to question any truth value with which such an allegorical or metaphorical account of the national reality might be vested. Sacheri and Campanella's treatments of this police case illustrate that a dichotomized understanding of good and evil is an oversimplification of this rape/murder case. Moreover, it is not this rape/murder case that constitutes the nucleus of the story upon which Sacheri is expanding in his creation of this novel, but rather the incarceration of the aggressor that is at the very core of this haunting story, as we see through the novel's genesis in this story that focuses on the husband of the victim and his own prisoner and leaves out the victim.

In both the novel and the film, Sacheri and Campanella blend several styles of storytelling: one that we understand belongs to our diegetic novelist, Benjamín, and another that tells parts of the story either to which Benjamín is not privy or that he does not deem worthy of including in his own novel. Benjamín's novel, we understand, is his

attempt to come to terms with his own past as well as with his feelings. As Manola Dargis affirms in her review of the film, "If it takes a while to get a handle on the identity of the dead woman, it's because she's initially conjured up in the imagination of Benjamin (Ricardo Darín), a former court investigator." As Dargis implies, Liliana is scarcely the nucleus of the story.

Film Noir and Existentialism

Befitting a story that takes as one of its main thematic axes a police investigation, the film and the novel both incorporate what we may productively consider elements of film noir. As Campanella remarked in an interview about *El secreto de sus ojos* and its adaptation from *La pregunta de sus ojos*:

> What struck me first about the book was the fact that it had the structure and premise of a typical noir novel, but the characters were not noir characters. In noir, the protagonists tend to be very cool and detached. Here they were everyday, real, fleshy. I related to them, especially their sense of humour, and the way they are afraid of things and are impacted by the events of the story. In film terms, it was like a film noir mixed with an Italian comedy. (Matheou)

Despite Campanella's assertion that the characters were not noir characters, one crucial characteristic that Benjamín does have in common with noir characters is his suffering from an apparent existential malaise of sorts.

This representation as existential is central to the character development in noir. As Robert Porfirio has affirmed in his "No Way Out: Existential Motifs in the Film Noir," "existentialism is an outlook that begins with a disoriented individual facing a

confused world that he cannot accept" (81). In keeping with this existential tone of noir, the film's diegesis begins with the slow piano notes of a nostalgic tango while the visual scenery shows us a romanticized, impressionistic shot of Irene and Benjamín saying goodbye at the train station. This shot is then superimposed with the voiceover of Benjamín's beginning to his diegetic novel: "¿Cómo se hace para vivir una vida vacía? ¿Cómo se hace para vivir una vida llena de nada?" Given the superimposition of this voiceover upon this shot, we understand that this nostalgic train station scene is the beginning of Benjamín's diegetic novel. In this sense, the narrative impetus to his writing is this existential feeling of his life's vacuousness. Benjamín's feelings of emptiness recalls Heker's diegetic novelist's presumption that her own novel will have an alarmingly empty end.

Within Sacheri's novel, the beginning of Benjamín's novel is also uncertain, although less overtly existential than that of the film: "No estoy demasiado seguro de los motivos que me llevan a escribir la historia de Ricardo Morales después de tantos años" (17), such that Sacheri avoids the almost melodramatic tone that Campanella ascribes to Benjamín's novel. These differences, of course, may be attributed largely to cinematography's precepts, particularly of a block-buster like *El secreto*, which would demand a certain level of romance and melodrama. Nonetheless, immediately after his assertion that he is not entirely sure of what has inspired him to write this story, *La pregunta*'s Benjamín turns his focus to a sort of grotesque, voyeuristic fascination with Morales's story: "Muchas veces me he sorprendido advertir en mí espíritu cierta alegría culposa frente a los horrores ajenos, como si la circunstancia de que a otros les sucedan cosas espantosas fuera un modo de alejar de mi propia vida esas tragedias" (17). Our

diegetic narrator's assertion here dovetails with cultural criticism regarding the voyeuristic spectatorship that takes place in the reception of violent and, specifically, sexually violent texts produced in the post-dictatorial period. Such arguments can be found in Marguerite Feitlowitz and Diana Taylor's vehement reactions to director Eduardo Pavlovsky's *Paso de dos*, in which Feitlowitz goes so far even as to inculpate the audience in recreating the military's violence visited on the Argentine body politic.[47] I return later to these questions of the spectacle of violence inflicted upon the body, but for now the question of Benjamín's affective identification with Morales is crucial in establishing a rationale for writing his diegetic novel, insofar as he represents himself as hopeful that doing so will help to relieve him from some of his existential malaise.

Benjamín also is figured outside of his own diegetic novel as feeling existential. He answers Irene's query in the film as to why he has decided to revisit this case so many years later and to write about it, "Me vi cenando sólo y no me gusté." Similarly, the novel's heterodiegetic narrator asserts that one of Benjamín's ex-wives often teased him for looking at himself in the mirror too much, concluding that this habit "no tiene nada que ver ni con quererse ni con gustarse. Siempre ha sido nada más ni nada menos que otro intento de aprender a saber quién carajo es él mismo" (10). Along with the other many references to the gaze in the novel and in the film (beginning with the very title of each), this act of self-recognition on Benjamín's behalf is analogous to his long and arduous process of self-realization through writing a novel that will, he hopes, lead to a sense of reconciliation with his own past.

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[47] See "A Dance of Death: Eduard Pavlovsky's *Paso de dos*." *TDR* 35.2 (1991): 60-73.

Benjamín's act of writing—insofar as it is represented as analogous to staring one's own reality in the face—is figured in the film and in the novel in stark contrast to Irene's aforementioned attempts at contentment through knowing that she is working for *a* justice if not justice itself. Irene remarks to Benjamín:

> Puede ser que esté buena la novela, pero no es para mí. No sé…vos te encontrás al final de tu vida y querés mirar para atrás, pero yo no puedo. Tengo que ir a trabajar todos los días y trabajar con esto que no sé si será *la* justicia pero es *una* justicia. Y al final del día tengo que ir a mi casa y vivir con mi marido y con mis hijos que adoro.

We understand that she has made a concerted effort to find fulfillment in the irresolution of this case as well as in her unaddressed affinity toward Benjamín. She turns to the conservative reassurances of a nuclear family and a government job, while Benjamín, now in retirement, creates fissures in such a coherent reconciliation with the present through his research into his own past as well as through his act of writing about that very moment.

This novelistic endeavor is figured as being spawned by Benjamín's quasi-existential dissatisfaction with his current state, such that, as Campanella has stated, the novel is in keeping with a typical noir novel. Fundamentally, though, Benjamín's character, as well as the other characters, are much more fully developed than typical noir characters. This character development is precisely what accounts for a more holistic representation of these characters than being mere vessels or synecdoches of pure ideological commitment. Rather, as Campanella himself has stated, they are characters who are figured as mutable.

Ethics, Justice, and Political Commitment

Nowhere is this mutability more evident than through Irene's self-deprecating assertion in the film that her younger self: "parezco otra persona: recta, conservadora, solemne." This self-reflection on her part is the first such affirmation in the film, and occurs after Benjamín shows her a photograph. As I will later analyze, photography is figured in the film as being capable of telling truths and histories that narrative itself is incapable of conveying, as it is through photographs that Benjamín is able to discern the culprit of the atrocious rape and murder that occurred. At this moment in the film, Benjamín brings Irene to take a look at herself, too, and she recognizes that she no longer identifies with this righteous, conservative, solemn person she once was. These adjectives correspond directly to the idealism and utopianism of 1970s youth. Irene, however, does not only seem to have lost these traits over the year but also refers to them with a self-deprecating tone, such that we understand that she recognizes that, now that she works for "una justicia" and not "la justicia," she has reached a level of disenchantment and, I would argue, realism that she did not have when she was younger. Irene's own awareness of her previous navieté would suggest a trajectory over the past decades through which she has come to identify increasingly less with the ideals that she held in her youth. In this sense, this character represents a loosening up of the rigid ideological ties of the 1970s, rather than adhering staunchly to the ideals of utopian revolution.

We are shown Irene and Benjamín's commitment to their beliefs in the Argentine system of justice in the 1970s at several moments throughout the investigation in the

novel as well as in the film. Mainly, we are shown time and again their corrupt boss, Romano, who repeatedly impedes the justice process and who is depicted as specifically targeting militant figures in the course of the investigation. In the film, before Benjamín has discovered that Isidoro Gómez is likely the culprit of Liliana Coloto's rape, he has a rough description of the suspect's physique. Nonetheless, Romano authorizes the arrest of two *perejiles*, one of whom, in keeping with the film's title, is disfigured in the eye, which, in keeping with the evidence they have collected, means that he cannot have perpetrated the crime. Infuriated, *Bejamín* rushes to Romano and screams at him, "son dos perejiles. Detuviste a dos perejiles," highlighting the injustice of Romano's having persecuted these individuals both for their involvement in leftist struggles and their low ranking within this revolutionary groups, as the depreciative term *perejiles* connotes. As will be repeated later throughout the investigation, Romano reminds him that he is his superior and that there is nothing that Benjamín can do to override Romano's decisions. We understand from the beginning of the film that this corrupt boss who will repeatedly impede Benjamín and Irene's quest for justice specifically targets leftist subversives.

