Post-Dictatorship Argentinian Cinema as a Renarration of Collective Memory

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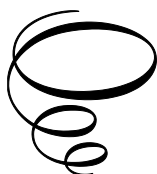
The Spectrum of Absence

By

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Translated by Lilen Gillet

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ABSTRACT

Although Film Studies is an area with important epistemological advances, in recent decades most of the analyses related to the Southern Hemisphere present an approach to this region's cinema that places importance on its historical-political descriptive capacity without paying attention to its symbolic power as a performative actor in the processes of social change. This book focuses on this epistemological gap by highlighting the discursive relationships between the ethical-aesthetic modes of production of Argentinian cinema in the first post-dictatorial decade and the competing discourses that were negotiating a narrative of the truth of the dictatorial past. The Spectrum of Absence covers the hyperreal dynamics through which this cinema stands as a cognitive map able to promote critical interpretations of the post-dictatorial world, represent a theoretical model about how society is structured, and guide the individual's sense of place at that moment of intersubjective forgetting. The book starts with an analysis of Luis Puenzo's film *The Official Story* (1985) presenting it as a pattern of reinterpretation, representation and reconstruction of the historical narrative that generates a new syntagmatic chain – a new syntax of memory – capable of promoting the social elaborative work of memory that confronts the symptoms of postmodern and post-dictatorial schizophrenia. For this reason, this syntactic organisation serves as a "cognitive map" for the examination of two other later films: *A Wall of Silence* (Lita Stantic, 1993) and *Buenos Aires Vice versa* (Alejandro Agresti, 1996), so that the three, together in one intertextual dynamic, are integrated into a post-dictatorial poetics that renarrates collective memory.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOREWORD

For the generation of Argentines born during the "National Reorganisation Process", or in the immediately preceding years, it is difficult to disconnect our lives from this *process*; the very term implies the development of a determination towards a specific objective, that began with the military regime and that extends to life under the *democratic* regime. Those of us who went through our socialisation process under this system and later grew up in the world they left for us cannot help but feel that we are *instruments* of such a reorganisation. Thus, the "re-democratisation" and the "process" have become two faces of the same coin, without which we would be unable to pay for our orphanhood.

We have been taught everything, everything, even what we should not have learned. Thus, the adults of the present have naturalised that fear and instilled conservative values as the only way towards coexistence. We believe in national myths as the true milestones that forged history, and we have become increasingly intolerant because this attitude seems to be the only truth constitutive of social life. Perhaps all this is due to this generation, to which I belong, being deprived of all connections with the alternative, that today constitute a hole in the social network: 30,000 disappeared fathers, mothers, educators, intellectuals, artists, scientists and workers of all kinds who were not there to educate us and will not be here to tell the story.

Up to the time when I was writing this book (2003-2005), the story of the past had been told, – relying on the horror and disregarding the civic and economic responsibilities that instigated it –, with the guarantee given by those who were present. These were the 38 million amnesiacs, deaf, blind and mute who were unwilling, or unable, to acknowledge themselves within the catastrophe.

Thus, what concept of social memory did they bequeath to us? One that builds a sense of belonging to the culture in which one is born? If every generation is educated by the memory of past generations, where was the generation that should pass down memory to us? Instead, we have received a transplanted memory of the national anthems and holidays that celebrate an independence in which no one believes, a memory that leapt over the

historical void of the unnameable, that which was not in books or discussed in classrooms.

From the place of a new young adult who refused to accept the teachings of their "education" and declined to educate new generations through the mechanical repetition of a sick Argentine society, I found it necessary to unveil the traces of memory of that utopia so it could "return with life" in the solidarity song of artistic expression.

Considering that 20 years separate the writing of this book and its present edition, and aware of the theories and perspectives with which analysts of the past two decades have offered possible explanations for the social catastrophe, this manuscript would be now completely obsolete. But it is not. In order to be so it would require today's Argentina to have overcome the conflicts by socially agreeing on a collective memory of the dictatorial past. If it were inconsistent with what this book reveals about the construction of the real carried out by the discourses of neoliberal democracy, the average Argentine would already have visualised the ways in which power manipulates them and would not have repeated electoral decisions that undermined their own present and future economic and moral well-being. It is sad to note that, despite the efforts of popular cultural politics that followed the writing of this book, none of this has been consolidated in any substantial way. Therefore, in the fortieth anniversary of Argentinean re-democratic process, I feel that the reflection that this book intends to communicate in 2005 is still valid and that, consequently, its original dedication could also serve as a motto today:

"This book is being written for all of us who recognise ourselves within a still solidary and still collective historical narrative."

PROLOGUE

XIMENA TRIQUEL

In his introduction to Lacan through popular culture, Slavoj Zizek wonders why the return of the living dead is such a recurring motif in films produced in the second half of the 20th century.[1]

From George A. Romero's movie, *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968), to *Pet Sematary*, originally directed by Mary Lambert (1989) – whose remake was recently released (Kevin Kölsch and Denis Widmyer, 2019) –, the dead return once and again to our screens.

Why, Zizek wonders, do the dead return? Resorting to Lacan, the answer he finds is that they do so because they have not been duly buried. Dead people return – he says – because there is a symbolic debt that remains unpaid. For him, an exemplary case of this return are the victims of the Holocaust and of the Gulags, whose shadows "will continue to haunt us like the living dead until we give them a decent burial, until we integrate the trauma of their death into our historical memory" (Zizek, 2000, 48). However, there is no doubt that there are also other deaths that remain without graves, and whose subjects likewise return on these and other screens.

Funeral rites represent symbolisation par excellence – through them, the fundamental function of signs becomes evident: to make the absent present. Where else would the absence of a person who dies find its place if not within the symbolic framework that constitutes us as a community? Without ritual, without this "second death", the dead cannot "stay in death", but rather persist in that intermediate space ("between-two-deaths", as Lacan would say): which is that of the ghost, that of apparitions – the one in the title of this book, the "spectre".

This is what Antigone claims for her brother, the possibility of a grave, a symbol to give death a closure. This is also what the ghost of Hamlet's father demands from him: a debt has to be settled.

Now, if the spectres return because they have not been properly buried, how would it be possible to ignore them in relation to the deaths that in Argentina

remained unwritten, without a grave to symbolize such absence?[2] And what is post-dictatorship cinema if not the space – one of them – where these spectres are allowed to appear?

For this reason, and unlike the historical period that we refer to as "post-dictatorship", post-dictatorship cinema cannot be circumscribed to a certain historical moment, but rather continues, insistently, despite time, even in movies produced nowadays. "Post-dictatorship cinema" does not constitute a temporary reference, but a spatial one: it is, as we have mentioned, the space where these spectres appear.[3]

* * *

Carla Grosman's text was written between 2003 and 2005, in a foreign country. At that time in Argentina, the laws of *Punto final* and *Obediencia debida*[4] were revoked, and President Néstor Kirchner ordered the removal of Videla and Bignone's portraits from the directors' gallery of the National Military School.[5]

 A new stage in human rights issues was beginning in this country, as was a new stage in the development of "post-dictatorship cinema".

Why then dwell on the previous cinema? Why go back to see and read those movies belonging to what we can call "the first post-dictatorship cinema"?

What can this reading contribute today, in such different circumstances, to reflecting on the past and, even more, the present or the future?

This book is the very answer to that question. The author focuses on the analysis of three movies, which extend throughout the decade – Luis Puenzo's movie *The Official Story*, (1985), Lita Stantic's *A Wall of Silence* (1993) and Alejandro Agresti's *Buenos Aires Vice versa* (1996). She proposes to identify operations that go beyond the historical situation, even though they refer to it. Thus, in *The Official Story* she finds the possibility of thinking about a new "syntax of memory", which enables the elaboration of collective mourning, while establishing a poetics that is repeated in subsequent movies. Grosman´s text addresses the theme of the last Argentinian dictatorship, but, at the same time, it encompasses what can be shared in other latitudes: the construction of collective memory, the work of mourning, cinema as a space for its development.[6]

Concurrently, in line with other works on the subject written from outside Argentina – such as those by William Foster or Richard King– it allows us

to see how these movies were read by the foreign academy and viewers from other countries, and in what way can project the Argentinian historical experience to other contexts. It should be noted that the three movies dealt with in this book, have had great international recognition.[7]

At the beginning of this prologue, I quoted Zizek's book whose title is *Looking Awry*. In Carla Grosman´s study, she looks at the movies that she analyses in that way: "awry", "from the corner of her eye", not to read in them what they say – or rather said – about recent history to their contemporaries, but to see what they expose – or exposed – unknowingly, a "political unconscious" (to use, as Grosman does, Fredric Jameson's term).

Grosman´s text, written in 2005, views Post-dictatorship Argentinian cinema from a spatial and temporal distance, through the eyes of someone who watches from another continent and decades after it was made. Its publication, 18 years later, creates further distance. Paradoxically, it is thanks to this gap, the void left by such distance, where it is possible to think again. That is, after we have looked at this cinema "vis-à-vis", once we have already analysed and understood it in its aesthetic, narrative, historical, political dimension, and, when it seems that there is nothing to discover there any more, this book provides us with the opportunity to look at those old movies again, this time "awry", and, by doing so, find new meanings there.
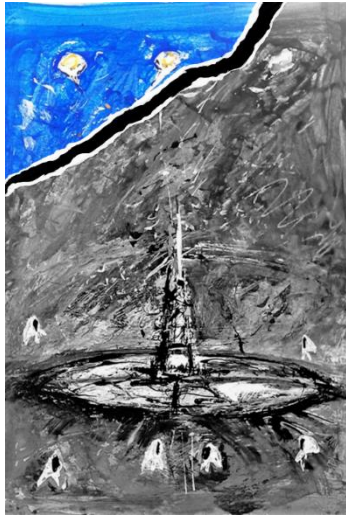
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Digital editing on *Ronda* by Alejandro Failla

INTRODUCTION

CINEMA, MEMORY AND FORGETTING: TWO SOCIO-SEMIOTICS STUDIES

I -First Decade of Post dictatorship. Cinema as a Symbolic Act for the Re-narration of Collective Memory

We must start by recognising that, during the re-democratisation (which, from a cultural perspective, I regard as the first post-dictatorship decade), Argentina showed characteristic symptoms of a generalised trauma typical of a society emerging from social catastrophe towards a system that does not channel their collective suffering and expresses itself socially through silence, forgetting or avoidance. Thus, while in the institutional sphere the political meaning of the events from the past were manipulated, in public discourse the claims of the direct victims of state terrorism were isolated. This isolation could occur through direct action, such as manipulation of the mass media, or by the monopolisation of painful accounts provided by direct victims.

