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Hear (no) evil, see (no) evil, speak (no) evil: artistic representations of Argentina's "Dirty War"

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HEAR (NO) EVIL, SEE (NO) EVIL, SPEAK (NO) EVIL:
ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS
OF ARGENTINA'S "DIRTY WAR"

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Interdisciplinary Program in Comparative Literature

by
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Preface

My research for this project began more than a decade ago. As an undergraduate, I took a class that was team-taught by a professor from the Spanish department, Raphael Correa, and a faculty member from Media Communications, Rosalind Bresnahan. The class was on Latin American Cinema (Third Cinema): films that had been produced, not for the purpose of entertainment, but rather as a call to action.

In that class, I learned much about U.S. Foreign Policy, and how the actions of our government agencies—predominantly the CIA—had irrevocably altered the histories and lives of countless countries and individuals. Of the students from the Spanish department, I was one of only three non-native speakers in the class. Many of my colleagues were immigrants from South and Central America. I felt a tremendous amount of embarrassment as I began to understand how our histories intertwined. I feared that in some way, I had played a part in the suffering of so many others, either through my political actions or inaction, caused by my ignorance.

Of all the events that we discussed in the class, the one that held my fascination was the military *coup d'état* that took place in Chile, on September 11, 1973. Perhaps it was the enthusiasm of the Communications Professor, who had spent much time in Chile; perhaps because the event took place on my birthday; perhaps it would have captured my attention anyway. Like a moth to a flame, I went, in search of all the information I could find. Of all the papers I wrote as an undergraduate, that one still stands out as the singular example of *invested* writing.

I remember trying to explain my research to my mother, and how deeply it affected me. I cried as I spoke of the testimonies I had read from the truth commission. One woman spoke of how her son had asked her how he was supposed to mourn his father when he didn't even have a

grave to visit. She told him, “*M’ijo*, you go to the cemetery; find the most forgotten, unkempt grave. Clean it up, and honor your father there, as if it were his.” My mother asked if it had something to do with my being adopted and not knowing my birth family. I had no idea.

Several years later, I took a graduate class in poetry; as a part of our presentation, we had to declaim a poem of our choice. I found myself returning to my passion; I did my research and presentation on Victor Jara, and the lyrics of his last song, known simply by its first line: “*Somos cinco mil*” (There are five thousand of us) written during his last days inside the National Soccer Stadium, where, along with 5,000 *compañeros*, he was detained and tortured. Victor’s body was dumped in the street with more than 40 bullet wounds. His friends wrote the lyrics on tiny scraps of paper, and smuggled it out of the stadium upon their respective releases. One was found with the scrap in his sock; fortunately, the guards assumed the writing was his own, and let him live.

Early in my Ph.D. program I applied for a pre-dissertation research grant. In an attempt to create a project that fit both my interests, and their funding guidelines, I proposed to go to Chile to research the effect of that past on the present population, specifically in music, and memorials in the urban landscaping. Once I finished writing my proposal I realized that, even if I didn’t get funded, I knew what I wanted to do—I just didn’t know how, without actually making such a trip.

Then I took a class with Laura Martins, and began to understand that a similar Event had taken place in Argentina, just a few years after the military overthrow in Chile. I was confused because, while I had heard of the “Dirty War,” it seemed that it received much less attention, even though the number of victims was nearly 10 times more than of those in Chile. Thus began my current research project. It has been both a personal and professional journey; the results of which are deeply gratifying. I hope you enjoy reading it.

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Abstract

My dissertation utilizes an interdisciplinary approach to analyze Argentina's "Dirty War; in it, I argue that our view of the Other is the key to not repeating the past. Literature has long been accepted as a resource for understanding culture; this dissertation moves beyond literature, and includes photography, art, and film to demonstrate how artists have represented and responded to this period of political oppression. Adopting a psychoanalytic approach for my research, I begin with a literary analysis of multiple texts which exhibit features of what Anne Whitehead calls "trauma fiction," texts in which the narrative voice displays the repetition and fragmentation of memory caused by trauma; I also include the paintings of two artists, whose works have not previously been analyzed, but which fall into this category. I examine two photographic exhibits, using them to reveal how Freud's theories of mourning and melancholia function. I also use the exhibits to explain the connection between photography and loss, and how photography fits within Lacan's understanding of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and the "gaze." My investigation of Tununa Mercado's *En estado de memoria* is the first to apply the psychoanalytic theory of "phantom trauma" to her text; I argue that the pathologies from which the narrative voice suffers are exacerbated by, but not exclusively the result of trauma experienced as an adult. I conclude with an examination of three films which deal with the long-lasting effects of the "Dirty War" on Argentine society; I propose that it is not enough to narrate the past; the portrayal of the Other should include an element of horror; furthermore, we must acknowledge—and give voice to—those unspoken feelings, and desires, wherein we identify, not only with the victim(s), but also with the aggressor(s) in order to prevent the repetition of the past.

Introduction

Background

To posit the texts discussed in this dissertation in an historical background, in Argentina, the period from 1976 – 1983 is known as the “Dirty War,”¹ a period in which the military staged a campaign to “cleanse” the country of dissidents. The exact number of citizens killed is still unknown; estimates are upwards of 30,000. Leading up to that point, the country had already experienced multiple military *coup d'états*, each followed by military parades, complete with tanks and heavily armed soldiers, and the extremely excessive use of force used to quash civilian uprisings (for example, 2,000 troops for 120 demonstrators). Diana Taylor states that, “The theatricality of terrorism endowed the national frame with a strange spectacularity” (162). Those in power used soldiers and citizens as the cast of their spectacle. Citizens who were not directly affected by the play were expected to learn something from the performance, and to play their parts as well.

Crucial to this period, also known as *el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (The Process of National Reorganization—*el Proceso* for short), or *la última dictadura* (the last dictatorship) was the element of abductions, both in broad daylight, and under cover of darkness, where people were “disappeared” without a trace. This is an oxymoron, as many people were taken with a great deal of theatricality—streets were blockaded while soldiers or plain-clothes policemen raided homes with a great deal of bravado; yet, once shoved into the waiting vehicle (the Ford Falcon was the automobile of choice), it became impossible to track down the victim. At other times, corpses reappeared, also playing a part in the play, as they were often reported as having been killed during an armed uprising. Those who remained alive were sequestered in

¹ Throughout this document I put the phrase “Dirty War” (or “*guerra sucia*”) in quotation marks, as it was not a war, but rather a case of the collective national military forces turning on its own (generally unarmed) citizens.

secret concentration camps, often right in the middle of the busy city. Linguistically, (in both Spanish and English) the verb form takes on the incomprehensible nature of the act: a person did not disappear; they *were disappeared*. “A ‘disappearance’ occurs when the acts of abduction, torture, and execution are complemented by the speech act of denial” (Graziano 41). Official denial served as a performative speech act.

In order to understand the event itself, we must first address the situation/atmosphere leading up to the “Dirty War”: these events don’t just “happen”; the military does not just wake up one morning and decide that “it’s a good day for a *coup*.” Dictators are born out of a collective consciousness. According to Marguerite Feitlowitz, “The Dirty War, [sic] though unprecedented in its extent and cruelty, did not erupt from a vacuum. Rather, it drew of a reservoir of beliefs, phobias, obsessions, and rhetoric that have filtered down through a variety of ultraconservative movements, tendencies, and regimes” (20). Such an event is brought into being through a combination of fear, projection, and narcissistic rage. Milan Svolik suggests that, while political scientists have traditionally maintained that “the possibility of a popular uprising is the central threat to a dictator’s power, and emphasize the role of repression in precluding a regime change” (477); however, this is only one aspect of a dictator maintaining power. He must have broad support from multiple sources: “the ruling coalition consists of individuals who support the government and, jointly with the dictator, hold enough power to be both necessary and sufficient for the survival of the government” (480). In other words, it takes a village to maintain a dictator.

The history of political turmoil leading up to Argentina’s “Dirty War” (1976-1983) is far reaching; some historians reach as far back as the sixteenth century, with the arrival of the Spanish *conquistadores*. For the purpose of this project, I will begin in 1969 where, (as in other

countries), a student demonstration with broad popular support ended in confrontation between the revolutionaries and government forces.²

In May of 1969, Argentina saw a series of workers strikes and demonstrations in various cities that led up to what is known as the “Cordobazo” event³ in the city of Córdoba, a city whose economy was strongly supported by automotive plants (with healthy workers’ unions), and which had a large university student population. The demonstrations which took place in Córdoba on May 29-30 served as a turning point: until that time, students and workers saw themselves as two separate entities, but on this occasion, the two groups united. The workers organized a 48-hour common strike, coupled with a demonstration. As the group—which began with some 4,000 members—marched towards the center of the city, they gained strength. As one witness remembers it, “the people's reaction was incredible, they came out into the street to hand us things, women, old ladies, gave us matches, and bottles or brooms to protect ourselves with. Everyone was in the street, old men, kids [...] there was a certain feel to the moment, joyous I would say, until then the worst hadn't happened” (Brennen par. 37). Some estimated the crowd in the tens of thousands. Police retreated; the military was called in to restore order, which they did with a tremendous amount of force. In reference to this event, Frank Graziano states, “The military government’s attempt to violently restructure society from above contributed decisively to creating the object of its phobic obsession—an ‘internal enemy’—in the lower strata” (21). This “enemy within” would eventually become the target of the “Dirty War.”

According to Manuel Antonio Garretón, the military dictatorships that emerged in the Southern Cone during the 1970’s (Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay) all followed a pattern, or rather went through two distinct phases: a reactive and a foundational. They were

² I am specifically alluding to events that took place between 1967-1970, in the U.S., France, Mexico, and Berlin.

³ The event happened in Córdoba, Argentina. Video clips avail at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5rXlh51i4&feature=related>>

simultaneously reacting against something (for example a populist society), and were at the same time attempting to create something new: “Catalyzed by the political crisis—perceived by some sectors to be terminal or catastrophic, a clear threat to their social position—the regimes attempted to disarticulate the former society” (15). Unlike other dictatorships, Garretón argues that these military regimes had a goal to institute a “nonredistributive, nonparticipatory brand of capitalism, and then to reinsert their respective economies into the world system” (16). He cites the so-called ‘Dirty War’ as a good example of the reactive phase, during which the object of the military regime is to dismantle the previous sociopolitical system; all those who participated in the chaos leading up to the *coup* are considered traitors and enemies of the state who must be eliminated at any cost.

As General Iberico Saint-Jean, the governor of Buenos Aires in May of 1976 put it: “First we will kill all the subversives; then we will kill their collaborators; then...their sympathizers, then...those who remain indifferent; and finally, we will kill the timid.” (Cited in Taylor 161). It was not enough to simply stay out of the way; reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition, the best way to preserve one’s own life was to inform on the suspicious behavior(s) of another, hence proving one’s loyalty to the commanding party. The result is, of course, a population living in terror: terror of the known as well as the unknown, terror of being brutalized for something that you have (or haven’t done), terror of not being able to protect your loved ones: in essence, a population living in a constant state of impotence.

In 1970, General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu, who had led the 1955 coup that deposed Juan Perón, was abducted and executed by Peronists /Montoneros. (Since being deposed, Perón had been living in exile in Franco’s Spain; his supporters wanted him back and in power.) During the 1970’s, the *Montoneros* groups consolidated; they robbed banks, assassinated senior police and

army personnel, extorted funds from multinational companies through kidnappings. In one incident, they garnered 60 million dollars in cash and another million in clothing/food (which they distributed to poor) in exchange for kidnapped Argentine businessmen. The reaction was both official and non-official. A group called “*Mano*” (hand) formed of off-duty police officers; they performed abductions and disappearances; the few who were returned, spoke of torture. “By the early months of 1971 one such ‘disappearance’ occurred on average each 18 days” (Rock, cited in Graziano 22). During this time, news of such disappearances was published in various daily newspapers.

On June 20, 1973 Perón returned from Spain; militants from both the left and the right opened fire on each other before plane landed. Perón returned ultraconservative and rejected the Montoneros (including his original supporters), referring to them as “germs” that were “contaminating” the movement (Gillespie, cited in Graziano 23). This reference to leftists as a contaminating factor in society became a standard excuse for “exterminating” them. Only a year after his return, Juan Perón died, leaving his second wife, Isabel in power. In November, she declared a state of siege; as she continued to lose power, she began to rely more and more heavily on the military to help maintain control of the country. In early 1975, she/the military sent 5,000 troops to quash 120 leftist guerrillas Tucumán, “this disproportionate display of force providing an index to the repression forthcoming under the dictatorship to follow” (Graziano 24). By October of 1975, violence had worsened nationwide and the armed forces were authorized to expand combat against the “internal enemy”; the Army was given supervisory power over all federal and penitentiary police forces.

Even though she was visibly losing power, Isabel Peron refused to resign, and impeachment proceedings failed in congress. Consequently, the military commanders settled

internal differences and reached an agreement to overthrow her government; they “strategically procrastinated until the grim scenario collapsed into a desperate state that they could exploit to their own advantage” (Graziano 25). In an attempt to stabilize the economy, the minister of economics called for an 82% devaluation of the peso and 50-150% increase in prices of basic supplies: food/gas/public transportation fares. “The crumbling economic and political situations constituted the classical scenario for a military *coup d’état*, which came during Carnival week [March 24, 1976], welcomed by most” (Graziano 25). Because there were so many different factions fighting against each other, as well as against the government, many Argentine citizens who were not involved simply wanted to see an end to the chaos; they wanted to feel safe to go out in public, and supported the *junta*’s methods of restoring order.

From its position of power, the *junta* now began to carry out a series of tactics designed to maintain that place of power. One strategy was to remove all opposition; another was to garner public support of its actions. The first strategy was mostly a matter of physical violence: continued (and accelerated) abductions, torture, and disappearances. Garretón posits that the Southern Cone military regimes, more than other dictatorships, instituted systems that “deliberately produced and spread fear” (23). This atmosphere of fear was instilled through physical repression, misrepresentations and omissions of vital information, and a well organized system of propaganda, that included a rhetoric based in fear, which reminded citizens of what a dangerous place they were living in. In 1975 General Rafael Videla declared that “As many people as necessary must die in Argentina so that the country will again be secure” (Cited in Feitlowitz 6). More than 340 clandestine detention centers were established throughout Argentina, mostly located “near major cities where ‘subversives’ were concentrated” (Graziano 37). The *junta* also prohibited protests, unions, and most public gatherings. An additional aspect

of this strategy was visual: the *junta* was visibly militaristic: parades, uniforms, tanks, automatic weapons, all imbued their presence, both in person, and through the press. Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla went from being the commanding general of the army to the *de facto* President of the Republic.

The second strategy—garnering public support—took a more rhetorical route; language was the key. First, the *junta* divided the world into two halves: West (the U.S.) and East (the Soviet Union). Preservation of “Western Christian civilization” became the locus of social organization. Videla explained that, “a terrorist is not just someone with a gun or a bomb but also someone who spreads ideas which are contrary to Western and Christian civilization” (Graziano 27 from *Nunca Más*). “Subversives” could not be identified simply by associating them with violent acts; it was their ideology which made them dangerous to Argentinean society. Additionally, this “either/or” statement drew public attention away from their own acts of violence, and towards the invisible danger of “ideas.” Most importantly, the *junta* understood the importance of consolidating the social consciousness: by appealing to citizens’ core values of “Truth, Love, Justice and Liberty,” the right-wing military posited themselves as the crusaders of Western Christian principles, and easily persuaded the public into a mass collective (in)action. By setting themselves up as the protectors of Christian moral values, they inversely posit the other as lacking Christian moral values.

The military staged the *coup* during Carnival, a period of debauchery, and predecessor of the period of Lent, which is, according to Catholic tradition, a time of fasting and personal sacrifice. I suggest that this was no coincidence: the rhetoric of the regime stressed the high level of personal sacrifice needed to bring order and healing to the nation. The idea of Lent, reminiscent of Jesus’ 40-day fast in the wilderness, followed by his betrayal (by an insider), and

his suffering and painful death was posited in such a way that, the citizens should willingly participate in the sacrifice required; moreover, the leadership represented the suffering Christ (betrayed by an internal enemy) who merely wanted to bring peace and order to the chaos (i.e., debauchery and selfishness) that Argentina was experiencing.

In order to bring the community together, the *junta* first divided it in half. This dualistic rhetoric created an atmosphere of “us” and “them”: “*la definición del «nosotros» abarca a porteños de clase media y los «otros» son los que eluden una fácil clasificación, vienen de lugares desconocidos, con intereses que, según el oficialismo, son contrarios a los que posee la nación*” (Rocha par. 7) (“the definition of ‘us’ refers to the middle class people of Buenos Aires, and the ‘others’ are those who elude simple classification, they come from unknown places, with interests that, according to the official discourse, are contrary to those that the nation stands for”).⁴ This separation of “us” and “them” also led to bifurcated lives: one public, one private (or clandestine), each one, according to Feitlowitz, had its own “encoded discourse” (20).

The fear of the “other” was common in the discourse of multiple military dictatorships in the Southern Cone in the 1970’s. In the wake of the Cuban Revolution and the ensuing nationalization of industries, voters in Chile electing Salvador Allende on a platform of socialist reform with the promise of nationalization, and various student and worker protests happening all across the globe, “the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone, operating within the US doctrine of ‘national security’ felt the need to unite in an effort to fight an incipient communist threat. The threat to their nations, as the officers who ran these countries learned at the US military School of the Americas in Panama, was less likely to come from the exterior than from an ‘internal enemy’” (Slack 494). The economic and political problems which faced these countries posed a real threat to maintaining national stability.

⁴ Translation mine.

The unified group created what has become known as “Operation Condor,” a secret network that spied on suspected leftist groups or individuals. The military leaders of each of the Southern Cone countries promised extradition of any “subversives” that attempted to flee their own countries to avoid persecution. Information released to the public in 2000 indicates that the leaders involved were able to “keep in touch with one another through a U.S. communications installation in the Panama Canal Zone which covers all of Latin America.”⁵ Operation Condor was also reported to have acted as an international hit squad, warning potential victims that there was no safe place where one could hide.

The violence, division, and isolation took its toll on all segments of the population, whether they recognized it or not. However, for some the trauma was more apparent. Victims who were abducted or killed and their families suffered the most obvious wounds. The families of the *desaparecidos* (those who were disappeared) found themselves in a schizophrenic nightmare, as the military and police forces categorically denied all activities. According to the CONADEP Truth Commission, “The abducted were never publicly acknowledged as detainees once they disappeared into the hundreds of secret detention centers known as “pits” (*pozos*) and “black holes” (*chupaderos*). Some were released into exile, but most of them were assassinated, and their bodies discarded” (CONADEP 1986, 11-13; Mittelbach 1986, quoted in Robben “How” 129). Until 1995, systematic denial of the abductions was solidly maintained by the military, creating an atmosphere of confusion, fear, isolation, and perhaps most destructive, self-doubt; citizens could not correlate what they saw/knew to be true, and what they were being told by authorities.

⁵ This information was made available during the Clinton administration by the U.S. Department of State in the “Chile Declassification Project.” A voluminous amount of materials was also discovered in Paraguay in 1992; known as the “Archive of Terror” it documents the activities of the Paraguayan secret police and their involvement in Operation Condor.

Parents, siblings, or spouses of disappeared young people were often told that: there was no such record of their family member being arrested; that (s)he had been mistakenly arrested, but had also been released; or that (s)he had been transferred to another police station. “The tone of the message suggested the false notion that it would be possible, by some means, to find him or her. This misleading evidence tended to create false expectations and produced a sense of disorganization, disorientation and frustration” (Puget 99). They were also told that *if* one had been detained, it was “*Por algo será/Algo habrá(n) hecho*” (for some reason/something (s)he/they had done). This became the scapegoat clause among Argentineans who could not face the terrifying truth that the Law could not be trusted—to do so would destroy their own psychic structure.

Having no reliable starting place to find information effectively trapped family members into accepting guilt for not finding (saving) the loved-one while they were still “detained” and before it was too late and they became a “disappeared.” Family members searching for their disappeared loved ones never knew what helped/exacerbated the situation. According to Graziano, the psychological effects became apparent after the “dirty war,” when group sessions revealed that, regardless of what actions family members took (not), “most came away with the ‘omnipotent idea’ that they could have prevented the disappearance if they would have done precisely the opposite of what they did” (42). Furthermore, the *junta* was systematically unpredictable; while many of those taken were, indeed members of various resistance groups, there was seemingly no predictable pattern determining who would be kept, who would be killed, be released, or who would be officially arrested (as long as one was “disappeared” the captors would not acknowledge their existence; however, once they were “arrested” family members could find out where they were being held and have limited contact with them). This

factor of random selection kept the entire population in either a state of complete denial or constant disequilibrium.

Fernando Reati argues that this period:

for its unconventional methods of terrorizing the population, left deep scars in the collective experience of Argentineans and in their artistic representations. In a nation where political violence had been pervasive through the years, the "dirty war" managed to shock and transform society because of the novelty of its punitive technology. It also forced intellectuals and artists to reconsider the means available to them to represent reality, in much the same way that the experience of the European Holocaust had prompted new questions about the representation of horror. (24)

Even though Argentineans had a history of political violence, what took place during this period surpassed what they could imagine, and altered the ways in which artists could represent the trauma they were experiencing. Horacio Riquelme explains, *«nuestro lenguaje cotidiano no tenía expresiones para comunicar la experiencia del terror; no había palabras para expresar la angustia proveniente del miedo crónico instaurado por motivos externos e incuestionables»* ("our everyday language did not have expressions for communicating the experience of terror; there were no connotations for the anguish that stems from the chronic fear instilled by external and unquestionable motives" (Cited in Rocha np). The traumatizing terror was unpredictable, unimaginable, and beyond the limits of language.

The question then becomes "How can such a lost, indefinable state of existence be narratively represented?" (Horvitz 6) Artists had to find new methods of expressing themselves; of narrating that which could not be captured in language. As Beatriz Sarlo argues, the fiction of that time needed to change in order to capture that traumatic experience. "The violent fragmentation of the objective world had repercussions in the symbolic world [...] fiction introduced bewilderment by using two basic strategies. On the one hand, it rejected mimesis as a unique form of representation, and, on the other, it proposed a discursive fragmentation of both

subjectivity and social reality” (240-1). The need to narrate the events that were taking place remained the same; the manner in which it was done needed to evolve in order to capture the trauma the country was experiencing.

Project

The focus of this dissertation is the artistic representation of this traumatic period in Argentine history and the unthinkable/unspeakable, specifically as it relates to political oppression. As trauma is sensual, I move beyond literature, and include photography, art, and film in my analysis. The texts I have chosen to analyze are all, regardless of the mode of expression, narratives of violence. Here, I equate narrative with story-telling, or meaning-making; this context includes visual arts as narrative. Narratives “constitute a primary means of communication and exchange” (Covington 405). While narrative may often be equated exclusively with discourse, either written or articulated, I argue that visual art, can in fact, through the artist’s use of the symbolic, convey a story. “Our need to create stories is, of course, linked to our need and capacity to symbolize ... Story-making is not only an interpretative act, it is also a symbolic process and, as such, carries within it the seeds for change” (Covington 405-6). Within the different semiotic systems, I hope to find a pattern, or perhaps a key to survival: what can we learn from these artists about surviving massive and psychic traumas?

My project is unique in that I combine these multiple artistic fields in my inquiry, and use Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in my interpretation. Lacan, while extremely popular in France and Argentina, is scarcely known in North American research. Additionally, I take the theories of Anne Whitehead and Esther Rashkin that thus far have been applied exclusively to texts written in English, and successfully use them to analyze texts written in Spanish.

The title of my dissertation harkens to the harsh censorship imposed by the dictatorship, especially during the first three years of the *Proceso* when it was “forbidden to inform, comment or make any reference to subjects which relate to subversive activity....This includes information relating to abductions and disappearances” (Cited in Graziano 255). The military imposed the speech act of denial onto the entire population. Citizens should see (no) evil, hear (no) evil, and speak (no) evil—not in the original sense of the maxim, that one should keep oneself pure, but rather in a sinister dictum, that they should ignore, deny, and repress whatever they saw, heard, felt, or knew to be true. Within a very short period, citizens internalized this prohibition, in public and in private. According to Nancy Caro Hollander:

One of the most outstanding features of a terrorized population is the compulsion to deny reality, to refuse to bear witness to the sinister drama that oppresses the entire nation. Denial shields the individual from his/her conscience and the internal or external demand to act in defiance of the systematic violation of basic human rights. [...] The psychology of denial thus functions to sustain the politics of terror. (“Psychoanalysis” 281).

This type of self-censorship continues long after the dictatorship is gone. It takes a conscious effort to break free from the habit of silence, inexpressiveness, and inhibition. In the works that I have chosen, the artists have done just that; their works create a space for reflection and healing from the personal and collective trauma.

Trauma, from the Greek *trauma*, or “wound,” originally referred to an injury of the physical body; more recently, the definition refers to a wound inflicted upon the mind; more specifically, “Trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (Caruth 91). So trauma isn’t the *event*, it is the individualized response to the event, the wound, or the void/rupture that takes place in the mind “the conscious awareness of the threat to life [...] It is not simply, that is, the literal threatening

of the bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late*” (Caruth 62 emphasis in original). If the surprise is not of the event, but the fact that the victim *could have died* because they were unable to recognize the threat of death in time, the incomprehensibility of the event lies in the survival, which cannot be intentionally replicated any more than it was a conscious act to begin with. It is, perhaps the recognition of powerlessness, together with the inability to process the pure quantity/type of stimulus that creates a sort of electrical short in the mind’s ability to process the information and the experience.

Trauma may be experienced on a collective level—as in a large group suffers from the same event; yet, it still remains on a deeply personal level; it never escapes the personal experience. We base our knowledge of expectation on our past through what are called “life narratives.” From past experience, we anticipate the future. Even if others shared the same “event,” their unique experience is based on the life narrative that they have already constructed, hence, their trauma is an individual experience.

Musicologist David Huron proposes that emotions evoked by expectation involve five functionally distinct response systems: reaction responses (which engage defensive reflexes); tension responses (where uncertainty leads to stress); prediction responses (which reward accurate prediction); imagination responses (which facilitate deferred gratification); and appraisal responses (which occur after conscious thought is engaged). He applies his theory of expectation to music, where elements of prediction and surprise, are used by musicians with intention, and are essential for the listener to have a pleasurable musical experience. The same elements are present in virtually every experience we have in everyday life. Expectation is at the core of our mental life, and self preservation. In *Making Stories*, Jerome Brunner posits that “Narrative in all forms is a dialectic between what was expected and what came to pass” (15).

Sometimes the narrative is based on achieving what is anticipated; at other times, the narrative is based on the rupture between expectation and reality.

Although storytelling is an essential fabric of everyday life, we rarely stop to ask, “What constitutes a narrative?” According to Bruner, for Aristotle, narrative included the concept of *peripeteia*—a sudden reversal in circumstances, which “swiftly turns routine sequence of events into a story” (Bruner 5). In other words, something must happen, an event must occur that breaks with the mundane, ordinary world in which the story is set—be it fictitious or real. Bruner continues that, although Aristotle touched on the topic, it wasn’t until the 20th century that interest in narrative resurged; he credits Vladimir Propp, who studied the structure of folktales, with recognizing that the structure of the story was not only syntactic; narrative “reflected the human effort to cope with the untoward and unexpected in life” (109). In general stories begin with a common assumption—which is shared with the interlocutor or reader—of the “normalcy” of the world in which the story belongs.

For the purpose of my project, I focus on the narration of real events. In this respect, “narrative involves the reconstruction of the mind” (Bruner 28). Narrative and memory work together. Returning to the theme of trauma, with traumatic events the body is not able to withstand the sensorial stimulus and the person experiences dissociation; the memory of the experience organizes itself as sensorial fragments, without linguistic integration (Maxwell, 282). Moreover, the traumatic stress affects the brain in its ability to integrate the memory in the left hemisphere of the neocortex, where long-term memories are stored, those which unite experiences with life narrative; for this reason, there is a special/temporal dissociation for the victims (Soloman, 54). As a result of this special/temporal dissociation, events overlap, everything is disordered; it is difficult to relate the events in chronological order: “Since trauma

is characterized [sic] by a loss of plot, the traumatic experience cannot be immediately 'translated' into the narrative structures of our mental memory" (van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, ix). The experience, while still vividly felt, is trapped in the inexpressible. Yet, while these things—pain, torture, trauma—take place outside of language, the expression thereof is essential, both for the survival of the victim, as well as the community.

It is through the narration of traumatic events that the brain is able to process the memory. "As the brain slowly processes the memory, it is abstracted and transferred into the left neocortex where it is filed away along with other memories and becomes part of the narrative of one's life. The stored information can be retrieved when needed to understand future events" (Soloman 54). Paradoxically, until the memory is processed, it will continue to haunt the victim; in order to speak of such events, the narrator must relive—on a sensorial level—the event(s).

Stepping away from traumatic memory/narratives for a moment, and returning to narrative theory in general, according to Marie-Laure Ryan, some leading researchers in cognitive science equate narrative with thought in general. She cites Schank and Abelson, who proclaim that "all memory consists of narrative" (28), and Mark Turner, who states that "Narrative imagining—story—is *the* fundamental instrument of thought" (28 emphasis in original), and posits that everything that we perceive, we instantly determine if it is background (unreportable) or relevant (reportable) information, in which case we will assign meaning—story—to it. This determination is, of course complicated when the information is incomprehensible to the one experiencing it.

Within each of the narratives that I discuss, we will see the multiple ways in which narrators process their trauma. I analyze works that are fragmented (like the narrative voice), photos that narrate loss, and films in which the narrative directs our reaction as viewers towards

a specific perception of the trauma—often towards an identification with the victim. In Chapter One, “Trauma Fiction in the Southern Cone” I discuss what Anne Whitehead calls trauma fiction: literary works which mimic the sense of fragmentation experienced by the narrators.⁶ In order to effectively represent that wounding, writers work outside of the traditional boundaries of literature: these writers re-create that sense of fracturing with language. Their work does not fit into any formal genres: on the surface, many have the traditional markings of a novel; yet, they are a mixture of fiction, non-fiction, biography, autobiography, memoir, and testimonials. They are as elusive to categorizing as the memories themselves. The narrative voices (like their narrators) are split, fragmented, and glide between first and third persons; they also embody the art of ventriloquism, allowing the voices of others to speak through their bodies, their pens.

The tactile nature of traumatic experiences shows up in these authors’ writing—especially female authors—with a leitmotiv of clothing. I include a section analyzing the inclusion of clothing within the literature, and offer suggestions as to why specific items appear repeatedly in their writing. Moving beyond literature, I also analyze artwork of two artists: Raquel Partnoy, the mother of one of the authors in this chapter, and Diego Dayer, a young Argentine artist whose work visually demonstrates the fracturing nature of trauma as portrayed in the literature I discuss.

In Chapter Two, “Between the Imaginary and the Real: Photographic Portraits of Mourning and of Melancholia in Argentina,” I discuss how the military regime was intent on erasing all those who they considered their adversaries, and how today the photograph of the dead/missing stands in defiance, contradicting that attempted erasure of the *desaparecidos*. First,

⁶ Throughout this dissertation, I use the word “narrator” with great reticence; it is the word literary analysis has coined for the voice that speaks through the text; however, the traumatized narrative voices in this text exist beyond the boundaries of a traditional “narrator”; consequently, we still lack a precise term for these “narrative voices.” I ask that you keep this in mind as you read.

I explain the connection between photography and loss, and how photography fits within Lacan's understanding of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and the "gaze." I discuss complicated mourning (circumstances which inhibit/delay mourning), and the difficulties created by political disappearances: as long as the family members maintain the belief that their loved one(s) might still be alive, they cannot begin the process of mourning the permanently lost object. Beginning with the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, and using the web-based art exhibits of Marcelo Brodsky and Inés Ulanovsky, I analyze the role of the photograph in Argentina, how it serves as a linking object, how it is used to symbolize the dead/missing, and how it can function to facilitate mourning, or to serve as proof of pathological melancholia. I argue that such artistic representations of loss function to reinscribe healthy mourning rituals within the Argentine society.