Benjamín and Irene learn, in the film, that the justice system has pardoned Gómez due to his capacity to turn over important subversive figures. Countering Espósito's indignation at this injustice, Romano reminds Benjamín (last name Espósito in the film) that he, Es-pó-si-to—as Romano sounds out slowly to him—has nothing in common with such an educated and high-class woman as Irene Menéndez Hastings, Ivy-League graduate and of Scottish descent, suggesting that Benjamín is making an embarassment of himself both in his attempt to rectify the injustice of Gómez's pardon and in his obvious amorous feelings for Irene. He then adds on that "una cosa que sí tienen en

común: ninguno de los dos puede hacer nada." In the novel, we learn that Gómez is pardoned as a result of the amnesty laws passed to exonerate the revolutionary groups' terroristic acts after Onganía's dictatorship. In both works, then, the political climate is precisely what impedes justice from being reached. More importantly, Sacheri's novel shows that it is the favors offered to *both* sides of the early 1970s political spectrum that have led to the proliferation of unpunished criminals in Argentina.

Despite this disturbing reality, in the novel as well as in the film, the works' respective audiences believe—and hope—that Benjamín's diegetic story ends with the justice system's capture of Gómez. *La pregunta*'s heterodiegetic novelist remarks after Benjamín goes to visit Morales to tell him that they have captured Gómez, "¿Y si este es el mejor final para su libro? […] ¿Por qué no darse por contento? Ha contado el crimen, la pesquisa y el hallazgo. El malo está preso y el bueno está vengado. ¿Por qué no concluir con este final feliz y ya?" (187). Ironically, this ending that Benjamín wonders to himself might be more appropriate for a novel than the true ending (which, crucially, Benjamín himself does not yet know) corresponds, at least on the most basic level of these signifiers, to the truth of the situation: Gómez is incarcerated and Morales has taken his revenge. The narrator's assertion here that Benjamín has recounted the crime, and the suggestion that to do so constitutes having fulfilled one's duty, evokes considerations of human rights writings, particularly human rights dynamics of the variety mentioned in this chapter's introduction, wherein one of the central elements is the fulfillment of vengeance through a direct inversion of the oppressor/victim binary. Sacheri thus suggests subtly that readerly expectations would call for this resolved narrative in which the perpetrator is imprisoned and the victimized individual has achieved revenge.

However, we soon learn that the story is much more complicated than this neat resolution.

Similarly, the film's intercalation of Benjamín's novel breaks into the present moment—at which time Irene is reading and commenting on what Benjamín has written thus far—right after Sandoval's murder and Benjamín's departure for Jujuy. After reading these sad endings, Irene remarks, "qué final desagradable esta novela. Una mierda." After reflecting that this story seems like another life, Benjamín clarifies, "no fue otra vida. Fue ésta. *Es* ésta." The film thus emphasizes the reality that this unresolved moment of the past has led to the fissures that now exist in these characters' present lives. Both Sacheri and Campanella's treatment of these expected diegetic endings highlight Benjamín's inability to create a satisfactory ending for his novel that is also true to the actual story. Like Heker's Diana Glass character, the filmic and novelistic treatments of Benjamín both suggest a difficulty in recounting the disturbing truths of this case. Unlike Diana, however, Benjamín is figured as incapable of writing a neatly resolved novel that he might wish were true when the reality of the case is so starkly different. The film's Irene, after he divulges his compunction about narrating the truth of a story whose ending he does not know, responds, "en una novela no hace falta la verdad, ni siquiera creíble." Irene would thus represent a contingent of individuals who, disillusioned with the political realities of the late 1990s wherein the only outcome for which they can realistically strive is her aforementioned "*una* justicia" if not "*la* justicia," may find consolation in fiction that maintains the standards for justice that no longer exist in the realm of political praxis, regardless of whether this standard is verisimile within the work's locus of production and reception.

Affect and Passion

Perhaps due to the very diffused paths that each of these characters has taken, Benjamín easily finds beginnings to his novel yet has little sense of where he ultimately wants his story to go. He remarks to Irene, "comienzos se me ocurren un montón, pero no estoy seguro de que tengan que ver exactamente con la historia." We understand, by the time he tells her this, that his uncertainty as to whether the beginnings that occur to him—namely, the romanticized shot of the two of them on the train platform—have to do with his feelings for Irene, which may or may not relate to the story of Morales and his slain wife. Again, these feelings are not at all figured—in the novel, that is—as wholly divorced from the case that Benjamín has reopened. Rather, the dialogue as well as the audiovisual language of the film repeatedly suggest an equation between the affinity that Benjamín feels for Irene and the case's resolution. Nonetheless, until he is fully able to recognize these similarities, he is uncertain of the coherence of his own narrative.

Benjamín's passions are (somewhat disquietingly) presented as a point of intersubjective relation between himself and the perpetrator of this violent crime, an identification that in turn leads to his solving the case, remitting to Piglia's assertion that passions are brought to the fore in Argentine detective fiction as the organizing narrative for these stories. Secondary character Sandoval remarks to Benjamín, "el tipo puede cambiar de todo, de cara, de casa, de familia, de novia, de religión, de dios, pero hay una cosa de que no puede cambiar, Benjamín: no puede cambiar de pasión," referring to Gómez's passion for football. Sandoval goes on to convince Benjamín that going to the

soccer game is a sure way to find Gómez by drawing an explicit analogy between Gómez's feelings about soccer and Benjamín's own feelings towards Irene: "y vos también, Benjamín, no hay manera de que te puedas sacar de la cabeza a Irene." Indeed, the pair does discover Gómez at the soccer game, a scene that, in many regards, constitutes the apex of a *crescendo* in the film's narrative that has been leading up to Gómez's capture. Many critical responses to Campanella's film have focused on this scene in particular for its accomplishd cinematography wherien the director uses computer graphics to create the illusion of an entirely full soccer stadium. In the chaos and fervor of this crowded stadium, however, Gómez is able to escape the pair, absconding from the stands and taking refuge somewhere beneath the stadium. At this point, Sandoval remarks to Benjamín, "siempre se nos hace humo," elucidating this character's ghost-like status and prefiguring the later moment in the film at which this character will come back to haunt Benjamín.

Corporality

Throughout the film and the novel, we are presented with references to the body. Moreover, the key moments of the story arc are punctuated by an emphasis upon corporality: the scene of the crime, the interrogation of Gómez, and Benjamín's discovery, in the novel, of Morales's and Gómez's corpses and, in the film, of their abject existence. To be sure, the aspects of voyeurism in these scenes are unavoidable. Like in Eduardo Pavlovsky's highly controversial play, *Paso de dos*, which premiered in 1990, questions of voyeurism and exhibitionism—both of these as they relate to the violence and victimization of state repression—question the ethics of who has the right to tell what stories and about whom. Again, we are reminded of the novel's Benjamín's

aforementioned "alegría culposa" that he feels from viewing others' pain and identifying with it. Nowhere are the stakes of this guilty happiness so high, nor more readily apparent, than in the scenes depicting Coloto's rape/murder and the gruesome depiction of Gómez's incarceration.

Campanella creates a stark juxtaposition between Benjamín's jovial disposition as he shares a joke with a fellow crime scene investigator en route to the crime scene and the shocking, horrific experience of first laying eyes on the crime scene. Once he walks into the apartment, his mood changes instantaneously and, as he nears the corpse to examine it more closely, he closes the young woman's eyes (later to affirm that he has looked her directly in the eyes). This reference to the identification that he has made with the victim by looking her directly in the eyes creates an identification not only between these two characters, but also with the audience, who also, through the gaze of Campanella's camera shots, look the young woman directly in the eyes. The director affirms in his director's comments during the scene in which Benjamín discovers Coloto's mutilated corpse: "no sólo lo estamos mostrando, sino que también lo sienten […] vivimos en carne propia el *shock* modificador que le provoca ver este cuerpo expuesto, frágil, mutilado."

Inexorable from the inclusion of Coloto's mutilated corpse and the spectacle contained therein is the complementary depiction of Gómez and Morales when Benjamín discovers them toward the diegesis's end. Campanella's Benjamín goes to visit Morales at his rural home, and only as he is leaving does he put together the pieces of the mystery of Gómez's disappearance and the disquietingly reclusive, abject existence that Morales himself has lived. Benjamín is at the point of getting into his car and leaving, but turns

back and follows Morales to the other side of his property, where Morales is startled to see him. There he encounters Gómez, an almost ghostlike apparition of a figure Benjamín has not seen for decades. As *New York Times* film critic Manohla Dargis remarked in her review of the film, "a young dead woman lies at the center of the mystery, but she's scarcely the only thing here haunting the living." In fact, if we return to Sacheri's original story, "El hombre," that in a sense constitutes the nucleus of this novel and its film adaptation, the horror that the author first sought to convey was, indeed, not the brutal rape and murder of Liliana Coloto, but the degree to which both Morales's and Gómez's lives have been destroyed by Morales's vigilante form of justice. In the novel, Benjamín receives a letter from Morales in which he outlines his own action of taking his own life.