In *The works of Memory* (2001, 48-50) the Argentine sociologist Elizabeth Jelin makes a distinction, essentially relevant to our analysis, between two groups that at the moment of redemocratisation began to negotiate the memory of the dictatorial past. The first is that of the "guardians of memory", a concept that applies to groups that, having been directly affected by state terrorism and having failed to find the conditions of social audibility to describe their experience, think of themselves as the only mourning relatives of the catastrophe, continually resorting to repetition and symbolic commemorations. In this way, they inadvertently hinder the possibilities of social elaboration of the experience by not allowing the intergenerational transmission of these memories. Unlike them, Jelin (2000) proposes the concept of "agents of memory" applied to groups that generate projects, new ideas and expressions of creativity that, regardless of whether they are direct victims, promote a collective redefinition of past experiences within present contexts. That is to say, looking at their actions in the cultural field, these groups understood the need to undertake the social elaboration

of collective historical memory. Now, what is history and what is memory? And how are the structural conditions to reformulate their social frameworks of interpretation created?

Theoretically, historical discourse is considered a textual construction since post-structuralists broadened the boundaries of the concept of text, which now encompasses objects that were, until then, thought of as realities or objects of the real world, such as social education, political power, social classes, institutions and events. Therefore, this new text is no longer restricted to written documents, but focuses on its constitution as an object beyond its empirical form and its relationship with other constructed objects; historical facts do not speak "for themselves". Frank Graziano (1992, 8) is part of this line of thought. He establishes the affinity between the discourse of history - often called fact - and that of literature, because history does not consist of raw events per se, but events that have come to us as more or less constructed narratives. Both are, in fact, the author's constructions with complex connections between their production conditions and some non-neutral paradigm that organizes them, gives them morality and meaning as truth. In Graziano's view, if history is a form of discourse that produces, rather than represents, past events, it must be the result of a methodology similar to that of textual strategies.

Fredric Jameson (1981, 20), using the same variables, sees history as neither a text nor a narrative, but, being an absent cause, is inaccessible to us except in its textual form. For this reason, the author argues, our approach to history of the real necessarily goes through a process of textualisation; narrativisation in the political unconscious. For Jameson (1981, 286) then, the discourse of history has two fundamental moments. The first is textualisation, the ideologisation process that narratively orders the events of the past. The second is narrativisation, the process of mental assimilation of this narrative, conveyed by textual means through a language that satisfies certain archetypal "drives" or "utopian values" that are present in the unconscious as archetypal impulses that find satisfaction in the narrations of cultural texts because both cultural production and religious practice are expressions of nostalgia for the collective. Jameson (1981) observes that these utopian values have been detached from daily life by the historical reification of the symbolic program of capitalism, but, he adds, they remain latent in the political unconscious. It is with this utopian reformulation in our psyche that the cultural artifacts of hegemonic power are connected with each other through a complex strategy of rhetorical persuasion on an unconscious scale. It is with this latent utopian impulsiveness that, according to Jameson, counter-hegemonic discourses must reconnect.

For Jelin, the materialisation of historical discourse is operated in the intersubjective dimension of memory where individual experiences can be transformed into collective experiences and embedded within shared cultural codes. Jelin sees memory as a representation of the past built as shared cultural knowledge that responds to a social organisation and its cultural codes. Thus, "personal memories are inserted into collective narratives that are often reinforced in group rituals and commemorations" (Jelin, 2001, 21).

But what role do these shared cultural codes play in the narration of experiences that aspire to become memories? Jelin's answer (2001, 20), based on Maurice Halbwachs (1980), is as follows: "we can only remember when it is possible to recover the position of past events within the frameworks of collective memory [...] Forgetting is explained by the disappearance of these frames or part of them". Quoting Gerard Namer, Jelin highlights: "...as these frameworks are historical and changing, in fact, memory is a construction rather than a single memory, and what does not acquire meaning within that frame is likely to be forgotten" (21).[8]

The sociologist concludes that forgetting occurs when public and collective practices no longer serve as the framework of individual memory: "when, due to political conditions, collective practices end up consisting mainly of ritualisation, repetition, deformation or distortion, silence or lies, and this is what causes the breakdown in the intergenerational transmission" (Jelin, 2001, 34).

Under these circumstances, and in order to help conceive a way out of forgetting, Jelin (2001, 31) proposes a clarification of the processes of memorialisation as "passive" and "active". This coincides with Tzvetan Todorov's distinction (2000) between the "literal" memory of an event (the social group preserves what is remembered as a non-transferable experience) and the "exemplary" one (when, "without denying the singularity of the event, the memory allows for learning, and the past becomes an action principle for the present").

The author then claims that there may be information stored in people's minds or in public and private archives, but these reservoirs are "passive" because they do not impel human activity in the present in relation to them. However, these memories can be enabled at the individual level, for which Jelin (2001, 23) incorporates another distinction, one introduced by cognitive psychologists between "recognition" - the identification of an item referring to the past - and its "evocation" - which implies the evaluation

of what is being recognised with active effort on the part of the subject -. Thus, the author states that in the social field passive memories are not per se a guarantee of their evocation, but, if the subjects evoke them when interacting, they become actions aimed at giving meaning to the past in the tragedy of the present; that is the social elaborative work of memory.

It is important to point out that Jelin recovers the Freudian term of "elaborative work" – which, in a therapeutic context, refers to the work of mourning. Laplanche and Pontalis (1981, 435-436) define elaborative work as the process by which the analysed subjects acknowledge specific repressed elements and free themselves from the control of the repetitive mechanisms that refrained them from such acknowledgement. In the context proposed by Jelin, such psychic work would be at play throughout the mourning process, which these authors define as an intrapsychic process following the loss of a fixation object, and by means of which subjects manage to detach themselves progressively from such an object. Based on this reading, Jelin (2001) applies the concept of "[s]ocial elaborative work of memory" to the political and collective fields with the aim of overcoming repetitions, forgetfulness and political abuses, as this would promote debate and active reflection on that past and its significance for the present and the future. This promotion of elaborative work has to do with the act of narration itself because, as Jelin (2001, 37) emphasises, "individual experience builds community as a result of the shared narrative act, of narrating and listening". That is precisely what we consider relevant when studying post-dictatorship cinema as an active factor in the processes of social elaborative work of memory. It is relevant, also, because if the experience is mediated by the symbolic acts that give and at the same time gain meaning within the interpretative cultural framework, it is possible to use symbolic mediations to resignify the historical interpretative framework of power. Hence, the evocative images of art and of the fiction of cinema and literature can - from an alternative textualisation strategy - restore alternative meanings to the construction of collective historical memory that could later be configured as a sociolect that legitimises the historical text as truth. That is why I consider symbolic mediations not only as acts that represent history, but also as facts that constitute it.

I agree with Jameson (1981) that the aesthetic act has a mythical status in the social imaginary because it both reflects and constructs an awareness of our historical present, which is what the author calls "the paradox of the subtext" (67). I contend that this simultaneity of reaction and situation that defines the "symbolic act" (Jameson, 1981, 62) constitutes the inherent historical performative capacity of the cultural text with which to modify

the perception of our own experience of the real and its interpretation as a narrative of the past.

Postmodernity and simulacrum as a cognitive map

Examining Jean Baudrillard's and Jean-François Lyotard's statements regarding the end of Modern referents such as the Real, Meaning, History, Power, the Revolution or even the Social, Jameson (1991, p. 50) claims these authors are covering up the theoretical problem of providing a narrative for contemporary history. He insists that the absolute rupture between Modernity, marked by totalising theories and revolutionary politics, and so-called post-modernity does not allow for certain existing continuities between the two. While these French critics propose that the "postmodern condition" is a new social formation, which is no longer governed by the laws of classical capitalism, Jameson disagrees. Instead, he suggests that "any postmodernist position in the field of culture - be it apology or stigmatisation - is simultaneously, and necessarily, an implicit or explicit political stance on the nature of current multinational capitalism" (1991, 14). He maintains that this "new society" is at all levels a phase of capitalism, since today capital penetrates territories that had never before been commodified, such as the unconscious. In this sense, Jameson (1991, 106) expresses that "what we have been calling postmodernism is inseparable from, and unthinkable without the hypothesis of, some fundamental mutation of the sphere of culture in the world of late capitalism which includes a momentous modification of its social function." This logic configures for Jameson the culture of the simulacrum, where the real is transformed into a series of "pseudo-events" or "spectacles" thaf an non-existent original. In his opinion, the "culture of the simulacrum" has materialised in a society that has generalised exchange value to the point that all traces of use value have vanished. Images have become the ultimate form of mercantile reification, the society of the spectacle in which "the past, as 'referent', is between parentheses and, finally, absent, leaving us nothing but texts" (Jameson, 1991, 46). The author argues that the effects of the new logic of the postmodern spectacle is the crisis of historicity, where subjects lose the ability to organise their past and future into a coherent experience. Their cultural production is now, according to Jameson (1991, 64), the fortuitous practice of the random or fragmentary, that is, "schizophrenic writing". Jameson uses such an adjective, following the Lacanian definition of schizophrenia that implies the breakdown of meaning along the syntagmatic chain.[9] Thus, for Jameson (1991) the logic of the simulacrum not only replicates, but also reinforces the logic of

advanced capitalism. Therefore, he declares that the only means of social change in the postmodern scene is to "reject this cultural form of icon-addiction that transforms reflections of the past into stereotypes and texts" (1991, 103).

So, what is the prescriptive possibility of postmodernity, given the exploded sphere of culture? In this context, says Jameson (1991, 21), art's mission responds to the need to invent and design "global cognitive mappings, both on a social and spatial scale" keeping the object and forcing a break with it. A "progressive art", the author continues, must involve a cognitive mapping of its cultural and aesthetic program to encourage critical interpretations of the postmodern world; it should represent a theoretical model of how society is structured, and guide the individual's sense of place. Ultimately, the mapping should become the "moment of truth of postmodernism", the "sublime postmodern", thanks to its ability to represent and, at the same time, constitute reality.

In my opinion, as a cognitive map, the simulacrum can fulfil the role Nelly Richard (1993, 453) prescribes: that of being a "postcolonial instrument of decolonisation" because "the use of the postmodern form (ephemerality, discontinuity, fragmentation, simulacrum) can redefine the roles in Latin American identity."

In view of this aim, I see in Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum (1994, 2) perhaps the only possible instrument to "intervene in history": its ability to distract power. Baudrillard considers that simulation is opposed to representation because the latter is a consequence of the equivalence principle of the sign with the real, while the former is a consequence of the utopia of the equivalence principle by the radical negation of the sign as value. As such, simulacrum cannot be controlled from the real because, as Baudrillard asserts, this is a hyperreal interconnection which referential order only governs over another referential order. Therefore, proposes the author, it can turn against power the same factors of distraction that power has successfully used for such a long time.[10] Consequently, I understand that there is still a possible field of negotiation within the hyperreal scene in which "the intervention in history" (which Jameson 1991, 21, upholds), should not diverge so radically from this logic of simulacrum but rather, in my opinion, the quality of the cognitive map that he prescribes should be the simulacrum itself.