The connections between Argentina's "Dirty War," and the Holocaust are multiple, profound, inexplicable, and sinister; for Argentina's Jewish population,⁷ the correlation was uncanny, as, not only did the military recalibrate tactics devised by the Nazis, but also a disproportionate number of abducted Argentineans were Jewish. In Chapter Three, "From the *Shoah* to "*la guerra sucia*": Phantom and Transgenerational Trauma in Tununa Mercado's *En estado de memoria*," I demonstrate how the repetition of persecution can be traced throughout Mercado's text, which is set during the violent dictatorships of Argentina. While the entirety of Mercado's text takes place during the second half of the 20th century, the narrator clearly demonstrates a psychic connection to the Holocaust, to a family secret so traumatic, it remains unnamed. Based on the work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, and what they and Esther

⁷ The Jewish-Argentine community had grown throughout the 19th and 20th centuries as the result of persecution-related immigration, as families left Russia and other Eastern and Western Europe countries for the more tolerant "Europe of South America."

Rashkin have labeled, “phantom” transmissions—suggesting that parents can transmit their (secret) traumatic experiences *unconsciously*—the reading that I provide of *En estado de memoria* markedly differs from others. Rather than focusing on the present trauma which the protagonist experiences, I seek to uncover the underlying sources of the multiple and otherwise inexplicable pathologies from which she suffers, which are exacerbated by the repetition of trauma and being forced into exile. I analyze how the narrator struggles against the internalized prohibition to maintain secrecy.

In Chapter Four, I move to the medium of film in the 21st century: “Projection and Horror: The Image of the Other in Film Portrayals of the ‘Dirty War.’” In it, I analyze three films: the first two deal with children of *desaparecidos* who are found and rescued by their biological families, the third, a murder-mystery. Drawing heavily on Angela Connolly’s analysis of horror films, I argue that the way in which the directors portray the Other often positions the viewer to maintain a cycle of victimization and violence, and I propose that it is not enough to narrate the past; the portrayal of the Other should include an element of horror in order to prevent the repetition of the past.

Limitations

A topic of this magnitude and importance can hardly be covered adequately within the constraints of a doctoral research dissertation. As I review the completed project, I recognize places where I know much more than I have written, as well as other areas in which I wish I knew more. Many books have been written; much work has yet to be done.

Additionally, in my introduction, I include musicians in the group of artists whose work serves as a form of protest, witnessing, and healing. My original intention was to include a chapter on the *Nuevo cancionero argentino*, a popular movement during the 1960’s and 1970’s,

and to analyze how musicians today pay homage to that movement. However, after giving a presentation at the ACLA in 2009 on the *Nueva canción* movement in Chile, and consulting with several colleagues who have published on the topic, it became very clear that I could not do justice to the topic without the benefit of spending time in Argentina; it will be the topic of a later research project.

And finally, while I delve deeply into the theories of psychoanalysis in this project, I am not a trained analyst. My observations and analyses are strictly from a literary standpoint. Moreover, I have not had the privilege of visiting Argentina; my analysis is structured and inhibited by my own linguistically and socially formed viewpoint. I do not pretend to comprehend what it means to live in a dictatorship. At the same time, I suspect that, for the very same reasons, I bring a unique vantage point to the discussion. For that reason I chose to undertake this project, of which I am extremely proud.

Trauma Fiction in the Southern Cone

**The undoing of the self in trauma involves a radical disruption of memory,
a severing of past from present, and, typically,
an inability to envision a future.**

Susan Brison

In the fall of 1980, Argentinean writer, Julio Cortázar gave a series of lectures at the University of California at Berkeley, in which he stated:

En América Latina, en las circunstancias actuales de muchos de nuestros países, los escritores que tienen una participación en la historia y cuya literatura quiere llevar en muchos casos, un mensaje y transmitir ideas útiles en ese campo, los cuentos realistas mejores, los cuentos realistas perdurables, por debajo de lo que cuentan y sin decirlo nunca, contienen siempre de alguna manera una denuncia. Una denuncia de un estado de cosas, una denuncia de un sistema en crisis, una denuncia de una realidad humana que es vista como negativa, como retrógrada.
(Cited in Tyler 603)

Cortázar places writers, and more specifically the short story, in direct alignment with both history, and politics. Fiction writers document history and denounce “a system in crisis.”

Writers who came after Cortázar continued this tradition of documentation and denouncement; however, the style in which they did it began to change drastically. Novelists from, for example, Chile and Argentina, two of the countries living under military dictatorship, began eschewing linear texts, opting instead for narratives that were fragmented, difficult to follow, and often without resolution. Their writing reflected the system of crisis—or terror—in which they were living, and the long-term effects of trauma.

In her book, *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead discusses the rise of ‘trauma fiction,’ literature that demonstrates the relation between trauma and fiction: “Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised [sic] by repetition and indirection” (3). A relatively new field of study, she points to 1980 as the

beginning of trauma studies in the United States, when post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was formally recognized as a legitimate diagnosis, and the American Psychiatric Association “acknowledged for the first time that a psychiatric disorder could be wholly environmentally determined and that a traumatic event occurring in adulthood could have lasting psychological consequences” (4). A decade later, ‘trauma theory’ emerged, as literary critics and psychoanalysts began to find a “resonance between theory and literature in which each speaks to and addresses the other” (4). While works such as those of Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and Cathy Caruth were both cutting edge and highly important to this movement, these theorists were not alone in their endeavors.

At the same time studies in Latin America began to uncover what came to be known as a ‘culture of fear’ that developed in a number of South American nations in the 1970’s. The research began in Argentina, in 1979 “a period marked by widely disseminated reports of abductions, disappearances, torture, and random executions by the security forces in that country” (Corradi, Fagan, and Garratón 3). Researchers interviewed a broad range of middle-class Argentines; they anticipated their subjects would, at some level, denounce the actions of the military government; instead, the individuals “were generally uncritical and professed ignorance or lack of concern about reported government abuses” (3). This surprising find led to much research on “the dynamics of state terror, the nature of political fear, and efforts within civil society to counter the effects of terror and fear” (3). This included a study of literature “as an index of changes that take place in people living in fear” some of the issues that stood out include: changes in genres, the relationship between author and public, the impacts of censorship, self-censorship, and exile, and the consequences of terror for literature (Corradi, Fagan, and Garratón 7). Similar to Whitehead’s findings on literature written in the U.S., certain

patterns emerged in Latin American fiction, as writers struggled to find strategies with which they could “challenge and represent [their] recent history” (Sarlo 238). According to Beatriz Sarlo:

The violent fragmentation of the objective world had repercussions in the symbolic world. Having to come to terms with repression, death, failure, and lost illusions, fiction introduced bewilderment by using two basic strategies. On the one hand, it rejected mimesis as a unique form of representation, and, on the other, it proposed a discursive fragmentation of both subjectivity and social reality. (240-1)

The authors are, essentially creating an affective experience of fragmentation for the readers.

Sarlo also proposes that the fragmented, coded style of writing used by authors during this period (1980 on) is not an attempt to avoid censorship; she argues that it is the intentional rejection of a realistic model of writing.

Although Sarlo does not mention it as a trait specific to literature from this period, she does recognize the aspect of intertextuality noted by Whitehead, who posits that, “Intertextuality can suggest the surfacing to consciousness of forgotten or repressed memories” (85). While many texts include reference to other texts, for Whitehead this aspect of intertextuality goes beyond the mere reference to an external source; the (new) text literally incorporates—embodies—or mirrors the text to which it refers. Texts like *Nadie, nada, nunca* (*Nobody, Nothing, Never*), and *En estado de memoria* (*In a State of Memory*) clearly depict this phenomena.

Nadie, nada, nunca (Juan José Saer, 1980) is a criminal fiction set in a small town on the Paraná River, where someone (nobody) is mysteriously shooting horses at night. The local newspapers downplay what is happening (nothing), and the novel ends without resolution (we’ll never know). Embedded in the storyline, the protagonist receives a book from his brother, living in exile in France. The title of the book is never mentioned in the novel; however, it is the

Philosophy in the Bedroom (*La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, 1795), by the Marquis de Sade.

According to Sarlo, “As in Sade’s philosophical novel, the reader who is disposed to work with the text can fit together all the pieces of the puzzle: the images of eroticism and death, the evil that culminates in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, and the concrete images of death—the horse killings—on the coast of the river” (242). From this perspective, readers can clearly see the parallel between the text they are reading, and the integrated text.

Similarly, *En estado de memoria* (Tununa Mercado, 1990), the author integrates Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, together with a commentary on it written by Jean Hyppolite, who also translated the original text from German into French. The first-person narrative voice recounts how she purchased the books in France, and while living in exile in Mexico, she and some friends decide to embark on the journey of reading them. For her, the task is at once, playful and taxing; at moments the readers felt “as naïve as we were unpredictably astute, thus, suddenly, with no competency for assimilating the text, we each came to believe that we understood everything” (112). The group never reads beyond page 50; Mercado’s readers can surmise that the discussions centered on ‘consciousness’ (structures of experience) and ‘knowing’. In an (ironic) parallel, the novel began in the waiting room of a psychiatric clinic; throughout the narrator goes on to relate her various ‘experiences’ with analysis, and her inability to speak/allow her unconscious to surface/integrate with the conscious. In the chapter entitled “Phenomenology,” the narrator talks about the short stories that came out of her during that same period, erotic in nature, “almost always they were simply narratives” (115). The erotic stories, which she says she wrote, “not because I was trying to write them; they planted themselves on paper and came together quite on their own, without my having to summon them” (115), symbolize her unconscious attempt to work through the trauma. Schank and Abelson discuss the

“ambivalent, neurotic storyteller” who, unable to relate a ‘forbidden’ story, will employ circumlocution to tell *a* story that is closely related, yet acceptable: for example, a woman with deep hostility for her mother may be unable to admit, “I hate my mother” but may say instead, “My mother hates me” or “My sister hates dogs.” The erotic, as we saw in the previous text, often closely related to violence and victimization, also represents the repressed unconscious, and the (lack of) integration of the traumatic reenactment into a narrative memory.

Just as intertextuality permeates fiction from this era, so does repetition. Whitehead states:

One of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can act at the levels of language, imagery or plot. Repetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression...Repetition is inherently ambivalent, suspended between trauma and catharsis. (86)

For readers, this aspect of repetition can either serve to highlight an important aspect of the plot, or it can create a sense of disequilibrium. In *Dos veces junio* (*Twice in June*), Martin Kohan begins the novel with the question, “¿A partir de qué edad se puede empesar [sic] a torturar a un niño?” (At what age can you commence [sic] torturing a child?). The notebook in which the message is written, and the question itself floats above the heads of the characters throughout the novel, surfacing from time to time, although, due to the fragmented style of narration, it is difficult at best for the reader to fully grasp the significance of the question until nearly the end of the novel. Until that point, the repetitive question simply serves as a confusing aside that, like a traumatic memory, can neither be integrated into the narrative, nor fully understood.

In a similar style, Saer uses repetition in his novel, *Nadie, nada, nunca*. In Saer’s text, the narrator repetitively gives the description of the patio in which a horse is being hidden for its protection. He points out the oxidated oil drums and batteries lying outside in the mud (*los*

tambores oxidados, las baterías, el barro). This serves the reader as a constant visual reminder of the surroundings, as well as of the poisonous excess of modernity, and the need to contain it. At the same time the seemingly random visual, like a traumatic flashback, also forces the reader to wonder, “Why is this here? Why does this keep happening?” The disconnect between the horse and the rubbish on the patio, where neither belong, the nearby river, symbolic of death, and the constant pervasive sense of danger create a sense of dis-ease for the reader.

The third aspect of trauma fiction that Whitehead discusses is a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice. We clearly see this in *Dos veces junio*, in which the story—if it can be called that—takes place in a 24 hour period (plus an epilogue). However, due to the fragmentation of time and space, and the slow manner in which the events are narrated (together with flashbacks and asides) it appears as though much more time has passed. With the text, the author demonstrates the effect of trauma by replicating the accompanying sense of dislocation. Trauma is characterized by the incapacity to follow a fixed narrative structure; the text represents the fragmentation that happens to individuals or to a society, as the result of experiencing systematic trauma.

Like Saer’s novel, Kohan seeks to demonstrate the affective aspect of collective trauma. As Beatriz Sarlo points out, “Strictly speaking, the set of fragments that constituted Argentina during those years of questioning and fear can hardly be called history. Is there really a history? Several novels reiterated this question, revealing the prevailing uncertainty about whether discourse could in fact order a reality whose underlying logic seemed to be secret and inaccessible” (239). While the narrator of the story, a soldier, does not experience the individual trauma which we will see in the following texts, he does, in fact represent a large element of Argentine society split off from reality, living in what Giorgio Agamben refers to as a “State of

Exception,” where the ruling government has suspended constitutional law and replaced it with its own laws of convenience. Like Argentine society as a whole, the narrator’s indifference towards the military’s perpetuation of crimes comes from a sense of self preservation and is an example of the fragmentary nature of collective trauma, where observers cannot afford to have opinions.

Indira Montoya categorizes *Dos veces junio* as a fugue—the polyphonic musical form; the fugue, like Kohan’s text does not have a linear structure. The novel, like the fugue, has various parts—or voices—that are independent of each other, but which overlap each other without losing their harmony; most importantly, together, the singular parts form a text more complete and profound than that of the individual voices.

The sections are very short, giving a choppy dimension to the story. Officially, *Dos veces junio* has a single narrator; however, from time to time, that narrative voice is fragmented, narrating events outside of the scope of his knowledge; other narrators slip in. A female prisoner periodically tells her side of story, yet, she is never actually introduced to the reader—in one section, the (unnamed) narrator, a military conscript is speaking; suddenly, like a phantom, a different voice begins talking, gives a glimpse of what is taking place in the jail, and then, the original narrator is back, picking up where he left off. Eventually, the two are brought together in the text, although they do not meet face to face. The conscript is in the jail, waiting to drive his superior home, when she reaches under the door and touches his boot. She talks to him, begging him to make a single phone call on her behalf, to tell someone where she is. He ignores her.

Gaps in the narrative also demonstrate fragmentation in the narrative voice. One of the main storylines is the abduction of a newborn by the doctor, for his sister who is childless. The actual narration is sparse: in narrating traumatic events, victims frequently skip over the most

important—most painful—information, and recount the less emotional details. The narrator never explains exactly what has happened; he speaks of an argument that he overhears regarding “a list” that the Doctor Mesiano intends to ignore,⁸ and as they leave the concentration camp, he offers help to the doctor who he “sees carrying something.” The narrator continues with a dialogue:

“No hace falta”, me dijo, “lo acomodo acá atrás”.
Lo escuché abrir y cerrar una de las puertas traseras, lo vi dar la vuelta para
sentarse otra vez de su lado.
“Eso sí”, me dijo, “no se te ocurra frenar de golpe” (153).
“Don’t bother,” he said, “I’ll put it here, in the back.”
I heard one of the back [car] doors open and close, I saw him turn around to sit
next to it.
“That’s it,” he told me, “don’t make any sudden stops.” (Translation my own.)

With this, we have the entire narrative of the sequestering of the baby. Later, in the epilogue, we see a four-year-old child, the nephew of the doctor, and we know that it is the same boy; the knowledge is not by explicit narration, but rather what Daniel Levitin calls *constructive memory*. The human brain has the ability to construct an understanding from isolated facts, based on the prototypes of already existing stories. With little information, the reader is able to extract “exactly what happened” from the narrative fragments. At the same time, the reader must have an adequate amount of background information to create a narrative from the fragments. For example, without an understanding of the child abductions/adoptions that took place during Argentina’s “Dirty War,” a reader could easily miss the significance of the sparse information given, and have no idea what happened.

While *Nadie, nada, nunca* and *Dos veces junio* are fiction based on a general reality, *Pasos bajo el agua* (*Steps Under Water*), written by Alicia Kozameh has been categorized as a book of fictionalized prison memoirs. Highly difficult to categorize, works in this genre have

⁸ Presumably the waiting list of military/police families wanting to illegally “adopt” children.

also been described as testimonial novels, and (auto)biographical novels. Authors begin with their own authentic experiences of trauma, and write them for a larger audience, admitting to making some stylistic changes. They also are honest enough to admit the plasticity of memory and the nearly invisible line between memory and fiction. Like works of ‘pure’ trauma fiction (trade fiction), like those just discussed, texts from this autobiographical genre also exhibit the same ‘key stylistic features’ to which Anne Whitehead refers: intertextuality, repetition and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice.

Perhaps better than any other text I analyze, *Steps Under Water* demonstrates the linguistic disorientation and fragmentation which took place in the clandestine prisons. In *Lexicon of Terror*, Marguerite Feitlowitz interviews multiple survivors; one, Mario Cesar Villani, a physicist who spent four years as a prisoner in five different camps says, “It was a completely insane situation. The torturers and victims were all living together [...] The guards were there all day. When they wanted a break, they’d come play *trucco* with the prisoners” (72).⁹ He continues, “It was extremely confusing, there were words I heard for the first time in the camps. Then there were others [...] familiar words that took on totally different meanings there. Those shifts were also extremely disorienting [...] Right after they disappeared me, I didn’t understand a lot of what was said to me. And then when I got out, people didn’t understand a lot of what I said to them. I realized I was still thinking—and talking in camp terms” (82). His wife, Rosita adds, “One of the first things I came to learn about Mario and other *ex-desaparecidos* was that they relate to words differently [...] At the beginning, being with these people could be very difficult. They communicated differently, minimally” (83). This minimalistic style of

⁹ *Truco* (Spanish for *Trucco*) is a card game, extremely popular throughout the Southern Cone, which relies on deception. The prisoners were only permitted to play card when a guard wished to do so. Prisoners remained shackled, cuffed, and blindfolded—the blindfolds pulled up so that the prisoners could see their cards, but never allowed to remove it entirely from their head.

communication shows up in Kozameh's text. For the uninitiated, it is extremely difficult to follow, as it omits any linguistic linkages normally used between ideas. It can best be described as a traumatized-stream-of-consciousness.¹⁰

In the opening lines of *Steps Under Water*, the third person narrator begins to show the oppositional nature of the text the reader is about to enter: Sara is running up the stairs to her parents' house; she looks out over the patio terrace "Everything is at once firm and slippery. It's there and then it vanishes" (1). She speaks to the elusive nature of both memory and reality. She begins to wonder about her mother's footsteps, wearing down the carpet "during those three and a half years" (2). At this point, the narrator appears omniscient, the narrative device employed here is known as Free Indirect Thought (FIT). As Michael Toolan explains, FIT "affords the reader the impression of encountering a character's ordered thoughts very much in that character's own words, and from that reflecting character's current perspective" (241). The device gives the reader insight into the thought processes of the protagonist; simultaneously, the narrative voice changes: "To know this would be enlightening. To ask, but to ask what. Why bother computing stupidities. *I get so sick of thinking about everything in terms of numbers. Besides, nothing can ever be answered unless you've been there. You have to see, and then you get the answer*" (2 emphasis added). The narrator no longer distances herself from the reader through the use of the third person; she tells us what she is thinking about—wondering what her parents think, what they do or do not believe. Then, she reminds the reader of the distance created between her and her parents by the experience that she has yet to name. "They don't want to recognize that vulnerability is a daily fact. And that it's not easy to neutralize it. Defend against it. But there's nothing to explain. What I have inside of me is all mine. And it takes me

¹⁰ For this text, as well as *La escuela* (*The Little School*), I use the English version; as with many writers who publish from exile, their works are much more available in English than in Spanish.

away to a solitude that I neither pursue nor resist” (3). The sentences are short and choppy, similar to her ability to process thoughts. As she contemplates her emotional isolation, the narrations slips back into the third person:

Just then she hears a mewing and her nerves crackle. She doesn't scream out: she can't.
A cat. I wonder where it is. What do I do now, where do I hide? In which corner?
She looks around, squinting her eyes. Why bother finding out. (3)

The narrator continues to slip back and forth between first and third person narrations. At the same time, she gives insights into her lingering experience of trauma: her physiological reaction to the noise of the cat mewing—she jumps, but in a reenactment of the trauma, she cannot scream. As Judith Herman explains, “When neither resistance nor escape is possible, the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized. Each component of the ordinary response to danger, having lost its utility, tends to persist in an altered and exaggerated state long after the actual danger is over” (cited in Brison 40). Under normal circumstances, a mewing cat does not cause a panic reaction; however, as the narrator continues thinking, allowing the reader into her thought processes, she reflects on her memories of cats, she says, “More and more I’m having fewer doubts about their existence. They used to be soft. I’m sure they still are” (4). Her doubt points to the elusive nature of memory and how trauma conflates reality with the imaginary, to the point that she questions what otherwise seems mundane.

She allows her thoughts to wander, and through free association we discover that her earliest memories of cats are connected to death and trauma: seeing a dead cat in the street, mouth wide open, followed by a piano lesson, where she was not allowed to play what she felt, but was forced to “shamefully” follow along with the notes on the page (5). For the child, the piano lesson forces her to repress the emotions she is incapable of processing on her own. The memories of all of the dead cats she has seen over the years come bubbling up, reinforcing her

terror, even as she attempts to take charge of her own thought processes. For the first time she gives her readers a glimpse of the unnamable: “Prison does not give you time to think about cats; nor is there room to think about circuses or any other kind of escape” (7). Between the fragments that she includes, the access the readers have to her free indirect thoughts, and the gaps that she leaves, we realize that she has just returned to her parents’ house after her release from prison; these first few pages represent her attempt to make sense of the everyday life from which she has been isolated, and by which she is completely overwhelmed—another aspect of trauma.

Of all the chapters in the text, the one that best demonstrates the fragmentary nature of trauma is titled, “Letter to Aubervilliers” it is written “For Juliana, who is Estela.” In the preface, Kozameh states that in her book, “The substance of the story, of every episode, is real; it happened [...] I have, however, replaced names” (xvi). It is not uncommon for authors of these types of works to change names, in order to protect fellow *compañeros*; however, the placement of the real and fictitious names together in this text causes the reader to question the logic.

In Kozameh’s text, the letter is written from exile in Santa Barbara (California) to a friend, also living in exile in France, “The letters fly” announces the epigraph, presumably indicating that the two correspond frequently. They also fly literally, as they are transported across the ocean. Giving her words “wings” permits the narrative voice to express herself. The protagonist writes:

We are moving along fluidly through the first days of 1984. And also quickly. Others are able to detach themselves from accumulation, and from the years. I thought about sorting through those events always willing to linger behind. This isn’t by accident. Don’t you go believing in accidents. I’m trying to stick myself at the vanishing point of every possible vision in order to begin a story whose axis would be our transfer from the basement in Rosario to Villa Devoto. Even if I turn myself inside out like a glove trying to get over all of this. (90-1)

In this section, we see several elements of trauma: we experience the same fluid and rapid movement of time to which the narrator refers; her short, rapid thoughts jump from one to another. The narrator describes the fragmentation of memories, as she unsuccessfully attempts to find a point of departure for her narrative, and her deep desire to work through the trauma. Also common to trauma victims is the sense of isolation: “Others are able to detach; I’m still stuck in the past.”

The irony of the year also warrants mention: 1984, both Orwell’s fictitious setting, in which the state watches over every move, monitoring the actions and thoughts of its population, which was in fact her reality—the one she is simultaneously trying to confront and avoid—and the year the summer Olympics took place in Los Angeles, just a few hundred miles away from where she is living. The summer Olympics of 1968 in Mexico, and 1972 in Germany, were both sites of massive, politically-based, traumatic violence; Argentina hosted the World Cup in 1978, which is also deeply embedded in the Argentine psyche as being connected to the military *junta*. As traumas are interconnected, all of this would trigger a tremendous amount of anxiety for the protagonist, which shows up in her writing.

While individual fragments in the text can easily be analyzed for meaning, when jumbled together, page after page, the end result is to finish reading the letter without the ability to remember anything that was read: memory relies on structured meaning. Because the writer has not yet given structure to her own chaotic memories, she cannot impose structure on her writing, especially, since she knows that the recipient—who experienced the same trauma—will understand her better than anyone else.

Repetition shows up in this text, not so much in the narrative, but in the actual narration: the narrator writes, “I don’t mean to be redundant, but I envy you. A mother like Adelina! One

lives apologizing. Fear of being repetitive. Ask the *milicos* if they cared about repeating methods, plagiarizing them, wearing them out. Okay then; don't even bother. Don't ask them a thing" (92). Her initial fear of being repetitive may be a comment on her own inability to express herself, as much as it is a comment on the repetitive nature of invading traumatic flashbacks. "Traumatic memory is inflexible and replays the past in a mode of exact repetition, while narrative memory is capable of improvising on the past so that the account of an event varies from telling to telling" (Whitehead 87). Ironically, it is through the telling of the traumatic event that Sara will be able to integrate the solidified fragment into a processed, narrative memory.

The issue of memory repeats as a leitmotif throughout the novel, specifically in the letter from her friend in Aubervilliers, in which her friend, Juliana says, "I repeat: whatever comes from you is received with all my love, but wouldn't it be better even for a person of your complexity, to try to forget a little? I know, no one forgets anything. I know" (131). Juliana seems to represent the middle-of-the-road: she wishes that Sara wouldn't stir up the memories as much as she does, but, when a third *compañera* visits her in France, she admits that "Mariela avoided talking about prison the whole time [...] she almost lets it be known explicitly that the subject really gets to her. Which hurts" (134). For Juliana, Sara dwells too much on the past, but Mariela's complete avoidance violates a basic need that her experience be acknowledged. These three women display how much storytelling (narration) is a social act.

According to Mieke Bal, "narrative memory fundamentally serves a social function: it comes about in a cultural context whose frame evokes and enables memory"; he goes on to say that, "narrative memory offers some form of feedback that ratifies the memory" (x). Although the memories are traumatic, the social event of sharing them with each other allows the women to integrate the traumatizing events. According to Schank and Abelson, "When we have no

listener for a story, we tend to bury it;" furthermore, "certain incoherencies are allowed to exist" in stories that remain untold (45). Mariela represents that part of Argentine society that wishes to avoid the past; Sara is stuck in a solitary "traumatic reenactment;" in Bal's words, she "lacks the narrative mastery over [the traumatic event] that turns her into a proper subject" (x) she admits that there are "great, unbridgeable gaps" in her memory (97), and that she has been "making a serious effort to remember certain episodes. But no such luck" (96). She once asks Juliana to write, "answering my questions about your torture" (91). Juliana represents those who are managing to integrate the traumatic (non) memory into a narrative memory. Although she doesn't understand Sara's insistent inquiries, she does respond with the requested narratives, and she is hurt by those who prefer to ignore the whole experience. However, Juliana still demonstrates symptoms of trauma. As she recounts the conversation with Mariela, she says, "I don't know at what point in the conversation, I was hit with the feeling that I was being invaded by the screams of our *compañeras* in the hole, calling out for water. Or asking to go to the bathroom. I don't know in what way you remember that echo, that sound. It's still so vivid to me" (134). Like Sara, Juliana experiences both the repetitive intrusion of the traumatic event(s) (which were also repetitive in nature), as well as the belief that her experience was somehow different—perhaps worse—more vivid than that of Sara. This experience is common among survivors.

According to Ghislaine Boulanger, there exists a marked difference between the effects of trauma experienced during childhood, and trauma experienced by adults: children dissociate and create different (split off) states of self which are unavailable to the conscious mind; however, once the ego, or perception of self, has been fully formed, this is no longer a possibility: "In adult onset trauma, while details of the trauma may be discounted or distorted,

stripped of their affective charge and their significance denied, the sense of a collapsed self, a mortal self first encountered during the catastrophe, permeates every aspect of the adult trauma survivor's conscious and unconscious life" (Boulanger "Collapse" 50-1). As adults, we have an observant self which serves as a witness to the inconceivable; dissociation in adults "de-forms an adults self-perception" (Boulanger *Understanding* 13). Captors relied on this destroyed sense of self to control their victims; victims struggled to maintain their sense of self.

In January of 1977, at the age of 21, Alicia Partnoy was abducted from her home; simultaneously, her husband was being detained at his place of work. Their 18-month-old daughter, Ruth was (miraculously) left with neighbors, who were able to contact Alicia's parents, with whom Ruth stayed for the next three years. Blindfolded during her incarceration and tortured, unlike so many others, Alicia Partnoy was freed after a period of more than three years, and forced to leave the country; the book, *La escuelita (The Little School)*,¹¹ documents her experience of the first three and a half months: the time she spent in the secret concentration camp named "The Little School."

In the very first vignette, "The One-Flower Slippers," the omniscient third person narrator tells about the day that Alicia was taken, and her arrival at "The Little School." The narrator says that "The following morning someone tapped her on the shoulder and made her stand up" (26). She is taken through a corridor, blindfolded, but able to see the floor and "blood on the tiles next to a spot of sky blue. They made her walk on the bloodstains; she tried not to avoid them so they would not notice that she could see" (27). As she walks, she realizes that the spot of sky blue color was very familiar, like her husband's pants. As she realizes that it was her husband "lying on the hall floor, wounded. Her heart shrank a little more until it was hard as a

¹¹ The title of Partnoy's book, as well as the name of the secret concentration camp in Argentina where she was held for part of her imprisonment.

stone” [...] “She stepped onto the cement floor of the ‘machine’ room and saw the side of the metal framed bed like those used for torture” (27). This concludes the paragraph. The next one begins with, “She does not remember exactly the day it all happened” (27), leading the reader to wonder to which “it” she refers: the day she was taken? Recognizing her husband? The torture session? The narrator continues, “In any event, she already knew by then something about the pace of life at the little school” (27). This indicates that it is not the morning after her arrival, but rather that the narrator is yet to tell us what “it” is that she does not exactly remember; she continues by telling the tale of how she chooses to share in a stolen whisper, the ridiculousness of her slipper with Vasca, whose bed was next to hers: “that one-flowered slipper amid the dirt and fear, the screams and the torture, that flower so plastic, so unbelievable, so ridiculous, was like a stage prop, almost obscene, absurd, a joke” (28). It is that moment of shared mirth that the narrator remembers (or not) as her introduction to the Little School.

In the vignette, “My Names,” Alicia tells of how, since the day she was arrested, she has not heard her full name; the guards threatened to only refer to the prisoners by number.¹² One day, as she is returning from showering—her third shower in two months—her body thin from malnourishment, one of the guards began to sing a folk tune about Death. The narrator comments, “Since that moment, they have called me Death. Maybe that is why every day, when I wake up, I say to myself that I, Alicia Partnoy, am still alive” (43). By reminding herself on a daily basis who she is, and that she is alive, Alicia is creating an internal witness to her trauma. Victims of trauma often report feelings of isolation; isolation is frequently a strong element of torture. Alicia and her fellow companions were blindfolded and forbidden to make any verbal or physical contact with each other. This isolation precluded them from fact-checking with each

¹² While Alicia was in the Little School, this was merely a threat; in other camps, it was a reality (See Timmerman, and Kozameh).

other: “yes, this is real.” According to Dori Laub, in order for a victim to process the incomprehensible, there must be a witness, “an independent frame of reference through which the event could be observed” (Laub 81); Alicia had to create her own, internal witness in order to maintain her identity—her sense of self and of humanity—in order to survive, and later to testify—to give her narrative.

Paul Ricoeur proposes that we remember events as they happen, based upon past experiences. “Expectation is thus the analogue to memory” (11); however, when the expectation (based upon past experience), radically differs from the present perception (as is the case with severe trauma), the ability to narrate (remember) is seriously impeded; even the most basic memories become irretrievable.