The film's visual depiction of both Gómez and Morales is a grotesque existence for each of these men. Morales is decrepit and defeated in his physical appearance as well as in his mannerisms, while Gómez—the very man who once was able to stare Benjamín and Irene coldly and detachedly in the eyes and show not even the smallest suggestion of fear or trepidation—now reaches out pathetically and desperately to Benjamín to save him from this arduous and empty existence to which Morales has subjected him throughout the past decades.

In contrast to the gruesome, difficult-to-watch depiction of Gómez that Campanella's film adaptation presents to viewers, Sacheri's novel—here, importantly, through the narrative filter of Benjamín's diegetic novel—recounts Benjamín's discovery of Gómez in a much more detached tone, although Benjamín's novel, like Campanella's visual depiction, also creates a certain equation between Morales and Gómez in this moment of the narrative. Benjamín encounters the corpse of Gómez: "El cadáver de

Isidoro Antonio Gómez tenía el mismo tinte azulado que el de Morales. Estaba un poco más gordo, naturalmente más viejo, ligeramente canoso, pero por lo demás no estaba muy distinto a como era veinticinco años antes, cuando le tomé declaración indagatoria" (302). The crucial similarity between both of these versions' endings is that Morales and Gómez are either both deceased or both living. This fact that either both must be living or both must be deceased is the only resolution available to either Campanella or to Sacheri as a means of escaping the necessarily limiting binary of victim/oppressed. That is, if one man were to have taken the other's life and survived, their respective statuses of abuser and victim would have been forever solidified, offering them no alternative to this binary. However, the works' endings suggest a way out of this binary, even if the alternative is a bleak one.

Sacheri's novel's narration of Benjamín's arrival at Morales's home and his discovery of both corpses—despite its relatively terse tone—stands in stark contrast to the earnest, matter-of-fact tone that characterizes Morales's missives to Benjamín against which this narration is juxtaposed. Benjamín reflects upon these letters: "Era Morales puro, un divorcio perfecto entre las palabras y el dolor, una pizca de ironía, una melancolía sincera sin las claudicaciones de la autocompasión" (297). Crucially, through the contrasts that the text creates between the reality that Morales is describing and the detachedness of his words, the novel makes explicit the fact that Morales's brand of vigilante justice, though figured as inspired by his undying love for his wife, is not a rash or haphazard vengeance, but rather a meticulously calculated and well-crafted effort at justice.

Benjamín makes a further point of comparison between Morales in the above citation and Gómez in his description of his and Sandoval's interrogation of Gómez. Benjamín describes his confession in the following manner: "emprendió un viraje expresivo grandioso: muy lentamente fue trocando su inicial gesto de fastidio e incredulidad por otro cada vez más interesado […] terminó hablando en un estilo casi doctoral de los recaudos que había tenido que tomar" (175), going on to add, "le hablaba a Sandoval como un experimentado y paciente pedagogo" (175). Like Morales, Gómez is capable of articulating himself in a detached and calculating language when the subject being described is an emotional and corporally gruesome matter.

This similarity between the two characters in the novel stands in stark contrast to the same scenes of the film: specifically, the discovery of the body, the interrogation of Gómez, and Benjamín's discovery of Morales's hiding place where he has kept Gómez. Specifically, the film's interrogation scene has Benjamín and Irene question Gómez, rather than Sandoval and Benjamín. This change makes even clearer Benjamín and Irene's complicated shared past and furthers the representation of both of these characters as incapable of reconciling themselves with the lack of justice for such a sociopathic character as Gómez. Moreover, the film's interrogation scene is markedly corporal in its audiovisual language as well as in its narrative.

Throughout the film's interrogation scene, Gómez's and Liliana Coloto's corporality—as well as that of Benjamín and Irene—are the driving force of the questioning. Again, we are reminded of Piglia's assertion that affect and corporality, rather than logic and deduction, constitute the organizing narrative of Argentine police fiction. While Benjamín is interrogating him, we see Irene react uncomfortably when she

realizes that Gómez is staring at her chest. She responds to this masculinist power by emasculating Gómez. She reads the description of Coloto's vaginal lesions and remarks that they must have detained the wrong person because the perpetrator of this rape and murder must have been extremely well endowed in order to have left such markings. In contrast, Gómez, she remarks, has "dos tallarines" for arms and could not possibly be capable of having committed such an act. Enraged, Gómez reacts by undoing his pants and exposing himself to both of them; this act of taking off his pants and exposing himself is effectively his "confession."

Juxtaposed to this very corporal language is the visual image of the scales of justice. During this interrogation scene, Benjamín and Irene are shown in the center of the screen with the scales of justice behind them. This visual language creates a marked contrast with the earlier scene in which a judge has closed Coloto's case and refused to reopen it, with both this judge and Irene shown to the extreme left of the frame with the scales of justice above them to the right of the frame, a visual arrangement that Campanella himself describes in his director's commentary as deliberately unbalanced.

The film's interrogation scene is one of the few in the film that was shot using a fixed camera. Campanella describes in his commentary that he sought a documentary-style effect in this scene. This use of a more realistic approach to film contrasts most drastically against the film's first scene: Benjamín and Irene in an impressionistic goodbye scene on the train platform. Tellingly, it is the scene that is most directly and overtly tied to a quest for justice that has the most realistic style. Of course, this use of documentary-type tropes is ultimately an ironic gesture, for we soon learn that the outcome of all of these characters' lives is infinitely more complicated than this scene in

which the police have finally found and detained the perpetrator of these horrible crimes would have us believe. This scene would offer a happy ending in its resolution of the horrible injustice visited upon Liliana Coloto, but we soon learn that this justice has not been attained once Gómez is released before he is ever tried.

Returning to Campanella's assertion that he was originally drawn to the novel because it had a noir feel but was different from noir, this elusive happy ending of the storyline of the bringing-to-justice process of Coloto's aggresssor deviates from standard noir classicsin which the investigation more often than not leads to a happy ending. Since this happy ending is impossible in this case—that is, even when a form of justice is reached, it is still figured as anything but happy—the only satisfactory resolution with which the characters and their audience are left is the resolution of Benjamín's feelings for Irene. Returning to the film and novel's origin in Campanella's story "El hombre," we might venture that, for this particular storyline involving Coloto, Morales, and Gómez, there is no possibility for a happy or just ending. Once this storyline is expanded into the film and its novel adaptation, nor is there any possibility of a resolution of Irene and Benjamín's feelings for one another so long as they continue to harbor any hope of a resolution in this case. Rather, it is only once Benjamín is able to realize the harsh reality of vigilante justice and the abject course that both of these characters' lives has taken that he is able to let go of his now anachronistic principles of justice and rectitude in order to reconcile himself with his present and confess his feelings to Irene.

Leopoldo Brizuela's *Una misma noche*

The 2012 winner of the coveted Alfaguara prize was Argentine novelist Leopoldo Brizuela's *Una misma noche*, marking almost three decades of literary production that has sought to reconcile the conflicting and complicated histories of the 1970s and the military dictatorship. *Una misma noche*'s diegesis straddles 1976—the months immediately after the military coup—and 2010, a year whose political climate was marked by the country's bicentennial celebration, the presidential leadership of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, and the death of her husband and predecessor, Néstor Kirchner. As Brizuela's novel emphasizes, Fernádnez's discourse, like that of Néstor, has long included a vindication of these human rights violations and of 1970s militant struggle. Crucially, many of these militant figures who were the protagonists of the revolutionary movements of the 1970s are the same individuals who are now touted as victims of the military dictatorship's human rights violations. In light of this political discourse—which figures at the very heart of Brizuela's novel—what is the place of human rights discourse within present-day culture and society? Where many have argued that the human rights agenda is an extra-political movement, Brizuela's novel elucidates the degree to which the current rhetoric of Argentina's political leadership has appropriated the discourse of human rights—and even built public spaces such as the *Espacio de la memoria y los derechos humanos* at the former *Escuela Mecánica de la Armada* (ESMA), the military's most notorious detention and torture center, as public buildings dedicated to this vindication of the military government's human rights violations.

Brizuela's diegetic novelist's narrative thread connecting the year 1976 to the year 2010 is an intrusion into the same house neighboring his parents'. Over the course of the novel, we learn that a group of military men entered first his own house in 1976 and then the neighbors' house searching for the daughter of the Jewish family who lived next door and, possibly, the narrator's own cousin who was living with his family at the time. At the present moment, 2010, a branch of the government's police has mysteriously invaded the same house, now home to a different family. We understand that the former event is a childhood memory that the narrator has repressed throughout the past thirty-three years. This complicated memory includes having been victim, witness, and—we later learn—semi-accomplice to the break-in that occurs to his own house as well as to the neighbors'.

Human Rights and Politics

Like Campanella and Sacheri's narrative framing of *Ojos*, Brizuela's cynicism toward human rights discourse offers us insight into the recent past that the use of metaphor in a liturgical or epic narration of the slain revolutionary figure would not allow. My analysis of the novel draws from recent political and cultural analysis within Argentina that emphasizes the dynamic between the 1970s and the past decade and the legacy of militancy as well as of the human rights violations that characterized the military dictatorship that followed the revolutionary struggles of early 1970s Argentina.