If we agree with Baudrillard (1978, 146) that, in this context, the definition of reality itself refers to what is always reproduced, the hyperreal, how

should we approach the functionality of the simulacrum as a cognitive map of criticism, representation and orientation against the schizophrenic context of post-dictatorship and postmodernity? Perhaps observing what, until now, has been "always reproduced" in connection to memory and the treatment of a traumatic past.

The concept of "Cultural industry" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944, 95) plays a fundamental role in the construction and reproduction of a type of memory which Jelin (2001) calls "passive" and Todorov (2000) refers to as "literal". This is so because the media - traditionally linked to hegemonic power - constructs reality by providing a convenient interpretation of the past that contributes to distortion and forgetting by associating their images and meanings with the utopian impulses that capitalism installed at the time of its establishment.

Jelin refers to this epistemological violence when examining the way in which the past gains meaning in a memory. She states that the past is expressed in a communicable story and with a minimum level of coherence if it has managed to link with the present, in a socially constructed act of remembering/forgetting, in dialogue and interaction with the frameworks of social interpretation that make experiences narratable. Without its narrative incorporation, traumatic events create cracks or gaps in memory because it is impossible for them to make sense of the past event in the present. In addition, she assures that, at this level, forgetting is not absence but the presence of that absence, the representation of something that was and is no longer there. That is why denial and distortion of past scenarios, such as post-dictatorship, causes interruptions and traumatic gaps in the narratives, which renders them isolated and incommunicable since they cannot be narrated (Jelin, 2001, 29).

I believe that non-hegemonic cinema is the privileged actor to fill in the gaps that the violence of official discourse has created in the representations of memory. Within this symbolic confrontation, cinema has all the weapons for such a fight because it has the iconic and symbolic potential to attach images to facts that were not visible, and, in doing so, the image embodies what was heard or suspected, and provides us with materiality and proof (even if it is only a simulation). In this way, what the cinematographic narrative reproduces by means of its meta-intertextualisation is an image that, repeated in the diegesis as a symbolic act of reaction and situation, replaces the gaps in the collective memory, modifying the perception of the spectator's individual experience. This makes explainable what the traumatic has rendered unrelatable; it recycles the legitim dynamics of the

discourse of power with the aim, now, of favouring the conditions of audibility of another narrative. The simulacrum would then be using the logic that Jameson (1991, 103) criticises as "icon-addictive culture" in order to propose another reality, one constituted in accordance with the logic of simulated power. This could be achieved by assigning image, body and truth to a narrative of the past that satisfies the utopian impulses that our unconscious archetypically has borne since the pre-capitalist era. This produces narratives that rescue, reconnect with - or at least express nostalgia for – the sense of belonging to the collective as a founding value of the social order.

The poetics of post-dictatorship: the "social elaborative work" from the cultural field

It has not yet been possible to eliminate either terror or the sinister to overcome the crudeness of the experiences lived. The (individual and collective) victims' recovery from situations of social catastrophe requires the support of a social process that acknowledges and names its gaps and "holes" suggests Jelin (1995, 142). In my opinion, the "elaborative work" in the field of culture should begin by dealing with the form of reference of the political moment at which efforts are aimed. Nelly Richard (2001a) asserts that "naming is exercising a signification control and also determining the terminological convenience of that word according to certain pacts of socio-communicative legitimacy" (9). Thomas Mulian (1997) analyses the handover process from a dictatorial government to a democratic one in the recent Chilean context, refusing any attempt to divide history into periods; for him there was no transition towards democracy whatsoever, but one towards neoliberalism: "The [Chilean] transition is thus a continuity and not a break" (15).

Given that the names imposed on these processes are signs that evoke the presence (manifest or tacit) of a myth, of a matrix of behavior, of a pattern of thought on the basis of which the entire socio-cultural life of the country has been organised, the word used to denote the aftermath of the military dictatorship period becomes highly relevant. Thus, hegemonic discourse in Argentina still refers to the history of the last 47 years of cultural polices as divided into three periods: the dictatorial regime (1976-1982), democratic transition (1982-1983) and the democratic regime (from 1983 onwards). Authors like Guillermo O'Donnell (1992, 17-55) and J. Samuel Valenzuela (1992, 17-55), who have dealt with the democratic period and defined conscientiously the limits of democracy as a "virtuous institution" from a

"perverse one" respectively, have made very valuable contributions, although they have continued to approach history in a fragmented way. Personally, I have chosen to prioritise continuity, as Moulian proposed. Therefore, I suggest pursuing a historicity criterion in relation to the word "post-dictatorship", which links historical moments via a process of transformation to the neoliberal system, sustained by the infliction of fear or its myth and by the exploitation of this memory of terror.

I consider that the word "post-dictatorship" is inclusive because it tries to unveil the extent to which the last dictatorial regime determined today's political-economic and social program.[11] We must admit that "post-dictatorship" is also a conflictive term because, as Felipe Galende (2001, p.144) argues, it reveals "terror as an accident in the passage towards the liberation of its own logic of accumulation". Such seems to be the triumph of the neoliberal offensive. Richard (2001a, 10) also advises that the word post-dictatorship gives way to various misunderstandings because it relies too much on the forthright semantic meaning of the prefix "post". First, it intends to convey the end of a time of hardship and to leave behind, just like that, the multiple traumas that still poke at the resentful contours of our "after". Secondly, such a word pretends to equate the experiential locality of our "after the dictatorship" with the more generalised meaning of the other "posts" (post-revolution, post-ideology, post-history). It is a rhetoric that makes up, continues Richard (2001a), "the triumphant repertoire of dismissals and cancellations of the end of the century, taking to a period of no return what was previously marked by discord, the tragic, the utopian and the rebellious" (10).

Despite these very pertinent remarks, "post-dictatorship", rather than "re-democracy", better explains the economic-political function intended to be assigned to memory, which is that of reproducing the myth of the market in its common sense. In this respect, I regard "post-dictatorship" as a term that could satisfy the discourse of those to whom Jelin (2001) refers as "agents of memory", particularly in their search for a dissident language that could operate tore-narrate memory, representing the conflicting experiences of this present as evidence of a surviving sense of the past.

In my opinion, "post-dictatorship" linguistically summarises the complex articulation between the political, social, cultural and representational problems that I have set out to address in this study when I was wondering about the re-narration of historical collective memory. In addition, the term provides the analysis with a perspective that presents that Argentine socio-political moment in relation to and contiguous with other post-dictatorial

processes in the Southern Cone. This analysis is important as it brings together several national cases which were simultaneously under a dictatorial regime in South America, as if they were pieces of the same neoliberal system. Their political and historical concurrency also evidences their respective bourgeois national state projects as their process of self-legitimation. They were the foundational fiction with which their dictatorships have been successively justified.[12] For this reason, my perspective is theoretically aligned both with Jelin's concepts related to the processes of social memorisation in Argentina, as well as with the perspective of re-narration of memory carried out by the authors of the "Critical Scene" in Chile. The latter is especially relevant here because their performative politico-critical mission aims, from their non-reconciliation with the neoliberal paradigm, to change the conditions of discourse production in the Chilean post-dictatorship "by diverting the executive line of its bureaucracy and technocracy from meaning towards the zones of uprising of memory, desire and imagination" (Richard, 2001a, 20).

Following the authors from the Critical Scene, who argue that by re-narrating memory we could de-totalise and reconnect with a heterogeneous political space, I am interested in how the cinema of the first decade after the end of dictatorship in Argentina compromised common sense in an active and participatory work of mourning. As such, this cinema is focused on giving new meaning to individual experience outside the margins of hegemonic discourse, which it does by incorporating these individual experiences into a heterogeneous narrative of the collective that operates as a new interpretative framework for re-elaborating past experiences in the present. Specifically, as regards the entire process of "elaborative work", I am interested in recognising its possibilities in the cultural field, from the intervention with symbolic means in the hyperreal process of constructing reality and history and therefore, of the processes that narrate this text in the collective memory. That is why in this work I emphasise the production mechanisms of this re-narrative, its symbolic system, its language; how, where and when symbolic means are used to achieve the transfer of memory that goes - in Todorov's terms (2000) - from a "literal memory" to an "exemplary memory".

Let us then follow Jelin's distinction between "the place of documentary discourse and the imaginative place of art and literature" (2001, 130). The author emphasises that, although the actors and institutions may display a will to act on - preserve, transmit – memories of the past, these must be studied as the "records of learning and remains, practices and orientations that 'are there'", implicit, and also like "ritualised repetitions, nostalgia,

idealisations, ruptures and fissures…" (131). Those "remains" emerge through the interstices of the narrations, omitted from official documents and artistic or literary texts. Mulian (1997) agreed with this observation when he opposed the concept of re-narrative to that of discourse, because the latter belongs to a logic that expresses the tendency towards historical totality. Thus understood, discourse corresponds to the fields of explanation or referentiality - the documental, according to Jelin; instead, a narration is about understanding an experience that cannot represent all the horror and suffering with a discourse.

This shift from discourse to re-narration in the field of representation is analogous to what occurs in the social sphere. In a way, it is the same strategy - that of distancing from the official institutional forms - that "the agents of memory" use to tell (their) version of history, by means of performances, theatre, exhibitions, poetry, literature and cinema. In this way, the "scenes of production of languages of the expressive media will be the inscription surfaces where memory has displaced the traces of experience in response to discursive requests from the present" (Richard, 2001a, 12).

Richard refers to such active work of reconfiguring meaning as the "subject memory" in process and in motion, a term similar to Jelin's "elaborative work" regarding the exercise of "active memory", or Todorov's "actualize exemplary memory". All these concepts refer to interventions in the narration of history by the use of cultural texts as symbolic acts to modify the political meaning of memory in the present.

We have already discussed the need for the symbolic act to intervene in the two fundamental moments of historical discourse performance: textualisation and its narrativisation. From Jameson's point of view (1981, 66), the function of any current Marxist cultural analysis cannot be content with demystifying or unmasking - what happens in textualisation or documentary discourse - but it must seek, by demonstrating the instrumental form of a given cultural object, to project its simultaneous utopian power (i.e. performative, transformative of the real). Doing so requires delving into the process of narrativisation of the cultural object, that is, approaching it as a symbolic act in the political unconscious and recognising its possibilities for connection with pre-capitalist utopian impulses. It requires artistic re-narrations to deal mainly with the creation of a new language capable of developing a completely new dynamic logic of the collective, a language whose categories and contents break away from an epistemology of individualism.