In the vignette titled, “A Puzzle,” the first-person narrator begins, “For a while now I’ve been trying to recall how Ruth’s face looks. I can remember her big eyes, her almost non-existent little nose, the shape of her mouth. I recall the texture of her hair, the warmth of her skin. When I try to put it all together, something goes wrong”; finally, the narrator divulges Ruth’s identity to the reader: “I just can’t remember my daughter’s face” (77). Alicia has been at the Little School for two months, and, try as she may, she cannot remember her daughter’s face. Her inability to remember what her daughter looks like has significance far beyond the simple retrieval of information; it touches on her core identity—that of a mother. While she struggles on a daily basis to remember who she is—her name—something captured in language, she is losing another part of herself, her identity as a mother. The fractured recollection of her daughter’s face mirrors the fracturing nature of trauma on the psyche.

Clothing

Although not mentioned by Whitehead, also common among trauma fiction that I analyze, is an abundance of descriptions of clothing. In her review of *Steps Under Water*, Alicia Partnoy (author of *The Little School*), mentions how the “brief but striking images of feet, shoes and walking link the chapters in the novel” (Solidarity 26); she points out how, in one chapter, the recently freed protagonist “searches for words” to explain to a friend how she was able to smuggle her poems out of the prison by hiding them in the straps of her summer sandals when her parents came to exchange her clothing. This leitmotiv of clothing runs through multiple works from this period; in multiple literary texts, items of clothing serve primarily as linking objects for the loved ones of the *desaparecidos*. As Anita Sacks explains, linking objects “are mementos of the deceased (e.g., a photograph, a piece of clothing, or a personal object of some meaning) that the bereaved might carry with them. What is unconsciously linked to the memento is the self-object relationship” (225-6). Whether the loss is temporary or permanent, these linking objects provide a psychic connection between the families and the missing. Two of the most commonly utilized linking objects in our culture are the photograph, and clothing. These female narrators focus specifically on shoes and coats in an attempt to include a (self)-protecting, nurturing, maternal image in the midst of an otherwise dehumanizing environment.

Clothing is essentially, a second skin. First and foremost, clothing is about the body—it serves to protect, to hide, or to enhance the body. As Elaine Scarry posits, just as “the woven gauze of a bandage is placed over an open wound, it is immediately apparent that its delicate fibers mime and substitute for the missing skin” [...] so clothing, “will continue to duplicate and magnify the protective work of the skin” (281-2); as it protectively clings to the contours of our body, we become one with our clothing; it becomes an element of our identity. Anthropologists

Jane Schneider and Annette Weiner point out that cloth covers or clothes more than just the body. “Yet its intimate association with the body is especially salient, putting it in a metonymic relationship to the self. Signifying rank, status, sexuality, power, ideals, it individuates the person” (178). Nobel Prize laureate Pablo Neruda goes so far as to propose that our clothing serves to express the deepest essence of who we are. In “Ode to Clothing” he writes, “In the wind / You ripple and rustle /As if you were my soul.”

Wearing clothing is a tactile, sensorial experience; we feel the texture, the cut, the weight of the materials and the design, even if—as Neruda reminds us, once it embraces us, we forget about it, because we are one with our clothing. According to Carole Scott:

Clothes mark the point at which the inner and outer vision meet, the point at which the physical self and the world touch. Clothing is the outer expression of an inner identity, an imaginative vision transformed into tangible form for others (and ourselves) to see. Dress enables people to identify themselves—socially, sexually, morally, aesthetically—to be recognized or to be misrecognized. (151)

Even in a mass-production society, clothes serve as powerful symbols with which individuals can be identified—in life, or in death.

Although many of the missing in Argentina were in their 20’s with husbands, wives, and young children of their own, it was predominantly their parents—their mothers—who actively sought to discover their whereabouts.¹³ In the midst of their isolation and fear, as they went to multiple police stations, hospitals, and morgues, they began to recognize others in the same places, overhear similar conversations, and see other hands tightly gripping photographs in the same manner that they were. The mothers of the missing began to talk to each other, eventually forming into a protest group, *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*,¹⁴ in which they marched in a circle

¹³ In Chile, the disappeared were predominantly male, as the legal system barely recognized the existence of women; in Argentina, many couples were disappeared simultaneously, leaving it to their parents to search for them and care for their young children.

¹⁴ www.madres.org/

around the main plaza in front of the Presidential Palace, demanding to know the whereabouts of their disappeared children, whose enlarged photographs they displayed on the posters they carried. These women not only carried the images of their children on posters, they literally wore them on their bodies; the photograph serves as an outer layer of clothing, a physical connection to the lost object, identifying the bearer of the photo-board as a protesting/protecting mother.

Additionally, the mothers agreed to use an item of clothing to identify themselves visually, so that they would stand out from passersby: a white scarf on the head, which originally, was not a scarf at all, but rather a cloth diaper, symbolizing their role as a mother, and their connection to the missing object. Later, some embroidered the names of the missing on their kerchiefs, as a way of honoring the lost object. It is interesting to note that these mothers chose to wear diapers, even though most of their children were adults, with children of their own; in other words, the *Madres* were not young mothers; the wearing of the diaper is symbolic; a way of “maintaining associations with a particular identity linked to a time, place, or person” (Banim and Guy 206); it allows the mothers to “maintain a connection with former, important aspects of themselves and their lives” (207). In a time when they suddenly felt helpless to fulfill their role as mothers—the protectorates of their families—they needed to feel connected to those days when nurturing was at its strongest, when their children relied on them completely in order to survive, and when mother and infant were virtually inseparable—another time and place when they literally “wore” their children on their bodies.

In the same way that the *Madres* protested in the Plaza, writers protested in print. First published in Argentina in 1975, Luisa Valenzuela wrote an extremely short story entitled “The Best Shod,” in which the author makes a bold criticism of a political situation that would only get worse. In it, the narrator, a beggar in Buenos Aires, tells of how easy it is to find good shoes.

Corpses are rampant, and while the clothing is unusable “ordinarily it has bullet holes, bloodstains, or is torn apart, or an electric cattle prod has left burns that are ugly and difficult to hide,” the shoes are generally in good condition “they haven’t had much wear, because their owners haven’t been allowed to get very far in life” (13). There is such an abundance of shoes that the beggars have set up an exchange; “sometimes the families of the dead people, who’ve heard of us heaven knows how, ask us to sell them the dead man’s shoes if we have them. The shoes are the only thing that they can bury, poor things, because naturally the authorities would never let them have the body” (13). The narrator also points out complicity: “The police are well aware that, thanks to us, this city can boast of being the one with the best-shod beggars in the world” (14). Written before the worst period of military oppression, which began in 1976, Valenzuela eschews the allegorical representation commonly used to depict political oppression, and focuses instead on an inanimate object that takes on highly personal features: a family member can identify the absent body by a pair of shoes. Also written prior to the change in narrative styles to which Sarlo refers, the text is linear in nature, straight forward, and direct. The visual image she creates of a relatively insignificant item of clothing takes on an almost unnatural level of importance.

While psychoanalysis has paid scant attention to clothing—outside the realm of the fetish—it has been suggested that “that clothes owe their origin and function to the castration complex.” Furthermore, according to J.C. Flügel, “it is the fear of the female body that leads men to insist that women be clothed” (“Review” 588); he suggests that “it would appear that the object most frequently symbolized by clothes is the phallus” (“Clothes” 205); he cites items such as hats, ties, and stiff collars. Other items, such as shoes can sometimes be feminine, and sometimes masculine (especially with its connection to the aforementioned fetish).

However shoes and coats fit into a special category of clothing: protective outerwear. These types of clothing protect us from the elements of nature; they nurture and make us feel safe. He surmises that:

we may expect that clothes, which protect us against cold, may be regarded by the unconscious as an equivalent of the protecting womb; we should expect, that is, that clothes may sometimes serve as womb-symbols. [...] Clothing and houses are both protections to the body, though situated at different distances from it. Our outdoor wraps are indeed a definite substitute for the house, when we leave its protecting shelter. ("Clothes" 212-3)

Returning to Valenzuela's story, while the clothing could not protect its owners from the torture and eventual death, the shoes—like a mother's love—remain intact; for the narrator, this element is essential for the survival of the nation. Striking is the realization that, even in a period of mass production, a single piece of clothing could be recognized by the family members—predominantly the mothers—and accurately serve as existential proof of life—and loss. Additionally, items of clothing serve not only to represent an individual; they serve as a substitute for the missing body; they are the missing loved one.

In a similar fashion, Alicia Partnoy begins her prison memoir, *The Little School* with shoes: "That day, at noon, she was wearing her husband's slippers; it was hot [...]. It felt nice to be wearing a loose house dress and his slippers after having slept so many nights with her shoes on, waiting for them" (25). From this sparse description, the reader gathers that she is comfortable and relaxed: a loose (feminine) house dress and oversized slippers that make a flip-flop sound as she walks down the corridor to open the door; a stark contrast to the exhausting nights when she falls asleep prepared for the worst.

But they come when she is not prepared; in her escape attempt, she loses both slippers; she is completely unprotected. Eventually, at the concentration camp, she is given another pair of slippers to wear. She is blindfolded 24/7, but manages to see glimpses through a tiny peep hole.

She sees that only one of the slippers has a flower on it “that one-flowered slipper amid the dirt and fear, the screams and the torture, that flower so plastic, so unbelievable, so ridiculous, was like a stage prop, almost obscene, absurd, a joke” (28). She wears the slipper for the entirety of the time she is at the Little School. The slipper, which figures prominently in the mind/memory of the narrator (as well as the reader), plays a significant role: it serves as a witness: it validates the narrator’s story, providing a tangible element of proof: proof of her existence; proof of her near extinction. Because of the narrator’s limited vision, the images that she does see are magnified, both in her own mind, and in the memory of the reader; consequently, that slipper, which provides only minimal protection, becomes a strong focal point. It mirrors the narrator herself, who attempts to provide an element of protection for her cellmates on various occasions, running interference for Benja by distracting the tormenting guard, and requesting to share her “leftover” bread with another who asks the guard for more (47). Like the slippers, which protect her from stepping on the tile floor “covered with blood stains” (27), she provides as much protection as is humanly possible in the midst of the chaos and pain. However, clothing does not always provide a sense of protection; it can produce other effects.

In *Steps Under Water*, Alicia Kozameh describes her emotional connection to clothing and clothing-as-identity in the chapter entitled, “Sara, What Does a Jacket Mean to You?” In it, a friend has asked to borrow a coat from the narrator; she simply cannot bring herself to lend it out—not only because that friend habitually doesn’t return borrowed goods; rather, because of a post-traumatic response to the symbolic meaning of the overcoat.

On the day that she is being arrested, she sits on the floor of her apartment as the soldiers ransack her house. One of them puts on her husband’s favorite jacket. She is certain that she and her husband have been under surveillance for some time, and the abduction of the jacket is

intentional and symbolic. She explains that Hugo loved that jacket “But when that asshole put it on, when that slimy sludge oozing from the cracks of the world decided to make contact with Hugo’s jacket, with its warmth, with its black color and the multicolored cuffs, the story changed like you could have changed the date of a party. Just like that. And don’t think it didn’t hurt to restructure my feelings” (78).

What we see in this passage is both the immediate reaction to the circumstances, and a self-reflective observation of the narrator’s psychic response. This psychical change to which she refers is a case of the “present experience restructuring past experience and giving it a meaning it did not have previously, and which is not a mere additional element” (Tutté 916). Hugo’s love for the jacket symbolizes his love for her as well; in an instant, that is destroyed. Her affective reaction to the jacket is immediate and long-lasting; what previously brought her comfort is now vile and repulsive. The soldiers tell her that they have already killed Hugo.

Even under normal circumstances, linking objects can provide comfort; however, they can also create a negative affect:

Looking at them stirs up pain as well as a vague sense of fear. Pain is caused by the physical object's reminding one of the original loss. Fear results from the mechanism of projective identification, which endows the physical object with menacing and accusatory qualities. In other words, when one looks at the toaster of an ambivalently regarded dead grandmother, the toaster also looks at one and brutally unmasks the hostility one had towards her. (Akhtar 18-9)

The narrator finds herself in a double-bind: the jacket already confronts her and forces her on an unconscious level to assess her relationship to Hugo who is allegedly dead and her anger at his unwillingness to acknowledge her fears when, “confronted by my intuition, my certainty that we were going to be arrested—the one always skipping out the door, always on the move—told me I should stop my crazy delusions and get out of bed” (87). Despite her warnings, she sits on the

floor, alone, while their home is ravaged, and his beloved jacket—their relationship—appropriated. Meanwhile, he is being arrested at his work.

Three years later, as she is released from prison (where Hugo remains), still under surveillance, she narrates how the same officer showed up, wearing the heavy jacket in the summer, “just so I’d see him. And my parents don’t believe that, they don’t understand what it means” (3). Once again, the narrator feels her complete isolation—those who should protect her attempt to dissuade her intuition. However, the officer’s action touches on the most primitive of uses of clothing: “The trophy is often used as a sign of the power (ultimately the phallic power) of its wearer or possessor; it is as if the trophy provided the owner with a new and finer phallus. On the other hand, the removal of the trophy from the victim is often a symbolic process of castration” (Flügel *Psychology* 30). The officer takes the jacket—the favorite jacket, the one most imbued with the essence of its owner—as a symbolic “spoil of war” (*botín de guerra*);¹⁵ for this reason, he takes the coat—the most visible article of clothing; a shirt or tie could be covered up by a sweater or coat, so he takes the jacket—proof of his absolute omnipotence over both Hugo and Alicia; they are powerless, and no one can protect them.

Closely related to the wearing of clothing as a trophy is the function of using clothing to terrorize, which the officer also does. “Decorations consisting of the parts of fallen enemies easily becomes gruesome or awe-inspiring [... the significance is] the wish to strike terror into the hearts of enemies or other persons whom it is desired to impress or alarm” (Flügel *Psychology* 30). The protagonist continues to see the terrorizing officer sporadically around town, always wearing Hugo’s jacket—a constant reminder of her impotence and their omnipotence.

¹⁵ “Spoils of War.” Although officially, officers were prohibited from doing so, it was a common occurrence for them to take whatever items they wanted from residences and victims, including furniture, electronics, jewelry, and even children.

In this text, we see a traumatic rupture; the item of clothing is still psychically linked to the missing object (Hugo); simultaneously, it is perversely linked to the source of the loss, and is a continuous source of (re)traumatization. Because the jacket still serves as a linking object—even with her partial restructuring, she cannot completely divest it of its original significance—it serves as a continual reminder of multiple losses; it also is a form of repetitive torture.

Similarly, Alicia Partnoy experiences a traumatic reaction to an item of clothing. Days after her arrival, she is being led to the latrine; she peeks down at the tile floor:

Someone had re-tied her blindfold during the night. The peep hole was smaller but still big enough for her to be able to see the floor: blood on the tiles next to a spot of sky blue [...] While they opened the iron grate into the corridor, she thought for a minute of the sky blue spot. She could have sworn that it was a very familiar color, like the sky blue color of her own husband's pants. It was the same sky blue of his pants; it *was* him, lying on the hall floor, wounded. (26-7)

Initially, what we see is the ability to identify a family member by a single article of clothing—or rather, a mere glimpse; until this moment, the whereabouts of her husband are unknown to Alicia. Her reaction is a combination of fear and self-preservation.

Recognizing her husband lying on the floor, surrounded by blood constitutes a threat. According to Allan Schore, even in infancy, our psychobiological response to trauma is comprised of two separate response patterns, hyperarousal and dissociation:

In the initial stage of threat, an alarm reaction is initiated, in which the sympathetic component of the ANS¹⁶ is suddenly and significantly activated, resulting in increased heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration. [...] But a second later-forming, longer-lasting traumatic reaction is seen in dissociation, in which the child disengages from stimuli in the external world and attends to an “internal” world. The child's dissociation in the midst of terror involves numbing, avoidance, compliance, and restricted affect. (450-1)

These primitive responses do not change in adulthood. The narrator recalls, “Her heart shrank a little more until it was hard as a stone. ‘We must be tough.’ she thought, ‘otherwise they will rip

¹⁶ “The autonomic nervous system (ANS), which regulates the functions of every organ in the body” (Schore, 446).

us to shreds” (27). Alicia’s initial response is physiological; she then turns inward in an attempt to protect herself, and relying on her strong sense of self, recognizes the element of control she still has: she is still in charge of her thoughts. While the clothing in this moment does not serve as a true linking object, it still serves an important psychological function, as it helps to strengthen her resolve to maintain control over her self-image and sense of identity.

The narrator also shares another event in which the function of an item of clothing provides a similar psychological function. In the *Little School*, several prisoners were held in the same small cell, but were prohibited from speaking to each other. They only knew of each other’s existence by small gaps in their blindfolds, or by voice recognition as they called out to the guards to request permission to use the bathroom, or to request that their blindfolds be tightened (failure to do so would result in a severe beating). As many of the political prisoners had worked together prior to their abductions, they could easily recognize each others’ voices.

In a vignette entitled, “The Denim Jacket,” the narrator tells about the comfort and protection she felt from a single article of clothing. She was “trembling out of rage and impotence” because they had taken away four of her *compañeros*—she was certain they were to be killed. Shortly afterwards, Alicia requested an extra blanket from the guard, and they brought her a jacket; it belonged to Vasca, who had been taken away. “I immediately recognized it. I put it on and breathed deeply” (109). She states, “It was like snuggling in my mother’s arms when I was a little girl. This was the first time I felt safe since the military arrested me” (109). Because of the affect she experiences as a result of wearing the jacket, the narrator deems it to be magical. She thinks of the times she peeked out from under to blindfold to see and whisper to the original owner, her friend Vasca. Even though Vasca is now presumably dead, she still feels empowered wearing her jacket. Later, the narrator is caught whispering to a fellow prisoner “[...] the guard

came and started to beat me with the rubber stick. Then, the magic power of the denim jacket came true: the blows almost didn't hurt. It was not the jacket's thick fabric, but Vasca's courage that protected me" (112). The jacket provides her with a momentary respite from the trauma of her imprisonment.

As Sandra Walker explains, "the traumatic state is one characterized by helplessness that can be brief, transitory, or complete and long lasting. In the traumatic state, victims may vacillate between feelings of traumatic intrusion and psychic numbing. [...] For the trauma victim, the external world may be experienced as filled with attacking objects, objects that fail to protect, and objects that abandon" (671). In this case, the jacket does the exact opposite: it serves as a linking object between her and Vasca, whom she believes to be dead, and it protects the narrator psychically: the connection she feels with the jacket/owner provides her with the same sense of maternal protection that she felt as a child. It is in this vignette, more than any other, that we recognize the similarity between the linking object, and the transitional object of childhood; in fact, Vasca's jacket seems to function more as a transitional than linking object.

The linking object connects the mourner with the lost object; while it provides a psychic connection, it also serves as a reminder of the painful loss. On the other hand, a transitional object serves as a substitute for the mother. Winnicott first introduced the concept of a "transitional object" in 1953; he stated that these objects are chosen by the infant within the first year of life, and include the following (of seven) characteristics:

1. The infant assumes rights over the object, and we agree to this assumption ... 2. The object is affectionately cuddled as well as excitedly loved and mutilated. 3. It must never change, unless changed by the infant. 4. It must survive instinctual loving, and also hating ... 5. Yet it must seem to the infant to give warmth, or to move, or to have texture, or to do something that seems to show it has vitality or reality of its own. (cited in Akhtar, 4)

Not only does Alicia remark on the similar qualities of her linking object to that of a transitional object, she herself makes the affective connection to her own childhood, and being snuggled by her mother. Even in the absence of its owner (Vasca/her mother), she still feels connected and protected by the love imbued in the coat. The narrator does not acknowledge the emotional reaction to the loss, which suggests that the overwhelming nature of the trauma put her in a regressed state; her need to mourn the loss of her friend is superseded by her need for nurturing and protection. Also important to notice, it is with this sense of protection that the narrator is able to slip from the traumatized third-person narrator, to the first-person: in this moment, she feels empowered and is able to narrate her own life.

It is not sheer coincidence that each of the writers who focus on clothing are female;¹⁷ it is indicative of something deeper. Each of these writers demonstrates a strong emotional connection between the narrative voice and various items of clothing, and specifically to protective outer garments.

Our relationship with clothing, fundamental as it may seem, cannot truly be explained; anthropologists aren't even certain as to the reason that humans began wearing clothes. The *modesty* theory proposes that humans began to wear clothing to cover their bodies out of shame; the *immodesty* theory suggests the opposite: clothing was worn to attract attention to certain—reproductive—body parts. The *protection* theory posits that man began to wear clothing as protection from beats, insects, other humans, or perhaps even from spiritual forces. Finally we have the theory of *esthetic expression*—also known as the decorative or ornamental theory; supporters of this theory point out that, while not every culture has dress, “there is no tribe that

¹⁷ The last text in which I analyze the psychological function of clothing is Tununa Mercado's *In a State of Memory*, in it, the narrator has what she calls “an ambiguous relationship to clothing” to which she never received an explanation in any of the “bogus therapies in which [she] was involved” (35). I have dedicated an entire chapter to the analysis of her text, in which I also discuss this element of clothing.

does not have ornamentation of some manner” (Ryan 42), be it clothing or jewelry that is worn, or permanent adornment to the body, in the form of tattoos, piercings, or other mutilation. Included in this theory is the idea that hunters first wore the skins of their prey as trophies, thereby gaining prestige among the tribe members. Essentially, we have no idea why humans began asking each other, “Does this work? Or no?” but ever since they did, the attachment to that outer layer has continued to strengthen, albeit predominantly on an unconscious level.

Our attachment to cloth begins at birth: we exit the warm, liquid womb, and are immediately cleaned and wrapped in cloth, preferably, a soft, malleable one. Not only is our connection to cloth tactile, in societies that are infatuated with gender distinctions, the color of these cloths signifies gender—newborns receive instant gender identification markers through blankets and head coverings. On a deeply unconscious level, that act of being wrapped up in soft, clean blankets, or being clothed harkens back to that initial mother-child relationship. It is no surprise then, that more often than not, children chose a blanket or item of cloth—clothing or stuffed animals—as transitional objects.

It has been suggested that the relationship between women and clothing begins during infancy: generally, it is our mother who clothes us, and who makes our wardrobe choices for us until we are old enough to do so for ourselves (that age is predominantly determined by the mother). “Our clothes are a bit like the mothers of our babyhood. Our mothers choose our clothes, put them on us when we're little, and in a way they remain associated with her” (McDougall 390). Furthermore, “Protective functions of clothes are noted by Flügel in that a mother will always suggest to her child that he or she should wear more, but rarely less” (Richards 346). From the time we are young, through adolescence it is often our mothers who

take us shopping for new clothes; we must try on various items and show them to her in order to gain her approval (of the clothing, of course).

As children grow older, however, sons shopping with their mothers for clothing becomes less frequent and more functional than it does for daughters, who continue to shop with their mothers, sometimes even into adulthood. As Arlene Kramer Richards states, “Because shopping for clothes is such a female occupation in our culture, girls experience shopping with mother as sharing a closeness and acceptable erotic experience” (346). In a society that often derides women (other than models) for “flaunting” their bodies, shopping together provides women with an audience and a safe space to bring attention to their bodies. “Clothing has an importance for women which goes beyond the meaning it has for most men. As decoration for the body, it calls attention to the features and proportions considered sexually attractive” (Richards 346). This explanation is, of course, culturally bound. Richards also discusses another element to consider: for women, sexuality is a “whole body” experience. She provides an anecdote of:

a little girl who heard a song for children intended to teach them about sexual difference. The song says that ‘Boys are fancy on the outside; girls are fancy on the inside’. The little girl was indignant. ‘No’, she said, ‘That’s not true. When I get dressed up, I’m fancy all over’. To the male listener, this may sound like compensation for or defensiveness about penis envy. To this female listener, it sounds like an expression of whole body narcissism and pleasure. From the little girl’s point of view, her whole body is a source of pleasure and an expression of beauty. By adorning herself, she is expressing her satisfaction with her body, calling attention to it, renewing it by calling attention to different aspects of it. Her erotic pleasure culminates in a shudder of the entire body. (340)

Richards also suggests that “penis envy” is simply a projection of what a man assumes he would feel if he were without that single source of bodily pleasure; however this is not a woman’s experience, because there is no single source: sexual pleasure is felt throughout her entire body.

Similarly, loss, bereavement, grief, and mourning are all experiences felt through the entire body. Just as transitional objects provide infants with bodily comfort, so do linking objects

to those who have experienced loss. Clothing offers visual, tactile, and (for a time) olfactory stimuli; consequently, it provides a psychic connection to the wearer. Each of these writers has demonstrated an important, psychic connection between the living and the dead through items of clothing, and the deep connection between our sense of identity and our clothing. We use clothing to protect us, not only from the elements, but also on a psychic level, from pain, from loss, from the unexpected, and from the inevitable. For each of these authors, outerwear provided more than protection from the elements; it provided an essential element missing from the frightening, dehumanizing environment in which they found themselves: nurturing. The clothing in their texts is the thread that connects family members with loved ones, wherever they may be. And yet, none of the examples given by these narrators deal with mis-recognition, only of recognition. Perhaps because it is of an exclusively visual nature clothing becomes easy to remember in situations of trauma. Additionally, items of clothing serve not only to represent an individual; they serve as a substitute for the missing body; they are the missing loved one. And yet, the visual aspect is too often overlooked in the representation of trauma.

Paintings

Seven years after her release and exile, Alicia Partnoy published her prison memoir, *The Little School*. The illustrations in it were done by her mother, Raquel, who discusses how it fractured the entire family:

As a mother of a “disappeared” child I experienced the horror of seeing how my family was gradually destroyed. From the day my daughter and her husband were kidnapped by the military forces, life was not the same for my husband, my son, or myself. Anguish, hatred, and depression overwhelmed us while we wondered if they were still alive, felt impotence because the military wouldn’t give us any kind of information, spent endless nights without sleeping for fear that the evil ones would come to our house to take another family member. Those feelings were to destroy our lives forever. (209)

Trained in her youth as an artist under Argentine artist and muralist, Demetrio Urruchúa, Raquel Partnoy used her artistic abilities to narrate her own experience. “Blindfolded I & II” are oil paintings; the ink versions appear in *La escuelita*.

“Blindfolded I”¹⁸ has a wonderfully translucent quality to it—one that is difficult to obtain with oil paintings; for this reason—and others, it gives the appearance that it is a watercolor. The colors in the painting create a rupture for the viewer: the peaceful, serene blues and greens evoke a sense of tranquility, while the faces transmit a profound sadness, even despair—which can be seen most clearly in the eyes of the face without the blindfold (who is, perhaps, an outside observer). I propose that this rupture symbolizes the abrupt nature of the traumatic event: in an instant, life goes from peaceful to absolute devastation. It also signifies the split between appearances and reality; the families searching for their loved ones felt completely isolated—to the outside world, life appeared normal; inside, they were dying.

The blindfolds represent the reality of the prisoners; they also serve as a metaphor. Prisoners were required to wear blindfolds for the duration of the time spent at the Little School. On a metaphorical level, for the military to abduct and disappear countless thousands of Argentine citizens required a great deal of blindness: blindness on the part of the judicial system, which accepted the denials by the military that such internment camps existed, and blindness on the part of the rest of the civilian population.

Of the three main characters in the painting, only one can definitively be identified as female—and that, because of her dress; although the other two appear more masculine than feminine, facial features remain relatively gender-ambiguous; representing how the act of torture breaks down traditional gender roles, creating bodies completely dependent upon their captors; torture essentially “feminizes” the male body. The olive-green clad female wears a dress, her

¹⁸ <http://raquelpartnoy.tripod.com/ArtProject/>

hands folded in front of her in what appears to be a protective gesture. Although torture breaks down traditional roles, gender still plays a significant role in the treatment of prisoners; she may be protecting herself, or she may be pregnant and wanting to protect her baby.

Although the painting allows for multiple readings, a likely possibility is that the female in the dress is Alicia, next to her, Carlos, her husband who was also kidnapped; the witness observer without the blindfold may be Daniel, the son of the artist, who never recovered from the devastation of his sister's imprisonment; according to his mother, "Daniel was a very sensitive person and suffered intensely from his sister's kidnapping as well as the family situation" (225); seven years after her abduction (four years after her release and exile), he committed suicide. As all prisoners were blindfolded at all times, this seeing observer must be an outsider, witnessing the suffering of those imprisoned.

Across the center of the painting we see the body of a naked woman; prisoners were frequently stripped of their clothing in order to exacerbate their feelings of helplessness, shame, and humiliation; the fact that it is a woman's body sheds light on the gendered nature of torture. However, in an alternative viewing of the same area, we see what could be a face—perhaps that of a child; children separated from their parents were certainly a common source of suffering and anxiety for those being held. The face in the painting lacks specificity, as I discussed earlier, the narrator admits her inability to clearly remember her child's face; however, the mouth is open, as if crying. That would be the last memory Alicia had of her daughter who was present when the military broke into the house and chased her out the back door, where they shot at her from the nearby rooftops with machine guns. Unlike the other figures in the painting, the child is able to express her terror; the others' lips are tightly shut, unable to speak, unable to express the ineffable.

In the background, we see faces, vague like memories; perhaps family members who have gone on before them, perhaps the faces of the disappeared who have already been executed, perhaps the faces are those of the living: the families and friends who search for the secretly sequestered, or the faces of the potential witnesses living right next door to the concentration camps, who look without seeing.

The next painting is similar in style and content; similarly, in name: “Blindfolded II.” Again, we have a complete disjuncture between the colors in the painting and the content. Brighter and more vibrant than “Blindfolded I,” the colors are still too warm and comforting to match up with the profound sadness, and helplessness that the two main figures emote. The faces appear thin and haggard; death lurks nearby. Although both figures wear blindfolds, they have ways of seeing—the narrator has given us a richly detailed account of how prisoners managed to see, using their other senses, and occasionally sneaking a sidelong peak from under the blindfold—at the risk of being caught and beaten for the infraction.

In this painting, we get a strong sense of the solidarity created between prisoners, even in the midst of their mandated isolation; the two bodies manage to connect, to share a blanket—a patchwork quilt—the handmade type, non institutionalized; a reminder of the prisoners’ humanity.

Behind the curtain of color, we see eyes peeking in. These peering eyes may represent a variety of things: again, they may be the families, searching for their loved ones, they may be the spirits of those gone before, watching over the living; they may be the guards, lurking in the shadows, waiting to pounce on the unsuspecting prisoners and punish them for breaking a rule, or for no reason at all.

In “Blindfolded II” we see the “One Flowered Slipped” that the narrator provides as one of her first memories in the Little School. The slipper, which figures prominently in the mind/memory of the narrator (as well as the reader), plays a significant role in the painting, just as it did in real life: essentially, it serves as a witness: it validates the narrator’s story, providing a tangible element of proof: proof of her existence; proof of her near extinction: She shuffled the daisy around for more than a hundred days [...] The day she was transferred to prison, someone realized that she should be wearing “more decent” shoes. They found her a pair of tennis shoes three sizes too big. The one-flowered slippers remained at the Little School, disappeared....(28). The flower serves as a witness to her time at the Little School; the visual representation reflects her verbal articulation. However, here, we have another layer of disconnect: without Alicia’s narrative providing the significance of this particular article of clothing, the viewer, not knowing what to make of it, is left in the dark—blindfolded, if you will.

The overwhelming sadness that we see in these two paintings offers us—the viewer-witness—a glimpse, not only of those depicted in the paintings, but also that of the artist; this is what it feels like to be the mother of a disappeared, forced to stand by helplessly, while your child suffers in a cold, lifeless detention center, hidden from view—or knowledge of the public eye. Because they lacked witnesses to the crime(s) during the event, these two women call upon their readers/viewers to serve as witnesses *ex post facto*.