Despite our novel's overt imbrication of human rights and politics, the scant literary criticism focusing on human rights in Latin America (scant in comparison to other areas such as South Africa, and in light of the plethora of political violence that has

taken place in the region) has largely embraced the notion that human rights transcends politics. Literary critic Fernando Rosenberg has asserted that literature dealing with human rights fulfills a certain post-political imaginary. Rosenberg has affirmed that human rights constitutes a thought process "desde la movilización del imaginario de los derechos humanos como una [sic] discurso global que se imagina como superación de la política" (94). He then goes on to explain that "si entendemos que en cierta medida la cultura global había explotado una imagen de Latinoamérica como región salpicada de coloridas revoluciones permanentes e inconclusas desde el 'boom', la 'novela de verdad y reconciliación' satisface el nuevo imaginario global de la postpolítica" (94). Situating himself within a number of novelists who would suggest that human rights literature may be anything *but* post-political, Brizuela elucidates the degree to which the human rights discourse inherent to such "truth and reconciliation" novels is also imbued with its own political ends and motives. Throughout *Una misma noche*, the author makes repeated mention of the strong nexuses between a political identification with 1970s revolutionary movements and today's human rights movements. Moreover, he explicitly narrates the degree to which current-day human rights movements have been used for political ends. *Una misma noche* intercalates scenes and narratives that may look like such a "truth and reconciliation" novel—indeed scenes of truth commission's hearings and testimonies themselves—at the same time that it demystifies this very mode of fiction. My analysis of the novel focuses upon Brizuela's narrator—Leonardo's—own representations of current political culture and draws from other recent interventions in the field of political and cultural analysis, placing this fictional character's stances of human rights and political discourse in dialogue with those of others.

There have been few examples of literary production that have refuted as explicitly as *Una misma noche* the possibility that a human rights agenda may constitute a move toward a post-political poetics, as Rosenberg affirms. To the contrary, Brizuela's novel suggests that this emphasis upon human rights ultimately serves to reify the same political factions out of which Argentina's military dictatorship was spawned. This reification of political factions that Brizuela suggests echoes the aforementioned exmilitant Héctor Leis, whose 2006 essay "Los límites de la política" asserted that 'reconciliation' is merely imposed by the oppressor to the defeated and that when the places were changed the dynamic remained the same, but with the signs changed. The "change of signs," as Leis terms it, between victim and oppressor impedes reconciliation in its perpetuation of, on the one hand, already-existing political factions and, on the other, this binary of victim/oppressor that allows for vindication yet not for justice or truth.

Within the novel, Brizuela's narrator, novelist Leonardo—an alter ego of the author himself—reflects upon his neighbor's mistrust of the police after the 2010 break-in occurs: "Que aun él, que llegó a este barrio en plena dictadura, haya llegado a comprender la iniquidad de la policía, me produce una sensación de victoria o de revancha. Un logro de este gobierno que apoyo" (22). Leonardo thus affirms the staying power of anti-military and anti-police sentiments resultant of the dictatorial period. More crucially, he asserts the sentiment of victory and revenge that the current political leadership has effected in him in opposition to these paramilitary forces. Brizuela implicitly equates "victory" with "revenge," in an allusion to the country's Kirchnerist group "Frente para la victoria," suggesting that this group may be predicated upon

revenge as much as on victory. The narrator asserts this feeling of "victory or revenge" that he figures, tellingly, as an achievement of this government he supports, right after recounting that this very neighbor referred to a "zona liberada," a term, according to our narrator, that this neighbor only could have learned from CONADEP's *Nunca más*. Like in Carri's film, wherein Couceyro is portrayed carrying the CONADEP's report with her as she goes to visit the detention center where her parents were held, Brizuela uses this report as an intertext that signals the values and beliefs of post-dictatorial Argentina. That he should juxtapose his reference to his neighbor's having used a term from *Nunca más* against a feeling of victory or revenge as an achievement of the Kirchnerist administration figures human rights as necessarily imbricated in political agendas from the beginning of the novel's exploration of these themes of human rights. Thus, we understand that the novel that this narrator is now beginning to draft is a novelistic endeavor that is critical of the Kirchners in addition to being self-aware of its own political and ideological biases.

The Creation of a New Narrative Imaginary

Leonardo's reference to CONADEP constitutes one of the novel's many intertextual references to existing Argentine texts focusing on events that occurred in the 1970s. The narrator's aforementioned occupation as a novelist is crucial, as is his self-referential creation of a diegetic novel. The author's creation of this fictional alterego and this character's reflections upon modalities of storytelling facilitate the novel's own contemplation of the existing stories that have been told—and that have not been told—about the 1970s in Argentina. To this end, Leonardo divides the novel that he is writing

and narrating into four sections: “Novel,” “Memory,” “History,” and, finally, “Dream.” The first three sections of the novel thus incorporate all of the previously visited areas of writing that have dealt with this historical moment. Brizuela’s inclusion of a “dream” section suggests going even further than the testimonial, fictional, and historical attempts to make sense of Argentina’s recent past. Alternating chapters throughout the novel are titled simply “A” through “Z,” such that Brizuela suggests a certain resignifying of the alphabet that runs analogous to his rewriting of the existing library and historical imaginary about his country’s recent history. Throughout the novel, our narrator finds himself presented with ongoings and memories of which he attempts to make sense through the act of writing and representing to his reader.

These very aspects of the novel’s structure recall Linda Hutcheon’s much-cited discussion of historiographical metafiction, which she defines as fiction dealing with “questions such as those of narrative form, intertextuality, strategies of representation, the role of language, the relation between historical fact and experienced event, and, in general, the ontological and epistemological consequences of the act of rendering problematic what at one point was taken as a given by historiography—and by literature” (xii). *Una misma noche*, like many other novels published in Argentina after the end of the last military dictatorship, is an exploration as much as of what did occur—or might have occurred—in the past decades as much as it is an exploration of the ways in which an individual might recount what might have occurred.

Brizuela’s novel constantly reflects explicitly upon the existing modalities of collective memory and the ways in which memory has been represented within fiction. To this end, he positions himself as a direct heir to twentieth-century Argentine fiction by

naming Julio Cortázar and then referring to himself as "una especie de casa tomada" (60). Cortázar's "Casa tomada," given its plot's similarities to that of Leonardo's diegetic novel, would be an obvious precursor to Brizuela's own narration of a house overtaken. His narrator then asks himself, "¿Pero qué escribir ahora?" then answers himself, "Escribir, precisamente, *sobre la táctica de entrar por los fondos*" (60, my italics). Leonardo thus begins his own novel with an homage to Cortázar and tells himself that he must write about the tactic of breaking into the back of the house, thereby leading his readers to believe that his novel will be in keeping with a police novel. Given his own equation between himself and a "casa tomada," we understand that this narrative endeavor of recounting an invasion into his home is analogous to a recuperation of his own memory.

Despite his direct allusions to previous authors, Leonardo also intentionally and explicitly differentiates between his own novel and the memories of the 1970s that have already been represented in previous cultural production. One of the most overt ways in which he breaks with previous narrations about the 1970s is through his repeated insistence that the soldiers who arrived at his home did so in a Gran Torino and not in a Ford Falcon. Not only does he insist upon this discrepancy between his own experience and others' experiences with military and paramilitary groups during the 1970s, but he refers directly to the Ford Falcon as a cliché of historical memory of the 1970s. Leonardo narrates as he begins to pen his novel:

> ¿con qué contamos?, me digo, casi de buen humor, como el inspector Dalgliesh ante sus casos. *Una madre. Un padre. Un hijo.* Por lo demás, un montón de diferencias. ¿Con qué? Con los lugares comunes de los relatos que se han hecho

> sobre esa época. Recuerdo que fue un Torino—y no un Falcon verde—el auto que descubrí de pronto ante mi casa" (42-3, emphasis original).

For our narrator, then, the Ford Falcon constitutes a synecdoche of not only the 1970s, but also of the ways in which this same time period has been represented in film and fiction.

Leonardo's equation between clichés of the 1970s and the Ford Falcon is not an exaggeration; as Fernando Reati elucidates in his recent article "El Ford Falcon: un icono del terror en el imaginario argentino de la postdictadura," published in 2009, this model of car has been central to the Argentine cultural imaginary dealing with the 1970s. Reati affirms:

> Pintado de verde y sin chapas de identificación, el Falcon fue uno de los símbolos más temidos de la represión, y la presencia de un Falcon con civiles armados en su interior llegó a ser sinónimo del terror en medio de una ciudadanía atemorizada que aprendió a mirar prudentemente hacia el otro lado cuando uno de esos temibles vehículos hacía su aparición. (386)

The critic goes on to enumerate some of the many novelists who include the Ford Falcon in their novels set in the 1970s—Miguel Bonasso, Mempo Giardinelli, Osvaldo Soriano, José Pablo Feinmann and Martín Kohan—as well as the films that have included this model car: such iconic films about state repression as *La historia oficial* and *Garage Olimpo*. As Leonardo suggests through this mention "por lo demás, un montón de diferencias," there are other stories yet to be told about the seventies, that is, stories that do not include this synecdoche of state repression. Thus, his insistence that the car that arrived at his home was not a Ford Falcon, but rather a Grand Torino, signals that the

novel that Leonardo seeks to write constitutes a departure from the stories that have previously been told about this time period.