Moulian (1997, 7) describes the re-narration and creation of a new language at such a socio-historical moment as the "poetics of the post-dictatorship". For this author "re-narrating" meant reimagining what preceded the naturalisation or normalisation of a prevailing order. In accordance with Jameson (1981), this would involve assuming collective desires as legitimate utopian impulses of pre-capitalist communal solidarity that reject the individualistic solitude imposed by the dominant discourse.

For Bret Levinson (2001), Moulian's *poetics* "is the emergence of a discourse after we have exhausted all conventional language, paradigm or measure of representation. Poetics is the articulation of my union with the Other" (53). This is the evocation of a common subjectivity, with which the subjects identify.

Poetics would be the new symbolic system of the post-dictatorship insofar as it forges a future which does not ignore, as in "passive forgetting", "literal memory", "documental discourse", "blocking", nor obsess over the past, as in the monopoly of pain experience exercised by the "guardians of memory". Instead, such a future must make its way through the past, producing identifications in the present, as in "subject memory", "exemplary memory", "active memory", to make active mourning possible. I argue, then, that Argentine post-dictatorship cinema is framed within such poetics.

Mapping, syntax and re-narration: The reinterpretation, representation and reconstruction of memory in post-dictatorship cinema

My premise is that Argentine post-dictatorial cinema builds its own narrative of truth, which creates a new historical narration by considering itself as a simulacrum in hyperreal dynamics. This re-narration configures a new interpretative framework with which to frame another collective historical memory. In such logic of simulation, the cinematographic narrative is not supported by any previous historical account, but refers only to its own logic of representation. That is to say, the cinema of this period works with a closed corpus of images and represented meanings that interrelate in a dynamic of "meta-intertextuality" (Genette, 1997) and thereby build a new symbolic system with which to re-semanticise reality. With this hyperreal dialectic, the cinema of the first post-dictatorship decade becomes an "agent of memory".

Its main function has been the reformulation of the interpretative framework to present images, evidence, voices, experience and remains previously marginalised by the official discourse. This is how such cinema succeeded in intervening, -with its heterogeneous signs-, the univocal references of "the real" that circulated in the self-legitimising hyperreal discourses of the dominant system. In the context of archival documentary discourses such as *Nunca Más* and the numerous official commemorative plaques at the time of re-democratisation, this fell within the strategy of past cancellation. This discourse without future claims that reinforced among the population fear of a recurrence of the horror, facilitated the continuance of the neoliberal program that paved the way for dictatorship and that was now veiled under the libertarian myth of democracy.

The film *The Official Story* re-narrates collective historical memory in a number of ways, the first being its great historical significance, because its narration challenges the totalising interpretative frameworks of hegemonic historical discourse in which it was possible to frame a collective memory of the horrific past detached from its political, economic and social causes. The film helped to articulate the problems of the democratic present connected with the events of the dictatorial past, since it unveiled the existing connections between the establishment of a neoliberal economic system and the violation of human rights committed by the Argentine military dictatorship against those who had opposed it. It made it clear that the external debt that the Argentinian dictatorship handed over to the democratic government was not the only debt with which Argentina, as other countries of the Southern Cone, signed its *ad eternum* dependency contract with the neoliberal system. The film brought us closer to that immense moral debt of the State to civil society due to the blood spilled during the transferral of its responsibilities to the hands of the market.

The second reason is its great epistemological relevance, since, by describing history only as a textual representation, it dismantled the narrative of power in which responsibilities for the violent acts of the past are disassociated from oligopolistic economic interests while such acts are presented as naturalised. This discursive deconstruction of History within the fictional representation of the film fulfils the essential role of orientation, or cognitive mapping with respect to the hyperreal and post-dictatorial postmodern logic in which it is embedded. This means that the film was capable of unveiling, through simulation, the way the simulacra construct a notion of reality, from which history is textualised and later narrativised as collective historical memory. That is why, with its own act of representation of - and in – a hyperreal configuration, the film gained the performative power of reality.

The third and last reason is derived from the previous two, when observing how this film fulfilled a politically crucial role by joining the dynamics of conflicting stories in the interpretation of reality, appealing to the statute of historical narration in the traditional sense. As symbolic mediation, *The Official Story* was not only a representation, but also a fact, as a vehicle for the constitution of political history. Its symbolic language named those archetypal utopian impulses of the collective, thus becoming a text of ideological persuasion able to legitimise the work of those who, in the social field, spread another version of the events: the "agents of memory". As such, they became the other members in the dialectical process (fiction-reality) with which this film sought to carry out a utopian-political re-narration of memory.

Luis Puenzo's film is presented, therefore, as a pattern of reinterpretation, representation and reconstruction of the historical narrative that generates a new syntagmatic chain capable of promoting the social elaborative work of memory that confronts the symptoms of postmodern and post dictatorial schizophrenia. Therefore, this syntactic organisation serves in my analysis, as the "cognitive map" with which I approached the examination of two later films in order to claim that the three, in an intertextual dynamic, are integrated into a post-dictatorship poetics revitalising collective memory. These films are *A Wall of Silence*, by Lita Stantic (1993), and *Buenos Aires Vice versa*, by Alejandro Agresti (1996).

Summarising these films as cognitive maps

The Official Story managed to re-frame the memories by re-presenting what Jelin (2001, 130) calls "the symbolic and material marks" of that past in a new historical narrative configured within the margins of fiction. I suggest that this is achieved by incorporating into its narrative a simulation of the main testimonial techniques of this socio-historical period, providing it with credibility and ensuring the spectator's identification with the source of its political-utopian values. With the appropriation of testimonial aspects into the cinematographic text - incorporating a new truth story - the viewer becomes an affected party, leaving their previous position as "guarantor audience" (Graziano, 1992, 71) of the official history. I contend that the film is a utopian re-narration of collective memory because its allegorical representation facilitated a shift from a "literal" to an "exemplary" memory.

In the case of *A Wall of Silence,* we observe how, faced with the melancholic scenario of the early 90s, when institutional denial of the truths of the past (pardons) made it impossible to give meaning to the victims' experiences of

pain and loss, this film promoted social mourning by operating paradigmatically from Benjamin's allegory (1928). Central to Stantic's film is the integration into its plot and its aesthetic representation, the problem of representing the social and psychological irrepresentability of these memories, while proposing new symbolic ways to make such experiences communicable.

In the chapter on *Buenos Aires Vice versa*, we will analyse the strategy with which this film stands as an epochal symbolic act, since it reflects a problem: the media's manipulation of subjectivity, memory and the social, but, also, the constitution of a new text of truth. Thus, while it uncovers the violence of distorted representation of meanings of the past conveyed from hyperreal dynamics, it circulates an alternative ideological text through the same channels of legitimation: utopias of the collective.

II – State Terrorism and Neoliberal Democracy: the spectacularisation of violence

In the complex postmodern and neoliberal context of the first decade of Argentina's post-dictatorship, the debate over the memory of repression constituted, manifestly or tacitly, the central struggle in the political construction of the future democracy. The meaning of the memory of the immediate past, both for the hegemonic reproduction of the neoliberal system and for its counter-hegemonic possibility, fits within a 20-year period. It begins with the coup d'état, on March 24th, 1976, which brought a bourgeois-driven military dictatorship to power, destined to violently introduce the neoliberal system. It ends twenty years later, when market logic was definitively consolidated not only as an economic power but also as a naturalised and undeniable discourse of order, freedom and progress.

Claude Lévi-Strauss' studies on the structure of myths (1963) recognised that social reality is fundamentally symbolic, and strengthened by its system of beliefs, customs, monuments, and institutions. Frank Graziano (1992, 9) has also observed that ritual is "(…) the paradigm of symbolic social expression that responds to social problems "reorganizing" – to use the word chosen by the dictatorship – the reality associated with the problem by displacing an effective solution with a symbolic drama that, ironically, aims at what is desired behind this displacement".

Such statements regarding the period in which I am interested allow me to identify the narrative mechanism used by this system as a ritual with which

reality was symbolically reorganised to enable its self-legitimacy as the natural, unique and necessary form of social life.

Graziano (1992, 8) states that the "Dirty War" - as is officially called the period of violence exerted on civil society by the repressive apparatus of the State – "was implemented under a form of polysemic violence". For Graziano, it was not only about the violence exercised to establish a politically and economically dominant group, but, considering its procedures, a political-religious mythology is revealed that underpins a "psychosexual experience" whose "ostensibly clandestine atrocities served as rituals of power spectacularization that rendered the population a "guarantor audience". This idea allows a question fundamental for our analysis: what role did the investigations and prosecutions of the actors in the military repressive ritual play for re-democratic politics? Did these serve as clarification of the political-economic causes that originated the repression, or did they rather contribute to the collective memory anchored in the domination rituals of military mythology, thus allowing the perpetuation of the system that had given rise to it?

We will demonstrate that these democratic procedures were the symbolic acts that "reorganised" reality and history for the benefit of the hegemonic narrative.

Finding the underlying mechanism of its ritual permits us to verify that this is the core of the hyperreal simulation through which the mythology of dictatorship served as a platform to narrativise the Market's text as a natural order in popular subjectivity. By searching for the traces of collective memory configuration, we shape the historical, political and discursive context of our case analysis chapters, which focus on a post-dictatorial cinema that, as an agent of memory, tackles the hyperreal narrativisation of neoliberal discourse from the only possible space of struggle for it: the same logic of simulation that underpins it.