Ironically, bringing these texts together serves to illustrate more differences than it does similarities. While the vignettes that I have chosen all include references to Alicia’s family, they do not accurately represent the lack of attention she places on family in the overall text; she clearly states her primary focus in the book’s subtitle: *Tales of Survival (Relatos testimoniales)*. Her handbook on survival centers on the relationships she maintains with other prisoners, all of

whom she apparently knew prior to her abduction; she never talks about her parents or brother, and rarely mentions her husband or daughter. In fact, when she realizes that she cannot remember her daughter's face, she laments, "If only I had her picture. But again, maybe it's better this way. If I could look at a picture of her face, I would surely cry...and if I cry, I crumble" (79). Having a material reminder of her daughter would render her terrifyingly vulnerable; if she crumbles, she loses a(nother) piece of herself; in an effort to maintain her identity, her sanity, she must forget (about) her daughter and focus exclusively on those around her.

Raquel, on the other hand, in order to survive must focus entirely on her (missing) daughter. The fact that Alicia is a grown woman, with a husband and child of her own has no bearing on her mother's actions—Raquel is completely obsessed with locating her daughter who has disappeared; the theme and function of her art is unified: expressing the ineffable pain she feels. And although she felt completely isolated in her pain, her experience was far from unique: in a country whose leaders were espousing "family values," 30,000 citizens went missing; each of them left behind families, decimated by their disappearance.

The next artist I discuss is much younger—too young, in fact, to have much of his own memory surrounding the "Dirty War." The main reason I include his work in this essay is because he was born in late 1978, in the middle of the period which I analyze, yet his paintings provide a vivid visual demonstration of the fragmentation about which Anne Whitehead discusses in the literature of trauma.

From the moment I saw his artwork at the Bryant Gallery in New Orleans, I knew Diego Dayer was Argentinean—I couldn't explain how I knew. The fractured nature of the visual fields, the gauze-like blindfolds covering the eyes and bodies of his young subjects, (their physical

features), the sepia tones, the European musical instruments. It all added up. I found his artwork intriguing and hauntingly beautiful.¹⁹

The first thing a viewer might notice is that the color scheme is reminiscent of Goya's "Third of May, 1808": (From a description of Goya's painting), "Here, in glowing whites, golds and scarlets against the sombre blacks, greys and browns of the background, the doomed men are immortalized" (Symmon 263). The extreme combinations of light next to dark and the colorful contrasts suggest strong tension. When placed next to Goya's painting, Dayer's use of red becomes unmistakably reminiscent of blood, flowing from the victims.

His work stands as an allegory; on a most basic level, it deals with the theme of memory; it clearly harkens back to the time of the "Dirty War," yet any memories he has (portrays) cannot be his own; they must belong to a prior generation. The sense of a haunting shows up most visibly in "Sounds of Memories," where the four subjects in the background—all musicians—appear almost translucent. These ghostly figures appear to be members of an ensemble—perhaps jazz, the music of ordered chaos. Mimicking traumatic memories, jazz offers a unique style of repetition that, because it is inherently improvisational in nature, cannot be perfectly replicated. While there are a total of five musicians, they lack a drummer—an element that provides (rhythmic) structure. This could be interpreted as opposition to "a regime obsessed with order and discipline" (Diz, 54). Also important to note, multiple paintings by Dayer include musical instruments, none of which belong to the highly political "*nueva canción*" (New Song Movement) of the 1960's and early 1970's; these instruments include the guitar, the *charango* (small stringed instrument similar to the ukulele), the *quena* ("pan pipe") and multiple other varieties of bamboo flutes, and the *tambor* (indigenous base drum). The music, dress, (ponchos) and all indigenous instruments connected to the *nueva canción* movement were banned by

¹⁹ <http://hindart3.blogspot.com/2010/11/paintings-by-diego-dayer.html>

military dictatorships throughout the Southern Cone. Dayer points to this silencing with his emphasis on European musical instruments, approved by the military, and setting the background for memories from that period.

In “Concert for Violin” we see a group of young subjects, all dressed in black and white stripes, reminiscent of prison uniforms. The youngest member of the group, with a shaven head—also reminiscent of prisoners—plays the violin. The violin, which has a pitch that closely mimics that of the human voice, is often used to evoke or express feelings of sadness. The scene is reflective of Jewish musicians forced by the Nazis to play for their companions in the ghettos.

“Hidden Wounds.” Oil on canvas. 31.5 x 35.5. In this particular painting, we see young people—like the youthful generation of the *desaparecidos*, sucked into a black hole by the military dictatorship. Initially, we see eight subjects; four male, four female. However, in the background, in the folds of a draped sheet, overarching everything we see the ghostly image of another, looking down. The folds of the sheet cover her eyes. On the couch, a pair of knees faintly appears beneath a draped white sheet, symbolizing the reality of that which cannot be seen. Each subject in the painting is either dressed or draped in white, harkening to the innocence of youth. As in Partnoy’s paintings, the blindfolds provide a dual representation, both symbolic of the blindness of justice, and the reality of the prisoners. The material in Dayer’s painting, gauze, points to a wounding; it represents the unhealed wounds, the covering of which prevents proper mourning to take place.

In all of the works I have discussed thus far, the author/artist experienced trauma first hand. With this artist, we have either second-generation trauma where the child growing up is consciously aware of the trauma suffered by the prior generation, of what is called “phantom

trauma,” where the child is imbued with the traumatic experience(s) through the unconscious.²⁰ Without question, the appearance of a “phantom trauma” surfacing in visual arts is a much more difficult argument to make, than it is in literature, especially without knowing specific details from the artist's life. Nothing has been written about this young artist, apart from a few newspaper articles. A pair of informal email inquiries have not produced a dialogue with him; but, in all honesty, I'm still reticent to delve into the personal history of the artist. I prefer to analyze exclusively what can be found in the paintings. Unquestionably, this first series produced as a professional painter visually demonstrates a phantom, and how “the crypt marks a definite place in the topography” (159) of the Argentine psyche: “The phantom represents the interpersonal and transgenerational consequences of silence” (Rand, 168). As such, Dayer's painting(s), may represent a traumatic loss in his immediate family, and/or may stand as an synecdoche for an entire country, still coming to terms with secrets and shame on the level of individuals, families, communities, and the country as a whole. Throughout the ages, artists of all types have helped societies work through traumatic events, providing language, and creating narratives to help process the memories and emotions, and providing both a space, as well as a model to experience catharsis. Artistic representations such as these serve to anchor (often alternative) histories of the events and their aftermath, reminding survivors—as well as those not directly affected—of the validity of their experience.

These narratives, literary and visual, have much to teach us, both in content, and in form. However, the greatest importance of these works may not be for the outsiders; it may be for the writers/artists themselves, as they attempt to restructure a sense of self, fractured by systematic torture, or for the readers/viewers who can relate to the narrative voices, who relate fragments of

²⁰ I discuss this in great detail in chapter three.

stories for those who lived on the outside of the prisons, but still in that constant state of terror, where it is nearly impossible to remember or to forget.

**Between the Imaginary and the Real:
Photographic Portraits of Mourning and of Melancholia in Argentina***²¹

**The dead are always with us and the bereaved continue to bond with them; indeed
the dead must be incorporated in some way if families, other groups and indeed
entire societies are to have any sense of their past.**

Tony Walter

**The camera introduces us to unconscious optics
as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.**

Walter Benjamin

**Photographs, as the only material traces of an irrecoverable past,
derive their power and their important cultural role from their embeddedness
in the fundamental rites of family life.**

Marianne Hirsch

Photographs serve a variety of functions. During the 20th century, the role of the camera evolved from an intimidating apparatus with almost magical abilities (used exclusively by professionals), to an integral element of modern life. Families began documenting their lives—celebrations, vacations, ordinary moments—essentially creating a lasting visual narrative for generations to come. For some, the family photo album has effectively replaced the once treasured family heirlooms. When homes are destroyed by fire or flood, owners lament the loss of family photos—pictures of their weddings, their children, their own baby pictures, their ancestors—perhaps more than any other item lost. Photographs function to psychically link the living with the dead, and in unfortunate situations, they serve to identify persons who are missing or even dead.

In Argentina, the photograph of the dead/missing has an even more profound significance: it stands in defiance, contradicting the attempted erasure of the *desaparecidos* by the military government. In one sense, what Argentina has lost is both incomprehensible and

* Permission to print this chapter graciously received from *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*.

²¹ I am deeply grateful to Laura Martins, Alexandre Leupin, Molly Rothenberg, and Lisa Bode for their encouragement to publish this article and to the editor and three anonymous reviewers of the *IJPA* for their insightful recommendations.

ineffable; it sits squarely in the center of what Lacan calls the Real; however, because the government denounced the individual family losses, and later maintained not only indifference, but also impunity, those losses could never be fully recognized; hence, they could never be properly cathected and traditional mourning can never be fully attained. Subsequent generations continue to bear the psychic burden of that lack—that which is never enough. Photographic art exhibits such as *Buena memoria* (“Good Memory,” Marcelo Brodsky)²² and *Fotos tuyas* (“Your Photos,” Inés Ulanovsky)²³ demonstrate the process of mourning and the psychic relationship between victims lost and those who remain, they provide a public space which recognizes loss and provides what Freud calls “reality-testing”—an essential stage in the process of mourning loss, and attempt to reinstate the Symbolic order by reinscribing healthy mourning rituals within the Argentine society.

Photography and loss go together: we photograph people, places, and events in the anticipation of loss. We know that children will grow up and change, grandparents will grow old and die, special events shared with loved ones will never be exactly replicated; we attempt to capture those moments in time—before they are lost. Photographs serve as proof of existence, essentially acting as a witness, as well as mnemonic devices, since we cannot rely on our memories to accurately retain all of the details of the past (or even the moment). Simultaneously, photography and mourning are inextricably bound together: we mourn that lost childhood and “the way things were.” Prosser reminds us that “photographs are not signs of presence but evidence of absence” (1). Photographs at once remind us of what we had, and of what we have lost.

²² <http://www.zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/brodsky/default.html>

²³ <http://www.zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/ulanovsky/index.html>

It is this type of loss that illustrates the concept that Lacan calls the Real, one of three terms used to describe how the psyche is ordered (the other two being the Symbolic and the Imaginary). In that recognition of loss—in the photograph—we experience the Real, which Lacan describes as “essentially the missed encounter” (*Four* 55); the instant the camera shutter closes, the moment that it eternalizes has already passed. In the printed photo, the viewer recognizes everything seen and everything missed in that moment. The photograph brings the repetition of that loss into consciousness with every viewing.

Because the photograph can be seen, it also fits into Lacan’s order of the Imaginary. Since Lacan considers the ego, in its most essential aspect, an imaginary function, he believes that “the fundamental, central structure of our experience” belongs to the Imaginary order (*Ego* 37). The Imaginary order, which is “the realm of image and imagination, deception and lure” (Evans 82), includes the specular image (what one sees in the mirror), what one sees in the gaze of the Other, and the mental image one holds of oneself of how they are seen in the world. However, nothing can be seen (or imagined) without language, which places the Imaginary order at the mercy of the Symbolic order.

The Symbolic order gives structure, through language and the law. The entire experience of being human is “ordained within a universe constituted by the symbolic function” (Lacan *Ego* 30).²⁴ Lacan also places the Other in the symbolic order, as well as the unconscious. Although the unconscious may be “the unknown subject of the ego” (*Ego* 43) and may not be at the subject’s disposal, it is not outside of the realm of language; in fact, Lacan goes so far as to propose that the “subject’s unconscious is the other’s discourse” (*Écrits* 219). While the subject’s conscious and unconscious are structured by language and the Symbolic order, there is another

²⁴ The Symbolic order is best explained in “The Symbolic Universe” in *Seminar II*; in it, Lacan admittedly draws heavily from Claude Lévi-Strauss.

register which exists, independent of the Symbolic. Lacan calls this the Real; while it is all-inclusive, the Real is also outside of language, rendering it absolutely inaccessible. Although it is beyond symbolization, the Real can still be felt; Lacan compares it to “a punctuation without a text [...] a noise in which one can hear anything and everything” (*Écrits* 324). For Lacan, the Real is not something outside of the Symbolic as much as it is a rupture where the Symbolic fails; it presents itself in analysis “in the form of trauma” (*Four* 55).

The connection between trauma and photography is strong: Freud compares childhood (traumatic) memories to a photograph, which can be developed, printed, and “seen” at any time in the future. Furthermore, photographs often create a rupture for viewers, who find themselves surprised when the image in the photo does not replicate the imaginary representation they hold of themselves in their mind’s eye; seeing ones’ self in a photo is akin to seeing ones’ self through the eyes of the Other, which brings us to Lacan’s concept of the “gaze”, and how it relates to photography.²⁵

Lacan’s description of the gaze closely resembles that of the Real. Our relationship to things is created in the order of the Imaginary, and ordered by the Symbolic, however, “something always slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that is what we call the gaze” (*Four* 73). Similar to the manner in which Clifford Geertz distinguishes difference between a blink and a wink, Lacan distinguishes between the function of the eye and of the gaze, between looking and *seeing* (and being *seen*).

The gaze can point outwardly (as a parent, gazing at a child), or inwardly (one can sense when (s)he is being observed); either way, the gaze is filled with elements of projection and desire. Moreover, the gaze reaches beyond the anthropomorphic to include animate and inanimate objects. For Lacan, the gaze has a certain presence to it, even if it is light reflecting off

²⁵ Lacan credits Merleau-Ponty in his construction of the gaze.

of a sardine can: “That which is light looks at me, and by means of that light in the depths of my eye, something is painted—something that is not simply a constructed relation [...]—but something that is an impression [...] it grasps me” (*Four* 96). The feeling of being watched captures the attention of that subject and forges a bond between the watcher and the watched. In that instant, the one being watched creates a mental image of the moment (s)he realized (s)he was caught up in the gaze. (S)he holds the image in her/his mind’s eye, yet as (s)he is looking outward, (s)he is excluded from her/his own image. We find this replicated in the photograph.

Barthes reminds us that inherent to the photograph is the pose. The unintentional pose (on the part of the subject) still requires the intention of the photographer, who chose to capture an image in that precise fraction of a second. The first photographic endeavors, however, required a subject to remain motionless while the light and mirrors inverted and then chemically replicated the image to create a permanent memorial.²⁶ As in a painted portrait, the subjects posed, looking directly into the eye of the artist. More than a century later, subjects who know they are being photographed invariably look directly into the eye of the camera/photographer. The person viewing that captured image then subrogates the gaze of the subject. When the viewer (of a photograph) knows that the subject is missing/dead, that gaze can evoke a profound recognition of loss.

In his seminal work on the topic (*Mourning and Melancholia*), Freud introduced the concept of mourning as the healthy response to a loss, be it a person, relationship, or ideal. The loss of a person may be through death, or separation—for example, the end of a relationship. During the process of mourning, the libido which was originally invested in the lost love-object is gradually withdrawn and redirected toward living people and problems (See Deutsch).

²⁶ The first photo to include a person was from a daguerreotype of a city street, shot in Paris, 1838. The image took 10 minutes to capture; by chance, a man getting his boots shined stood still long enough for his profile to be burned into the final product.

Melancholia, on the other hand, Freud describes as a pathological mental state, in which the affected often experiences a “profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment” (*Mourning* 244); this sense of guilt springs from ambivalence that existed in the relationship, prior to the loss; the mourner himself feels that he is “to blame for the loss of the loved object, i.e. that he has willed it” (*Mourning* 251).²⁷ In melancholia, the loss points not merely to the object, but also a loss in regards to one’s ego.

Freud also points to the initial similarity between mourning and melancholia. Mourning is a gradual process in which the ego frees its libido from the lost object, which is facilitated by what he calls “reality-testing,” the recognition that the object is, in fact, gone. This process requires a tremendous amount of energy, as each memory that surfaces forces the ego to recognize the loss. The ego, confronted by the reality of loss must decide whether it is willing to move on without the love-object, or die along with it. In healthy mourning, the ego separates; in melancholia, it cannot. As the process of healthy mourning takes time, symptoms of melancholia do not present themselves immediately after the loss. Freud makes the distinction that, while mourning is the result of the conscious recognition of loss, with melancholia, the object-loss is withdrawn from consciousness. This would posit melancholia in the realm of Lacan’s Real; withdrawn from consciousness, the loss remains inaccessible.

²⁷ Juan-David Nasio suggests that Freud uses the term “object” rather than person because the person loved is a “representative of a history, or a collection of past experiences. More precisely, this person would bear the common mark or the common feature of all persons loved in the course of a life” (78); consequently, it is more than the person that has been lost.

Moving from the theoretical to the practical, Vamik Volkan describes a phenomenon that takes place with a young man who knows his father is dead, but is stuck in a state of pathological mourning:

[this] young man would be so struck from time to time by the resemblance of some older man seen on the street to the father he had lost ten years earlier that he would believe the man might actually be his father. In one sense he recognized the impossibility of this, but he could not restrain his impulse to hurry to pass the older man so that he could turn and get a good view of him. (“Complicated” 335)

While on a rational level, the young man knows his father to be deceased, on an unconscious level, he remains in denial and continues to seek proof to the contrary. In this instance, such behavior is considered pathognomonic of chronic mourning. The function of analysis would be to bring into consciousness that which is not allowing him to release—or withdraw—his (unhealthy) attachment to that object, which has already been lost.

When Freud discusses the process of mourning, he states specifically that, “Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object” (*Mourning* 243). While he never recanted the strength of his statements in *Mourning and Melancholia*, later in life, he lost both a daughter, and then a grandson. In a letter to a colleague he wrote that after such a loss, “we will remain inconsolable, and will never find a substitute” (Freud *Binswanger* 196). He suggests that it is neither possible, nor preferable to withdraw all libido from the attachments to the object.

Catherine Sanders suggests that the loss of a child—even a grown child—may be the single most distressing and long-lasting type of grief to work through: “No relationship in life is more important than the attachment between parent and child” (196). She explains that the loss of a child illuminates the enmeshment between actual losses and symbolic losses: on a symbolic level, the child is an extension of the parent. The child represents a love object, unifying the

couple, a statement of a rite of passage, a source of power and autonomy, and a future immortality. Children also represent a reenactment of the parent's own childhood. Additionally, parents often feel an overwhelming sense of guilt for their inability to protect and to prevent the death.

After the loss of his grandson, Freud exhibited some of the same symptoms which he described in his own work on melancholia, and although he touches on the idea of mourning requiring a period of latency, it was his followers who began to formulate the stages of grief. John Bowlby, for example, divides bereavement into four phases: Numbing, Yearning & Searching, Disorganization & Despair, and then Reorganization. His research included animals—birds and primates, for example—leading him to assert that, while the process of mourning may vary between cultures (and species), the reaction to the loss of an object is in fact, primal.

According to Sanders, the “normal” grieving process takes three to four years; she also discusses what she refers to as “complicated mourning”—situations which often inhibit the normal process, or exacerbate symptoms of melancholia—what many refer to as “chronic mourning.” Such complications include multiple deaths in a short period of time, death after a long illness (when the caretakers are emotionally overwhelmed even before the death), the death of a child (of any age), and homicide (accidents are easier to understand on a conscious level than when another human takes the life of a loved one in what society generally considers “deviant behavior”). Such complications add additional time to the process for those who can/do work through the stages of mourning—she suggests that a homicide generally requires a minimum of five years. However, in all of the work on mourning that I have discussed so far, we can return to Freud's concept of “Reality” in which, “Reality-testing has shown that the loved

object no longer exists” (*Mourning* 243); this precludes the case of kidnappings and disappearances. Consequently, in these cases, the process of grieving becomes even more complex.

Leading up to Argentina’s “Dirty War,” the country had already experienced multiple military *coups d’état*, extreme violence, and abductions in broad daylight, where people then “disappeared” without a trace; while they remained alive, they were sequestered in secret concentration camps. Most, however, were killed, many of their bodies buried in mass graves, others dumped into the river or the ocean.

According to Salimovich, Lira, and Weinstein, “Disappearance was a particularly cruel form of political repression against the opposition [...] [they] were inconclusive, uncertain, chronically harmful, and indefinitely prolonged, painful experiences for the relatives” (80). In addition to encountering a void where information should be found, family members were shamed for even admitting the disappearance: if the police/military had taken the missing person, it could only be for something that they had done. If the missing was guilty of “socialist thinking” (a cancer to the society), the rest of the family was consequently tainted by association; searching for the loved one, speaking about them, missing them, admitting that they had been abducted: these actions made the family members complicit, suspect, and feeling isolated. Hollander points out that, under normal circumstances, the death (or kidnapping) of a loved one brings a community together, to support the family, and to honor the life of the one lost or missing. With governmental abductions, “family and friends are left in a state of terrifying uncertainty, with no possibility of psychological closure”; additionally, citizens were prohibited from even speaking about it.

Exacerbating the loss of the family member(s), the remaining family members lived in constant fear of what was yet to come. Julia Braun states that, after her son was abducted, “In subsequent weeks and months, we lived in constant terror that they would come for us or our younger son” (Hollander *Love* 116); like many others, she recounts how they slept in the homes of friends and family members, buried or burned books in their personal libraries, lived under constant threat; “But they never came! Because they didn’t descend on us to search our home, as in so many other cases, it was if the earth had swallowed Gabriel up...as if they didn’t even realize it was our son they had” (Hollander *Love* 116). Hollander points out that “this pattern of unpredictability was implemented by the terrorist state to foster confusion, doubt, panic” (*Love* 116). Consequently, the military—which normally represents the Symbolic order—because it does not conform to a systematic structure, for the affected citizens—begins to slip into the Real which is unimaginable, hence it is unpredictable.

This unpredictability creates a high level of anxiety which severely complicates the mourning process; the mourners do not have a safe space in which they can acknowledge their loss, creating what Marie Langer refers to as “frozen grief”.²⁸ Moreover, the loss could not be defined: the Symbolic order refused to acknowledge the existence of the abducted; consequently, the family members were unsure if they were grieving a temporary loss, or a death. Because of this, “reality testing remains suspended for a longer period. The instructions to decathectize [sic] the loved object because 'it might be dead' and/or to go on cathectizing [sic] it because 'it might be alive' operate simultaneously or successively in a violent way, exposing the psychic apparatus to a high degree of de-structuration” (Kijak and Pelento 466). This relentless

²⁸ For Langer, “frozen grief” is a phenomenon among individuals who have experienced losses and “not had the opportunity or the appropriate conditions in which to mourn” (6); she coined this term as a result of working with a multitude of political victims from various Central American and Southern Cone countries, as well as her own experience (and other compatriots) living in political exile from Argentina during the “Dirty War” period.

conflictive emotional state traps mourners in a sense of perpetual immobility, or what Kijak and Pelento call, “special mourning.”²⁹ Mourners are trapped in a state of psychic entropy. I would suggest that it is, in fact, better referred to as “Real mourning,” because during this traumatic period, the possibility of healthy mourning remains inaccessible.

In order to begin the process of mourning, the individual must, in spite of the conflicting or missing information, believe that the object is dead. However, “since for the unconscious the question of death is inextricably associated with the death wish, this reality judgment gives rise to intense guilt feelings. Without the support of the symbolic, the feeling that to declare the object dead amounts to killing it is greatly intensified” (Kijak and Pelento 466). As long as the family members maintained the belief that their loved one(s) might still be alive, they could not begin the process of mourning the permanently lost object; this became especially problematic as different family members came to the “certain[ty] that the object is dead” at different rates. Julia Braun reminisces that, while it took eight years for proof of her son’s death to surface, she had already come to that conclusion much earlier, after hearing a speech by the vice president two years after her son disappeared. “Mariano [her husband] was horrified and insisted that it was I who was killing Gabriel. I felt terrible. But I realized that something had changed inside me, that, for me, the struggle to find Gabriel alive had ended” (Hollander *Love* 116). The mourning work, as Freud describes it, requires the acknowledgement of death, which in turn triggers the mourning process. As the “missing” were neither dead, nor absent, the family members could not begin a healthy process of mourning.

²⁹ Kijak and Pelento (together with Braun) have labeled it “special mourning”; however, this is a misnomer, as “special” indicates privileged or preferred; instead this is mourning brought on by egregious circumstances. Unfortunately, there is no single adjective that can adequately describe this type of mourning. The authors use the term “special mourning” in opposition to ordinary; it has three characteristics: 1) people went missing as an act of the State; 2) the State refused to acknowledge the act; 3) the State enforced a reign of silence and terror.

Earlier, I mentioned *las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, the protest group whose members marched in a circle around the main plaza in front of the Presidential Palace. The women demanded to know the whereabouts of their disappeared children, the enlarged photographs of which they displayed on the posters they carried. In essence, the act of carrying a photo-poster in the Plaza—even while marching in silence—became a performative speech act—a demand. Outwardly, these photos served as a way to identify the missing person(s); however, psychically, they functioned as a linking object³⁰ to the individuals. As Volkan explains, “A linking object is something—usually inanimate—actually present in the environment that is psychologically contaminated with various aspects of both the dead and the self of the mourner” (334). The importance of a linking object is not the actual item, but rather the function that it serves; it symbolizes the relationship the individual had with the lost object, and permits her/him to imagine a continued connection, even in the face of absence.

Two of the most commonly utilized linking objects in our culture are clothing and the photograph—be it a professional or school portrait, or a family snapshot. Colson explains: “Photography bears a close relation to the process of change and mourning. It allows a partial identification with the lost person through a reinvestment of the fantasies and affects associated with the visual image” (281). Having a photograph of the lost object partially curtails reality testing; as long as the lost object can still be “seen” in a tangible way, her/his presence can still be imagined; on one level, the reality of loss is supplanted by the symbolic visual image.

Such is the case with the *Madres*. Because their actions were photographed and published, eventually the photos of the missing took on a role of their own: they became

³⁰ Similar in function to a child’s transitional object—as described by Winnicott—the linking object, as introduced by Volkan, provides comfort to the bereaved. It may consist of a gift from the deceased, an item still belonging to the deceased upon death, or an item psychically connected to the bereaved at the moment they first received the news of the lost object (the song playing on the radio, or an article of clothing they were wearing, for example).

symbolic; at the individual level, photos become symbolic representations of the missing persons (Robben *Assault*); however, on a massive scale, each individual photo became a synecdoche for all of the missing citizens, and a demand for justice. The images—initially belonging primarily to the order of the imaginary, morphed into the symbolic—the order to which language belongs; they began to speak on behalf of those silenced. Ironically, through their protests, the disappeared—that which was hidden by the Symbolic (the Law)—became the symbol of repression, identifiable to the rest of the world. However, it is not the *Madres*, their actions, or even the enlarged photos of their children that serve as the symbolic, but rather the combination of those elements, which are then captured in photographs that creates this transition from image to symbol. In Argentina, these photographs have become a symbolic representation of socio-political oppression and the violent trauma of disappearance.

The connection between art and politics is certainly nothing new. Argentina, and specifically Buenos Aires, has long considered itself the “cultural nerve center of Latin America” with an influence in many fields, including visual arts; artists share the conviction that the language of art is international in scope, and that art has a social function (Glusberg).³¹ In the years immediately after the fall of the military *junta* and the re-entry of democratically appointed leadership, Argentine citizens were repeatedly admonished that the best way for the country to move forward and heal was to forget the past. Artists have actively rejected this mentality and vigorously contested the ideology of the dictatorship through their art. Their exhibits remain popular, as the country still struggles to recapture that which resists representation.³²

³¹ Being the “cultural center” has included intellectual trends as well; throughout the 20th century, this meant an unparalleled interest in psychoanalysis among intellectuals and both the upper and middle classes (Plotkin, and Hollander *Love*). Consequently, many analysts were treating and among those targeted as subversives.

³² See Tandeciarz for an insightful analysis of several recent large-scale “sites of memory” in Buenos Aires, dedicated to remembering the brutality of the dictatorship.

The artwork which I analyze has been exhibited (among other venues) in ZoneZero, a web-based photographic magazine dedicated to the constantly evolving medium of photography. Based in Mexico, the works chosen for representation are politically charged and international in scope. I begin with the exhibit of Marcelo Brodsky, *Buena memoria*; first edited and exhibited in 1997, it has since been presented more than 120 times in 26 countries. The second exhibit I discuss, *Fotos tuyas*, belongs to Inés Ulanovsky; the exhibit is part of a larger collection which she published as a book by the same title in 2006.

Marcelo Brodsky's *Buena memoria* ("Good Memory")

At the age of 40, Brodsky returned to Argentina after having lived in Spain, in exile for many years.³³ He found himself questioning his identity; he began searching through family photographs from his youth. Upon viewing a class photo from his freshman year of high school, he decided to find out what had happened to each of his classmates. That became the focus of his search, and the locus of his exhibit, which includes voices of classmates who survived.

In the exhibit Brodsky explains, "My intention is to communicate to the new generations the experience of the state terrorism in a different way such that the transmission of it will generate consciousness and memory. Photography, with its precise ability to freeze a point in time, was the tool I used for this purpose" (*STAND-UP*). Brodsky begins with a reverse reality check: finding all that are still alive. Then, the dead/missing. Ironically, a disappearance usually had witnesses; often, the military made a performance out of it, especially for those who were taken from their homes: streets were blocked off, apartments ransacked and destroyed, victims shot at (but rarely hit) with machine guns while they fled. Parents often received phone calls,

³³ Tens of thousands of Argentine citizens were forced into exile during the *Proceso* period; simply leaving the country did not guarantee safety, as the dictatorships in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil agreed to facilitate extraditions of political exiles between themselves. Large numbers of exiles found refuge in Mexico, others fled to Europe.

sometimes anonymous, telling them that someone had witnessed the police taking their son/daughter. Although families could find no proof or information after that event, they frequently had knowledge that their loved ones had been abducted by the authorities.



(Group Photograph)

Brodsky's search for his former classmates uncovered a larger question: how many of their school's former students are among the missing/dead? No social group functions in isolation from others—students from his class had younger and older siblings and cousins; students dated, married, and befriended other students who were younger and older than they were. As the narratives surged forth, he and his classmates began to compile a long list of names. Then, upon a visit to their former school, they discover another reality: the students currently attending the prep school feel no connection to what happened in the very recent past. As one alumni states,

It was 1984: not that much time had passed, but for these young Argentineans, those young Argentineans [we] were, perhaps, just the details of a myth. A myth, in general, has no precise details: they don't exhibit them, they don't need them. It was the same here. The myth of those years was made with generalizations: angels or demons without defined circumstances, collective figures without a personal history. These students, on this afternoon, in the Great Hall, could not believe that those students had been just like them [...] (Caparrós)

Consequently, Brodsky's project grew beyond the initial enlarged class photo to include a memorial at the school to name (honor) all of the alumni lost to the *proceso*. This act—and its compulsion—stems from a primal need, much more than simply wanting to inform the current generation of what happened a mere 10-15 years ago; it has to do with the social construction of grief and mourning rituals.

According to Sanders, grief represents the emotional reaction to loss; mourning represents the culturally defined acts typically performed after a death. However, individual cultures (and subcultures) determine and perpetuate the actions and reactions considered “appropriate” to specific losses (Fowlkes). These socially constructed ideals regulate the rites/rituals regarding treatment of the body, how the bereaved are expected to behave (and for how long), and how the community should behave towards the bereaved.

Argentina was a society in which, during the period I discuss, the state’s actions (the secret discarding of victims into bodies of water, secret mass graves, imposed prohibition of speaking about the disappeared) radically altered the Symbolic order surrounding mourning practices and the expression of grief within the culture. The mere expression of grief for the disappeared was considered taboo, and as Freud posits, if an object is taboo, so too is discussing it; to speak about it is to risk ostracizing oneself from the community. These radical alterations in the Symbolic order precluded citizens from experiencing a healthy mourning process. However, in every culture, the death ritual is “constantly being redefined and reconceptualized within most societies in ways that reflect the contemporary reality” (Katz 6). Brodsky’s exhibit participates in that cultural shift. Breaking the taboo established by the military and convincing the school to acknowledge, and publicly display the names of 98 former students who are dead or missing, created a space for mourning to take place, and reestablished an element of the Symbolic order that had been perverted.

Brodsky’s exhibit also includes written entries from friends and colleagues, and a section entitled “Memories,” dedicated to his brother, Fernando, who was kidnapped on Aug. 14, 1979 (he was never found), and to his friend, Martín, who disappeared in 1976. In these sections, Brodsky posts photos from his childhood, through adolescence.