Postmemory and the Child Witness

As part of this new narrative that Leonardo seeks to create, a fundamental element of his generation of writing about the 1970s is his age group's identification with others based upon the shared experience of state repression. The aforementioned break-in to the neighbors' home triggers Leonardo's memories of the family who lived there in 1977, the Kupermans. Given that this narrator was a child at the time of this break-in, rather than an adult, his memory of this event is different. According to Marianne Hirsch's theories on "post-memory:"

> But in the particular case of postmemory and 'heteropathic recollection,' where the subject is not just split between past and present, adult and child, but also between self and other, the layers of recollection and the subjective topography are even more complicated. The adult subject of postmemory encounters the image of the child victim as the child witness, and thus the split subjectivity characterizing the structure of memory is triangulated. Identification is affiliative group or generational identification. (166)

Fundamentally, Hirsch's contention is that the child-witness's memory of such an event triggers an affective identification as the result of a "more complicated subjective topography" based upon a triangulated identification that causes an affiliative or generational identification. In keeping with this theory, the return of Leonardo's repressed memory of the neighbors' break-in rekindles an interest in Diana Kuperman, who was disappeared from this house, at the same time that it encourages Leonardo to

delve deeper into the memories of his friend Miki. Miki's parents were disappeared during the dictatorship and so he was raised by his grandmother. He has always been very aware of his own identity as the child of disappeared persons. His grandmother is one of the directors of the former *Escuela Mecánica de la Armada (*ESMA), now converted into a space for memory and human rights. Miki is figured as an almost stylized representation of the a member of the group H.I.J.O.S. At one point in the novel, as I will later discuss, he accompanies Leonardo to the ESMA and, as Leonardo comments, Miki is squarely "one of them," that is, cast indelibly in the role of victim to the military's repression during the dictatorship.

Leonardo searches for Diana Kuperman and finally finds her in the phone book. He contacts her and attempts to learn more about her experience as a political prisoner. Where she comes across as reluctant to divulge much information in her phone conversation, he opens his email some time later to find an extensive transcript of her testimony before the truth commissions, parts of which he intercalates into his novel. Brizuela's inclusion of and focus upon these testimonies include another fundamental modality of Argentina's memorial culture. We understand, though, that Leonardo's desire to learn about Diana Kuperman is not as a politicized means of reparation or vindication, but out of an affective identification with another adolescent, like Hirsch's aforementioned theories on post-memory. Motivated by the return of his repressed memory of the 1976 break-in, he wonders about Diana Kuperman and therefore asks Miki about his own experiences, attempting to glean more information about Diana Kuperman using Miki as a proxy.

Crucial to the novel's figurings of these generational and affiliative identifications are the operative elements of who belongs with which group in the wake of the legacy of armed struggle as well as state repression. As I analyze below, Leonardo couches his father as "uno de ellos" anytime he is operating under a command of an officer, in addition to describing himself as "entre ellos, yo" when he accompanies his friend Miki and his grandmother to the ESMA: "Y yo pienso en Hebe [de Bonafini], en las abuelas a quienes he visto […] Algo nuevo además del dolor, o quizá el dolor a secas, las está arrastrando. Algo que me deja afuera. Pero estoy tan orgulloso de ser, por primera vez, entre ellos, yo" (216). Questions of inclusivity within this broad panorama of political and personal groups pervade the novel, leading us to understand that Leonardo is constantly seeking—and is constantly denied—a space and a community in which to reconcile himself with the truths of the past few decades outside of any specific pre-existing ideological or political affiliation.

The *Escuela Mecánica de la Armada*: Before and After Dictatorship

What must be mentioned regarding Leonardo's identification with both Miki and Diana are the subtle—yet certain and repeated—mentions of his own father's ties to the Navy. We learn as the novel progresses that Leonardo's house was broken into before the neighbors' house in 1977. Reluctantly, the narrator eventually divulges his father's background in the Navy and speculates as to why these military men would have entered into his family's house first, concluding that they were, in fact, seeking out his father as an accomplice to their breaking into the Kupermans' and taking them prisoners. Most likely out of fear, the young Leonardo's reaction to these military men's occupying his

home was to sit at the piano and ignore these men, just as he would go on to repress his entire memory of this event. His father's Navy connections are represented as having helped him and his family to escape questioning or repression; at the same time, Leonardo cannot but wonder whether his father—and by extension, Leonardo himself—was a true accomplice to the neighbors' disappearance. At the present moment, 2010, his father has passed away and his mother is either too senile or too stubborn to discuss that evening. Leonardo, then, is left to be the only carrier of this memory which we understand has become inextricable from an identification with the neighbors involved in this event. As part of his research into his own past, the narrator searches for information about the ESMA when it was a school and finds only one book. This dearth of information about the ESMA before it was a detention torture center, and, later, a memorial site, elucidates the lack of awareness or understanding within current Argentine political culture of moments of history other than the military dictatorship, particularly a person such as Leonardo's father's memory of his own formative years at the Naval School.

Specifically, Leonardo looks for a book that he had seen once in a secondhand bookstore that prescribed each seaman's actions in any given circumstance, which would provide Leonardo a justification for why his father behaved a certain way in the face of the soldiers' having entered his home. Reading this book, he hopes, will help him either to exculpate his father for not having stopped the military men from kidnapping the neighbor or to understand his father better. However, he is unable to find such a book; this failure to recover any published accounts of the ESMA before it was a site of torture connotes the existing library of recent Argentine history's having excised stories such as

the ESMA's previous incarnation as an actual military school, focusing endlessly upon this space as a locus of state repression and violence. Since this history has been silenced on the bookshelves of libraries and bookstores, Leonardo is not able to reach this reconciliation with his father.

As part of this consideration of his father's own motivation or rationalization for his behavior on the night of the break-in, Leonardo notes that, from his perspective as a child, his father was a different person when operating under the orders of a superior commander. Returning to the moment at which the military men have just pulled up in front of the house, he narrates going to look for his father, "Tan pronto el Jefe le dice algo a que no atiendo […] mi padre ya no es mi padre. Se vuelve uno de ellos" (105). He then wonders to himself, as his father guides the men to the back of the house, "¿Y qué debe hacer el 'pibe' de un ex suboficial?" (107). Throughout the novel, Leonardo positions himself as accomplice as well as witness to the kidnapping that would take place next door, shifting constantly between a genuine desire to understand better his father and a feeling of guilt for what he did not impede his father or the military men from doing.

Returning to the moment in 2010 at which the entire neighborhood is discussing the break-in into Leonardo's neighbors' house, our narrator informs us that he has told his neighbor of the similar break-in that took place a few decades earlier, clarifying to the reader, "pero no le digo que antes pasaron por mi casa. Ni le cuento lo que sucedió en esos diez minutos que permanecieron entre nosotros y no me he atrevido a revelar jamás a nadie, eso que ahora me hace temblar como una fiebre" (24). Through this information with which Leonardo supplements to his reader what he has already told his neighbors,

we learn of his feelings of culpability regarding this event as well as of the fear that it still inspires in him.

The Legacy of Armed Violence

While Leonardo is not able to identify wholly with his father, he is also unable to identify with the victims of state repression as represented by the kirchnerist *Espacio de la Memoria y de los Derechos Humanos* or with groups such as HIJOS. As a means of trying to reconcile his own memories with, on the one hand, his father's training and behavior and, on the other, peers such as Miki and Diana Kuperman, he visits the former ESMA. However, just like the existing novels, histories, and memoirs that have been written about the 1970s, this museum space is yet another medium that does not provide Leonardo with the resolution that he seeks, but rather—to his mind (and his stomach, as I discuss later)—reifies the existing ideological polarization that pervades the current Argentine political landscape.

At one moment of the ESMA tour, the tour guide asks why the visitors think that the guards at ESMA may have followed a particular practice with the individuals detained there. As the other visitors venture guests, our narrator thinks to himself: "Porque creían que estaba bien" (237). While he later adds, "creían que lo que hacían estaba bien. Y eso es lo más terrible" (237), the first part of this assertion is almost identical to Heker's Leonora: "Creen que lo que hacen es lo mejor que pueden hacer para eliminar la subversión" (245). Like Heker's protagonist—who has formed an empathetic bond with her torturers, also at the ESMA—Leonardo's identification with his father and, by extension, the soldiers with whom his father was affiliated, allows him at least to

understand their rationale for what they did in spite of how deplorable the acts committed at the ESMA were. As Leonardo learns throughout his tour, however, and as I will address below, this identification with the military's rationale for their actions is not an experience that other visitors to the ESMA share with Leonardo, or at least it is not one that they articulate. As such, ESMA is a space in which certain histories and certain experiences—such as those of the narrator—are silenced. The only stories that are told in this space are those of the victims and the defeated.

This visit to ESMA is the culmination of Leonardo's delving into his own past after the 2010 break-in and the return of his repressed memory of the neighbor, Diana Kuperman. His focus upon her has inspired him to find out more about Miki's identification with other children of disappeared persons, a fictional member of the Argentine group HIJOS. Leonardo hopes that visiting this site with Miki will allow him to reconcile some of the memories of the moment in 1977 when the soldiers entered his own house. However, we understand that this attempt at an affective identification with the victims of state repression represented in the ESMA is foiled by the sensationalized and propagandistic representation of history with which this memorial space presents visitors.