Historical context prior to the coup d'état

Turning to the Armed Forces to carry out violent forms of repression with which to re-establish the bourgeois socio-political order is one of the continuous actions in the historical dynamics of the 20th century in Argentina. Such was the case in 1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966 and 1976. Graziano (1992, 15-24), considers that the rationale behind these constant actions, is that the responsibility of the Armed Forces shifted from the defense of the country to the protection of public consciousness from the

infiltration of an "exotic ideology": international communism. According to this discourse, an exotic ideology is one that dissents from or proposes an alternative to the forms of social exclusion that capitalism as a system presupposes, including the union activities of the working classes. The role of the Armed Forces becomes organic to bourgeois governance as long as it preserves the economic elites in power. They, in turn, legitimise the role of the repressive forces as a form of preserving "the moral and spiritual values of Western and Christian civilization" and the social "natural order" that the advocates of these exotic ideologies would endanger.[13]

In the face of the military coups, the working classes did not always react in the same way, but from the 1960s, the sectors of the working class, which had constituted the solid foundations of Peronism, were the phobic obsession of the bourgeois military. They were seen as the "internal enemies" who organised an armed counterattack that would mobilise with revolutionary fervour and justice in pursuit of Perón's return, as the Montoneros did, among others. In its 18 years of armed struggle, Peronism was outlawed and its leader exiled in Franco's Spain, until they managed to weaken the legitimacy of the military regime and return through the polls in the 1973 election, which restored Perón to power. However, in his third government, Perón did not turn to the typical corporatist dynamics of the first Peronism for the benefit of the working classes. Having taken an extreme-right ideological stance, the leader rejected his Montonero "soldiers", labeling them as the "infiltration" or the "seed of communism" within his party, and sparked an internal war. His death, in 1974, left the vice-president, and his third wife, Isabel Martínez, in power. Nicknamed Isabelita, she restored the anti-subversive laws that had been repealed in 1973, and, therefore, authorised the Armed Forces to intervene in the subversive suffocation. The Montoneros ignored the legitimacy of Martínez and announced their return to clandestine resistance. From that moment on, with the crucial influence of presidential adviser José López Rega, alias El Brujo (The Wizard), the government established the right-wing terrorist coalition "La Triple A" (Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance). According to Alejandro Garro and Henry Dahl (1987, 283) it targeted armed groups, but also left-wing sympathisers, intellectuals and, in general, all dissidents. As a result, two thousand people were murdered between 1973 and 1976. The political and economic unsustainability of the government engendered broad opposition, which set the classical scene for a coup d'état, which, in this case, was both military and civic and more than welcome by many, not coincidentally, during the carnival week of March 24, 1976.

Economic program of the "National Reorganisation Process"

The dictatorship tried to implement economic reform, consisting of a reformulation of the economic role of the state and its relations with the classes in the production system of such a dimension that it would need a parallel strategy for its implementation: state terrorism. The decrease in the state's direct role in the economy, via the liberalisation of the financial market in 1977, privatisations and the closure of public companies, required both the political demobilisation of the working class and social disciplining.

The military regime imposed a liberal system that initiated the process of impoverishment, desalarisation, and weakening of trade unions and increasingly subjected the working class to the discipline of the market. Financial speculation and the private accumulation of capital in a few hands meant that the fiscal deficit could not be reduced later or prevent inflation to safeguard the country from the crisis. The large external debt that the regime acquired was not invested in infrastructure or internal production, but rather in alleviating the terrible impact that the economic defalcation was leaving and in enriching a few beneficiaries. The debt momentarily favored the purchasing power of the middle class, but it immediately became clear that it was a smokescreen that hid financial obligations with interest that could only be paid at very high rates.

Disappearance as a rite of narrativisation in the political unconscious

The forced disappearance of people had a political-discursive character by which the military regime tried not only to eliminate the enemies, but also, with the public denial of such acts, sought to eliminate them politically by prohibiting the manifestation of their social ties and destroying the social fabric. Such denial distorted the experience at the level of discourse, as observed in regard to state terrorism in Chile, by Antonia García (2000, 87-92). In this way, and following Graziano (1992, 9), the system of disappearance functioned as a form of political disarticulation of society as a whole, and was the rite with which the rhetoric of the dictatorship celebrated a "reorganization of reality", connecting it to the tradition of the spectacularisation of violence. As in Ancient Greece and Rome, the logic of the spectacle of atrocity legitimised the truth that power is enforced by rendering the population its guarantor, transforming it into political power.

Michael Foucault (1977, 49) wrote about the public penalisation of crimes as a discursive tool for the state's domination over civil society. He

emphasises that public execution has a political-legal function as a ceremony in which wounded sovereignty is reconstituted. According to the author, this act does not aim so much at restoring balance as to bring out the asymmetry of power that exists between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the almighty sovereign who shows his strength. With this reflection, Foucault makes it very clear to us that power renews its force in the penal spectacle by reinforcing itself through the ritualistic exhibition of its omnipotence, and that the audience is a fundamental part of this exhibition as it guarantees the truth that the act of atrocity conveys and tests on the body that it sacrifices.

For Graziano (1992, 41), disappearance is instead a spectacle of abstract penalisation because, in this case, military repression ensured that the resolution of disappearance cases was constantly postponed in the institutional system. Hannah Arendt (1951, 378) recalls that, in Nazi Germany, keeping the crimes secret kept the population more united than if the secret itself had been exposed. Graziano (1992, 74) points out that during the Argentine military government the secret was always hinted at, but never revealed, to ensure the effectiveness of the abstract spectacle.

According to this author, the secret ritualistic spectacle consisted of three acts: abduction, torture, followed by execution and its subsequent institutional denial. These were the three acts of a ritual in which the public was the "audience", because they witnessed the abstract spectacle of the detention centers and an "actor", because their status as "audience" (although it seemed passive) played an integral role in the efficacy of the abstract spectacle through which power is regenerated. That is, the public acted as a guarantor (Graziano, 1992, 76). Thus, a closed universe of meaning identified as real was constructed with its own logic of truth that was verified by the acts of abduction and torture.[14] This circular logic was the guarantor of self-reproduction of the repressive system because, as Levi Strauss points out, "the ritual confirms the myth". Alternatively, as Jameson states (1981, 67), the "symbolic act" reflects and constitutes reality.

Following Baudrillard (1978, 1994), we know that simulacra are acts that precede the real, and that, in their logic of signs of the real, they are valid as such. They are, at the same time, "symbolic acts", according to Jameson, that construct reality and history. Then, we ask ourselves: is the ritual of domination, in this context, a form of simulation? Can we identify some logic, in this ritual of domination or simulacrum, with which to explain domination relations in the post-dictatorial period?

For Graziano (1992, 92), the disappearance system was represented as a tragedy in three acts that, through the abstract spectacularisation of violence, constructs a new reality. The author indicates that the first act, kidnapping or "abduction", accounted for the fact that the "clandestine" claims of the "Dirty War" were a repressive agenda codified at some intentionally decipherable level. As such, the lack of discretion and disproportionate force that the "task forces" displayed suggested that the strategy was intended to meet objectives that went beyond the act of kidnapping itself. "Excesses are constitutive of their power" Foucault has said (1977, 50).

In the second act of the drama, the truth is constructed through the exercise of torture. According to Graziano (1992, 96), the torture methods used by the military repression in the 140 clandestine detention centers distributed throughout the country were not aimed at extorting significant data, but, rather, at the physical and mental breakdown of the victim. Interrogation under torture was, thus "a monologue disguised as a dialogue, [since] whatever was said it was the Regime who spoke" (Graziano, 1992, 103). Then, most of the detainees were to be executed, which included the simulation of armed confrontations with victims who suddenly "appeared" dead in the streets.

The Third Act, the finale, was denial, "disappearance occurs when the acts of abduction, torture and execution are completed with the discourse of denial" says Graziano (1992, 4l).[15] Such contradiction between spectacular violence obscured by the discourse of denial is what produced the paralyzing terror. That seems to be the moment when, according to Hannah Arendt (1951, 435) "reality loses its quality of real and assumes the nature of a nightmare".

Now, if the political economic purpose of this reorganisation of the truth was to eliminate dissidents of the market system, even future ones, why then not suspect that these strategies could have had some discursive continuity? In this sense, I propose that the system of abstract spectacularisation of violence can be summarised in two stages of simulation: the institutional and public indiscretion of acts of violence, on the one hand, and their institutional and public denial, on the other. I suggest that such dialectic extended into the post-dictatorial period since it is, ultimately, a strategy of power domination; the logic of domination of neoliberalism itself.

The exploitation of memory of repression as a confirmatory ritual of the neoliberal democratic mythology

By 1982, the proliferation of dissident discourse inside and outside the country, eroded the credibility of the regime and the absence of "terrorism" no longer justified its existence. At the same time, the economic crisis and external debt led the political parties to propose a return to the democratic regime. Then, when trade union resistance began to be reorganised, on March 30 1982, the political-economic simulation took the form of a military campaign that stirred Argentine nationalism; the Falklands War. The enemy was now external and very real: the United Kingdom. The defeat in this war, combined with the other variables, urged the *de facto* government to call for elections. In the "Final Document of the War against Subversion and Terrorism", issued in April 1983, the Military Junta justified all the abuses of the state, denied responsibility for disappearances and also denied the existence of "concentration camps" which, by then, indeed, had already been dismantled. Three weeks before the democratic elections, the military offered a gesture of "national pacification", an "amnesty law" that would guarantee impunity for both them and the "subversives". Meanwhile, they ordered the destruction of all documentation and evidence of crimes committed by the state.

In December 1983, the democratic period began under the leadership of President Raúl Alfonsín, head of the Radical Civic Union. Alfonsinism showed disengagement from the political struggle between Peronists and conservatives, and identified with the peace, transparency and neutrality that neoliberal democracy had to present to continue with the economic system. Economic concern was key in this period of high fiscal deficit, high inflation and payment of the enormous inherited external debt, which through the International Monetary Fund, led to the political dependence of the Argentinian government on international capitalism. Such debt also undermined the possibilities of economic growth and narrowed the options to confront the existing moral crisis politically.

In this paradoxical context, in which the economic system is both judge and litigant party, political-institutional negotiations take place regarding the truth about the disappearances and the assignment of responsibilities. Although the Alfonsinist platform expected to clarify the crimes committed through state terrorism, the logic of a dependency democracy would hide the fundamental causes that motivated the institutional abuses during the dictatorship. As the "agents of memory" suspected, it was difficult for the democratic government to effectively and honestly assert the victims'

human rights (Jelin 1995, 103). Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, and other radical organisations who supported such rights demanded specific conditions for the democratic government's investigative commission. It should consist of members elected by the people, and its task should go beyond investigating the atrocities as common crimes; it should look for the political-economic causes that motivated them, to determine and prosecute the civil liabilities behind the extermination plan and disappearances. These petitions exposed the legal system's self-professed detachment from economic interests as its very *raison d'être*, because, as expressed by Fernando Rojas (1981, 169-171), the legal system is there to underpin the national state's position as an autonomous entity separated from the capitalist production system. However, and as this claim was futile, the democratic government institutionalised the demands according to the logic of this sort of national state's fetish, and created a Human Rights Secretariat, dependent on the Executive power. Such institutionalisation of a social claim left the human rights organisations out of the negotiation

It seems coherent to observe that the CONADEP's (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons) investigation methods focused on interrogating the victims individually. While they described the acts of horror in detail, they did not publish a comprehensive name list of the perpetrators (beyond what the victims could remember), nor did they try to explain the political-economic causes that prompted the military to impose state terrorism. For Graziano (1992, 243), all of this responds to a specific decision to institutionally protect the *de facto* government; from an insider view this point is blurrier. Its report was published under the name *Nunca Más* in 1984 and its popular dissemination contributed to the creation of a consensus recognising the aberrant nature of the "Dirty War". However, such a report limited itself to narrativising the historical text of power that explains the "Dirty War" as a confrontation between two sides equally armed and responsible for the violence, in which society was a mere spectator. In this way, the libertarian myth of democracy remained unchanged, expressed by the functional specificity of justice, which had to effectively resolve the conflict while the ritual "reorganised" the reality associated with the problem, displacing the fundamental economic-political content towards the field of symbolic tragedy.