One photo of Martín is listed as “the last photo of Martín,”³⁴ reminding the viewer of the role of photography as a linking object: on a temporal level, this object is the closest the parents can come to actually having their son. Older photos can remind them of the past, but this photo serves as a reminder of the minute details of what he looked like; it anchors those last precious moments together. As Michael North elegantly states,

Though we take most photographs to capture and preserve the present, the stillness of the photographic image simply emphasizes the untouchable distance of everything as it recedes into the past. In fact, photographs often capture details unnoticed in the present, which then remain as records of the vast tracts of experience we are too obtuse ever to possess. Going back to old photographs, therefore, is not always to recapture experience but often to realize, sometimes for the first time, how much we have missed. (955)

The photo of Martín was taken on a fishing trip with his parents; shirtless, he stands in a boat, fishing pole in hand, squinting into the sun, waiting tolerantly, as someone snaps his picture. Not intended as a portrait, but rather a keepsake, the photo captures the relationship between parent and child-turning-adult; the parents, wanting to hold onto the fleeting moments spent together at a much scarcer frequency than when he was young; hence, the photo anticipates loss—the normal loss that takes place as young adults separate from their parents and create their own space in the world.³⁵ Instead, the photo serves as a final resting place for the image of the lost object. It is for this reason that Jay Prosser posits the photograph—any photograph—in the realm of the Real; referring to Lacan he states, “The [R]eal is not reality. It is that which escapes reality. The [R]eal only becomes apparent to us in ‘the return, the coming back’ of trauma. Yet, in the return of the [R]eal we realize we missed reality in the first place and are doomed to

³⁴ <http://www.zonezero.com/EXPOSICIONES/fotografos/brodsky/memo/martinsp.html>

³⁵ The photo was taken in 1976. Public awareness of disappearances had begun as early as 1970. Snapshots taken during this era may have held—if only on an unconscious level—a heightened awareness of impending loss.

remain remiss of it” (5). The lost object forces the realization of what was already missed the first time.

In another photo, Brodsky admits that he is unsure if the photo is of his brother, or of him; the photo (together with the admission) becomes visible proof of the difficulty of separating the ego and the lost object. Although the two are close in age, and appear very similar in physical appearance, the fact that Marcelo himself cannot distinguish the difference between himself and his brother may indicate a much deeper aspect of identity. “In many instances a photograph, facilitates a partial identification with the lost individual through a reinvestment of the fantasy and affect associated with the visual image. Whether in normal or disturbed people the photo makes it possible for internal relations with the lost person to be supported externally” (Colson 275). For Brodsky, the external object allows a confused identification with the lost object. The confusion may also point to an element of survival guilt. Survival guilt is common among all family members who feel guilty for being alive, and especially for enjoying the pleasures of life when the deceased cannot. Survival guilt is especially rampant among siblings, who often question the apparent randomness of who lives or dies, and frequently believe that the “wrong one” died.

The section dedicated to Brodsky’s friend and his brother, both disappeared, serves as a substitute signifier for the two missing objects; it also serves as an act of mourning. As Colson states, “Failures in the ability to mourn or becoming frozen in an acute state of mourning [melancholia] are nonadaptive, noncreative, and negate the existence of change, growth, and ones inevitable death” (275). Brodsky’s exhibit is the exact opposite: a creative piece which validates change, and his acceptance of death, even without absolute proof. The photo-essay not only functions as a tombstone, celebrating the lives of the two loved ones, but also serves as

proof of their existence. In the exhibit, Martín Caparrós states: “Photography has a privileged role in this sense. We understand that the photograph does not tell: it shows. If a photo says that we exist, it is because we do, in fact, exist” (Apariciones). By posting photos of the two missing persons, Brodsky contests the disappearance and provides proof of their existence prior to their respective abductions.

Interestingly, although Brodsky was trained in photography,³⁶ his photo exhibit is not his artwork as a photographer; it is merely the positioning of old photos, together with explanations and reminiscences from the past. Consequently, in isolation, the photos within the work neither stand alone as art, nor as significant; out of historical context, and without the verbal explanation provided by Brodsky, they are simply snapshots, which could have fallen out of virtually any family photo album. This places the photos back in the realm from which they originated: the order of the Imaginary. It is through the combination of the images, and the explanatory text, that the photos take on a significance beyond themselves; they become signifiers, hence they enter the Symbolic order of language. However they also belong to the Real because “photographs are not signs of presence but evidence of absence...Photographs contain a realization of loss” (Prosser 1); a loss which can never be fully articulated.

Inés Ulanovsky’s *Fotos tuyas* (“Your Photos”)

In her on-line photo exhibit, Inés Ulanovsky demonstrates various aspects of mourning, and melancholia, in several Argentine families. In her work, Ulanovsky includes original artistic photos, but like Brodsky’s exhibit, the primary subject is still photos from the past, and how that past “interacts” with the present. Perhaps drawing from photographer Alfred Stieglitz, “[whose] idea of portraiture was to take several photos of the subject to display together, thereby aiming to

³⁶ While living in exile, Brodsky earned his degree in economics from the University of Barcelona; he then trained as a photographer at the International Center of Photography (www.marcelobrodsky.com).

convey personality more effectively than a single photo” (Colson 277), Ulanovsky paints a photographic portrait by combining multiple images. At the same time, she creates a dual portrait: that of the living subject, and of the missing object—in relation to the subject.

Entitled, *Fotos tuyas* (“Your Photos”), Ulanovsky introduces her subject(s) with the following admission: “When I was a child, I had a mysterious attraction to the photos of the disappeared. Every time that I saw them at a demonstration, I had the sensation that they were not dead. That they were observing everything from their own photos. They were watching us.” Her quote brings us back to Lacan for whom the gaze not only serves to establish a sense of self(identity), but also the way through which we enter the symbolic order (culture and language), and how we view others. Moreover, “the Gaze in Lacan's later work refers to the uncanny sense that the object of our eye's [sic] look or glance is somehow looking back at us of its own will” (Felluga 2). Many of the photos were taken from government identification cards, in which the subject was, in fact, looking directly into the camera, giving the impression that the person in the photo was returning the gaze of the viewer; the knowledge that the person in the photo was missing (or dead) adds to the sense of the uncanny.

This fascination for the photos of the missing becomes the inspiration for her on-line exhibit. In first frame of this section of Ulanovsky’s exhibit, we view a photographed image of a note, hand-written by Alicia, who states that, “My beloved brother Mario, my friend, was killed on April 10, 1975. Graciela, his wife and Pablo his 11-month-old son were standing in front of him when he was murdered. The pain that we feel from losing him is very intense. I search for him constantly.”

In the next frame, we see a box of photos, sitting on a marble slab; the most poignant, a 4” x 6” head shot in black and white; the



man is wearing a white shirt, and has short, dark hair, which disappears into the black background. His dark eyes stare directly into the camera in the initial portrait, as they also do in the second portrait: he stares out at the viewer from this box of photos (collected with the intent of capturing his essence). In the midst of all the old, faded family photos surrounding him, in this professional portrait, he appears fresh, timeless; the photo appears recent, giving the illusion that it was just taken yesterday, and he could step right out of the photo itself (or walk through the door) to greet us. This of course illustrates one of the problematic features of photography: “At the pathological end of the relation to time, change and mourning, there are those whose photography serves to fix time magically, symbolically obstructing change, the process of mourning, either denying change or permanently distancing oneself from an essentially depersonalized subject” (Colson 275). While the family sits gazing at the image from the past, they fail to recognize the ever-widening gap between the past and the present. As Prosser points out, photography “doesn’t move forward but remains frozen ... it presents a moment of intense immobility, and it is this temporal immobilization that renders photography melancholic” (25). The family, like the photo, is “without future” (25); they cannot accept the idea of a future which does not include the lost object.

In the fourth frame, Ulanovsky photographs Alicia, the sister of Mario Alberto Gershanik sitting at a kitchen table, photos spread out across the marble surface, some black and white,



others in faded color, reminiscent of the pictures taken during the transition period in the first decade of color film. In the photo, we see Alicia holding a photo, peering intently into it, almost as if searching for the

person captured within the image; perhaps even wishing for the image—like a fantastic Cortázar story—to come to life; this is what Freud describes as “clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis” (*Mourning* 244).

In a healthy process, “Mourning has a quite precise psychical task to perform: its function is to detach the survivor's memories and hopes from the dead” (Freud “Totem” 65). Our memories are bound together with photographs; often, viewing a photograph causes a “forgotten” memory to resurface, transferring it—if only temporarily—from the unconscious back into the realm of the conscious. Ideally, in mourning, this allows for the cathexis of which Freud speaks. Photographer Elsa Dorfman reminds us that, “Poring over images of the dead is an active part of grief, of mourning, of dealing with the actuality of death” (2). In this sense, what we view happening in Ulanovsky’s photo is perfectly normal, and a healthy way of dealing with a lost object. The viewing of photos is one way in which “work of mourning is completed [and] the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (Freud *Mourning* 245).

However, combined with the first photograph in Ulanovsky’s exhibit, I would suggest that this is not the case. With Mario’s sister Alicia, we see symptoms of melancholia, in which “the object is kept alive from the moment when it should have become part of the past” (Bratton 211). Mario is not one of the *desaparecidos*; he was murdered, right before his wife’s very eyes. The fact that his sister “search[es] for him constantly” indicates that, like the young man in Volkan’s case study, she is unable—on an unconscious level—to accept that the loved object no longer exists. Not often discussed, the loss of a sibling has a far-reaching impact on the survivors. Pollock states:

Sibling loss takes various forms, has different precipitants and different outcomes, and relates to the meanings and fantasies of the loss events.

In sibling loss through death or in holocaust events, we find many reactions, e.g., identifications, guilt, inability to mourn, the paralysis of the future

because of the past, a sense of foreboding and expectation of dire consequences, anger, envy, responsibility, shame and stigma, overcompensations, resentment, etc. ... Various coping-defensive measures are utilized, e.g., mourning-liberation, projection, denial, splitting, transference, depression and withdrawal, delinquency, psychosomatic complaints including sleep disorders, school failures, or learning difficulty. (30-1)

Although we do not know the details surrounding Mario's death as it relates to Alicia (for example, how old she was when it happened, if she was left an only child, how their parents dealt with the loss), nor of Alicia's relationship to him (how close they were in age, as well as emotionally), we do have a glimpse of the answer in Ulanovsky's third photo.

In this photo, we see the family kitchen table, two empty chairs beside it. The chairs are not at the head or foot of the table (generally reserved for the father and mother), but rather on the side, symbolizing the children's place at the table. As both chairs are on one side of the table, one could surmise that at least one other sibling belonged on the opposite side of the table; this would also indicate that perhaps Alicia and Mario were closer to each other than to the other sibling(s). Down the center of the marble table top, we see a crack, visually separating the siblings' chairs from each other, representing how death has broken their relationship in half. After all these years (the photo was taken in 2001), the family still holds on to the broken table, as it symbolizes a connection to the past, and to the lost object—the love and a cherished sense of completeness that the family once had.

Conclusion

The *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* predominantly utilize photos taken from state mandated (state produced) identification cards, whose function is to inscribe the photographed individual into the Symbolic order; an identification card serves as proof of existence and citizenship. Those official photos serve as incontrovertible evidence that, at one time, the state acknowledged

the existence of this individual. The enlarged photo, together with the demand, contests the act of disappearance.

The photographic exhibits—or fragments thereof—that I discuss in this chapter point to loss; they illustrate the connection between photography and loss in general, in that, the moment captured in time no longer exists; each photograph within the exhibits also represents a lost object, and gives us, the viewer, a glimpse into the relationships the living still have with them.

While the two exhibits share similarities in theme, Brodsky creates a public space for his own mourning; in doing so, he validates his own (and others') loss(es). The photos represent life prior to the traumatic rupture of the lost object. Photos of victims taken mid or post-trauma can create a distancing effect: upon viewing the picture of a soldier, gun pointed at the head of a prisoner, or of a bullet-riddled corpse, a viewer may find him or herself unable to imagine participating in the scene, or feel any sense of connection to the victim. By taking photos from family albums, Brodsky draws the viewer into the process; the viewer can imagine a similar photo in one's own family album. Because of their inclusion in this exhibit, the photos, which were once proof of a very personal family memory, are now shared and part of a cultural and collective experience that is reshaping the Symbolic order, and the ritual(s) of mourning.

Ulanovsky also creates a public space for mourning loss. Although I only discuss one fragment of her exhibit, in it, she documents both mourning and melancholia. Her portraits give a glimpse of how survivors interact with the photos of the lost objects, and how the photographs serve as linking objects between the lost objects and those affected by the loss. In her work, viewers can recognize the long-lasting effects of this particular form of violence; for some, it may serve as a reality check, as they may see themselves mirrored in the photographs, searching for the lost object in old family photo albums, unable to acknowledge and grieve that loss.

At the same time, each of these uses of the photograph demonstrates the inherently contextual nature of photos. While we may easily distinguish between photographic genres (a family vacation snapshot, as opposed to a professional portrait), the significance of the individual photos in these exhibits requires explanation, as do any photographs. The photograph does not speak for itself (Batchen). Rather, it is simply a tool whose use is determined by social practices. In Argentina, the use of the photograph in these types of creative endeavors helps to open dialogue in a country where speaking of the *desaparecidos* was taboo. In turn, it reinscribes healthy mourning rituals within the Argentine society; however, like the mourning itself, the work remains incomplete.

**From the *Shoah* to “*la guerra sucia*.” Phantom and Transgenerational Trauma in
Tununa Mercado’s *En estado de memoria*.**

All secrets are shared at the start.
Abraham & Torok

What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others.
Abraham & Torok

In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s psychoanalysts began publishing research on the assessment and treatment of survivors of Nazi concentration camps. They identified patterns of “psychic distress involving anxiety, depression, pathologies of mourning, psychosomatic illness, isolative behaviors, and fears of persecution [which] appeared and contributed to what became known as the ‘survivor syndrome’” (Rashkin 433). A decade later, research began to emerge on the children of Holocaust survivors, and the possibility of parents transmitting trauma onto their children overtly, or otherwise. Children of survivors often integrated a sense of isolationism and persecution. Children were often named after family members killed during the Holocaust, and felt guilty for being alive while simultaneously being expected to replace an entire generation. Angry parents verbally attacked children either mimicking their tormentors, calling them “vermin” or accusing them of being “Nazis” (Kestenberg). Repressed, angry children resented their parents for being “weak” and “allowing” themselves to be captured and tortured. As all of these symptoms surfaced, psychoanalysts could generally find the source and treat the patients. This was trauma that was transmitted overtly.

Much more complex is the idea of “Phantom Transmissions,” founded on the premise that parents can also transmit their (secret) traumatic experiences *unconsciously*. Rashkin bases this theory primarily on the works of French analysts, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, who, in the mid 1970’s, proposed a metapsychology of secrets: a theory explaining the “psychopathology that can be produced as the result of the concealment of events experienced as

too shameful to be articulated in speech” (Rashkin 435). By Abraham and Torok’s definition, the phantom is “a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious” (173). In other words, it is not a secret shared among family members, nor one that a child hears whispered among the adults. “The words used by the phantom to carry out its return (and which the child sensed in the parent) do not refer to a source of speech in the parent. Instead, they point to a gap, they refer to the unspeakable” (Abraham and Torok 174). The traumatic experience is silently transmitted to the child through affect, through cryptic language and behavior, and through silences—where there should be discourse—directly into the child’s unconscious.³⁷

The implication of a “phantom” is that a patient, as a young child (or adult child), will demonstrate pathological symptoms commonly associated with a traumatic experience; however, in analysis, the source can never be discovered. Additionally (like genetic anomalies), these phantoms, can skip generations, be transmitted among extended family members, or can even infiltrate a family through a close friend or unrelated caretaker. Rashkin argues that this model can be found, not only in real life, but also in literature, providing an invaluable tool for reading texts that otherwise leave more questions than they do answers. I agree; *In a State of Memory* is just such a text. Beneath the surface lurk recognizable traits of a phantom transmission of

³⁷ It should be noted here that the theories of Abraham and Torok differ greatly from those of Freud and Lacan, on multiple points. Christopher Lane has published a detailed comparative analysis of their works. He suggests that their “emphasis on egoic coherence takes Abraham and Torok beyond the purview of psycho- analysis and into the realm of psychology” (6); he also points to various statements by Lacan and Jacques that seem to directly refute claims made by Abraham and Torok. Esther Rashkin also dedicates the first chapter of her book, *Family Secrets* to a comparative understanding of Freud, Lacan, and Abraham and Torok in relation to psychic development, the Oedipal myth, and unspeakable secrets (the phantom of Hamlet) before she continues with her application of Abraham and Torok’s theory. While I do not pretend such a broad understanding as these two authors, I have chosen to follow Rashkin’s lead, and proceed with my analysis, knowing that it varies from my other chapters, in which I take a more Lacanian stance.

trauma; this reading focuses on how the narrator³⁸ struggles against the internalized prohibition to maintain secrecy and draw hidden material out of the unconscious.

On the surface, Mercado's autobiographical fiction is a story of exile, pain, and an attempt at repatriation, complete with the difficulties of such. In essence, it is a text about not fitting in—while in exile, the narrator and other exiles remain outsiders. Strangers in a strange land. Upon returning to their homeland, they are again accused of being outsiders: those who left (deserters) can never fathom how difficult it was to stay and live under the dictatorship. The exiles' pain cannot be validated because it can never compare with the pain and suffering of those who lived through the Event.

The narrator speaks of the trauma of living in exile, where the sensation of time is distorted: *"El tiempo del exilio tiene el trayecto de un gran trazo [...] no se lo quiere percibir porque se supone que el destierro va a terminar, que se trata de un paréntesis que no cuenta en ningún devenir"* (29). ("The time in exile has the trajectory of a large brush stroke [...] you don't want to perceive it because you suppose that this being-without-a-country is going to end, that it is a parenthesis that counts for nothing").³⁹ The psychological splitting that takes place during exile does not automatically heal upon return. In fact, questions about adaptation exacerbate the sense of fragmentation. Exiles, she explains, recognizing the intolerance of their interlocutors, invent a template answer: *"dividiendo en franjas temporales un desarrollo que, por su dramatismo, no admitía recortes. Y cada cual hacía su cuento: había un antes, de integración deficiente, y luego una mejoría"* (130). ("dividing in temporal fringes something that, being so dramatic, did not admit any slicing. And each person will spin their own tale: there was a before,

³⁸ Difficult to label, *"enunciadora"* would be closer; one who both receives and transmits a message, almost like a medium or clairaudient; "narrative voice" is the closest literary term we have in English.

³⁹ Translation mine. Most of the translations of this text are from Kahn; on occasion, I have superseded his with my own.

of insufficient assimilation, and then a subsequent improvement” (102). In reality, the protagonist finds herself nearly incapable of functioning and suffers from multiple phobias which keep her physically and emotionally trapped.

Because the protagonist remains unaware of the secret, she—and those around her—focus exclusively on her own known history. Were the protagonist not living in a repetition of trauma, it might be easier to recognize the phantom—or at least to continue searching for the source of the narrator’s pathologies. However, the nature of the phantom trauma so closely mirrors the current trauma (and its repetition), that the two are conflated in the text. The narrative focuses on two periods of military dictatorship during which she lived in exile first in France then in Mexico. In retrospect, the narrator refers to her time in France (1966-70) as a “so-called” exile, because the second period (1974-86), known as the “*el Proceso*” or “The Process” (of National Reorganization) was so violent that the first seemed to pale in comparison.

In a State of Memory does not fit into any single genre. Marina Kaplan points out that critics have referred to it as a novel, autobiography, autobiographical fiction, memoir, fragmented memoirs, testimonial novel, personal testimony, and a “criolla gender essay” (a subgenre). Peter Kahn, the translator, calls it a book, an autobiographical fiction, and a novelistic memoir. The style with which Mercado writes has all of the markings of a fiction, yet the events are all too real. Drawing from Shoshana Felman’s work on memory and historic trauma, in this chapter, I refer to the text as a “narrative.” In analyzing the works of Albert Camus, Felman relies on Maurice Blanchot’s definition of the narrative in general as “the tension of a secret around which it is elaborated, and which declares itself without thereby being elucidated, announcing only its own movement” (“Betrayal” 193). A traumatic event, in general, is unspeakable, a combination of inaccessible sensorial fragments and secrets, consciously kept

inside for fear of what will happen if they are shared. The very process of narrating, of putting those disordered fragments into words, into a coherent story, is required for the brain to process the event as an actual memory.

In the preface to *In a State of Memory*, Kahn states, “The events described in this book, whether factual or not, form a part of both the individual and collective experience” (x). The statement draws attention, not only to the style with which Mercado writes, but also to an element common to the writings of individuals describing events of mass trauma: the impossibility of separating “me” from “we.” According to Felman, “Narrative has thus become the very writing of the impossibility of writing history” (“Betrayal” 200-1). While the focus of Felman’s work centers on the Holocaust, it remains highly applicable to Mercado’s writing, in which the narrator attempts to make sense of her experiences.

The narrator begins her story with an explanation of “The Illness” which she sees as defining her very existence. Very early on in the text she indicates that she sees herself as a conductor:

Sería muy difícil ponerlos de manifiesto, decepcionar a los demás, hacerles ver que la antigua savia del poema, “la que por el verde tallo impulsaba la flor, la misma que impulsaba mis verdes años”, era en realidad una perfecta inductora de úlceras y de gastritis, y echar por tierra la tranquilidad con que me veían apacentar las horas y los días no habría servido para nada. (11)

I would find it so very difficult to expose my affliction, to disappoint those around me, to have them see [the ancient sap of the poem] the “force that through the green fuse [drove] the flower, [drove] my green age...” was, in fact the perfect [inductor] for ulcers and gastritis, and to throw away the tranquility with which they watched me while away the hours and the days would have served no purpose at all. (4)⁴⁰

Savia (sap) is to a plant what blood is to a human: like an electrical current, it runs through the body, carrying energy. The poem she quotes is from Dylan Thomas; however, she misquotes

⁴⁰ Kahn’s translation omits the word “sap,” rectifies the quote from Thomas, and translates *inductor* as “incubator” thereby losing the narrator’s allusion to an energetic current.

him, placing this force, not in the present tense (as Thomas does, “the force that drives me”) but rather, in the imperfect, the elusive past: the force that *used to drive* me. This same force, she states, is the perfect inductor; an inductor is a passive electrical component which stores energy; it can either delay or reshape the currents which pass through it. In certain cases, it can also be called a “choke.” The narrator is literally storing this secret/energy. Later, the narrator admits, “*Las cosas pasaban sobre todo entonces en la garganta*” (18) (Mostly my afflictions were concentrated in my throat” [10]); the narrator is literally choked by the deathly secret; holding it in causes severe internal turmoil which reconfigures itself in stomach ulcers and blisters on her throat, which prevent her from speaking. Furthermore, she recognizes the gaze of those around her who expect her to remain complicit in their silence, regardless of the cost.

Although we are never given an exact age, we gather that the narrator is already an adult in 1966; she speaks of her suffering as a result of accepting, “*contraviniendo mi fobia, un cargo docente en la Universidad de Besançon, sitio en el que, como creo haber dicho antes, estuvimos los míos y yo en un llamado primer exilio, después del golpe de Estado del 66*” (22). (“in flagrant defiance of my terrible phobia, a teaching position at the University of Besançon, where, as I believe I mentioned before, my family and I spent a so-called first exile after the coup d’état of ‘66”) (13). Ironically, she has not already disclosed this information; furthermore, the phobias to which she alludes, and from which she suffers, began long before her first exile.

In the introduction to the English translation, Jean Franco observes that “exile does not altogether account for the extreme state of alienation expressed in the book” (xviii). Through her stories, we gather that the narrator exhibits distinct characteristics of a child haunted by a “phantom”: “the ‘phantom,’ may be diagnosed as obsessive, compulsive, phobic, hysterical, eating disordered, manic, depressive, schizophrenic, autistic, or even epileptic” (Rashkin 435).

Throughout the text, the narrator alludes to various ailments which she suffers: among others things, her aforementioned (nonspecific) phobia of teaching, accompanied by physical sensation of a “*hueco en el estómago*” (23) (“hollow stomach”) (12), “*la compulsión examinatória*” (24) (a “compulsion to analyze”) (14). She describes her discomfort with competition of any type, and she states that her profession of ghostwriting “*configura una neurosis de destino*” (25) (“constitutes a neurosis of destiny”) (15). One of the most difficult aspects of treating a patient suffering from “phantom trauma” is that they themselves do not know the source of their anxieties. According to Rashkin, “in phantomatic transmissions the parent transmits to the child not only the unspeakable content of the secret, but the unstated obligation to keep the secret invisible and unreachable and to prevent anyone from discovering it, including the child” (446). On the surface, the narrator seeks treatment; however, she simultaneously avoids discovering what lies hidden in her unconscious. On a practical level, she blames finances: she could only afford group therapy, never individual analysis. However, before leaving for France, her analyst provides her with several individual sessions, “during which she never uttered a single word”—so strong was the internalized prohibition.

Her rampant issues with clothing include having “*nunca he podido cubrirla por [sus] propios medios*” (49) “*no había logrado poner[se] una prenda [suya] legítima*” (117) (“never been able to carry out the act of dressing [her]self”) (35), an inability “to wear a legitimate piece of [her] own clothing” (91). Furthermore, she states, “*La imposibilidad de llenar hasta el tope venía acompañada de una sensación de carencia, de despojo y de desnudez [...] la desnudez propia de las pesadillas para mí era una circunstancia natural de la vigilia*” (48) (“The inability to carry out activities to the point of completion was accompanied by a sensation of need, of exposure, of nakedness [...] the nightmarish sensation of nudity was, for me, a constant in my

waking hours”) (34-5). The narrator freely admits that she has spent countless hours seeking relief from her symptoms from a variety of mental health professionals, to no avail: “*Nadie, en ninguna de las terapias de engaño en las que me vi mezclada, me dio una explicación acerca de mis relaciones ambiguas con la ropa, probablemente el objeto en el que con más crudeza se encarnan los términos de la carencia, el despojo y la desnudez*” (48). (“No one in any of the bogus therapies in which I was involved ever gave me a satisfactory explanation for my ambiguous relationship to clothing, probably the subject to which the terms need, exposure, and nudity most crudely apply”) (35). The narrator’s repetition of “need, exposure, and nudity” provides an important perspective of her state of being in the world.

As a young child, the protagonist realizes that she enjoys having someone else dress her; a trait that she carries into adulthood. “*Nunca he podido cubrirla por mis propios medios. Con ardides logré que los míos, en distintas edades me visitaran. La decisión tiene un momento clave cuando siendo muy niña, consigo convencer a una tía abuela que a partir de ese día voy a quedarme quieta, como si estuviera hecha de pasta, para que ella me vista*” (49) (“I have never been able to carry out the act of dressing by myself. Through various ruses I have succeeded in getting people close to me, at all the different stages of my life, to dress me. It was a decision I made at a crucial moment, when, as a very young girl, by staying very still, as if made of porcelain, I persuaded a great-aunt to dress me from that day onward”) (35). What we see here is an adult with a severe restriction of an essential ego activity. Most children, by age one can be taught to cooperate while being dressed, and can dress themselves between ages two and three. The narrator, however, remembers having made a conscious decision to refrain from this activity of autonomy, not by way of a typical childish tantrum (screaming, kicking, or flailing her arms

about), but rather by way of inactivity, feigning a lifeless, inanimate caricature of herself. This atypical reaction may be an early indication of a deeper problem.

Allan Schore proposes that “The essential task of the first year of human life is the creation of a secure attachment bond of emotional communication between the infant and primary caregiver” (440). Unfortunately, “the primary caregiver is not always attuned and optimally mirroring, that there are frequent moments of misattunement in the dyad, ruptures of the attachment bond” (442). Infants react to and integrate their caregivers’ emotional states: sensing anger, fear, frustration, or neglect, an infant experiences a hyper-arousal. Initially, “distress is expressed in crying and then screaming” (Schore 450). Milton and Judith Kestenberg remind us that during the Holocaust, “babies became a source of danger because they cried and thus could give away a hiding place. Adults demanded that they be silenced. At times, mothers themselves would suffocate them or give them luminal to keep them asleep” (546).⁴¹ However, when distressed crying fails to summon the nurturing required, “a second later-forming, longer-lasting traumatic reaction is seen in dissociation, in which the child disengages from stimuli in the external world and attends to an ‘internal’ world. The child's dissociation in the midst of terror involves numbing, avoidance, compliance, and restricted affect” (Schore 451). While such behavior is common among infant animals who feign death as a mode of protection against being attacked, human babies do not generally do so unless they have experienced either hyper-arousal, or neglect from their primary caregivers.

Infants who repeatedly experience either trauma, hyper-arousal, or neglect in the first year of life, often have difficulty later in life. Trauma, in this case includes, for example, if a mother repeatedly reacts to a crying child with panic or terror, the child absorbs that emotional affect and experiences it as trauma. For infants, these early “regulating self-selfobject

⁴¹ Also see Volkan “Holocaust.”

experiences provide the particular inter-subjective affective experiences that evoke the emergence and maintenance of the self” (Schoore 436); in other words, our sense of self is created through the mother’s gaze; this is how we see ourselves as individuals, and in relationship to others. In this case, the young narrator’s immobilization may be classified as more of a learned response than a choice. Moreover, the narrator states that she made an active decision to not dress herself, which would indicate autonomy; however, at this young age, children have not yet developed a sense of autonomy: dressing oneself is typically both a step towards and proof of having gained a sense of autonomy. Her “choice” is to remain passive, inconspicuous, safe; her (in)action demonstrates her internalized sense of feeling motherless, unprotected.

The narrator speaks of several negative clothing related experience(s) during childhood, including being dressed up like a doll: “*Los míos de la infancia intentaban disfrazarme para los carnavales e incluso me obligaban a hacerlo cuando me resistía*” (54). (“When I was small, my family would dress me up in costumes for carnival, even forced me to do it against my wishes”) (39). She describes three different characters: “*Fui caracterizada de ‘negrita’, con el clásico vestido rojo con lunares blancos que es también el de ‘hormiguita viajera’, la piel cubierta de betún [...] y también de ‘gitana’*” (54) (“I was made up as a ‘pickaninny’, in the classic red dress with white polka dots, which also served as the costume for ‘the little traveling ant’,⁴² skin covered with shoe polish [...] and also as a ‘gypsy,’”) (39) complete with headscarf, dangling jewelry, and a long, pleated skirt. The narrator recalls, “*Cuando me daba cuenta de que desaparecía detrás del antifaz o del ungüento negro y que de mi identidad sólo quedaba el brillo de las pupilas y el blanco del ojo, me echaba a llorar, provocando comentarios acerca de mi pusilanimidad*” (54-5). (“When I became aware of how I disappeared beneath my costume or behind the coat of black salve applied to me, and that all that remained of my identity were the

⁴² *La hormiguita viajera* (The little traveling ant) is an Argentine children’s story by Constancio C. Vigil.

whites of my eyes and the shine of my pupils, I would burst into tears and then be scolded for acting silly”) (39-40). The young narrator struggles to maintain her own sense of identity; the adults around her react by shaming her.

Francine Broucek explains that shame is connected to self-identity on a deeply primal level; when a child “reaches the stage of development when [s]he becomes self-conscious in the objective sense, the shame experience takes on new phenomenological characteristics—a painfully heightened awareness of self as an object of observation for others, with an attendant wish to withdraw or hide oneself. Others will be experienced as distant, rejecting, or alien, and one will have an unpleasant sense of uniqueness and social isolation” (371). The narrator’s isolation distances her from what she needs the most: nurturing. The painful sensation of shame, which she describes as “need, nakedness, and exposure” remains with the narrator.