Central to the narrator's visit to the ESMA is the timing of his trip: the day after Néstor Kirchner's sudden death in 2010. Immediately after arriving at the ESMA, Miki's grandmother, Susana, makes an explicit connection between the loss of peers in the armed struggle and Cristina Fernández's loss of her husband: "las que hemos perdido compañeros en la lucha […] sabemos por qué momento está pasando la presidenta" (216). Brizuela's situating his narrative in 2010, then, allows him to reflect upon the way

in which Néstor Kirchner's death was taken up by kirchnerists as a way of creating an identification between Cristina Fernández and militants who lost a loved one to the struggle. Crucially, this identification works both ways: just as Cristina Fernández describes herself as "militante," Miki's grandmother couches Fernández within her own group of people who have lost loved ones in the cause. Moreover, the locus of enunciation—that is, at the ESMA itself—highlights the use of this space as a means of interpersonal identification due to everyone's having lost a loved one. Above all, though, this interpersonal identification is highly inflected with political affiliation, such that the ESMA is figured here as a space in which life, love, and loss are on display, but always within the broader context of a specific political narrative. As my reading of this scene of the novel shows, this political narrative begins with the *Montoneros* in the late 1960s and continues, as evinced through Susana's assertion, through Néstor Kirchner's death.

Leonardo identifies two individuals at ESMA, one of them Miki's grandmother, and the other one much younger, Clara, the tour guide. Leonardo observes about Clara: "como es tanto más joven que yo, unos veintiocho años, comprendo también que es más joven que todo cuanto puede contarse de este sitio; y que, por lo tanto, su compenetración con la historia de la ESMA es fruto de sensibilidad, no de experiencia" (218). Despite her age, as Leonardo observes, this young woman appropriates the persona and the ideological affinities of the nineteen seventies radicals whose lives and deaths are now on display within ESMA's walls. He informs us that this tour guide, "retoma el discurso de Susana, casi como si la imitara o quisiera sucederla, no puedo dejar de compararla: tiene su mismo espíritu, quizá. Pero no su aspecto, como si imitara a esa otra que Susana fue" (217). Brizuela touches here on the ongoing phenomenon within Argentina of young

adults who strongly identify with and adopt their parents and grandparents' generation's militant legacy connected with the nineteen seventies.

Furthering this line of inquiry into today's young adults' appropriation of 1970s militant identity is this young tour guide's mention of "la Gaby," referring to the nickname of Norma Arrostito, a well-known member of the most radical militant group, *Montoneros*, responsible for the assassination of the former Argentine president Aramburu. Leonardo observes that the young guide points out a specific detention cell and and says, "Ahí, durante un año estuvo presa la Gaby," as if all of the visitors would know exactly to whom she was referring just by saying "Gaby." This reference to "la Gaby" evinces the notion that all visitors to ESMA—if not all Argentines—would be expected to know who "la Gaby" is, positing a shared ideological and political sensibility among visitors ESMA's visitors. Leonardo then expalins that the tour guide, "se corrige ostentosamente, como si hubiera olvidado por un momento que no somos, como ella, militantes" (238). His mention "como ella" ironically highlights the anachronism of this character's self-identification as militant. Once she realizes that she must explain to whom she is referring by saying "Gaby," the young lady chooses the word *ajusticiamiento* rather than *asesinato: "*participó en el secuestro y ajusticiamiento del General Aramburu…Y reparen […] que digo *ajusticiamiento*" (238). The *Montoneros*' assassination of Aramburu would form the origin story for their group's militant action throughout the nineteen seventies; the implicit vindication of this action through the terminology "ajusticiamiento" thus creates a strong identification with this militant group.

"Ajusticiamiento," tellingly, is the very word that the *Montoneros* chose in their 1971 missive proclaiming that they had kidnapped and killed Aramburu. The letter describes, "por todo esto que a diario cosechamos, en el apoyo popular creciente, los frutos de este *ajusticiamiento* histórico," understood to have been authored by Galimberti, as he was in charge of the *Montoneros'* communications at that point. Moreover, Arrostito and Mario Firmenich, her accomplice in the kidnapping and assassination of Aramburu, chose the same word in their own description of the event in *La Causa Peronista*: "El *ajusticiamiento* de Aramburu era un viejo sueño nuestro. Concebimos la operación a principios de 1969. Había de por medio un principio de justicia popular—una reparación por los asesinatos de junio del 56" (my emphasis). The young tour guide's use of this word thus positions her squarely within a legacy of *Montoneros* involvement and connotes a solidarity with this group whose legacy clearly still lives on through such spaces as the ESMA.

In addition to having originated in the most prominent and infamous leaders of the *Montoneros* group themselves, this use of the lexicon "ajusticiamiento" to refer to the assassination of Aramburu has become so pervasive among militant circles that it is even practiced by dissident *Montoneros* who have come to disavow their own involvement with the group, as is the case of Antonia Canizo, friend and associate of Arrostito and Firmenich who affirms when interviewed by Gabriela Saidon for her book *La Montonera: Biografía de Norma Arrostito*: "Lo que tuvo este grupo armado en particular fue que dio el gran puntapié inicial en la historia argentina para que la lucha armada saliera a la luz. Eso significó el *ajusticiamiento* de Aramburu" (87, my emphasis). As Beatriz Sarlo has explored in *La pasión y la excepción*, the chant "duro, duro, duro, estos

son los Montoneros que mataron a Aramburu" would become the battle cry and the origin story of the *Montoneros*' political activity throughout the 1970s. Given this long history of the *Montoneros*' assassination of Aramburu, the tour guide's appropriation of this signifier, *ajusticiamiento*, provides a clear case of young people today in Argentina who have positioned themselves squarely among 1970s militants.

In light of this celebration of armed struggle, our narrator grows increasingly agitated and uncomfortable with the tour guide's discourse, silently proclaiming to himself, "¿por qué ella parece obviar el hecho de que todos y cada uno de nosotros tenemos una experiencia previa de aquella época, y una idea sobre esa experiencia?" (233) He then rushes out of the museum and vomits, a visceral intolerance for the one-sided and monolithic representation of the 1970s that the human rights and memory projects encapsulated in this museum have consecrated. As they are driving back from the ESMA, he tells Miki in an almost confessional mode, that he cannot understand the armed struggle, that he just cannot put himself in the place of those who vindicate the use of violence as a means of revolution. We understand, then, that the experience and ideas that Leonardo has about the 1970s are not represented in this space because they are anathema to the ideologies inherent to the armed struggle. The only way that he may see his own history represented is through his writing of this novel, which may constitute a move towards overcoming these monumental ideological camps within the realm of literary production and cultural memory. As a means of explicitly rejecting the versions of history currently presented by ESMA in its "memory and human rights space," Leonardo's visceral act of rejecting the discourse of the tour guide—and, by extension, that of human rights movements—is spawned by his disgust towards this space and the

version of history that it presents as much as it is by the version of history that it does *not* offer its visitors: one such as that of Leonardo's father.

After rushing out of the building and vomiting, Leonardo is reunited with Miki, and drives with him back to Retiro from ESMA. They sit in silence during the car ride, until Leonardo finally says to Miki: "La verdad es que no puedo entender la lucha armada, Miki […] Es decir, puedo entenderla teóricamente. Todas esas teorías sobre la violencia de arriba que genera la violencia de abajo. Y sobre la necesidad de 'hacerse cargo de la Historia'…Pero no puedo ponerme en el lugar, ¿entendés?" (246). This utterance is met with Miki's silence and a half-hearted nod, which leads Leonardo to think that Miki is still thinking of his own father, as he observes Miki's soft smile on his face after having visited ESMA. Leonardo's speculation here creates a direct link between the politicized versions of 1970s armed struggle presented in a space such as ESMA and the memory of a father Miki never knew. Rather than create a point of identification between Miki and our narrator, their visit to ESMA has proven to create an indelible division between the two: to Miki, Leonardo—who, in his own words, simply cannot understand the armed struggle—will always be on the outside (without Miki's even knowing the truth about Leonardo's father) and Miki, for Leonardo, will always be in support of the armed struggle.

The Novel's Irresolution

Our narrator's visit to ESMA—like his consultation of other writers, history books, and neighbors' testimonies offered to the truth commissions—proves not to provide the resolution between warring political factions that he had hoped. Rather, this

visit has served only to reify the divisions that continue to exist within Argentine society. As such, his act of fleeing the building and vomiting is analogous to his novel's ending: a chapter titled "Z" that has simply a black square drawn across the whole page, suggesting that language—manifest, in the words of his own section titles, through: history, memory, novel, and dream—has not sufficed in providing him with a resolution of this moment of his country's and his own recent history.

Conclusions

On the Revolutionary "Library"

As I have shown, all of these films and novels place themselves in direct dialogue with both historical and fictional accounts of 1970s militant commitment in such a way that recalibrates our cultural understandings of recent history vis-à-vis present-day politics. Returning to my introductory statements, all of these works resist an allegorical approach in recounting their stories of militant individuals. Not only are these works being created within or in opposition to existing traditions of film and literature, but they offer direct meditations on these existing libraries of history and politics at the same time that they seek to broaden these corpuses. The self-referentiality and playfulness of these works mirrors the ideologically unorthodox actions and characters that they contain. Insofar as these literary and filmic innovations broaden the scope of Argentine cultural production's relationship to politics and the country's recent past, we might understand them as a means of refiguring the revolution's library.