The democratic myth or the national fetish of functional specialization as an effective solution to the conflict

Between 1985 and 1986 CONADEP's actions made it easier for a Federal Court to criminally condemn the high ranking officials of the Process, but the so-called Trial of the Juntas stirred up opposition within the Armed Forces and among right-wing sectors that sought to protect themselves from criminal liability. The pressure from lower-ranking officers was such - including a military mutiny that Alfonsín could not quell due to lack of military support - that the constitutional president had the "*Punto Final*" (last word) (1986) and "*Obediencia Debida*" (due obedience) (1987) laws sanctioned, which constituted, in the end, amnesty laws. But in 1988 there were two other riots, also aimed at acquitting the high-ranking officers in prison and those who were still on trial. These pressures on the Alfonsinist government underlay its premature handover of power, "by democratic means" to the newly elected president, Carlos Menem. A year later Menem pardoned the convicted soldiers and, to strike a balance, also benefited those guerrilla leaders who had been tried for terrorism, even though they did not represent the 30,000 disappeared people and, in fact, a very high percentage of the victims were not guerrilla militants but members of civil society supporting community-building causes.

Thus, the new myth of democracy is celebrated and reinforced through the functional specialisation of the "fetish" of the pluralist State: the rituals of elections, the illusion of publishing the truth, the exercise of independent justice and parliamentary representation, flawed practices that have supposedly allowed us to describe a democracy as consolidated. O'Donnell (1992, 48) says that a democracy is consolidated when the democratic actors no longer have as their fundamental concern defending themselves against a regression to authoritarianism; when their practices reproduce democratic institutions; when these democratic relations are extended to the practice of other social spheres. Since in Argentine post-dictatorship democracy we could not guarantee democratic procedures without interests and powers reserved for a minority, we faced what Samuel Valenzuela (192, 62-65) called a "perverse institutionalisation system".

In my opinion, what remains unchanged in the myth of democracy is the narrativising of the capitalist text in the collective unconscious, because it continues to promote a subjectivity linked to the individual and the private, eliminating the possibility in social networks of reproducing relationships that promote a sense of belonging to the collective. Paul Buchanan (1997, 116) warns that destruction of the bonds of citizenship and reinforcement of

subjectivity in the private sphere through the daily fragmentation of individual survival and alienation, weaken the citizens' possibilities of political participation. This neoliberal mechanism that Buchanan refers to as the economic dimension of social life in neoliberal democracies, reminds us that the same words were used to describe the context of terror and the mythologised reality of the military regime that had dismantled social networks, confining public practices to private and individual spaces. Thus, neoliberal democracy configures a popular subjectivity that interacts collectively in a cathartic and centralised way from power, nuanced by individual actions that create the illusion of community participation. Again, people are used as a guarantor audience, a witness without memory that legitimises the decisions of a few protagonists who make and narrate history.

Thus, the question: how could the neoliberal democratic myth reproduce the hegemonic system previously narrativised by the dominating ritual or simulation procedures of dictatorship? Here what becomes important is the proposition of Herman Herlinghouse (2001, 58): "the critical interpretation of the advanced globalization into which we have been brutally incorporated requires resounding anti-historicism so that its violence is not placed outside History like a kind of 'accident on the road' ". I follow this idea in my critical interpretation of post-dictatorship where I suggest that indiscretion and simultaneous denial of violence, as method of domination, is a discursive constant of the neoliberal system that gives continuity to the dictatorship in the post-dictatorship (although we are now talking about symbolic and economic violence). When re-reading the acts of institutional treatment that the re-democratising narrative sought in the cases of human rights violations committed by the military dictatorship, I discovered that the spectacularisation of violence was renewed. This is because, in the democratic narrative, there are also two ritualistic moments of mythification of power: that of "Truth" (spectacularisation of violence) – the publication of *Nunca Más* as a catalogue of horror – and that of "Justice" (institutional denial) – the laws mitigated for the former commanders and their subsequent pardons. Now it is necessary to analyse the impact of these two dimensions on the construction of collective memory and for what purpose it was constructed.

For the majority of those who testified at CONADEP, the trials were a brief reparatory act that initiated larger, dynamic and open social and community processes, because the legal treatment of the crimes gave legitimacy and truth to the victims' versions. We might be led to think that a reconstitution of social values coming from the institutions set in motion active or

exemplary processes of social memorisation over the immediately recent past. However, subsequent judicial reparations via pardons had the opposite effect regarding the construction of truth. Such pardons are the institutional denial of that truth that created gaps in the present narrative of social memory. This made it impossible for the victims' experiences to make sense of the past event in the present and, therefore, their narrative became incommunicable. So, what was the use of those published testimonies within the neoliberal democratic interpretive framework? The answer seems obvious: exploitation of the memory of terror.

In my opinion, the most significant text of the official discourse in this context is *Nunca Más*, with its enumeration of the atrocities and the omission of the true political-economic causes that founded it. Its narrative depersonalises bodies and turns them into instruments of power, as they now serve as a reminder in the political unconscious of the atrocious consequences of a possible authoritarian regression if democracy did not take the correct political meaning, that is, if it did not become an economically dependent democracy.

The best-seller *Nunca Más* transforms spectacular atrocity into political power and again turns the population into a "guarantor audience", with which, following Foucault's idea, "power renews its power through the spectacle" (1977, 49). The book, without a doubt, narrativised a literal memory of the events but cancelled the possibility of explaining what happened and, by omission, justified the narrative of the market and its economic policies; it served as a support argument for the subsequent amnesties and pardons. Thus it prevented the construction of an exemplary memory that might provoke people's opposition to the sanction of amnesties and pardons or to the rejection of the social and economic policies of neoliberalism. Therefore, it functioned as a ritualistic act of domination, the repetition of the indiscretion/denial dynamic with which the market manages to impose a "symbolic rearrangement" of reality, once again.

The last barrier to restructuring the role of the State in accordance with the market model required the prevention of more revisions of foreign debt acquisition and the military regime's state terrorism. This is why, in 1988, a shrewd manoeuvre by the economic power prompted the premature exit of Alfonsín and the rushed election of a Peronist, Carlos Menem, who, using the tradition of populist messianic personalism, managed to manipulate the unions, divide the CGT and, thus, definitively demobilize the working class.

By 1989, when Carlos Menem took office, it was clear that payment of the debt was not a political matter and that its fulfilment would impose a monetary restructuring of the state: "the Washington consensus." The new president eventually privatised public companies, strengthened the restructuring of class relations and imposed the fetish of the state separated from the market. In this framework of supposed liquidation of ideologies, the pardons were widely justified. If anything they consolidated Menem's re-election, via constitutional reform, in 1995, it was not democracy, but the neoliberal economic plan.

When the pauperisation of the working classes led to the growth of criminality among the excluded social sectors, the still present guarantor audience, sometimes even feeling nostalgic for the "military iron hand", regarded Menem's reviving of repressive dynamics with broad social consensus and with a renewed vocabulary: "zero tolerance" and "trigger-happy".[16] Then began the rise of the "insecurity business" that, not coincidentally, opened up new job opportunities in different corporations for the now "unemployed labour", as were euphemistically called those that served the repressive groups of "tareas" (duties) of the dictatorship. Once again there is an indiscretion of violence, through mysterious murders or sudden deaths of social actors; terrorist attacks with a clearly xenophobic drive, shady business or gun smuggling with the Middle East and countries at war, and money laundering from drug trafficking. The protagonists of public discourse are then corruption and impunity; regarding the latter, some repressors spoke of the extermination methods used during the dictatorship. Although in his 1989 electoral slogan Menem urged voters with the motto "follow me, I will not disappoint you", it was an absolute social fraud. Moreover, in that context, possibilities of protest were null or obsolete because, paradoxically, the denial of this spectacular violence operated within the legal framework of the democratic social contract stipulated in the Argentine National Constitution, for which "no one defrauds those who know and consent."

Outcomes

Laura Tedesco (1999) rightly observed that the post-dictatorship neoliberal state and the bureaucratic authoritarianism of the 1970s managed in a similar way the agendas that tried to subordinate the working class politically and economically. "While the authoritarian bureaucratic state tried to depoliticize the working class, the neoliberal state will try to depoliticize the economy, de-ideologize politics and transform social problems into economic ones" (Tedesco, 1999,169). Thus, the author

argues, neoliberalism has exacerbated the old contradiction between capitalism (private hands decide on private resources) and democracy (citizens decide how to distribute public resources) (Tedesco, 1999, 171).

Summing up, the neoliberal state uses the image of political democracy to legitimise economic exclusion. Therefore, through the new libertarian mythology of democracy, it has been possible to reproduce the dynamics of indiscretion-denial of the violence of the dictatorship, by exploiting its memory in a more complex, but no less coercive way. This allows the market system to make use of the institutions and, especially, the cultural field of the post-dictatorship to accentuate the memory of the past of terror and modify symbolic and material traces that identify it as responsible for the social catastrophe. As such, the new political form is nothing more than another form of hegemonic reproduction of the dominant paradigm, a strategic movement intrinsic to the needs of the market that, as stated by Buchanan (1997, 115), reproduces consensus among subordinate groups whose material and ideological expectations have been dismantled by the authoritarian regime.

Bret Levinson (2001, 46), for his part, explains how the hegemonic system makes use of the memory of repression: "The memory of terror turns fear into a marketable resource, the market thus represents a step towards freedom, freedom is associated with the possibility to choose between multiple private options. What skillfully disappears here is the idea that there is a dominant ideology, which is neither necessary nor true, so it cannot be defeated either because it simply does not exist".

It is clear, then, how both in the dictatorship and in the post-dictatorship the market manages to represent itself as the only possible system, the "natural necessary and universal order", a social constitution. That is the myth that constructs the present, the idea that the market "is": "any alternative is absurd, not even a problem" adds Levinson (2001, 47).

As we have seen, naturalisation of market logic is the result of a discursive process operating on the truth in collective memory. Here, the role of cultural objects simulates a context capable of framing a real interpretation of personal experiences, turning them into a collective memory that reproduces the values and historical narrative of those who were in charge of simulating the truth. Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to take into account that memory, as a field of dispute, may represent a possibility of what Ernesto Laclau (1981, 54) calls "an expansion of the field of the political". Paraphrasing this author, we should consider that, if the elements

of a social formation depend, in terms of their social configuration, on concrete historical practices, other diverse practices might struggle to propose alternative articulations. Conquering hegemony is not only conquering political leadership, but also modifying the common sense of the masses and achieving a general rearticulation of society capable of substituting the current domination and installing a new hegemonic system.