The parent’s choice of costumes is also very telling: first, the pickaninny: according to Pilgrim, “[in North America], picaninnies were portrayed as nameless, shiftless natural buffoons [...] The first famous picaninny was Topsy -- a poorly dressed, disreputable, neglected slave girl. Topsy appeared in Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery text *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Topsy was created to show the evils of slavery. Here was an untamable "wild child" who had been indelibly corrupted by slavery” (par. 2); the pickanninny was an odd choice for an Argentine family; Negros were, like the Jews, despised by the Nazis.

The same black-faced, red-dress costume serves for another character, the little travelling ant, in which the narrator’s loss of identity is based, not solely on the physicality of the costume, but on the underlying symbolism. *La hormiguita viajera* is a child’s story which begins with a tiny ant, struggling under the weight of an enormous laurel leaf. She encounters an older ant, and expresses her relief at the encounter, as she does not see anyone of her species (*no veía a nadie*

de mi especie); she also admits that she has no name; she is simply an ant; although she is known as the “Traveling Ant” (*No tengo nombre, hormiga nomás, pero soy conocida como la Hormiga Viajera...*). Immigrants experience the same sense of isolation and lack of identity expressed by the traveling ant. Oftentimes, they are forced to give up their names (or the correct spelling thereof), as well as the family members left behind, creating a lingering sense of guilt coupled with the loss. This sense of displacement continues with the third costume she describes, the gypsy.

Like the other two costumes, the protagonist’s gypsy costume speaks of a connection to a (despised) people without a country, not unlike the Jews prior to 1948. If we take the author to be the age of the protagonist, these memories of carnival from her childhood would have been taking place more or less during the World War II. Additionally, the gypsy costume—with the jewelry—speaks of a loss of childhood, of a young girl who is not permitted the innocence that should be afforded her by her parents.

Not only is the young narrator dressed up against her will (her attempts at expressing autonomy futile); when she reacts, contesting not merely the act of being dressed up like a doll, but also the unconscious, underlying repetition compulsion that is being forced upon her, she is shamed. This action on the part of the parents (dressing her up for carnival) symbolizes their attempt to cover up their own feelings of loss; rather than mourning, they project their feelings of inadequacy onto their young child. Furthermore, the initial stages of shame continue to haunt the narrator for the rest of her life.

The strongest of her childhood memories related to clothing takes place at school, where she and the other kindergartners are dressed in costumes for a performance; “*me disfrazaron de mariposa, con un vestido amarillo vaporoso de holanes, listones café que dibujaban el cuerpo de*

la mariposa y unas alas de alambre cubiertas de tul moteado que se prendían a la espalda del canesú” (55). (“they dressed me as a butterfly in a wispy dress of yellow gauze with coffee-colored stripes that outlined my insect shape and wings of wire with speckled tulle attached to my back”) (40). Although she states that she is a butterfly, her costume fits the description of a bee, the importance of which will become clear later. First, the narrator has no sense of agency; she merely acts as a pawn, absorbing the adult’s projections placed upon her. The costume is wispy—ghostlike. The material of her costume, gauze, points to a wounding; she represents the unhealed wound. “*La hermana Serafina intentó prender mis alas al vestido con un alfiler de gancho, pero el alfiler se deslizó y agarró también, junto con la tela y el tul, mi piel* (55). (“Sister Serafina attempted at the last minute to secure my wings to my dress with a safety pin, but in her haste, the pin slipped and pierced my skin along with the material and tulle”) (40). An angel (seraphim) working in a kindergarten named “Perpetual Aid” (*Perpetuo Socorro*) would be expected to provide protection and comfort; instead, the narrator laments, “*Salí a escena como atrevesada por un puñal, y esa punzante sensación ne me ha abandonado. Nunca le dije nada a nadie sobre este incidente, sólo Sor Serafina lo supo. Desde aquel día nunca quise estar en ningún escenario*” (55). (“I went out on stage as if run through by a dagger, and that pierced sensation has never left me. I have never told anybody about that incident, only Sor Serafina knew about it. From that day on I have never had any desire to go on stage again”) (40). The narrator forever equates the costume with pain; she refuses to ever get on the stage again—to participate in the family’s façade—yet, she chooses to remain complicit in their own silence, keeping the event a secret.

Her issues with clothing continue to plague her into adulthood. Terrified of feeling naked, yet feeling overwhelmed by the need to cover her body with “something strange”, she avoids

shopping for new clothing. Instead, she “has a long history of inheriting other people’s clothes, the definitive metaphor of her vicariousness” (Avelar 213). Often, her wardrobe is inherited from friends (or strangers) who have died. “*Cuando recibo en herencia o como recuerdo la ropa de algún amigo o amiga que acaban de morir, me visto con ellos; tengo la sensación de que los llevo*” (52 emphasis in original). “When I inherit, or keep as a souvenir, the clothing of a friend who has recently died, I dress myself *with them*; I have the feeling that I am wearing them” (37 emphasis in original).

She admits the downside to this vicarious living:

Tengo todavía en una percha, en la última de mi ropero mexicano, un saco gris que, sin saberlo, me dejó al morir mi amiga Silvia Rudni y que me fue dado por los suyos como recuerdo; lo usé mucho, era muy de mi gusto llevar a Silvia puesta pero, de pronto, con el tiempo, las puntas del cuello se hicieron notar y, al verme con él, en una misma unidad corporal en el espejo, tuve un golpe de autocompasión: éramos de los sesenta en los ochenta. (53)

I still have a gray coat, on the end hanger in my Mexican wardrobe, that, without knowing it, was left to me by my friend, Silvia Rudni, whose family let me have it as a keepsake; I wore it often, because it was a pleasure to wear Silvia on me, but suddenly, with the passage of time, pointy collars went out of fashion and, viewing us together in the mirror, I had a stroke of self-pity: we were from the sixties living in the eighties. (38)

By wearing the coat, the narrator outwardly displays her inability to part with the deceased; however, her actions reach beyond the healthy use of linking objects and demonstrate an emotional void; the articles of clothing represent the absent friends and country(wo)men, of whom the narrator is unwilling to let go. According to Laura Martins, “*Al cubrirse con esa especie de piel del otro que no está, señala la absoluta unicidad de ese otro, de ese muerto o desaparecido; rubrica su singularidad irrevocable*” (“Covering herself with this type of skin which belongs to the other, who no longer exists, signifies an absolute oneness with the other, who is dead or disappeared; it ratifies their irrevocable singularity”).⁴³ The narrator is keeping

⁴³ Translation mine.

alive the identity of her friend, while simultaneously incorporating that identity with her own. As she surrenders to the merging of the two identities, she allows a fragmented part of herself to die in order to keep the identity of the other alive.

The narrator demonstrates a pathological need for nurturing; she dresses herself with the deceased to escape feeling vulnerable and unprotected; the disconnect she feels between her body and the clothing reflects an uncomfortable relationship with her mother: “Our clothes are a bit like the mothers of our babyhood. Our mothers choose our clothes, put them on us when we're little, and in a way they remain associated with her” (McDougall 390). Throughout *En estado de memoria*, we notice a distinct absence of mothering; one event that stands out in the narrator’s memory, “*una escena esfumada por sucesivos velamientos en sueños y pesadillas, pero para mí constitutiva. Es mi primer día de clase de la escuela primaria y mi tía abuela Berta Zeballos me lleva*” (136). (“a scene that had been blurred by countless shadings in dreams and nightmares, that was nonetheless constitutive for me. It is my first day of class at the elementary school, and my great-aunt Berta Zeballos is accompanying me”) (107). The two travel by tram some thirty blocks to the school, holding hands the entire way. They arrive at the school, the children are already lined up in the courtyard: “*cuando ella se va yo no he logrado encolumnarme en ninguna hilera [...] no avanzo hacia la clase como el resto, no pertenezco a ninguna de las filas, me voy quedando sola y me quedo finalmente sola mientras todo el mundo desaparece hacia el interior*” (136). (“when my great-aunt leaves, I still have not joined any of the lines [...] nor do I advance toward the classrooms with the rest of the children, I do not belong to any of the lines, I stand apart and finally remain alone while the rest of the world disappears inside” (107); a teacher finally notices her, checks her list, and that of another teacher; “*rezagada, ya todos los alumnos están sentados en sus bancos, rígidos, comiéndose tal vez como*

yo su propio terror, o su propio deslumbramiento, pero es el mío el que para mí cuenta, es su marca en mí lo que se registra y va a perdurar” (137). (“the word ‘registration’ dominates this confusing exchange until, finally, common sense compels one of them to add my name to the list in her folder”) (107); she enters the classroom, feeling as if she is “lagging behind the others, the students already perched on their stools, rigid, perhaps swallowing their terror just like me, or their amazement, but it is only my own terror that seems to matter, the mark that is left on me that will endure” (107). It is not her mother who accompanies her to her first day of school, but rather her great-aunt. Although the aunt seems to contain the young child’s anxiety while travelling, upon arrival at the school, the child is left to fend for herself; as the mother has neglected to register her for classes; she does not exist. This sense of vulnerability continues to haunt her into her adulthood, while she continues to collect an endless supply of substitute mothers in her closet.

Although the narrator recognizes it as a detriment, she cannot alter her unwillingness (inability) to part with her second-hand clothing. Whether she ever wears the items or not, she cannot get rid of them. Once, she takes a jacket and a blouse from a deceased stranger—a kinless woman; she wears the jacket (nurturing, protective outerwear), but the blouse she never wore, not even understanding why she took it in the first place. She gives it away as a gift. Twenty-five years later she reminisces, “*Lo cierto es que llegué a sentirme culpable con esa muerta por haberle interrumpido su eterno retorno en mí a través de esa blusa*” (52-3). (“What is certain is that I have felt guilty ever since for having interrupted the eternal return of that woman through me and that blouse” (38). She feels that she has lost some kind of energetic connection to the unknown woman. Rather than feeling the guilt, whatever clothing she receives, be the benefactors dead or alive, she keeps the clothing, “*condenaba a estar colgados para siempre*”

(52) (“condemned to hang forever in my wardrobe”) (37) regardless of how much it clutters up her apartment or mental life. This overwhelming sense of vulnerability, expressed as a life-long obsession surrounding clothing, harkens back to infancy, and feeling unprotected. Just as she recognizes the absence of mothering, the narrator replicates the same absence with her own children. Throughout the entire novel, she only refers once to the existence of her own children, and then simply to share a dream her daughter has about being trapped in Trotsky’s house forever. In this singular moment, the narrator demonstrates the repetition of her own pathology in her daughter; unwittingly, she passes the phantom down to the next generation.

The terminology that Abraham and Torok employ to describe this “artificial unconscious, lodged in the very midst of the ego” (159) belongs to the grave: it is a “crypt,” a “tomb,” a “grave”; it is “silent,” “sealed in,” a “secret”; the carrier of the secret is a “cryptophore.” We find this same language, chosen by the protagonist herself, which in turn points to a phantom in the text.

Throughout the text, the narrator describes how a sense of condemnation and confinement invades her consciousness: she speaks of a (now deceased) friend who, by giving her advice on cooking, “*sin habérselo propuesto me absorbe en un sistema cerrado*” (45): (“unintentionally confined me within a closed system” (32); upon her first return trip to Argentina, she states that, “*Los primeros días no pude ni asomarme a la calle; me aferré al reducido espacio del cuarto en el que dormía*” (67); (“during the first few days I could not even set foot in the street; I stayed closeted in the space of the room where I slept”) (50-1); while exiled in Mexico, she describes nightmares in which, “*la casa de mi infancia en Córdoba aparecía en mis sueños, perforada de roperos sin salida en los que era atrapada en medio de las fricciones de la sedes, el algodón o la lana [...] Presa en esa casa[...] ella era una gran esfera*

en cuyo interior estaba condenada a rodar para la eternidad; ella fue ataúd, barco, paraíso aéreo” (119-20). (“The house of my childhood in Córdoba, for instance, would appear in my dreams, perforated by doorless closets where I stood, trapped amid the quivering silks, cottons, and woolens [...] Imprisoned in that house [...] it was like a vast sphere in whose interior I was condemned to drift for all eternity; it was a coffin, a ship, an aerial paradise”) (93). Her descriptions indicate that she herself is a repository for the unknown, related to death. Her usage of words—*condenada* (condemned), *eternidad* (eternity), *ataúd* (coffin)—point unmistakably to her psychic sense of morbid entrapment; she sees herself as trapped inside the crypt, condemned to maintain this unknown—unspeakable—secret.

The initial clue indicating that the narrator carries the secret of another is found in the first chapter. The protagonist states, “*Me he contentado siempre con curas sucedáneas* (15) (surrogate treatments)—an odd adjective to delineate between individual and group therapy. She explains how her initial group therapy sessions included psychotropic drugs; after the *coup*’ of ’66, such practices became illegal. Consequently, group members found themselves substituting the analyst’s office for someone’s home, and acid for hashish. She recalls that on one occasion, “*estaba desdoblada, quería decir yo y decía ella [...] costó muchísimo [...] sacarme de mí, una otra que entrevía y a la que no podía acceder y todavía una otra más que no me soltaba*” (17, emphasis in original). (“my head was so splintered that when I wanted to say *I*, I said *she* [...] it was not easy [...] gaining access to that *other* of whom I could only catch glimpses, or snaring that *additional other* who would not let me go” (9, emphasis in original). In that moment of reckless abandon, the phantom slips through a crack from her unconsciousness; she is the secret-keeper of another woman.

Despite the unspoken imperative to maintain the internalized secret, throughout the narrative, the protagonist labors to discover the phantom. Intuiting that language—writing—holds the key, she attempts to write. While in Mexico, she sits down nearly every Sunday, after spending the weekend with friends: “*escribía sin escribirlo el primer párrafo de un largo escrito que siempre sentí como un desencadenamiento, pero muy pronto la cadena se enredaba o simplemente quedaba trunca*” (40). (I would write, without really writing it, the first paragraph of an extensive work that I always felt was a kind of ‘unshackling’ experience, but very quickly the shackles would become entangled or simply break off”) (28). Although she desires to unravel the secrets of the past which haunt her, because she does not have access to them, her vain attempts to write simply dissolve into nothingness. She goes on to explain how, each Sunday, returning to the city, driving away from the volcanoes, she had the sensation that “*la marcha va dejando atrás [...] un recorrido que se parece al de memoria*” (40) (“progress leaves behind [...] a trail that resembles memory” [28]). The sight of the volcanoes, disappearing in her rearview mirror, forces her to recognize the unnatural conflation of past/present in her own world.

What places Mercado’s protagonist in a unique situation is the literal repetition of trauma; like the entire novel, this chapter (“*Cuerpo de pobre*”/“Poor Person’s body”) can be read on two levels: on the conscious level, the narrator attempts to process the multiple deaths and personal losses of those around her. She and other exiles vigilantly seek information from Argentina, constantly monitoring both the living and the dead. Simultaneously, the exiles mourn their own lost lives, as they attempt to (not) assimilate into their place of exile. These losses connect to the prior, unresolved (unexperienced) loss(es) trapped in her unconscious, and completely inaccessible to her own memory. As she drives away from the serene countryside, towards the city, her car stirs up a cloud of dust; she perceives the swirling particles as “[los]

muertos que entraban por mis ojos y salían por mi nuca, *arremolinados en las ráfagas de la memoria [...] el cementerio era vastísimo y había allí todo tipo de muertes y de muertos*” (41, emphasis in original). (“*the dead who entered through my eyes and exited through the nape of my neck*, whirled through the mill of my memory [...] it was a vast cemetery, containing every type of death and dead...”) (29, emphasis in original). The narrator goes on to speak of specific losses, recalling multiple memories of a friend, Mario Usabiaga,⁴⁴ who she insists on calling by first and last name each time she refers to him, inscribing his name in the rolls of history and her memory.⁴⁵ Although the protagonist suffers from multiple losses in the present: “*la vida se me aparecía, en este tipo de imágenes, perforada por miles de grandes y pequeñas pérdidas*” (41-42). (“life appeared perforated by thousands of losses, both great and small”) (29), including multiple displacements—or what Annette Levine refers to as a “transgeographical trauma.” Every loss she suffers in the present is connected to another loss from the past, and which remains inaccessible to her on a conscious level.

Another (linguistic) clue supporting this haunting resides in the chapter, “*Celdillas*” (a synonym for honeycombs, which the narrator uses rather than the more common synonym *panal*). The root of *celdillas* is “*celda*” (cell) which refers to small, confined spaces, such as prisons.⁴⁶ With this reference, (along with other morbid clues in the chapter referring to bees, ditches, heaping...) the reader is (un)consciously drawn to the idea of the sinister, even before the narrator introduces her link to the Holocaust.

⁴⁴ Usabiaga, a literature professor, published an essay in 1976 critiquing Carpentier's frivolous characterization of the First Magistrate “given the reality of brutal dictatorships in Latin America” (McQuade 267).

⁴⁵ In remembering her friend in this chapter, Mercado makes multiple references to cooking. It is no coincidence: she was living in Mexico City when Rosario Castellanos published her critically acclaimed short story “*Lección de cocina*” (“Cooking Lesson”) in 1971.

⁴⁶ In the English version, the chapter is titled “Cellular Chambers”; in it the use of “honeycomb” (65) is a paronomasia for “catacomb” a different allusion to death.

The narrator begins by explaining that the mere sight of “*la alienación de agujeros idénticos*” (85) (“the alignment of identical openings”) (65) would produce in her, what she referred to as the “*efecto celdilla*” (“*cellular effect*”), during which she experienced, “*la sensación repentina de estar poseída por un deseo biológico irreprimible de morder*” (85). (“the sudden irrepressible biological need to bite into something”) (65). This sudden, irrepressible urge to bite has a psychological explanation: “[in children] frustration may produce an aggressive reaction including the unconscious urge to bite, which, however, may be repressed because of a sense of guilt and the end result may be an eating disorder or a chronic disturbance of the gastrointestinal tract” (Lehman 472). We see this biological/psychological desire/repression expressing itself in the protagonist throughout the narrative.

The narrator connects this urge to bite with the visual image of the honeycomb (to which I will return in a moment) and to bees. On a psychological level, bees enjoy a multiplicity of representations: teeth (biting), the phallus (stinging), the nipple (bee stings), the breast (shaped like the hive, producing sweet sustenance in the form of milk/honey), reproduction (the visible demonstration of pollination), the uber-feminine (queen bee), the selfless worker (drone), efficiency, and organization—both in the construction and spacial use of hives (for all of the above see Bradley). Returning to a childhood memory, the narrator stated that her parents dressed her as a butterfly for the school play. However, the costume she describes is that of a bee: yellow gauze with coffee-colored stripes, and wings made of tulle (an open material consisting of hexagons). Furthermore, she is “stung” with a safety pin, a pain from which she never recovers.

On a practical level, honey bees are not indigenous to the Americas. They are, essentially, immigrants. For the (adult) narrator, bees also represent overcrowding, secret mental

compartments, and imprisonment. At the end of the chapter, she divulges important information, but only enough to force the reader to guess the meaning. She reportedly “combs” her memory for the source of this obsession with hexagons:

las primeras imágenes por mí vistas y registradas hace más de cuarenta años, en unas fotografías de campos de concentración que archivaban mis padres. Cuerpos amontonados y muertos; cuerpos alineados dentro de fosas, llamadas con pertinencia fosarios; entrañas de una cámara de gas expuestas en un corte transversal (la puerta ha sido abierta); columnas de un desfile militar nazi, los cascos redondos vistos desde arriba, encolumnados, en su caja rectangular y cuadriculada. Ese orden instaurado por el terror repele y al mismo tiempo devora; si se lo elude, de cualquier modo triunfa, la cavidad gana la partida. (93-4)

the first images I ever saw and registered more than forty years ago, they are photographs of concentration camps kept by my parents. Bodies lying in mounds, all dead; bodies lying neatly aligned in open graves, appropriately called mass graves; the interior of a gas chamber, viewed in cross section (the door has been left open); the marching columns of a Nazi parade, the round helmets viewed from above, endless columns, like a rectangular box divided into squares. This order established through terror repels and at the same time devours; if it is avoided, it triumphs anyway, the cavity wins the day. (71-2)

In the silence—the absence of text—the narrator alludes to the photos as being “family photos”; the reader must surmise the high level of importance attributed to these photos by the parents: why else would they carry them from Europe to Argentina, and keep them, if they (the parents) were not somehow connected to the camps?

The fact that this is the first childhood memory registered in the narrator’s memory indicates that she was traumatized by the contents of the photos; the split between vision and tactile senses in her memory demonstrate the fracturing nature of the trauma. One could deduce that the parents were victims of the Holocaust, that the photos symbolized lost family members. However, from the description of the photos, we sense that they were documentary in nature; the depictions of the camp itself could be of photos taken in the aftermath, upon the liberation of the victims by the Allies. Yet, as she continues to describe the endless columns of marching soldiers,

it would seem that these were taken during the time that the Third Reich was still in control; we know that the Nazis carefully documented their own rise to power, using cinematography to chronicle their actions—atrocities—which later would serve as evidence of the crimes they committed against humanity. These photos were taken by someone who saw the trauma; were these the photos of the victims, or the aggressors? Nothing in the text clearly points in either direction; however, I argue for the former; based on specific pathological tendencies demonstrated by the narrator, I propose that the symptoms of transgenerational trauma from which she suffers are proof that her family is indeed somehow connected to survivors of the Holocaust.

The connection between this memory, and the image of the honeycomb (which has haunted her for her entire life) is not coincidental; it is the perfect example of psychological self-organization. Peter Saunders and Patricia Skar explain: the French physicist Bénard discovered that if a large shallow container (of any shape) is filled with water and then heated evenly from below, the water will begin to move and eventually, it will spontaneously organize itself into a pattern looking something like a honeycomb. This phenomena (known as the Bénard convection) can be applied to psychoanalysis, because all dynamic, self-organized systems (including the brain and the personality) follow the same natural laws. Maxson McDowell explains, “My psyche organizes itself spontaneously around a pre-existing principle. The organizing force is entirely impersonal, not specific to me as an individual nor even to my species. I am drawn into it inexorably as though into a vortex. Images of that organization thrust themselves upon me” (648). In other words, this organization is universal; the images appear in the unconscious, through dreams, and in the conscious, through associations. A key factor, however, is the *pre-existing* principle; the brain seeks to connect any new information to something that is already

known. Consequently, when the sensorial input received exists outside of the understood, or the Imaginary (what can be imagined) or Symbolic (what can be explained) orders, this organization breaks down.

Throughout her life, the narrator's psyche continues to attempt the process of self-organization. Because dynamic system organization is based on the principles of geometry and economics, her psyche chooses the same organizational pattern used by bees: "The hexagonal shape maximizes the packing of the hive space and the volume of each cell and offers the most economical use of the wax resource" (Elman et al. 111-2). The narrator's brain attempts to take scattered information, and give it order. On an unconscious level, she recognizes the pattern as both familiar and simultaneously unnerving; she sees the structure as "*el compartimiento que me incluía y era yo misma creció más allá de nuestros límites, dejándome convertida en un hoyuelo, ocupando el terror todo el espacio*" (91-2 emphasis in original) ("This compartment that included me and that was me grew beyond *our* limits, rendering me an empty shell, and all of space was filled with terror") (70 emphasis in original); it is both hers, and not hers at the same time.

Returning to Abraham and Torok, they state that, "the crypt marks a definite place in the topography" (an odd yet appropriate use of the word, as I will indicate in a moment) "It is neither the dynamic unconscious nor the ego of introjections. Rather it is an enclave between the two, a kind of artificial unconscious, lodged in the very midst of the ego. Such a tomb has the effect of sealing up the semipermeable walls of the dynamic unconscious" (159). In the beginning of the chapter, "*Celdillas*," the narrator spends more than nine pages describing the life-long obsession she has had with the sensation of the honeycomb, the visual fracturing/organizing effects of the geometrical, interconnected surface that sometimes surrounds her; finally, [of her memory] she

states that, “*por el corredor estrecho que me deja la conciencia sólo llego a paredes sobrelabradas, a bajorrelieves vastos y densos en los que las salientes y las entrantes parecen llamar al tacto por su morbidez*” (93 emphasis added). (“along the narrow corridor permitted me by my conscious, all alone, I encounter elaborate walls, vast and dense bas-reliefs whose *soft, morbid projections and recesses* seem to call out to my sense of touch” (71 emphasis added). It is as if the narrator receives a visual image of that topography which Abraham and Torok describe as “the semipermeable walls of the dynamic unconscious: which were sealed in that “artificial unconscious” (159). As the protagonist makes this valiant effort to break through, to find the source of her pathologies, the association that comes to her rescue is that of the photos seen in her childhood.

The difficulty of treating a phantom is its illusiveness. By its very nature, it cannot be seen, merely felt. The proof of the existence is demonstrated through absences. While the phantom may be discovered, and even exorcized, as the narrator struggles to do in this text, without information from family members—those who know—the actual secret cannot be discovered, merely conjectured. These photos provide an important link between the family of the protagonist and the Holocaust; they support all of the evidence in the narrator’s psyche of the existence of a phantom. However, they remain problematic on an historical level.

Mercado’s narrative is admittedly autobiographical in nature. She was born in Argentina in 1938 or 1939, during the rise of the Third Reich. Her parents were established, not recent immigrants; in fact, on one side, her family boasts of being descendants of a Basque ancestor and an indigenous princess (Franco xiii). It is unrealistic that her parents ever saw the Nazi concentration camps, or had first-hand experience during the war. Notwithstanding, displaced family members often experience a tremendous sense of guilt and shame for surviving what

others do not. In a powerful article on *L'Emprise* (roughly translated, “the grip”), Nadine Fresco explains, “Because one was not arrested, taken away, exterminated, because one missed death, one is then condemned, for years on end, to miss life, a survivor irremediably other than that other one who holds, holds back existence, transfigured and magnified by his very disappearance” (424). The survivor never escapes the grip of guilt; it transforms into projection: “It could/should have been me,” which is exacerbated, even reinscribed, every time the family experiences the repetition of a mass trauma survival.

This sense of guilt over (not) being chosen surfaces on the narrator’s first day of school; the affect of terror she feels on that day remains just as strong in her adulthood—proof of traumatization. She states that, “*no estoy en las listas, y no ha sido esta condición ni enaltecedora ni degradatoria, ha sido simplemente estructurante*” (137). (“I am not on the lists, and this condition has been neither ennobling nor degrading but, simply, formative”) (107). During the Holocaust, exclusion from a list meant evading death; this, like all methods of survival, carries with it the overwhelming guilt of sending another in one’s place. Due to the absence of the mother in the narrative, I propose that it is the mother’s secret/phantom that the protagonist has internalized. It is possible that the mother had friends or family members who were, in fact, direct victims of the Holocaust. It is equally possible that the Holocaust simply served as a reminder/repetition of a prior mass trauma suffered by her family.

The clearest indicator that the phantom existed as a real person is in the section entitled, “*La especie furtiva*” (“The Furtive Species”). In it, the protagonist speaks of an encounter from 1951 (the author would have been about 11), the memory of which floats through her unconscious like a ghost. It is a summer evening, in the dark,

la mano de un niño cruza el espacio que separa su cama de la mía [...] las dos manos han tenido que vencer toda adversidad, toda oposición, para recibir y

transmitir al mismo tiempo su deseo de unirse [...] produciendo sucesivas iluminaciones interiores, un ardoroso dolor porque en la intensidad misma que la unión provocaba estaba anticipándose la separación” (95-6)

the hand of a child reaches across the empty space that separates his bed from mine [...] the two hands have overcome all adversity, all opposition, to simultaneously receive and transmit their mutual desire to be united [...] producing successive interior illuminations and an ardent pain because in the intensity provoked by that union there was already the anticipation of separation. (73)

The narrator speaks of this chance encounter, which took place “at the discretion of adults” (who placed the two youngsters of the same age in the same room, in separate beds). An isolated reading might suggest that this encounter had sexual overtones; however, the intricately structured text carries all the vagueness of a ghost. The narrator relates,

en la epifanía del encuentro o en la pesadumbre de la pérdida, ha tenido la resonancia de esa figura: ajeno o ajena a la forma que cobra en mí, el otro o la otra, como el niño, están mudos o ausentes cuando la figura se recrea [...] se manifestaba en evocaciones y era recogida por mi conciencia como un vástago al que no se puede desconocer ni, menos aún, negársele un nombre” (96)

in the epiphany of the encounter or the sorrow of the loss, has had resonance in that figure: no matter how the image has grown in me, the other, like that child, is mute and absent when the figure itself is recreated [...] it has recurred in memories and has lodged in my conscious mind like a descendant who can be neither disowned nor, for that matter, denied a name” (74).

This connection to the past is reaffirmed when she describes how she continues to see the ghost/child from her window, as he “*mira la casa, la recorre con sus ojos oscuros y acuciosos como de comadreja, después mira a los lejos el tranvía que no llega*” (97). (“looks at the house, measures it with dark, penetrating, ferretlike eyes, then peers into the distance for the tram that does not come”) (74). She goes on to describe his clothing: he wears knickers, gray school stockings, and black ankle boots; however, this attire does not fit the reality of 1951 as much as does 1921; this description—this furtive memory—is a vestige of the past and belongs to another.

Inexplicably (for the narrator), this “memory” surfaces while she is on a trip to London. On the flight, she observes that fellow passenger has suffered a heart attack; his wife and the stewardess conspire to act as if he is sleeping (as not to alert the other passengers), to “[a] *las buenas maneras dejaban a ese hombre abandonado a su suerte*” (100); (“politely abandon the man to his fate”) (77); upon landing, an ambulance is summoned. She is in London with a photographer to do a story for a Mexican magazine. The two of them walk through Hyde park, her companion “*con enormes zancadas de ganso*” (99); (“stomped along with the elastic strides of a goose”) (76); she and her goose-stepping companion work their way towards a crowd milling about; she sees a green, red, and white flag. Thinking it is a Mexican flag, she rushes toward the group, only to discover it is the Iranian embassy, occupied by hostage-holding terrorists. Her confusion peaks when, upon returning to the hotel, she sees a cluster of grapes. The image of this geometric formation triggers a (false) memory, or “knowledge” that, “*Alguien se había suicidado en un hotel en Londres*” (101). (“Someone has committed suicide in a London hotel”) (78). The phrase repeats itself, doubles over, and bounces off of the walls of her mind. As she reflects on it later, she explains, “*La especie furtiva con desdoblamiento tiene una construcción discernible: una voz interior, levemente separada de la mía propia, formando una suerte de sonido-aura a su alrededor, me dice, en una circunstancia inesperada, una verdad*” (103). “The furtive species, along with the divided self, has a discernable construction: an interior voice, slightly separated from my own and forming a kind of aura of sound around itself, says to me, in unexpected circumstances, a truth” (79). This truth, this phantom, strives to make itself known, as much as the narrator seeks to discover it. They reach towards each other, just as the image she holds of two young children, reaching towards each other to clasp hands in the dark.

Throughout the narrative, the protagonist yearns for relief from her multiple pathologies: she seeks analysis; she attempts to write. In Mexico, every Sunday evening, she sits down to write (she inadvertently writes erotic texts). With a group of friends, she attempts to read Hegel's *phenomenology*. On her second return to Argentina, she tells a therapist/friend that what she really wants, more than anything, is to *write*. (61). She truly desires freedom. Her narrative ends with a description of her psychotic-like effort at writing—which mimics the hexagonal cylinders produced by her brain's attempt to find structure. Simultaneously, the phantom endeavors to break out—it escapes through glimpses, images, words, affects, and false memories; unfortunately for the narrator, the information escaping holds no significance for her; she cannot transfer it into language. She is condemned to maintaining the secret.

While the focus of my reading of this text focuses on the phantoms in the narrator's psyche, it should not be forgotten that in the present, she is also dealing with the issues connected to living in exile not once, but during two separate dictatorships. This alone would be traumatic: "The exiles find it difficult to unite the fragments. They do not know what to do with the experience of living abroad which is largely irrelevant in a country still frozen in an inward looking isolationism. To which corner of reality can they consign this past that cannot be shared?" (Martínez 17) I propose that her experiences in exile exacerbated what was already present in her psyche.