If we return to Horacio González's recent piece on the Trotsky Museum, we recall his mention of Trotsky's library as "un cierto aleph del siglo XX" ("Casa, museo, estado ¶ 4). To speak of revolution and implicitly cite Borges, as González does here, is indeed suggestive. For Borges was, of course, repudiated by revolutionary and antibourgeois culture in mid-century Argentina (as Pron and his father's discussion of the bookshelf remind us). In the most vehement and well-known indictment of Borges, the 1971 essay "Calibán," Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar categorizes Borges as "a colonial and the

representative of a dying class" (28), explaining this characterization: "For him the creation par excellence of culture is a library […] Unlike some other important Latin-American writers, Borges does not pretend to be a leftist" (28-9). Fernández Retamar critiques the cultivation of a library as bourgeois and colonial, yet the novels I analyze here—to say nothing of Horacio González who, like Borges before him, is Director of Argentina's *Biblioteca Nacional*—inventory the revolution's library. Recalling Borges's own ambivalent ideological and political stances and the library he creates in "Biblioteca de Babel," these works' libraries move towards infinity in their incorporation of contradicting ideologies.

Nearly forty years after going into exile from Chile, Ariel Dorfman also reflected on Borges as part of his remembrances of his own lost library in Santiago to which he had dreamed of returning home only to learn that many of its volumes had been destroyed in a flood. In a column titled "My Lost Library" published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dorfman makes sure to mention his own allegiance to the small socialist group *Movimiento de acción popular unitario* (MAPU) and recalls Miguel, the young boy from a working-class family who once helped him to tidy up and organize his library:

> I recited some lines from Neruda or told him a fable by Jorge Luis Borges. Borges whose work I loved in spite of his having been decorated by Pinochet, Borges who wrote about a library as infinite as the universe but never once conjured up a child scrubbing his *Ficciones* on a sunny day in winter, never once stopped to think that the intellectual delectations of eternity and avatars could be denied to a boy like Miguel because of what that very general inflicted on my country, never

> realized, my dear Borges, that if there had not been a coup and Allende, our democratic president, had not been overthrown, Miguel would inhabit a nation where his future, as a reader and as a worker, would have been diametrically different. (¶ 51)

Dorfman includes Borges in his library but contextualizes him within a framework that recognizes what the revolutionary Left sees as the limitations of an author such as Borges. While "Calibán" indicts the creation of a library as bourgeois and colonial, the authors included in my analysis, like Dorfman, acknowledge that revolutionary libraries do exist. Dorfman's inclusion here of Borges, although he disclaims the ideological limitations of the author, would suggest the expansion a once rigid—or even not openly acknowledged, in keeping with Fernández Retamar—revolutionary library.

In addition to his mention of Borges, Dorfman also pays homage to the role played by Cortázar—who positioned himself as a model leftist intellectual for having exiled himself to Paris during Argentina's years of political violence—in his physical library as well as within his mental imaginary of a more just society. Dorfman credits Cortázar with having inculcated in him a revolutionary and antibourgeois artistic and political spirit:

> Cortázar's prophecy, itself springing from the nostalgia for the primitive and ghostly that informs the vision of so many antibourgeois artists from the Romantics onward, informed my critique of Chilean society and the forced march to modernization that Pinochet had inaugurated, turning us into a greedy nation of consumers with little sense of the common good. Cortázar had taught me that

> there persisted a mythical, magical Chile lurking underneath or behind or beyond the everyday, haunting the ordinary, challenging the conventional. (¶ 43)

Although, as we see through his open admission that he loves Borges despite his problematic ideological orientations, Dorfman seeks to an extent to include ideologically unorthodox writers and texts within his own revolutionary library, the library whose destruction Dorfman laments is nonetheless markedly in keeping with revolutionary politics. Dorfman's reflections on his lost library were published in 2011 and thus signal the perpetuation of such an ideologically exclusive library.

The works included in my analysis refigure these libraries in a way that, unlike Dorfman's assessments, does not qualify the merits of other authors on the basis of their ideological coherence with revolutionary thought. Just as Pron's narrator reflects on his father's bookshelf (and his father, of course, replies to the novel's explanation of his bookshelf, justifying its omissions), Heker's Diana Glass describes her own readings of Che Guevara. Kohan's narrator, of course, cites Lenin at length, while Brizuela's diegetic novel positions itself as heir to Argentina's tradition of detective fiction and describes his childhood home as "una especie de casa tomada" à la Cortázar, yet distances itself from the "lugares comunes" of postdictatorial fiction. Carri reads aloud from her father's revolutionary sociological writings and carries a copy of the *CONADEP* report with her as she goes to visit the former torture center where her parents were detained, highlighting a culture that is highly cognizant of the appropriateness of certain texts in certain contexts. These works suggest a library that—like Pron's narrator's consideration of his father's library—takes inventory of what it does not contain as much as what it does.

Museums of Revolution

Closely linked to the notion of revolutionary libraries is the concept of the revolutionary museum. Returning to Fernández Retamar's indictment of Borges as bourgeois and colonial, it is worth noting that after he critiques Borges's cultural model of the library, he goes on to note that, more so than a library, Borges's ideal creation of culture is "better yet, a museum—a place where the products of culture from abroad are assembled. A museum of horrors, of monsters, of splendors, of folkloric data and artifacts (those of Argentina seen with the eye of a curator)" (28-9). While this gloss of a museum conjures images of nineteenth-century museum catalogs of imperialist war chests, Fernández Retamar's criticisms of museums is also telling. Here, more so perhaps than in the case of the library, is the inherent problem of capturing revolution within the conceptual category of "museum," due to the contradiction in terms inherent to "museum of revolution." Nonetheless, as the works I have analyzed here indicate, a growing contingent of museum spaces both in Argentina and throughout Latin America have emerged in such a way that commemorates the revolutionary spirit.[48]

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[48] In the last installment of his trilogy of edited volumes on museum spaces, *Museum Frictions: Public Spaces/Global Transformations*, anthropologist Ivan Karp (along with his co-author Gustavo Buntinx) focuses on museums that "display in their history, actions, and survival strategies a tactical sense of how to maneuver with and against other institutions" (207). Karp and Buntinx's conceptualization of museum spaces may be seen as yet another form of intertextuality in their "maneuver against other institutions," in

Of course, the role of the museum of revolution figures most prominently into Kohan's novel, but we must recall that museum spaces are also narrated in *Una misma noche*, *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*, and *Los rubios* (here, the former detention and torture center *Comisaría de Villa Insuperable*, nicknamed "Sheraton"). As Kohan's narrator as well as Horacio González's piece on the Trotsky Museum emphasize, novelistic accounts of the revolution serve—to an extent, at least—as analogs for museums, and vice-versa, in the words of González, "condensando una conmovedora tensión entre novela y Estado, poesía e historia" ("Casa, museo, estado ¶ 4), whereby the notion of "museumifying" revolutionary principles is present—at least implicitly—within all of the works I analyze here.

As discussed at length in the first chapter, the question of the function of a museum—whether it serves to preserve the life of its subject matter or whether, quite to the contrary, it serves to highlight the death of the same subject matter—is crucial for the consideration of the status and legacy of revolutionary thought within present-day Argentina. In a country that annually converts dozens of former detention and torture centers into museums and historical sites and celebrates *Montoneros* day, Peronist loyalty

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their rewriting of histories as they have previously been told. Of note here is that Karp and Buntinx's immediate focus here is on community museums, which share the minoritarian standing of the spaces that I have analyzed above that serve to memorialize the revolutionary ideals of a small demographic. In this light, their emphasis on the Gramscian "war of position" operative within community museums as they position themselves vis-à-vis the broader social order are also relevant to the museum spaces I have analyzed.

day, the anniversary of the military coup, and the anniversary of the return to democracy, does the memorialization of its revolutionary causes ensure that these movements live on, or does it rather consecrate the fact that such movements do, in fact, belong to the past? Let us consider an iconic image of revolutionary commitment in Argentine cultural production: *La hora de los hornos* and its shots of the open-eyed corpse of Che Guevara with Pino Solanas's narration proclaiming that Guevara's death was not in vain and that any and all who ally themselves with the revolutionary movement will also be able to die for a cause. This is to say nothing of the corpse of Eva Perón's itself which, in her death, not only engendered life but took on an afterlife all its own.[49] Within the context of the Christian mythology that fueled the revolutionary spirit, what is death but the consecration of eternal presence?

This question is, of course, impossible to answer. Worth noting, though, is that the self-referential framing that characterizes all of the works I analyze here mirrors, within fiction, the creation of museums. It is as though, with each layer of narrative added onto these works, another pane of plexiglass were being added to a nugget of history. What, then, is the function of these layers of memorialization? Does even the skeptical, ironic narration of past revolutionary fervor not serve to reawaken or revitalize these very movements?

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[49] It must be noted here that a popular *Montoneros* chant included the verse, "Si Evita viviera, sería montonera," such that the figure of the deceased Evita has been taken to signify revolutionary commitment. See Beatriz Sarlo's *La pasión y la excepción* and/or Tomás Eloy Martínez's 1995 novel *Santa Evita*.