In other words, the transfer from literal to exemplary memory involves actively promoting memory, pointing out what events (humiliation and violations) need to be transmitted and integrated into the conditions of the present, abandoning the formal institutional routes through which official history circulates, which reproduce a "mythologised" or "fetishised" reality. In this sense, human rights groups are "agents of memory" when, for example, Mothers of Plaza de Mayo hold the same image and proclamation that they presented during the dictatorship to show that, in a democracy, the fight against neoliberal outrage remains the same. Their performative tactic consists of claiming an alternative proposal to the system of legal impunity supported by the official historical narrative. This strategy executed outside legal or political representation, creates a popular moral and ethical statement that configures another truth in the collective memory while affecting the public image of the perpetrators and their government collaborators.[17] Although it is true that, as Jelin (1995,140) points out, "the moral condemnation that these groups legitimize, however, cannot replace the political sense that the lack of justice has, especially when attention is focused on the construction of a democratic institution", it is necessary to recognise that, as O'Donnell (1992, 21) proposes, the actions of these groups can at least neutralise those unconditionally authoritarian actors and promote references and practices compatible with democratic functioning among the neutral actors. We shall ask ourselves if there is, indeed, a different path from the legitimising text instituted by justice, that is, if the fight for memory could influence justice itself by modifying the frameworks for truth interpretation.

"The agents of memory", by fighting for the sense of history and the contents of tradition and values, fulfil a task in which the bourgeois fetish plays a dual role. That is, although they know that accessing the legal system is not an option, their own action is facilitated by the guarantees of political freedom given by the myth of democracy. This is what O'Donnell (1992, 23) highlights as the complex dialectic between politics and other spheres of social life that allows an expansion in cultural and socio-economic democratisation.

Now, if the legitimacy of the hegemonic discourse rests on the memory of the repression, why was the struggle of Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who promoted another memory of repression, not powerful enough in the first decade after the dictatorship to become a narrative force? Perhaps, one answer is that the performance exposes and the ritual imposes. It follows that the rite would seem to have gone further in the constitution of subjectivity because the rite has somehow been connected with the political unconscious. Is to say, it has linked with those utopian impulses introduced at the beginning of capitalism, which are satisfied through polar rivalry, exaltation of the individual and defense of the private. In other words, they were introduced into a psychic structure that has been disarticulated from its archetypal belonging to the collective or the plural. If this is the case, then, a resignification of the collective memory from textualisation is required to clarify the importance of the capitalist paradigm in the socio-political causes of repression. Such elucidation must reach such a deep level in the discussion that the socioeconomic parameters of capitalism get to be questioned, together with the unconscious impulses that are satisfied in it from within the narrativisation that legitimates it, from the very hyperreal dynamics that operate in the fields of collective memory.

In short, a true discussion would be a dispute over the construction of the truth of the past that is incorporated into subjective experience as an exemplary memory. In practice, it would imply reconnecting the "guarantor audience" with their sense of belonging to the collective, re-aiming their expectations and attitudes to becoming a political actor. To achieve this, it is necessary to produce discourses that are materialised into ritualistic dynamics, that is, to implement symbolic acts that socially construct another perception of the real. Clearly, they will continue to be simulations, but they will serve as a context for the truth that the "agents of memory" try to convey. That is why we will analyse the re-narration of historical memory provided by post-dictatorship cinema, which, for these purposes, seem to have been an almost essential actor.
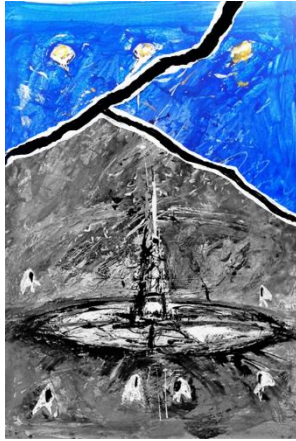
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"Fragmento 2"

Digital editing on *Ronda* by Alejandro Failla

CHAPTER I

SIMULATION OF *TESTIMONIO* IN *THE OFFICIAL STORY*. AUDIENCE IDENTIFICATION WITH COLLECTIVE CATASTROPHE

The Official Story is a film that proved to have an enormous capacity for historical narrative. The film appropriated the political power contained in the testimonies about military repression in re-democracy discourse to modify its conditions of interpretation. Thus, by recontextualising the facts from the past, the film gave rise to another collective memory. In my opinion, the narrative of Puenzo's film simulates a socio-political context that, as a new field of truth, interconnects and gives meaning to victim testimonies that the official power was circulating in a piecemeal manner within their own hyperreal channels of discursive authorisation.

I intend to demonstrate here that the utopian account of *The Official Story* rectified the conditions of social audibility to understand the experiences of pain and loss circulated by the "militants of memory" (Jelin, 2001). I suggest it did so by narrating a traumatic experience presented as a social condition that also affected the audience. In doing so, this film urged the spectators to relinquish their previous role as a "guarantor audience" (Graziano, 1992) of the hegemonic discourse. That is why I claim that *The Official Story* took the lead in post-dictatorship cinema: that of being a "cognitive map" (Jameson, 1991) which syntactically organizes collective historical memory, becoming a paradigmatic representation of individuals in their own position in the complex post-dictatorial sociocultural context. At the same time, it prescribes certain routes of circulation and connection between the present and the past, in that not at all coincidental scenario of collective disorientation.

This film's scheme of re-narration is composed of three axes. First, a reformulation of the social frameworks of interpretation to articulate facts from the past in the present. Second, an appropriation of the symbolic power

of the historical text as a referential and reproductive field of hegemonic discourses of truth – expressed in the testimonies of the victims of repression transcribed by official army agents - for the construction of a new historical truth. Finally, and based on the two previous aspects, there is the approach to the film as a "symbolic act" (Jameson, 1981) that, at present, reflects and constitutes history from a fiction-reality dialectic.

Reconstruction of the Interpretation Frameworks: The political purpose of testimonial discourse (or its ideological textualisation), and the aesthetic conventions of its representation (or its utopian narrativisation)

Fredric Jameson (1991, 23) stated that postmodernism aims at a situation in which everything in our social life - from the value of change to the value of use - has become cultural. In other words, the hegemonic socio-political "reality" is determined by the cultural logic of the hyperreal. Therefore, a dissenting proposal is only possible if the cultural field that legitimises this "reality" is modified. In this sense, the ideological re-narration that should be incorporated into hyperreal dynamics should also be utopian. This makes it clear that social change projects must be addressed from the cultural point of view in an essential rhetoric: the intrinsic relationship that exists between the aspect of ideological textualisation and that of the utopian narrativisation of the message so that it acquires true status in the political unconscious.

Since the utopian form of capitalism is nowadays represented in accordance with the same aesthetics and logic as those of the dynamics of the hyperreal, in which simulation plays a fundamental role in narrativising the legitimacy of the dominant system in the political unconscious, other forms of the utopian could also be simulated and thus narrativised in the unconscious. This includes those utopian forms that precede or oppose capitalism. Following this logic, the simulation that has, so far, served the dominant system as a reproduction machine, can also, as a signifier whose utopian referentiality is easily subvertible, be its Achilles heel. That observation gives relevance to John Beverley's statement of the relations between *Testimonio* and politics: "the question of the nature of the *Testimonio* is, firstly and ultimately, political, but a 'postmodernist' kind of politics based, to some extent, on aesthetics" (1992, 17). The exploration of this testimonial perspective will enable me to substantiate my thesis: the simulation, and assimilation, in the symbolic field (ideological-utopian) of post-dictatorial

cinematography constituted the fundamental impulse towards an elaborative work of collective historical memory.

As I have suggested, Argentine post-dictatorial cinema incorporated *Testimonio*'s simulations into its fiction plotlines. Thus, I raise the following question: what are those generic discursive aspects of the *Testimonio* desirable for a cinematographic language whose postmodern "cognitive map" is the mission of re-narrating collective historical memory from a counter-hegemonic perspective?

To answer this question it is necessary to take into consideration the reflections of the authors who have dealt more closely with this political-literary genre. For Antonio Vera León (1992), the emergence of *Testimonio* as literary discourse is an event of great complexity because it criticises the very contradictions of modernity in Latin America. The author states that this emergence is related to the politicisation of Latin American discursiveness around the "revolutionary project of putting producers in control of the means of production, as a way to eradicate the domination and repression produced by capitalist modernity" (184). For Vera León, the revolution and its discourses of a "re-foundation of history" constitute the historical and discursive mediation between *Testimonio* and modernity (42). Vera León further asserts that the political character of *Testimonio*, and its rewriting of history, inevitably places it in tension with humanist historiography, which is the discipline that institutionalises the political history of national states from the discursive interests of bourgeois power. That is why *Testimonio* deconstructs the bourgeois project of Latin American modernity. George Yúdice (1996) corroborates that testimonial writing, in this respect coincides with one of the fundamental tenets of postmodernity, the rejection of what Jean Francois Lyotard (1984) calls grand or master narratives, which function to legitimise political and historical teleologies such as the Proletariat, the Party, the West, etc.

But it should be ascertained that, no matter how much the "*le petit recit*" of the *Testimonio* is announced among those who reject the great narratives of modernity, the *Testimonio* retains a function of hegemonic concentration. Therefore, this does not entirely follow the descriptive and passive postulate that views postmodernity as an irrefutable condition. This brings us closer to the suggestion by Hugo Achúgar (1992, 62): that the statement of *Testimonio* is guided by the collapse of rationalist modernity, but carried out from a critical modernity; "thus, *Testimonio* is the criticism of modernity and not its denial". I venture the idea that this prescriptive condition contained in the statement of *Testimonio* is in itself, insofar as it is conceived

as the survival of a critical perspective of modernity within postmodern discursivity, the aesthetic-political purpose of its genre. This brings it closer to the Jamesonian project of a postmodern "cognitive map". That is to say, a "cognitive map" that aims to achieve a historical re-narration from the utopian simulation.

To return to Beverley (1992, 17), "[b]oth in the Central American revolutions and in the civil movements for the human rights and re-democratisation of the Southern Cone, *Testimonio* has been not only a representation of their forms of resistance and struggle, but also a means and even a way for them". I understand that it is in this new discursive configuration that this literary genre becomes a performative discourse of social reality, as it is a reflection and a historical constitution. That is, if the purpose of *Testimonio* is, as Beverley (1992) states, "politics, but a 'postmodernist kind of politics', that is founded to some extent on aesthetics", then it is to be expected that what happens to aesthetics will have a great influence on political life. We have to remember that Jameson speaks of the omnipresence of culture as a determinant of all spaces of postmodern society, and Vera León (1992, 186) alleges:

> If the political literary modernity in Latin America has armed itself from the opposition between writing and experience (...), *Testimonio* is opposed as a utopian writing, as a transmodern medical political discourse whose project lies in transcending the hierarchy of representation that exhibited the regimes of discourses of Modernity. Hence the notion of *Testimonio* as anti-writing based on the transcription of the marginalised / oral as a colloquial speech in opposition to the specialised literary language.