En estado de memoria has no real sense of closure because it reflects the reality of one who still suffers from an unknown pathology. However, the intent of this essay is not to uncover the phantom, rather to provide a new perspective with which to read the text—one that affords a deeper understanding of what otherwise remains inexplicable. Mercado's narrative is not merely a brilliant description of the difficulties of living in and after exile; it also provides a clear

example of the complexity of the repetition of trauma, with multiple implications for the generations growing up in post-dictatorship Argentina.

Projection and Horror: The Image of the Other in Film Portrayals of the ‘Dirty War’

[The] moment in which we are forced to acknowledge that what binds together our community is the scapegoating and sacrifice of the ‘other’, is a moment of sublime terror which could potentially open the way to acknowledgement of collective guilt.

Angela Connolly

In a reflection on Truth Commissions and violence prevention, Brandon Hamber states that “There is an expectation that the emotional testimony of victims and the uncovering of past atrocities were committed and by whom will prevent impunity, transform social relations and the meaning of past violence, and affect how people will act in the future” (211); he suggests that this is not the case. Drawing on Peter Novick’s analysis of the Holocaust and collective memory in the United States, he suggests that, “There is identification with the victim, rather than the perpetrator, precluding people from thinking of themselves as potential victimizers. This over-identification with victims serves to devalue the notion of historical responsibility and the complicity of bystanders” (211). In other words, our view of the Other is the key to not repeating the past. We often think that simply narrating the past is enough to prevent the repetition of evil in the future; however, as long as our narratives focus on the victim, making sure that the interlocutor identifies with—sees themselves as—the victim, the repetition of the past is inevitable. Only when we are capable of seeing ourselves in the aggressor—seeing that, under different circumstances we too could possibly become an aggressor—can we truly begin to make the significant changes necessary to avoid repeating the past.

In this chapter, I analyze the portrayal of the Other in three films that deal with the “Dirty War” in order to show a progression of how the Other/other is imagined. In the first two films, we have the stories of children of *desaparecidos*, abducted, and illegally “adopted” by people with connections to the military *junta*; neither child protagonist knows that she is adopted until

the courts intervene, each at the request of the Grandmothers' organization. The final film is a detective story centered around a murder/horrific breach of justice that took place in 1974, on the eve of the military *coup d'état*. In each film, I point out the manner in which the director portrays the "other," and how that portrayal serves to perpetuate a cycle of violence—or not.

In its most basic sense (and the way that Freud used the term), "other" can refer to anything outside of ourselves: other people, or "otherness." Lacan developed the concept into something more complex. First, he distinguishes between the "Other" (*Autre*) and the "other" (*autre*, or *objet petit a*). The Other is the locus of language and desire. It belongs to the Symbolic Order, to speech, and the Law; it "cannot be assimilated through identification" (Evans 133). We can never identify with the Other because it is greater than us; it determines how we see ourselves.

Our formation as a Subject begins with the gaze—the gaze of the Other. In a healthy environment, the infant is held/fed/cared for by the all powerful mOther (the mother being a symbolic figure, rather than a specifically gender-based or genetically-connected person). The gaze is filled with desire and projection; through the mOther's loving gaze, the subject feels loved/loveable, and returns that gaze back to the mOther. Within that primary relationship, the Subject begins to recognize—and respond to—the desire felt through the mOther's gaze. However, when the gaze is laced—or even filled—with hostile projections, it ruptures that healthy formation. In an unhealthy relationship, the parent feels threatened by a subject whose gaze demands more than (s)he is capable of providing, and often responds to that demand/projection with anger, or even violence, creating a cycle of vilification.⁴⁷

The *objet petit a(utre)*(small other) is akin to the projection or reflection of the ego; we see ourselves in each other. As the mOther's desire shapes the child's unconscious, the *objet*

⁴⁷ See Beebe and Sloate for a case study on mutual gaze patterns between infants and mothers.

petit a is what the child fantasizes about the mOther's desire; hence, it belongs to the imaginary order. As the Subject projects her/his desire/lack on others, (s)he is reminded—through the reflection of the returning gaze—of her/his own lack. The realization of this lack can result in injury to the ego.

Narcissistic rage is primarily the result of a wound to one's ego, and is often related to shame as a result of that injury. It may also be the result of recognizing that (s)he is not in control—either of one's own thoughts, or of another's thoughts/actions. The response—the overreaction—can be seen in a Subject's response to an injury, when (s)he lashes out against the offending object. It is this narcissistic rage that we see in the Military *junta*; according to Heinz Kohut, the narcissistically injured:

cannot rest until he has blotted out a vaguely experienced offender who dared to oppose him, to disagree with him, or to outshine him. [...] The opponent who is the target of our mature aggressions is experienced as separate from ourselves, whether we attack him because he blocks us in reaching our object-libidinal goals or hate him because he interferes with the fulfillment of our reality-integrated narcissistic wishes. The enemy, however, who calls forth the archaic rage of the narcissistically vulnerable is seen by him not as an autonomous source of impulses, but as a flaw in a narcissistically perceived reality. He is a recalcitrant part of an expanded self over which he expects to exercise full control and whose mere independence or otherness is an offense. (385-6)

This viewpoint of otherness is the source of terror as the Subject recognizes her/his inability to control the Other/other. The reaction is a shame-based rage which includes “the active (often anticipatory) inflicting on others of those narcissistic injuries which he is most afraid of suffering himself” (Kohut 381), and the primitive desire to obliterate anything/one who falls outside the imaginary ideal world. When the narcissistically injured individual or group takes a position of power, the results are devastating.

In her article, “Psychoanalytic Theory in Times of Terror,” Angela Connolly delineates between horror and terror, and further between what she calls *uncanny horror*, *abject horror*, and

sublime terror. Connolly begins by defining terror: “from the Latin root *terrere* - to frighten - is defined as extreme fear, while horror, from the Latin root *horrere* - to bristle or to shudder - is defined as terrified shuddering, intense dislike. Thus, while terror refers to the mental state associated with fear, horror refers more to its physical effects and has semantic overtones of disgust and repugnance” (408). She reminds us that not only do the two play different roles, terror, in and of itself is not a bad thing; even as children, humans enjoy being frightened. It is the excess of terror, and the inability to escape it that creates the experience of trauma.

Connolly goes on use the portrayal of the Other in horror films to demonstrate the difference between uncanny horror, abject horror, and sublime terror. With horror, both uncanny (Freud’s term) and abject (Kristeva’s term), the fearful reaction to the Other is recoiling, “a movement which reinforces mechanisms of repression and foreclosure and brings about narrative closure” (419)⁴⁸ In other words, if the reaction is horror, the viewer sees the Other as so foreign, that (s)he shuts off any possibility of identifying with it. However, when we experience what Connolly calls sublime terror, in which “the monster is both abject and subjectivized. It is portrayed as absolutely alien and ‘other’, but at the same time it is presented as possessing fears and desires even if they are perverse or psychotic ones” (420), the reaction is identification with the Other; we recognize the other in ourselves, and ourselves in the other. Granted, Connolly is discussing *horror* films, with completely fictitious characters. Nonetheless, we can apply her taxonomy to nearly any text in which a “monster” is depicted, be it human or otherwise. I propose that the depiction of the Other, creating a reaction of horror, perpetuates the cycle of victimization, whereas when the reaction to the Other is sublime terror, we can walk away with what Connolly calls “the realization that the perverse and psychotic desires of the monster are a

⁴⁸ For Freud, repression and foreclosure refer to the mind’s ability to protect the ego from injury by excluding painful impulses, desires, or fears from one’s conscious awareness. For Lacan, that which is in the Symbolic or Imaginary is repressed; that which is in the Real is foreclosed.

mirror image of our own perverse desires and the perversity of our own community and culture” (420), and the possibility of breaking that cycle.

Cautiva and *Los pasos perdidos* are films with a similar theme, which began in Luis Puenzo’s 1985 film *La historia oficial*: each of the protagonists is a (female) child of *desaparecidos*, whose biological grandparents are searching for her. In *La historia* the protagonist, Gaby, was five years old; in *Cautiva*, the protagonist, Cristina Quadri, is 15; in *Los pasos perdidos*, Mónica Erigaray is 23. Each film portrays the complexity of identity.

Cautiva is, as reviewer Volker Poelzl says, “A captivating drama about the legacy of Argentina’s military dictatorship of the 1970s, which still affects Argentina to this day” furthermore, “the movie skillfully shows how the disappearances during the dictatorship remain a taboo subject that is veiled in rumors and widespread ignorance.” It is director Gastón Biraben’s debut film; its strength lies in the director’s willingness to grapple a difficult and important topic.⁴⁹

The plot of the film surrounds a 15-year-old, and how she responds after it is proven that she is not who she thinks she is, but rather the daughter of a disappeared couple.⁵⁰ She is torn from the life she knows, and gradually allows herself to integrate into the family in which she was conceived, the Lombardis. In doing so, she must face and begin to mourn her losses.

The inciting incident occurs when the protagonist is in school; the Mother Superior calls her out of class, where she is introduced to a man and woman who are going to take her to see a judge. She asks if her parents are aware of this. They are not. Assisted by one of the nuns from her school, she is taken by these strangers to the courthouse, where a judge explains to her that her parents are not really her parents. She escapes and calls home. The first thing we notice in

⁴⁹ Movie trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gffrHzRVSc&feature=fvsvr>

⁵⁰ She also discovers that she has been lied to about her date of birth and is actually 16.

this scenario is the breach of legal etiquette. The way that she is taken—abducted—in secrecy, without her parents’ knowledge is ominously reminiscent of the same way that so many young people—including her parents—were abducted years earlier.

She makes it to the train station and calls home; her father comes to pick her up to take her home. Upon his arrival, they are surrounded by unmarked police cars; once again, she is taken. The father, a retired police captain attempts to threaten the detaining officer but is told that this is a federal matter; he is helpless to do anything. Again, we see the law using the same basic tactics that were employed by the prior regime (perhaps on a lesser scale of violence—for now); it is unsettling, as it forces the viewer to question how—in the eyes of the abducted—the one abduction is any different from another.

At the courthouse, Cristina is introduced to a woman who claims (with the proof DNA evidence collected under false pretense)⁵¹ to be her grandmother. Cristina is now a ward of the court, and sent to live with the grandmother. She is warned not to tell anyone where she lives, nor to contact anyone from her past. Like those living in secret detention centers, who, from time to time were taken out on the streets, she is expected to act “as if” everything is “normal.” She is enrolled in a new school, under the name given to her at birth, Sofía Lombardi. While to her “new” family,⁵² this may be only logical—her parents decided on a name before she was born/they were taken. For her whole life they have known her as Sofía; however, for the protagonist, who knows herself to be Cristina Quadri, she may as well have been given a number: she has been completely stripped of her identity. We see the repetition of violence in the democracy that replaced the former military regime; the manner in which the “transfer” of the “subject” takes place would in fact exacerbate what would already be an incomprehensibly

⁵¹ The court ordered a blood test; the family is told that it is simply “a follow-up” to the removal of her appendix.

⁵² From an overall perspective, they are the “biological” or “birth” family; however, to the protagonist who never knew that she was “adopted,” they are simply new.

traumatic event for any teenager, and in fact is a repetition of sorts. Additionally, the film also—unnecessarily—promotes certain stereotypical portrayals of the “other,” which, essentially encourage a mentality that will continue to repeat the past over and over again.

The director, Gastón Biraben, portrays each family in a stereotypical manner. The abducting/ appropriating family is orderly, beginning with the name “Quadri” (square). The design of the house and its furnishings are square, with sharply contrasting colors: dark wood floors, light colored walls and couch. The floors and stainless steel kitchen appliances are all highly polished, producing a sense of military-like order.

Not only is Cristina an only child, her parents apparently have no other family either—except for friends of her parents, they are socially isolated. She does not appear to have any cousins or grandparents. Her birth family, on the other hand, may not have as much affluence, but what they don’t have in money, they make up for in personality. We see them eating outside, with a warm, green, colorful background. She has younger cousins; there is a great deal of laughter. The interior of the house has more handmade items, the coloring is warmer, and more inviting; the wood floor is older, more worn, unpolished, more “homey.” This portrayal sets up the viewer: it makes perfect sense that Cristina/Sofía would “naturally” gravitate towards her “new” family (who wouldn’t?) They have much more to offer her than those “other” people (cold, evil villains).

At the same time, we catch glimpses of how the abducting parents view the “other” family. Throughout the ages, adoptees have appeared in narratives; in Biblical times, Moses was saved from death when he was adopted by the Pharaoh’s daughter. However, the characters surrounding these adoptees make clear the prevailing cultural belief that one can never truly rise

above (or sink below) their inherent identity.⁵³ In Victorian literature, birth mothers were typically perceived as inferior, dirty and immoral; adoptees often treated as scapegoats who could never truly rise above their sordid beginnings (Howe). Like the Victorian predecessors, the military families who raised children from the “other” side, felt that they were providing a service, not only to the child, but to the country, by “saving” them from an immoral, communist lifestyle. We see this “othering” portrayed in the film.

After a short break, Cristina is permitted by the judge to return to her (Quadri parents’) house, to gather her personal possessions. Her mother suggests that she looks “dirty” and should shower/change clothes. “¿Querés darte un baño primero? Está sucio ese lugar ¿No? Tenés el pelo sucio” (“Do you want to take a bath first? It’s dirty there, isn’t it? You’re hair is dirty”). This is the epitome of the stereotypical response to the birth family: they are dirty/inferior. The father chimes in with a more political bent: “How are those jerks treating you?” In a demonstration of utmost projection he asks (twice) if the judge has wired Cristina with a microphone, saying, “Those people will do anything to take you down!” From the Quadri parents’ perspective, the birth family—political and moral deviants—cannot be trusted. Cristina’s father sees “those people” as a threat; obviously if “they” (still) exist, it is because the *junta* failed, and it has returned to haunt them (him). It represents the abject—that which cannot be contained by the Law. With the unwelcome shift in power, he sees the new order as a “monster” with which he cannot identify—regardless of the striking similarities.

On a later visit, Cristina/Sofía confronts her Quadri parents about her origins, and how she came to be with them. They explained the story as it had (allegedly) been told to them: she was found abandoned in a train car at the station. As she presses for details, her Quadri father

⁵³ Moses proves this by rejecting his Egyptian upbringing and leading “his people” out of slavery; the Egyptians would argue that his actions are proof of his inherent inferiority; the Israelites, of his superiority.

reiterates, “*Tus padres te abandonaron*” (“Your parents abandoned you.”) This statement ultimately vilifies the birth parents, and posits the abducting parents as “saviors.”

After learning the details of her birth from a nurse who worked in a prison near one of the clandestine detention centers, Sofía/Cristina returns to the Quadri house to again confront her parents—especially her father. We see a photo of him in his police uniform, together with her godfather, “*El Turco*” (Glow worm) Jorge Macías.⁵⁴ The name is familiar to the viewing audience; he was not just any military man, who may have participated peripherally in the “Dirty War”; he was the Argentine equivalent of Spain’s *Torquemada*, the synecdoche of torture. There is no question of good/evil, no humanity can be found in this character: he is the epitome of malevolence. It was he who arranged for the baby to be separated from her own family and to be given to his good friends. By positing the characters within the film at opposite ends of the spectrum of good versus evil, the line is clearly drawn; the viewer knows where they are expected to stand. Bíraben omits the gray area in which most people actually live; however, “judgements [sic] of evil depend on consciousness, individual and collective, or in other words that judgements of value, of what constitutes good and evil are not fixed in stone, but are exquisitely variable and they will differ from individual to individual and from culture to culture” (Connolly 414). In this respect, *Cautiva* serves to maintain difference and otherness within Argentine culture.

Some time after she begins living with her biological family, Sofía/Cristina runs into a former classmate, the daughter of her parents’ best friends (Macías). Her friend is visibly hurt that Cristina “disappeared” and never contacted her. Sofía/Cristina attempts to provide an

⁵⁴ The name, “*El Turco*” (Julian the Turk) actually refers to Julian Simón, an “extremely sadistic anti-Semite” (Feitlowitz 58). The subtitles translate *el Turco* as “Glow worm”; presumably for his abundant use of the electric prod on detainees. The audience, however, would most likely recognize the nickname “*El Turco*” missing the change from Julian Simón to Joarge Macías.

explanation, and then asks her friend, “Did you know?” (about my situation even before I did?) Susana looks away; we know that she knows something. In the shot, the camera cuts back and forth between the two girls; it looks upwards at Susana, and slightly down at Sofía/Cristina, placing Susana in a position of authority. Additionally, we see a separation of class: Susana is dressed in her school uniform: a new, white polo shirt with the school crest embroidered on the front. Sofía/Christina has been removed from that school and now attends a public school. She is dressed in “street” clothes, a white t-shirt and a comfortable looking sweat jacket. The two girls are no longer living in the same world. After some prodding, the friend concedes that, yes, she knew. “*No sé cómo lo supe*”(I don’t know how I knew) “One day, it occurred to me that you didn’t seem like them. I asked my parents, and they told me, but made me promise never to tell you.”⁵⁵ Sofía/Cristina admits that, at some level, she always suspected that “*no les pertenecía*” (I didn’t belong to them).” While this sense of “not belonging” is a common theme among adoptees (and bearers of other secrets, as I have discussed in chapter three), it still touches on a stereotype surrounding the “adopting” family, ignoring the fact that *many* blood-related, natural born children also feel as though they do not belong to the families in which they find themselves, and serves to perpetuate the “otherness” of the adoptee. As portrayed in the film, the adoptee is an “other” who can never fully assimilate, or be accepted by the Other family.

This sense of not belonging also shows up in *Los pasos*, a film by director Manane Rodríguez, which takes place in Spain; the protagonist’s family is originally from Argentina. The title, *Los pasos perdidos*, harkens to a pair of Latin American texts, first, a novel with the same title, by Alejo Carpentier, published in 1953, which explores the transitional nature of identity. More recently, and a much stronger connection, is to the children’s song by María Elena Walsh,

⁵⁵ On a technical level, this seems highly unlikely; the film is set in 1992. The Military *Junta* still emphatically denied all disappearances and clandestine prisons. Earlier in the film Susana knew about these things; however, it is highly unlikely that a high-ranking official would have shared this information with his child.

in which the narrative voice speaks of being in the land of I-don't-remember (*el país de nomeacuerdo*) in which, she takes a (wrong) step, and is lost. This song was chosen by director Luís Puenzo, as the theme song for *La historia oficial*, (1985), the first major film to deal with the sensitive issue of the fate of the surviving children of the *desaparecidos*. Consequently, the title instantly makes the viewer aware of the connection to the disappearances and to the looming change of identity for the protagonist. As such, the viewer is placed in a position of knowledge (s)he understands the significance of various textual clues long before the protagonist can make sense of them.

The plot of the film (based on a true story) is simple: In 1999, Mónica Erigaray's life is disrupted when she is tracked down in Spain by her biological family from Argentina. Her parents deny the "accusations" that she is not their biological child. Unlike the abducting parents in *Cautiva*, who immediately admit that the child is not their biological daughter, but deny any knowledge of wrongdoing in how she came to them, in *Los pasos*, the couple adamantly insists that Mónica is their daughter, and they should not have to bow to the insult of proving it with a blood test. The issue is taken to court; Mónica must come to terms with reality. The court separates her from the house of her abducting parents—who are arrested for the murder of her mother, her subsequent appropriation, and the usurpation of her identity. The film ends a year later with her returning to Buenos Aires to meet her biological grandfather, the famous Argentinean writer Bruno Leardi. Upon her arrival she introduces herself (for the first time) as Diana—her name prior to her abduction.

In *Los pasos perdidos*, we see how secrets are transmitted to the unconscious. The abducting parents invest a tremendous amount of energy in "creating" memories for the child. Unlike the other protagonists, who are separated from their mothers at birth, Mónica is 18

months old, and has already begun forming lasting memories. These memories haunt her, especially in her dreams, and she has no way of making sense of them. We also recognize a phantom; in *Los pasos*, we can see the manner in which a secret is encrypted through the behavior(s) of the parents. It is important, to note that encrypted secrets (phantoms) are the result of a secret that is so shameful, it remains unspoken. However, in the case of the Argentine officials, the motivation for secrecy is not overtly connected to shame or guilt; rather, it is a method of preserving a highly desired way of life. The phantom secret manifests itself through the pathological behavior of the secret bearer. In this case, it shows up in the repetition of a child's game.

Mónica works in a pre-school. At one point, she is sitting before a group of four children. She begins to ask each child, “¿Cómo te llamas?” (What is your name?). As the children respond with their Christian name, she prompts them for their full names. Then she asks, “¿Cómo se llama tu madre? ¿Cómo se llama tu padre?” (What is your mother's name? Your father's name?). Initially, it seems an odd game to play; however, it is precautionary; if a child is separated from their parents, it is much easier to reunite one who knows their full name, and those of her/his parents. As she quizzes each child, they haltingly produce the names as requested. The last child responds to her question, “¿Cómo se llama tu padre?” with an innocent, “Papá.” A look of wistfulness clouds the face of the protagonist, followed by a faint smile; in that moment both protagonist and viewer recognize the innocence that is lost through the repetition of the game. Later in the film, the origins of the game unveil its sinister significance.

After Mónica realizes that her self-perception has been destroyed, she finds a cassette tape amongst her childhood toys. On the tape, Ernesto and Inés Erigaray are asking her—as a young child—the same questions: What is your (full) name? What is your father's name? What

is your mother's name? Both the protagonist and the viewer recognize the significance of the "game"; they are attempting to erase her identity/memory, and replace it with a new one.

According to the director, this aspect of the film is based on a real case: one of the returned children had such a cassette. "*Su abuela la escuchó y era un juego siniestro que hacían los apropiadores. Una forma de control de esa familia sobre esa hija robada. Brandoni encarna a un apropiador, su personaje es confuso, nunca es tierno. El peso del ocultamiento no puede generar franqueza en las relaciones*" (Cited in Bianco par. 7) (The grandmother listened to it and it was a sinister game played by the appropriators. It was a form of control by this family over the stolen child. Brandoni [actor playing Ernesto Erigaray] incarnates an appropriator; his character is confusing; he is never affectionate. The weight of this secret does not permit openness in relationships).⁵⁶ The secret intent behind the sinister game creates a phantom in Mónica's psyche.

Phantoms also arise as the result of an unnatural lack of information, which we also see in this film. For example, women often tell stories about "when I was pregnant (with you)," providing children with their own prenatal narratives. Often, as adopting parents have no such stories to tell, they substitute this by reminding the child of how fortunate they are; in this way, if the adoptee is an only child, (s)he understands. However, Mónica has received neither type of input. As her mother attempts to fill in some of the blanks for her, Mónica asks, "Why did you never have more children?" Inés turns away and offers a vague response about "complications" from when Mónica was born. Not until the trial does it come to light that her mother has been physically incapable of bearing children since before she was born. Mónica also recognizes an absence of history from the past; all she knows is that her father was a mechanic. She is confused when the protestors accuse him of being a killer and torturer; however, she cannot create an

⁵⁶ Translation mine.

alternate reality in her mind for a lack of information: “They have never told me stories about Argentina.” As she and her mother sift through a box of photos from her childhood, her mother shows her a picture of a baby in a crib; she explains, “See, here it is. I thought I’d lost it with all the others, or that your grandmother burned it with all the papers that she didn’t want anyone to see.” The photo is of a baby younger than Mónica was when she was abducted; the fire—which cannot be disproved—a way of explaining the void where evidence of her existence should be. This void illustrates exactly how the phantom is formed. Her mother shows her another photo and presses her, “*Mirá, mirá. ¿Te acordás?*” (Look, look. Remember?). The mother’s insistence on Monica’s remembering, along with the false photo creates the desire for an imaginary memory where none exists.

Throughout the film, the protagonist, Mónica is being followed by a woman who merely stands at a distance and watches her. (Were it a male character, he would be dubbed a stalker.) The viewing audience knows she represents the “grandmothers.” In a choreographed effort, the Grandmothers’ organization begins posting flyers all around with photos of Monica as a baby, demanding to know the whereabouts of this missing child. The media picks up on the story, the father is visited at work by his lawyer; we discover that this is not the first time that accusations have arisen. In the gaze of the *abuela* we see desire; it is also unsettling (traumatic) for Mónica. Initially, the gaze is unnerving, as Mónica recognizes the desire inherent to it (what does this woman want?). According to Martin Sorbille, “gazing is an inverted act insofar that certain overwhelming images move toward the subject” (106). The grandmother’s gaze is a possessive desire: the *abuela* wants that Mónica should be returned to her rightful family; Mónica feels that constant presence as a threat.

The Grandmothers enlist a classmate of Mónica to work with them; he is supposed to get close to her and gain her trust. He offers her support throughout this traumatic period of uncertainty. Where Mónica's boyfriend takes sides with the parents (this is an outrage!) and merely sees her as a pawn in some "scheme," the new friend looks at her through the eyes of the mOther: he sees her for who she really is: she is not Mónica; she is Diana. In that gaze, Mónica experiences the repetition of the mOther's gaze; one that constructs her as a Subject, not based on who the abductors want her to be, but rather for who she already is; this (re)construction is traumatic for her.

Rodríguez portrays the Other/other with more subtlety than does Biraben; however, we still see the Military *junta* as an Other with whom we cannot identify. Once Erigaray believes that the "issue" has gone from an irritation to a threat, he—together with Mónica's boyfriend and a hired security guard—begins to display physical violence, first against the classmate, Pablo, who is working with the grandmothers and trying to coax Mónica into meeting her (still alleged) biological grandfather, then with the grandfather himself. They threaten to kill Leardi if he doesn't leave the Erigaray family alone. Mónica's boyfriend (who fully supports her parents) is portrayed as a "Caveman." He shuts off her misgivings and refuses her the emotional support that she needs; he is a Spanish replica of a young conservative from Argentina. Erigaray speaks of "*esta gente [que] no conoce límites...es tan enferma*" (those people [who] know no limits...they are so sick); with indignation he refers to Leardi as the "*viejito loco*" (crazy old man) who keeps returning to harass them.

Throughout the entire film, Mónica's father remains in denial. He refuses to admit anything to her. He sees the Grandmother's organization as a monstrous Other. Returning to Connolly's definition of abject horror, in his projection, "there is no attempt at subjectivization,

the motives for the creature's behaviour [sic] are meaningless and unintelligible, it is devoid of any psychic reality. It is faceless, speechless and possesses a kind of mechanical quality that identifies it as utterly inhuman. Thus there can be no process of identification, no integration is possible and the monster can only be foreclosed, expelled into the Real from whence it will return with frightening regularity” (Connolly 420). The Erigaray parents cannot (refuse to) see any element of the other’s viewpoint. However, Rodríguez uses an intertextual component for the most prominent portrayal of the Other/other as monster.

Shortly after the onset of their legal problems, the family is watching television together. Mónica and her father have fallen asleep; Inés is watching *El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*) by Victor Erice (1973), a quasi remake of director James Whale’s original (1931) film version of *Frankenstein*, which (together with its sequel, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, 1936), is considered one of the finest horror films of all time. In the original, Henry Frankenstein is a doctor who succeeds in finding a way to bring the dead back to life. However, the clip from *El espíritu* differs from the original: the child is not Maria, a precocious blond, but rather a silent, dark-haired child “with large, sad eyes” (as Leardi describes his own granddaughter). The viewer immediately thinks of young Mónica. In the clip, the young girl, Ana, is looking at her reflection in the pond; her image dissolves as the monster appears in her place. Inés glances over at Mónica and Ernesto, then back at the television. It is not clear who she considers the monster (Ernesto, Mónica, or Leardi), but the connection is clear; the dead has returned to life to haunt them. Mónica awakens and attempts to make sense of what she sees: her/our view turns to the television, where the camera is looking down on the child, from above (the monster’s view of her) in a close-up; then it cuts to the child’s view, looking up in a close-up at the face of the

monster. The whole segment only lasts 48 seconds; however it firmly plants the idea of the Other as Monster in the mind of the viewer.

In both *Cautiva* and *Los pasos perdidos*, each side clearly sees each other as a Monster, with whom neither can identify; each side projects his/her own dark side onto the other: “from an individual and a collective point of view, the universal tendency to project onto the other our own shadow plays a vital role in the way in which we experience difference and otherness [...] to the degree that [one] does not admit the validity of the other person, he denies the ‘other’ within himself the right to exist-and vice versa” (Connolly 413-4). As dramas, each film maintains a Manichean dichotomy between good and evil; the viewer is unequivocally aligned with the victims (those who identify with the aggressors would never watch the film, based on plot alone), (s)he resists acknowledging the validity of the other, and is encouraged to maintain this rigid structure.

Returning to Angela Connolly’s argument, it is the element of horror that creates an unbalancing; she suggests that, “the horror genre has always been remarkable for its tendency to undermine the hierarchical binary oppositions, order and disorder, rationality and irrationality, good and evil, used for the construction of the self in Western society” (422). If she is correct, what we need is to portray the situation with more horror. Juan Campanella does just that in *El secreto de sus ojos* (The Secret in Their Eyes) (2009).⁵⁷

El secreto is essentially, a nostalgic detective story. The protagonist, Benjamin Espósito, recently retired from working for the courts, decides to write a novel based on a cold case that he worked on (and was forced to abandon) 20 years ago. The film is filled with flashbacks and revisions, frequently pointing to the fallibility of memory. The inciting incident takes place in 1974, the film cuts back and forth from present to past, to piece together two parallel stories of

⁵⁷ Movie trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcHkTSqeGoU>

unattainable love. The flashbacks take place during the initial stages of “*la guerra sucia*,” and throughout the film we see multiple connections to the “Dirty War” and “justice.”

The film begins in a train station, with an unwanted departure, then cuts to the protagonist/writer attempting to find a beginning to a story. He writes; the viewer sees the fantasy version in his head. He stops writing, tears up the paper, and begins again with a new imaginary version of what happened on that morning. He stops in frustration. We then see the protagonist in an office cluttered with papers, where he argues over taking a murder case. He consequently meets Irene, with whom he is immediately captivated. According to the director’s cut, these four elements, all found in the “introduction” set up the rest of the film, which he sees as three “acts.”

Irene represents Lacan’s *Autre*--the Other. Almost always dressed in red, she represents danger. Tall, strong, articulate, recently returned from earning an Ivy League education in the U.S., she is introduced as Irene Hastings (Spanish pronunciation—*ahstings*); she corrects, placing the emphasis on the Anglo long “A” *HĀstings*. She is the powerful mOther, and a constant threat to masculinity; she reverses the traditional roles of active male/passive female by taking charge of her life, career, name, and (eventually) lover. Espósito plays the role of a passive male who looks/desires, but does not act on his desires; consequently, he is castrated by the symbolic order, by the *Autre*. According to Robert Resch, for Lacan, “the object, *object a*, is not simply an actual, concrete woman; rather, it is an actual woman upon whom the Subject projects his fantasy. Thus, object *a* is a sublime, fantasmic quality, something in the object more than the object itself” (in Ritzer, George. *Encyclopedia of social theory*, VI. 433). The viewer can already see that she is the unattainable desire of the protagonist. This sets up one of the conflicts that will drive the plot of the film. The letter “A” (*Autre*) continues to serve as a

leitmotiv throughout the film, predominantly through a broken typewriter, on which the letter “a” is broken.

Campanella also sets up the importance of the Lacanian gaze early in film; throughout the film, the female is viewed through the masculine/objectifying gaze. In this introductory scene, where Espósito meets Irene, the protagonist is speechless; he simply “takes in” the beauty of the female-as-object; she establishes her own power by meeting—and returning his gaze unflinchingly. In this instant, the protagonist experiences what Julia Kristeva refers to as the sublime, triggering “a spree of perceptions and words that expands memory boundlessly... removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where ‘I’ am—delight and loss” (Kristeva 12). This “memory” is related to that sensation of pre-oedipal *jouissance*. Espósito is still reveling in this sensation of the sublime, when he enters the crime scene, where he is faced with the abject. According to Kristeva, the abject is that which simultaneously attracts and repels (predominantly related to the body/bodily fluids), and is closely related to the sublime.