If we were to ask the narrator of *Museo de la revolución*, the answer would, of course, be yes. Pron's novel, for its part, would suggest that all these layers of mediation serve, finally, as a way for a son to grow closer to his own father through an understanding of the latter's revolutionary commitment, instilling in his son a "spirit" of this commitment. Leonardo's reactions to his tour guide at the ex-ESMA, however, does not offer him any resolution with his father's military past that began in the very space that is now the museum he is visiting. Rather, this space reifies social divisions and fissures between individuals belonging to warring camps or, more specifically, whose parents belonged to warring camps during the 1970s, precisely through its perpetuation of the cause for which these revolutionary individuals fought.

The Present and Present Past[50]

[50] In *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Andreas Huyssen begins: "Historical memory is not what it used to be […] the boundary between past and present used to be stronger and more stable than it appears to be today. Untold recent and not so recent pasts impinge upon the present through modern media of reproduction like photography, film, recorded music, and the Internet, as well as through the explosion of historical scholarship and an ever more voracious museal culture" (1). As an introduction to "Memory Sites in an Expanded Field"—his chapter on Buenos Aires's *Parque de la memoria*—Huyssen posits "all such struggles about how to remember a traumatic past of genocide, racial opression, and dictatorship play themselves out in the much larger and more encompassing memory culture of this turn of the century in which national

Returning to the above example of Che Guevara's corpse as the paragon of revolutionary commitment within late 1960s and 1970s Argentina, a consideration of what this very image has come to represent would be productive in conceptualizing the legacy of revolution today. Of course, Che's image has become so ubiquitous that it has been turned into an empty signifier. Moreover, it has been absorbed into neoliberal hegemony in such a way that cannot but signal the death of the revolutionary spirit. While the context of present-day political culture in Argentina has certainly changed since the neoliberal heyday of the 1990s, we must take into consideration Menemist Argentina. Three of the works analyzed here—*Museo de la revolución*, *La pregunta de sus ojos*, and *El secreto de sus ojos*—while all produced in the early 2000s, are set in the mid-1990s. Heker's novel, for its part, was published in 1996, also during the country's Menemist rule, while Carri's film was released after the economic crisis of 2000, immediately before Kirchner's presidency began. While I have already mentioned Kohan's opposition to Heker's novel due to his position that suggesting leftist fallibility was politically irresponsible in light of the Left's repression at the time, all of these works' representations of Menemist Argentina bear analysis for what they elucidate about the legacy of 1970s revolutionary movements.

As previously mentioned in my analysis of Kohan's novel, Norma Rossi remarks, "Ya viste que los peronistas ahora se abrazan con el almirante Rojas. Y viste que Galimberti ahora trabaja para Jorge Born" (174); political categories that would have

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patrimony and heritage industries thrive, nostalgias of all kinds abound, and mythic pasts are being resurrected or created" (95).

applied to individuals in the mid-1970s are no longer valid.[51] However, as Marcelo's conversations with his boss suggest, a text such as Rubén Tesare's might serve to reinvigorate revolutionary interests. Of course, Kohan's publication of this novel during the honeymoon period of the Kirchnerist return of the left, the novel might also serve such a purpose within contemporary Argentine political culture. Heker's novel, for its part, obliquely mentions a third friend of Leonora and Diana's who now finds herself working for a multinational corporation, having sold out in her own way, though not, of course, in quite the same fashion as her friend Leonora Ordaz. Perhaps the most overtly critical of present-day political culture are *La pregunta de sus ojos* and *El secreto de sus ojos*, both of which represent 1990s Argentina as a political and cultural climate in which justice is largely inaccessible; Irene proclaims that she is content in her life because she has a family she loves and a job that allows her to work for "*una* justicia" if not "*la* justicia," signaling that any belief in true justice has disappeared. Marked by neoliberal economic policies and institutionalized impunity for the perpetrators of state violence during the 1976-1983 dictatorship, the Menem years have come to represent a period in which revolutionary ideals had been crushed.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the mid-1990s has been conceptualized as a changing point in the political culture surrounding 1970s militancy and the subsequent

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[51] *Montoneros* leader Rodolfo Galimberti kidnapped Jorge and Juan Born on September 19, 1974, to hold them for ransom for 70 million USD (the largest ransom sum in Argentina's history at that point). As Norma Rossi's character notes here, Galimberti would later go on to work for the Born Brothers in the mid-1990s, selling them "informes políticos" (Larraquy and Caballero 479).

dictatorship, most notably as demonstrated by Miguel Dalmaroni, who cites the trials of Navy officer Adolfo Scilingo (responsible for the regime's infamous "vuelos de la muerte" wherein they drugged prisoners and tossed them into the Río de la Plata from helicopters) and the creation of the group H.I.J.O.S. as crucial moments for politics as well as for history.[52] Within the context of my analysis of Kohan's novel, Sacheri's novel, and Campanella's adaptation, I contend that these authors' choice to situate the action of "present time" in the 1990s (as opposed to the flashbacks to the 1960s and/or 1970s) belies the decade's political and historical context's ongoings as a more obvious relief against which to depict 1970s revolutionary principles than the early 21st-century. That is, these authors clearly had a common enemy in Menem, and to speak of impunity and the impossibility of justice was easier in this time period. In the past decade, however, human rights culture has gained such momentum and has become so complex that to create a clear context against which to contrast the days of the 1970s flashback would be difficult if not impossible.

Moreover, as Kohan's Marcelo remarks to his boss, a text such as Tesare's writings contains the risk of reawakening the revolutionary fervor of the 1970s. If this observation is indeed true in the case of Tesare's writings, it is, albeit to a lesser extent, also true of the other texts analyzed here. Yet to make a simliar remark regarding the possibility of texts rooted in 1970s revolutionary thought and experiences in Kirchnerist Argentina would be non-sensical, in light of the increasingly present mentions of 1970s

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[52] Horacio Verbitsky interviewed Scilingo and published his 1995 book *El vuelo:Una forma cristiana de muerte, confesiones de un oficial de la Armada*. The "vuelos de la muerte" are also included in the 1999 film *Garage Olimpo*.

revolution and militancy throughout the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century that have formed the basis of Kirchnerist leadership.

Conclusions

Critical debates surrounding the ethics and feasibility of 1970s armed struggle in Argentina continue to abound. Even if we limit ourselves solely to this year (2014), we find a litany of such heated arguments. In January of this year, the death of *Montonero* poet Juan Gelman prompted Ceferino Reato to publish an article in which he questioned Gelman's capacity for "autocrítica," suggesting the entire group's inability to conceive of its own past in a way that allows for self-critical reflection. Pro-Kirchner journalist and former high-ranking *Montonero* Horacio Verbitsky then took Reato to task for his critique of *Montoneros*. A few months later, the previously referenced (and already controversial) former *Montonero* Héctor Leis was visited by former presidential candidate and human rights leader Gabriela Fernández Meijide (mother of a *desaparecido* and author of the controversial 2013 book *Eran humanos, no héroes*) and the two recorded their lengthy conversations in a documentary entitled *El diálogo*, wherien the two again scrutinize *Montoneros*. Horacio González would respond specifically to Fernández Meijide's comments in a *Página/12* column criticizing her "ausencia de cariz trágico en su pensamiento" for clouding her judgment ("Simbologías" ¶ 6). We see, then, that the Argentine Left readily dismisses perspectives on the country's recent past that are not presented within the framework of tragedy. Tellingly, González also dedicates a great deal of his attention in this same column to celebrating the cultural

importance of myths. The cultural model created by discourse such as González's is one marked by myth encoded in tragedy.

To consider this relationship between myth and politics, we may turn to Roland Barthes' *Mytholgogies*. Specifically, the chapter "Myth Today" offers a productive theoretical framework for considering this relationship. Published in 1959, Barthes' essay affirms that the Left becomes its own mythologizing mechanism precisely at the moment at which the *revolution* becomes *the Left*, delineating between the two. This model that Barthes creates speaks directly to the phenomenon that I seek to consider here: the revolution's transformation into its own mythologizing entity, the Left. A fundamental question to consider in light of Barthes' assertion is that, while he may be exercising a considerable amount of critical scrutiny toward the left in his notion that the Left can—like the Right, as he affirms—be mythologizing, he maintains that the Left does not rely anywhere near as heavily on myth as the Right. Is this lack of necessity of mythology on the Left that Barthes purports (a) precisely what has changed in the Left over the course of the five decades since Barthes penned this essay, or (b) readily attributable to Barthes' own Leftist orientations and, by extension, indicative of the very blindspots in criticism on the Left that I have sought to consider here?

As the works that I have analyzed seek to elucidate, the myths of heroic revolutionary martyrdom have been at the center of leftist cultural production since the onset of the dictatorship and circumstantial defeat of revolutionary causes in 1976. Since that time, the shifts in Argentina's political landscape have been met with sea changes in fictional aesthetics, all the while maintaining an unspoken solidarity with one another. With the much commented "return of the Left" throughout Latin America the past

decade, cultural criticism must, for its part, reconsider the political, ethical, and aesthetic categories that we use in our analyses of cultural production. For the aesthetic modalities of fiction, as I have shown, serve to question not only what versions of history individuals and society choose to remember or believe, but also how the present and future are informed by these memories.

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