The protagonist arrives on the scene of the murder. Before the viewer sees the actual crime scene, we first see the reaction of the protagonist. Upon viewing the crime scene, Espósito is stunned. Time seems to stand still. The victim is depicted in a series of three shots, beginning with a full body shot, followed by a medium close up of the face, framed by her splayed arms, and finally, a close-up of her hands/arms. In-between each of these shots, we get a reverse-angle close-up shot of Espósito; the camera lingers on his face; we see his reaction. He appears deeply affected by what he sees. The camera’s gaze, closely watching the protagonist as he gazes upon the corpse, forces the viewer to search for some hidden meaning: did Espósito know the victim? Does he have a daughter? There is something unsettling in the way that we see him; it is almost as if he is the one who has been victimized. The corpse, according to Kristeva, (any corpse) “is

the utmost of abjection...imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us” (4). The corpse reminds us of the constant threat of our own nonexistence. The murdered corpse goes beyond this: it “remind[s] the viewer of the frailty of the Symbolic order, on which life as an autonomous subject depends” (Tatum 252). Essentially, it points to the absolute impotence of the Law to (preventatively) protect us from each other.

In this scene, we also have the initial introduction of the picture within a picture, as Espósito/the camera scans the room, looking at various photos of the victim—some in which she is with her husband, others alone. A detective informs us that they are recently married. In this scene—and frequently throughout the movie—the camera uses an over-the-shoulder-shot in which the viewer constantly has something in the corner of the shot which precludes a clear, unobstructed view. This obstruction draws the viewer into the film, as an observer, wanting to get in closer, wanting a better view.

At the same time, the crime scene itself is an artistic vision. The placement of the body is that of a reclining *odalisque*. The word *odalisque* is French, with Turkish origins: it is an apprentice female slave to a concubine in a harem. In the 19th century, the painters in the artistic movement of Orientalism (especially Ingres and Matisse) conventionalized the reclining nude female such that it became known as the *odalisque*, which can be compared to murder scene.

View One: full body shot. Overall, we have natural lighting, (what I’m going to call) yellow overtones: yellow sheets, orange rug, caramel-colored wood flooring, streaks of red blood. Pale skin, jet-black hair. Light coming from window over-exposes (burns) hands/arms/portion of left breast. The coloration is warm-to-hot, indicating a crime of heat/passion. Additionally, “curvilinear and serpentine shapes, diagonal lines, spirals, and circles are all dynamic shapes that prompt some eye movement” (Guest 56). The line of the body falls

gracefully off the bed and onto the floor, dividing the picture diagonally, and drawing the focus of the viewer into the negative space (dark shadows) to the right of the body: into the void. The image represents a split for the viewer “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/ male and passive/female” (Mulvey 62). This scene demonstrates such a split, as the men stand around the lifeless body; not only is the in the point of view of the camera masculine, we the viewer stand slightly behind another male, while a third kneels down, photographing the body; every male eye in the room is gazing upon the female who cannot respond. Additionally, the coloring (including an unusual amount of blood for a strangulation) is hot; the body, still (cold). Splayed in a passive, eroticized *odalisque* repose; in the context of a (violent) crime scene, it appears unnatural.

View Two: Medium-Close-up head, partial torso. The artistic pose again takes precedence over the content of the shot. Upon a close examination, the viewer cannot determine the source of the blood: the face/torso appears relatively unscathed—little bruising around the still perfectly made-up eyes or the mouth, simply the presence of inexplicably smeared blood. The combination of jet-black hair and alabaster white skin, with a few bluish veins showing through on the breast, is again reminiscent of the notion of the eroticized (marble-like) female beauty. The curvilinear shaping prompts the gaze of the viewer to continue moving, rather than to stop and rest on one spot; hence, it pulls us away from the abject and detracts from the violent nature of the crime.

View Three: close-up of hand/forearm. A close-up of the hands/forearms. On the left hand, we catch a glimpse of a wedding ring. We do not see substantial abrasions or blood under the fingernails (blood drawn from the attacker), only what is presumably the victim’s own blood

spattered on her hand, and streaked on her arm. As in View One, the arm cuts the shot diagonally.

The shot sequence draws the viewer into a sense of abject: the diagonal and curvilinear lines force the eye to continue moving, rather than resting, or being drawn into the gaze of the body; simultaneously, the camera is both obscured by another person, and the focal point moves outward, to the extremities; this essentially heightens our sense of desire. We instinctively find ourselves wanting to return to get a better view, to gaze at the lifeless, disheveled nude body *in its entirety*. Like the protagonist, we are caught up in the abject—that sense of simultaneous repulsion and attraction.

At the same time, the sequence of shots positions the protagonist as the victim: we begin and end with Espósito. The sequence lasts 1:30 and consists of 16 shots, most very short (12 are less than 7 seconds). For every shot we have of the victim (the body, or a photo of her) we have a cutaway nearly equal time of him. For the first 60 seconds, we hear nothing but a piano, playing one note a time; slow, delicate, and in a medium-high key (matching the feminine voice). However, as we (Espósito) view the body, we also hear him sigh deeply; even as we focus on her body, we are interrupted by the reminder that he is not only present, but profoundly affected by what he sees. His reaction takes such precedence over the scene, that, as viewers, we nearly forget that this female body has been raped and murdered by the hypermasculinized, manic-erotic, narcissistic male, and our interest is piqued by the male protagonist/“victim.”

A closer look at the wide angle shot (view one) is disturbingly similar to *Lustmord* (*Sexual Murder*) (1922) by German painter Otto Dix.⁵⁸ According to Maria Tatar, this painting was based on a crime scene photo, which was published in Erich Wulffen’s *The Sexual Criminal*.

⁵⁸ According to Maria Tatar, many artists during the Weimar Republic (between World Wars I and II) were obsessed with depictions of the mutilated female body; simultaneously, the country experienced a surge of serial killings.

In Dix's painting, there is a pool of blood flowing away from the head of the victim; Campanella reproduces the same effect with his victim's mane of black hair. Other similarities include the spattering of blood around the bed and on the victim, and a portrait of some sort hanging off to the side and slightly above the victim.

As Tatar points out, positioning of the body is essential: "posed in a fashion reminiscent of eroticized female bodies [...] Dix's subject appears as a disruptive figure, the decomposing body in what might otherwise be a composition of classic order" (15-7). The same can be said for Campanella's work. As with a classic work of art, we as viewers, instinctively want to move in and get a closer look; the pose (together with the visual obstructions) heightens our sense of desire to gaze at the nude body.

For Lacan, the gaze closely resembles the Real⁵⁹ and is filled with elements of projection and desire. Campanella incorporates a kaleidoscope of examples of how the gaze functions: the bifurcation between what is spoken with words and what is expressed through the eyes, the power of the mutual gaze (and how we communicate through it non-verbally), the ever-present objectifying male gaze of desire, and the melancholic gaze focused on the lost object. The rape itself—and the subsequent murder—never becomes central to the plot; it remains a floating signifier throughout the film. The gaze holds much more significance.

The husband is quickly dismissed as a suspect. The police arrest two workers seen in the building a few days before the murder; a confession is beaten out of them. We see a prelude to the police brutality that is to come. Espósito, however, refuses to accept the confession, insisting

⁵⁹ Our relationship to things is created in the order of the Imaginary, and ordered by the Symbolic, however, "something always slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that is what we call the gaze" (1973, p. 73). Lacan distinguishes between the function of the eye and of the gaze, between looking and *seeing* (and being *seen*). The gaze can point outwardly (as a parent, gazing at a child), or inwardly (one can sense when (s)he is being observed). The feeling of being watched captures the attention of that subject and forges a bond between the watcher and the watched.

on keeping the case open, even though the police have no other suspects. He visits the widower at home, looking through photo albums for clues to understanding the victim. It is in these photos that the gaze begins to take on a heightened level of importance; he notices a young man who is repeatedly “caught” on film, gazing at Lilianna, the murder victim; it is because Espósito recognizes himself in those photos that he understands the significance of that gaze—he looks at Irene with the same gaze of longing, desire.

At the same time, we see the repetition of the murder scene-as-art. At the widower’s apartment, Espósito picks up another album; as he begins to leaf through the pages, we see a black-and-white photo of Liliana. It is a close-up of her face, printed in a 5” x 7” photo, pasted in a square photo album framing it with a 3-4” “matted” border. The size of the photo, the negative space surrounding it, and the quality of composition gives the appearance of a professional model in an artist’s portfolio. However, it is a photo from the crime scene. The viewer is directed, once again, toward the beauty of the victim—and consequently the loss the husband suffered—as if physical beauty quantitatively intensifies the sensation of loss. These photos have the appearance of a portfolio—not only in content, but also in presentation: they are in an album, in the hands of the victim’s husband. This is, of course intentional on the part of the filmmaker. He is presenting the victim as a work of art, objectified in all of her beauty. Even in death, she remains the subject of the male gaze. Once again, the artistic presentation of the victim distracts the viewer and detracts from the horror of the crime.

The viewer must also ignore the fact that the widower possessing the photo absolutely contradicts police protocol: it is the family of victims that provide the police with photos, not the other way around. Case photos—evidence—would remain the property of the police, and not be shared with the family. Furthermore, the content of the photo contradicts the integrity of the film

on a technical level. In the scene when the photo was shot, the eyes of the corpse were still open as is common with homicide victims who are fighting to stay alive. *After* the photographer completed his work, the eyes were closed, and the body was immediately covered with a sheet. The “authentic” crime scene photo would have had the corpse with eyes wide open, shocking the viewers, and obliterating any ability to preserve a sense of artistry in the photo.

The young man in the photos (Gómez) becomes a suspect; he is eventually captured, and confesses. The gaze, once again, plays a pivotal role in garnering that confession. Upon his capture, the suspect is detained for three days, without any explanation. He is finally brought into a room for questioning; however, Espósito, not trusting the process, intends to illegally question him before the judge arrives. When his sidekick, Pablo fails to show up to help—presumably out getting drunk—Irene becomes complicit. Initially, she argues with Espósito, attempting to convince him to wait and do the interrogation according to the law. However, the top button of her blouse has come undone and in the middle of their conversation, she suddenly feels the penetrating gaze of the suspect on her breasts. Almost transfixed, he doesn’t even notice when she stops talking and turns her face towards him. Feeling the violation, she brings her hand to her chest, fingering the button and reassessing the situation. This pivotal moment changes everything for the suspect, as she turns against him, and by mounting a powerful attack on his masculinity successfully goads him into a full confession. The scene produces a sense of relief that the confession has been garnered; however, it is at the expense of following the law (which the viewer, like Espósito, fears will fail if left to its own devices). The viewer begins to recognize their own desire to transgress the Law in the name of justice.

We also see the repetition of desire between Espósito and Irene. Mid-way through the film, the two (in the present) are reminiscing over coffee; Irene has brought old photos from her

engagement party. In two different photos, we see Espósito as a mirror image of the murderer with Liliana: rather than looking at the camera, he is gazing over at Irene, the love he is about to lose to marriage. The viewer cannot help but recognize the irony: under different circumstances, it would be *he* who was accused of murder. The seed is planted: how different is he, really, from the murderer? As the plot develops it becomes more difficult to distinguish between the Other and the other.

For Lacan, the *petit a(utre)* is akin to the projection or reflection of the ego; we see ourselves in the *petit a*. In *El secreto*, the viewer is placed firmly on side of victim, husband, and the side of “justice.” We identify with—both as a projection and a reflection—the victim. Like the main characters we equate the Law with justice and order. However, as the tale unfolds, we experience a split; the emerging government is not seen as a protection, but rather a monstrous Other, with whom we can neither identify, nor trust. In an unexpected twist, the murderer is set free from prison, and employed in the service of the emerging military government. Espósito and Irene seek an explanation. They are informed that the police are fully aware of his psychopathic character and consider it a valuable trait; furthermore, there is nothing that either of them can do about it—especially Espósito, who (unlike Irene), is a *nobody*, who should stop pining after what he can never attain. Gómez, who is walking around free, armed, and with the full protection of the law becomes the representation of the Other, creating a psychic split in Espósito, as he can, on one level, identify with and on another, not identify with him. The viewer identifies with the protagonists, recognizing the threat to their well being. The antagonist is armed, psychopathically dangerous, and has full permission to exact revenge on those who put him behind bars. Thus begins the reign of terror. Although the film skips ahead, passing over the actual “Dirty War,” the viewer can clearly see allusions to this period in Argentine history.

Throughout the film, the concept of memory and forgetfulness works as a leitmotiv: in viewing the photo albums, each photo is covered with a strange piece of waxed paper, with an outline of the contents, and a number over each person. On the opposing page in the album, is a name, corresponding to the number. The outline of each body is vaguely reminiscent of the scene of a homicide, where evidence is numbered. Furthermore, identifying people with numbers harkens to the “future” past, as citizens/prisoners were referred to by some captors by number, rather than name. Morales explains that he thought up the system, as “over time, you forget” (people). A year after his wife’s murder, he confesses to Espósito that he no longer remembers the little details: on that last morning together, did she make him tea with lemon? Or was it honey? He laments that “I can’t remember if it’s the memories, or the memories of the memories” that he retains. This obsession with remembering the dead, and the details, speaks to the melancholia experienced by the country in general, and the families of the *desaparecidos* still attempting to process their losses.

The tale of the past ends with Espósito, who is on the government’s hit list, leaving Buenos Aires, and Irene. The present tale begins with his return—after the return of democracy to Argentina—and his decision—almost obsession—to write a novel about what happened. In order to uncover the truth, Espósito eventually tracks down Morales, the husband of the victim. Morales, still a bank manager, has moved out to the country, where he lives alone. Espósito questions him about the past, and mostly, how it is that he has moved on—his query isn’t as much about the murder as it is about himself: as one man—completely in love—to another, how does one reinvest one’s libido after the loss of the object of desire? Morales’ answer is disingenuous: it was 25 years ago: forget about it. This causes Espósito to suspect that Morales is hiding something. After he leaves the “ranch,” he parks his car on the highway and stealthily

returns to the property where he finds Morales in the barn. There he has built a cell to hold the murderer. As Espósito steps into the building, Morales is framed under an archway, next to the entry to the cell. Espósito gazes upon the unknowing prisoner; the shot cuts to a reverse angle, from inside the prison, viewing Espósito through the bars. Then back at the prisoner, with Morales to the left. We view him through the “bars” of a window pane. In that moment, the viewer sees that all three men are being held captive by the past.

Espósito (the camera) slowly moves towards the cell, finally stopping in a close-up of his face. The prisoner returns Espósito’s gaze (to the camera), approaches Espósito, and reaches through the bars. Espósito recoils. Gómez softly begs, “Please, tell him to speak to me.” The viewer realizes that, not only is Morales secretly holding him prisoner, he has been subjected to a severe form of torture for more than 20 years: completely isolated from any human contact. The viewer is forced to recognize the mimesis of the vigilante justice and simultaneously to wonder if it is actually *possible* that there could be hidden prisons left over from the *Proceso* period, still detaining political prisoners in Argentina. As the viewer wonders what Espósito will do, she must also ask herself, “What happens when the Law fails our expectations? What would I do?” Will he (should he) intervene? Will he (should he) tell the authorities? He walks away, never speaking a word; not to Morales, not to the prisoner, who begged him for the sound of a human voice, nor to the audience in a voice-over. The scene ends with him simply walking away.

Although Campanella leaves the ending open, we suspect that Espósito will continue to do nothing. If Espósito is defending justice, the viewer is forced to (re)consider the definition of justice. Given the prior circumstances, the murderer being not only freed, but also promoted in the service of the government was completely unjust. Yet, because the image of the prisoner is so

closely linked to those of the *desaparecidos*, we immediately reject the idea that this could be justice either.

Connolly states that horror films:

show a remarkable capacity to provoke social consciousness, and by bringing together oppositions that are traditionally dissociated and kept apart, by blurring the boundaries that separate self from other, life from death, good from evil, such films actually work to weaken the projection of evil onto the ‘Other’ and thus provoke reflections on guilt, both collective and individual. In other words they offer one of the few opportunities available in our society for an encounter with the Sublime. (423-4)

This is exactly what Campanella does in *El secreto*; he refuses to tie up the loose ends, forcing the viewer out of a passive viewing. The film turns the gaze upon the audience; requiring each viewer to take a position. Even if one refuses to accept that version of vigilante justice, we are still forced to imagine—if only for an instant—how we would (re)act in that situation. The boundaries between self and other are blurred, making viewers complicit.

Unlike the other two films I discuss, *El secreto* allows the viewer to experience the sublime—that instant in which beliefs are unraveled. “The moment in which we recognize the other in ourselves and ourselves in the other is a sublime moment of ‘unlimiting of the imagination’” (Connolly 419). It is not until the projection of the Other as pure evil is broken that we can begin to recognize what *really* went wrong—in any situation. It is not the simple narration of the past that will alter the return of the repressed, but rather through an acknowledgement of similarity, and of the possibility of collective responsibility.

However, this is not an easy task; as Freud points out in “Civilization and its Discontents,” humans are not “gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness” (111).

Unfortunately, as he also points out, this idea runs counter-intuitive to how we see ourselves—or at least how we want to see ourselves. He asserts that aggression is a natural inclination on the part of mankind, and in fact cannot be quashed. As an example, he cites how “once the Apostle Paul had posited universal love between men as the foundation of his Christian community, extreme intolerance on the part of Christendom towards those who remained outside it became the inevitable consequence” (112). A similar discourse used by the *junta* during the *proceso* period, in which extreme violence was meted out in order to promote Christian values.

Where Sigmund Freud pointed out the innate aggressive nature of humans, according to Harold Blum, it was Anna Freud who formulated the concept of identification with the aggressor, which he explains is, “rooted in the child's use of identification to overcome feelings of fright and helplessness, and to obtain aggressive as well as libidinal gratification” (610). It is an important coping mechanism. Our desire to identify with the victim may occur similarly, “on a developmental continuum, going from the early stages of self–object relations up through more advanced stages where partial identifications with victim objects may be components, for example, in normal sympathy, altruism and curbs on destructive aggression” (Orgel 373). Because we generally prefer to see ourselves as sympathetic, we may find it easier to posit the Other as the aggressor (who also is the one who withholds, and imposes the Law on us, which prevents us from experiencing total gratification).

Blum goes on to state that identification is a normal, healthy aspect of our development, but that it has been seriously overlooked in studies of psychic trauma. He states that identification is often connected to love. “Paradoxically, there is an automatic identification in states of traumatic terror. [...] The helplessness of the ego is compensated for by identification with the aggressor, an expectable defense and a mode of adaptation” (611-2). By identifying with

the aggressor, the once helpless victim regains a sense of power. This is a crucial element of recovering from trauma, and in restoring a sense of autonomy. Otto Kernberg suggests that in situations where trauma has:

altered psychic structures in a consistent way, the treatment always reveals an unconscious identification with victim and victimizer that needs to be analyzed [...] so called trauma therapies that treat the patient only as a victim [...] typically, tend to maintain an unchallenged severe inhibition, whether it is in the sexual or aggressive realm, reflecting the patient's unanalyzed, unconscious identification with the aggressor. (78)

Ignoring this necessary identification with the aggressor leads to a repetition of trauma, as the victim is unable to fully process or make sense of the chaos experienced. On an individual level, this repetition takes place in the fantasy of the victim. On a social level, the unresolved identification will replicate the cycle of violence.

The late Stanley Milgram published the findings of his social experiment in 1965 in which “an experimenter ordered a subject known as the ‘teacher’ to shock a ‘learner’ each time he or she gave a wrong answer on a learning task. The learner or victim was an actor who actually received no shock at all. As is now well known, 65% of the subjects obeyed orders and inflicted what they thought was extreme pain on a protesting victim” (Kabatnick and Marcus 116-7). The common response to his findings is an adamant refusal to consider that one could be in the majority, and a denouncement of those who were. Yet, similar studies have garnered similar results. Freud was right: at the core, we have a powerfully aggressive nature.

Returning to *El secreto*, Campanella provides an unusual option to the viewer to choose whether to identify with the victim or the aggressor. (Or to decide who is/are the victims in the end.) His primary audience is Argentine citizens; his open-ended conclusion invites viewers to at least for a moment, consider the possibilities; this is truly, the only way that a traumatized society can write its own narrative and avoid the repetition of violence.

Conclusion

Amnesia brought on by repression is one of the liveliest forms of memory.

Jacques Lacan

We needed art—the language of infinity—to mourn the losses and to face up to what in traumatic memory is not closed and cannot be closed.

Shoshana Felman

Although the texts which I have analyzed are separated predominantly by genre, literature, photography, and film, I hope that the way in which I have brought them together, and through my analysis of them, it is obvious that none stand alone, and that various elements function as leitmotifs throughout this project. For example, the photograph, while the subject of its own inquiry in chapter two, also appears in literary texts. Alicia Partnoy (almost) wishes she had a photo of her daughter in prison; photos from the Holocaust seen as a child haunt the narrative voice in Mercado's text into adulthood. In each of the films I discuss, the photo plays a significant role, as young people look for photos from childhood to support the narratives they have been given, adults produce false photos to create fictitious narratives, and photos of adults capture the gaze of desire towards the lost object. Clothing also runs between multiple texts, reminding us the various ways in which clothing serves us, far beyond simply covering our nakedness. The fragmentation of the narrative voice can be clearly seen, not only in the literary texts, but also in the paintings of Raquel Partnoy and Diego Dayer, whose works provide us a way of visualizing what others have expressed in writing.

According to Lacan, the structure of thought is based on language. Language exists prior to the Subject, and it is through language that the Subject enters into the Symbolic order; we choose to accept the language offered us in order to understand and to be understood. Furthermore, he states that, "the subject's unconscious is the other's discourse" (*Écrits* 265) or rather, "the presence of the unconscious, being situated in the locus of the Other, can be found in

every discourse, in its enunciation” (*Écrits* 834). Just as our self image is created by the Other, so is our unconscious; this is evidenced through our language.

In his book, *Dead Subjects*, Antonio Viego posits that, because “language as structure has certain privative and generative effects on the speaking human organism” (1), marginalized Subjects are essentially “dead on arrival” (210). His argument, based on Saussure’s notion of language as “a system in which signifiers signify only in virtue of their difference from other signifiers, and so any determination made about the human subject in language will be incomplete and insufficient to exhaustively defining who or what the subject is” (5) refers to the topics of race, ethnicity, and/or gender. However, I propose that a similar argument can be made for the situation in Argentina.

During the *Proceso*, the military *junta* in Argentina perverted the language that was spoken with a multiplicity of double entendres,⁶⁰ and through prohibition, relegated Subjects into the realm of the unspoken. They attempted to re-structure subjects through a highly specific discourse, and to completely erase those who would (or might) not comply. During this period (according to the *junta*), the *desaparecidos* ceased to exist both physically and linguistically. Additionally, the discourse altered by the regime served to re-structure the unconscious of the entire population. The artists whose work I discuss demonstrate the Subjects’ conscious fight against this dehumanizing structure, and against the *junta*’s version of the events that took place.

Lacan states that, “history is already being made on the stage where it will be played out once it has been written down, both in one’s heart of hearts and outside” (*Écrits* 262). This points to the theatrical nature of history and the fictitious nature of memory; he does not argue that history is written after the event, but rather that history is written down, and then played out. He

⁶⁰ For example, bus stops became known as “detention zones”; young people spoke of “hoodies” (sweat jackets with hoods)—the term became synonymous for the hoods placed on prisoners when detained. Simple, everyday language was infiltrated with the slang used by the military forces. (See Feitlowitz for more examples.)

also reminds us that, in remembering an historical event, different parties have different experiences and, “although it is ‘the common people’ [...] who pay the price, it is not at all the same historical event” (*Écrits* 261). We see this clearly in Argentina’s history, as multiple participants experienced the threat of annihilation by the other (whether it be on a socio-economic level, or on a physical/literal level).

Once the *junta* lost enough power that democracy could be reinstated in the country (1983), they repeatedly denied any wrongdoing, and admonished the citizens that the best way to recover from the past was to simply forget. According to Antonius Robben:

In 1984, the Argentine military embarked on a decade-long campaign of intentional public denial, which could not but end in failure. Massive traumatic experiences cannot be silenced indefinitely by a large group of people, even by such a hierarchically structured organization as the armed forces, because silence does not erase the original emotional assault experienced by its members. (“How” 130)

Exacerbating the situation, because the *junta* denied the disappearances which the public knew had taken place, the suspicion remained that the military still held people in secret detention (Robben).

It is this atmosphere that many of the literary works which I have analyzed came forth. Their purpose was not only, as Cortázar stated in his lecture, to “denounce a system in crisis,” but also to serve as a witness, to support the testimonies of those who had survived, and to speak on behalf of those who did not. Moreover, Claude Lanzmann, has emphasized “*el papel del arte (y por lo tanto de la 'forma') en la transmisión de una experiencia límite que sólo puede ser rodeada y elaborada sin cesar, en la medida en que es fundamentalmente inasimilable*” (cit. in Vezzetti 4) (“the role of art (and hence its ‘form’) in the transmission of a traumatic experience that can only be surrounded and repeatedly elaborated, insofar as it is fundamentally

inassimilable.”⁶¹ The function of art is the transmission of the experience by enveloping and relentlessly expounding on something that is fundamentally inassimilable—an impossible task. In reference to his own film, *Shoah*, he states that it, “had to be built like a musical piece, where a theme appears at a lower level, disappears, comes back at a higher level or in full force, disappears, and so on” (cited in Felman “Era” 76). Not only is this essential for the transmission of the experience, it is also essential for the reception, so that the audience is not overwhelmed and shut off communication.

Because denial also functions as testimony, in some cases, as with Alicia Partnoy’s text, they served as an accusation and historical document; the appendixes include a diagram of *la escuelita* (including the torture room), descriptions of the guards, and descriptions of as many fellow prisoners as she could remember. Many of these texts also have a sense of “processing”; the writers seem to be working through their own trauma even as they narrate their experiences. This requires a great deal of courage, as self-censorship is difficult to break out of. All of these works—literary or visual arts—function to bring a painful topic into the general conversation, break down internalized censorship, and reclaim the language that was perverted by *junta*.

What these works do not do is cry for pity. The line between compassion and pity is a thin one. “In order to commiserate, we must transcend our self and the illusion of self-sufficiency by putting our self in another’s place, seeing the world through her eyes rather than our own. Rousseau calls this process ‘identification’” (Boyd 524). This identification becomes problematic: on the one hand, we identify with the one suffering because we can imagine ourselves in her place, and how we would feel; on the other hand, we are relieved that we are not the one suffering. Rousseau suggests that human suffering should serve to develop character: compassion can only be developed as a reaction to another’s pain. However, exposure should be

⁶¹ Translation mine.

moderated: “[One’s pupil] must be touched and not hardened by the sight of human miseries” (cited in Boyd 525). Paradoxically, in order for one to feel compassion, another must suffer; Robert Boyd argues that with this, “in the end, human suffering becomes a kind of ‘spectacle’ to be controlled, showcased, and manipulated for the edification of the few” (525). Rousseau points to the theatre, where viewers react to the imaginary, romanticized spectacle of suffering more than in an authentic situation, where human suffering is ugly. Boyd summarizes: “As moral spectators we unavoidably feel pity when we witness suffering, but in everyday life we are unlikely to act upon these feelings” (527). Boyd’s explanation of pity is similar to Kristeva’s definition of the abject: it both attracts and repels because in it, we recognize our own mortality. Consequently, pity promotes a voyeuristic distancing, rather than action to relieve the suffering.

Furthermore, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich suggest that, “identification with the innocent victim is frequently substituted for mourning” (cited in Connolly 424). Such identification precludes proper mourning, without which neither the individual nor society can hope to move beyond the past. It also serves to (re)create a cycle of the return of the repressed and the repetition of violence. In order to break this cycle, we must reject our impulse to identify with the victim; we must be willing to examine our own dark side and recognize our own secret desires. Perhaps even more difficult is to refrain from identifying with anyone long enough to simply listen, and not understand.

In an article titled “The Obscenity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann,” which is the transcript of a discussion led by Lanzmann, Shoshana Felman—while introducing Lanzmann—quotes Lacan: “What counts, when one attempts to elaborate an experience, is less what one understands than what one doesn’t understand [...] Interpreting is an altogether different thing from having the fancy of understanding. One is the opposite of the

other” (cited in Lanzmann, Caruth, and Rodowick 477). This willingness to listen and not understand is essential to truly hearing what is being spoken; as soon as we think we understand we stop listening.

In his discussion of a film which (in his words), “seeks to rehabilitate the image of a Nazi” (484), Lanzmann refers to “The Obscenity of Understanding,” brought on by the question of “why?”: “To gaze directly at the horror demands that one renounce distractions and evasions, beginning with the chief among them, the most falsely central, the question of why, with the indefinite train of academic frivolities or vulgarities [*canailleries*] it never ceases to induce.” (482). The question of “why?” creates a never-ending distraction from looking directly at the horror of the Event; not only does the question have no answer, in an attempt to create an answer, it becomes a question of evil, and instead of crimes *against* humanity, the discussion turns to crimes *of* humanity, in which all participants become victims of some sort. Even the perpetrators become victims of circumstances—be it their upbringing, or the fact that they are simply following orders.

Lanzmann does not replace “why?” with a more suitable question; instead, he suggests that “the act of transmitting is the only thing that matters, and no intelligibility, that is to say no true knowledge, preexists the process of transmission” (478). In order for that transmission to take place, there must be a willing listener, one who does not seek to understand, merely to interpret. In a similar vein, Alain Badiou defines Evil as the rush to judgment, when the “desire to force the naming of the unnamable is unleashed in fiction” (118). Trauma cannot always be named; what matters is the transmission, or rather, the process. Because trauma shatters our very core identity, it cannot be “fixed” all at once. The singular act of telling one’s story does not free the victim from the horror; traumatic memory works its way out, piece by piece. It is a process. It

cannot be rushed. The works of art which I have analyzed (and my analysis of them) rely on that process. My attempt has been to interpret, rather than to understand; I hope I have been successful.

In my introduction, I stated that through my research, I hoped to find a pattern, or perhaps a key to survival: what can we learn from these artists about surviving massive and psychic traumas? What I have discovered is best articulated by Deborah Horvitz in *Literary Trauma*: “The authors I study are, above all, *artists* committed to bearing witness to oppression. They understand that true political change is impossible without a metamorphosis in which those desires and wishes considered unspeakable—certain sexual, aggressive, even sadistic feelings—become a deliberate part of public as well as private discourse” (18 emphasis in original). It is not merely the act of narrating the past that will prevent future repetition; neither is it merely the act of receiving the narrative. In our telling, and in our listening, we must acknowledge—and give voice to—those unspoken feelings, and desires, wherein we identify, not only with the victim(s), but also with the aggressor(s).

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Vita

Juliana Reineman was born in Long Beach, California. She grew up in the San Bernardino Mountains, where she learned to ski and developed a deep love for nature. She took the G.E.D. exam in 1984 at the “recommendation” of her high school faculty. Her first degree was an Associate of Arts degree in media communications, with a focus on television programming. At the age of 28 she returned to college to earn a teaching credential. She enrolled in Spanish 101, where she fell in love with the language, changed her major, and graduated with honors four years later. She has travelled to Peru, Costa Rica, and Cuba to improve her language skills. She has earned two Master of Arts degrees: one in English composition, the other in Spanish. She is an avid photographer. She loves learning and teaching, and is passionate about life. Her research interests include 20th century Latin America (Southern Cone, Caribbean, the “Boom,” the short story, and women writers), literature of trauma, psychoanalysis, second language pedagogy, interdisciplinary studies, music and visual arts.