In this sense, the discursive space constituted by *Testimonio* is markedly rhetorical. Achúgar (1992) says that "*Testimonio*, in addition to being *another* history, is as well, a history from *the other*" (64). The discursive construction of this history from "*the other*" is what reveals its aporia of representation because *Testimonio* occupies a legitimate place in the struggle for power from subalternity only from the moment in which it is institutionalised as legal discourse. Indeed, says Achúgar (1992, 63) "the character of '*another* history' or of 'alternative history' that *Testimonio* has, seems only possible when the 'silenced', the 'excluded' from the official History try to access memory or a legal space". The author also said: "this institutionalisation seems to be possible only in the current period, when the central subject has been precisely off-centered" (52).

Beverley (1996) describes *Testimonio* as narrative driven by the urgency of communicating the problem of subalternity, where what is personal is

political and where affirmation of the subject of a discourse that is both individual and connected with a class or group, is marked by a situation of marginalisation, expression or struggle. On performance, the author states: "the narrator in *Testimonio*, speaks for, or on behalf of, a community or group, thus approaching the symbolic function of the epic hero without necessarily, at the same time, assuming his hierarchical and patriarchal status" (27). This observation makes it unlikely that the statement of *Testimonio* is a "story from the other". It is also debatable that the informant of *Testimonio* is an "epic hero" since, as Vera León (1992, 189) observes, "the testimonial discourse places the experience on the side of the informant narrator and reserves the writing for the transcriber who knows the institutionalised ways of narrating".

Following these lines of reflection, in the testimonial process the life of the "other" is not simply the testimonial reference of the text. In that transcription life is reinvented, thought of as a cultural figure in which the transcriber reads the resolution of social and historical fractures. This view collides with the story of the particular offered by the informant narrator. Hence, suggests Vera León (1992, 195), the testimonial text can be read as the place of unresolved tensions between the stories that comprise it; as the place where a story that documents the life of the other is negotiated; and that the ways of telling it are ways of imagining it and appropriating it for writing.

Seen in this way, Gyatri Spivak's words (1988) become paradigmatic: "If the subaltern subject could speak - that is, in a way that really mattered to us - then he wouldn't be a subaltern" (43). Beverley (1992) evidently reconsidered this matter because he interprets Spivak's text by recognising that the subalterns are partly so because they cannot be adequately represented by academic knowledge, since this knowledge actively produces subalternity by the act of representing it. In my mind, Spivak's focus is on the Gordian knot, where *Testimonio* is presented inevitably as an aporia of representation in which theory and academic knowledge have only one place: that of representing the subaltern as such.

From my perspective, this problem exceeds the academy and may well be reinterpreted to take account of the representation of cinematographic or literary fiction as a dynamic of the hyperreal. It is true that *Testimonio* cannot free itself from the Prometheus myth because, although "it is close to everyday politics by abandoning specialized literary language", it remains tied to the "[literate] transcription of the marginalized / oral" (Vera León, 1992, 186). However, we should rethink this aporia as its irreducible

discursive dimension, and enhance its "utopian writing" side that narrativises its ideological text in the political unconscious. This discursive alternative would be more appropriately aligned with the concept of a postmodern "cognitive map" as a political / utopian simulation with which it is possible to perform a historical re-narration. I suggest we are in the presence of a simulation, firstly, because "orality referred to -and constructed in- the testimonial text, is the space in which the transcriber bases his authority" (Vera León, 1992, 190). Secondly, because academic concern about the truth of the word of the subaltern is fallacious as it will be mediatised or transfigured by its writing genre, anyway. The simulation is that *Testimonio* is a construction that somehow denies the real referent. Instead, the transcriber appropriates that real reference and builds a story that his institution legitimates and then incorporates into the real scene. The power of plausibility that the simulation of a testimonial account acquires is its political potential because its circulation among the dynamics of the hyperreal becomes a channel of ideological legitimation.

In the face of this, what should really concern us is that the discourse of this simulation should be politically coherent with the interests of the witness. As Beverley (1996, 31) proposes, the narrator's relationship with the transcriber in the production of *Testimonio* is "an ideological figure or ideologeme due to the possibility of union of a radicalized intelligentsia and the poor and working class of a country". That is why, with Jameson (1991), we could be facing the "cognitive map" with which intellectuals and artists offer a sense of orientation of how society is structured in the postmodern era. The idea is consistent with Antonio Gramsci's "war of position" led by the organic intelligentsia (1981 [1929-1935]).

Then, from the moment this testimonial convention simulates the incorporation of the voice of the subaltern subjects - displacing the narrator or central subject "History's speaker" to accommodate "the *other* story" (Achúgar, 1992) - *Testimonio* becomes an aesthetic enunciation with the political capacity of hegemonic concentration. Beverley (1996, 39) says this happens because:

> …if the novel had a special relationship with humanism and the rise of European bourgeoisie, *Testimonio* is by contrast a new form of narrative literature in which we can at the same time witness and be a part of the emerging culture of an international proletarian/popular-democratic subject in its period of ascendency.

Ultimately, it should be admitted that the *Testimonio* exists only as a simulation and that, if we try to deconstruct it, it becomes an aporia and

loses its strategic political power. To make it even more visible: if the first oral stage of *Testimonio* were the image of the subaltern and transcription were its photograph, it would no longer be possible to discuss the image that the photographed subject provided, but rather if what we see in its mechanical capture is consistent with what the photographed subject stands for. What does matter urgently is to ask ourselves: who focuses, frames and shoots the photograph? Then, in what contexts is that image published and for what purpose?

On the other hand, we say that this simulation is, besides political, also utopian, because from the transcription / mediatisation of the testimony of the witness, coded according to the convention of orality / truth, a fundamental identification is taking place within the reader. According to Achúgar (1992, 65) it is the permanence of orality that produces the interpretation of *Testimonio* as authentic. Therefore, in front of the reader, "the orality or the traces of such orality of *Testimonio* operate as an icon of experiential reality" and from there the willing acceptance of the truth follows. There is a sort of natural confidence with which the receiver from *Testimonio* accepts what is narrated "as a truth and not as if it were true", says Achúgar (1992, 63). Therefore, if in this rhetoric, the viewer/reader believes that, in the text, "fiction does not exist, or exists in a zero degree that does not affect the truth of the narrative" (Achúgar 1992, 63), the utopian power of narration legitimised by the institution would be absolute. As such, *Testimonio* is a text ideologically constructed into a convention supported by two strengths that characterize its genre: plausibility and empathy. The empathy felt by the readers / spectators towards this "realistic" representation of an individual and collective experience, makes the moral connection with the exhibited testimonial narrative, which is a direct link with his utopian impulses.

Testimonial discourse thus appeals to a social change that calls into question the stability of the reader. That is to say, from its ideological textualisation it constructs the empathic listening that promotes the reader's favourable position towards that testimonial narrative. Moreover, from this same identification, *Testimonio* is narrativised as true. This production of identification is then the utopian performative strategy of *Testimonio* as a cultural object that preserves, as proposed by Jameson, a statute of myth constituting the political unconscious.

The double potential of *Testimonio* in simulation is precisely what makes it an extremely attractive discourse for the spaces of representation that work with the illusion of the real. I argue then that the cinema that incorporates

simulations of testimonies into its fictional texture does not actually intend to represent reality or respond to the irresolvable conflict of representation inherent in this genre, but to appropriate the utopian / political power that *Testimonio* entails as a form of ideological survival in postmodernity.

The cinematographic appropriation of the utopian / political power of testimonial discourse to represent historical narrative

The plot of *The Official Story* is developed chronologically during the months of political upheaval and negotiations of the historical truth that characterised the transition to democracy in Argentina between March and December 1983. Alicia (Norma Aleandro) teaches Argentine History in a high school and is the wife of a technocrat who adheres to the military regime (Héctor Alterio). Despite what might be expected of her profession, Alicia has lived comfortably oblivious to the country's socio-political circumstances during the military dictatorship, taking care of Gaby, her five-year-old adopted daughter, and teaching according to authorised books. The protagonist is, up to that moment, another spectator and almost the symbolic personification of *The Official Story* itself: unaware of political or ideological fluctuations and clinging to the naturalised text of power, without even realising it. Only from the testimonies of people emotionally related to her will she begin to discover another truth. This unmasking process constitutes a new reality that resignifies her own life, as Ana, (Chunchuna Villafañe), a friend returning from exile, reveals why she left. This is how Alicia becomes aware of reports of enforced disappearances, torture and the existence of clandestine prisons; about the birth of babies that were appropriated by families affiliated to the military power, while their mothers were executed. Alicia begins to suspect the origin of her own adopted daughter, and even though she is still alienated, this will change her passive situation as a "guarantor audience" of a heinous crime. Alicia approaches the truth through the group of Madres de Plaza de Mayo. She meets Gaby's true grandmother and, through her, learns whom her parents were and how were their lives and circumstances of their disappearance. Alicia's own story symbolizes another historical narrative. As Nelly Richard points out when referring to the conditions of the post-dictatorship: "a way of thinking and speaking that is affected, in the double sense of the word: inhabited by the affections and shaken by the effects" (2001b, 106).

History and Literature at the bar table

On March 14, 1983, the first day of class, Alicia has to present the school subject "Argentine History" to her students. The protagonist offers them the following concept: "to understand history is to prepare oneself to understand the world. No people could survive without memory and history is the memory of the people" (minute 5). These words start the line of the cinematographic story - which, as a symbolic object, reflects and constitutes reality - that describes Alicia's relationship with her students and the controversies generated by the hegemonic historical text in the classroom. That is, this sub-plot makes visible the way in which the film's story begins to explain its own mechanisms of discursive construction as a key to decoding and, at the same time, narrativising its new ideological perspective. The dramatic thread that follows these discussions at school is narrated at the same diegetic level as the rest of the story, but these moments must be read according to their level of significance to that of a metaphor. The film is clearly conceived from a post-structuralist point of view since what is presented here as a sub-plot of the film is, simultaneously, the symbolic code to decipher the reality that the main plot is representing. I aim at justifying the idea that, in presenting this historical deconstruction as a conflict of the film, its context of significance is constructed at the same time, while the film as a cultural text, is capable of modifying social interpretative frameworks.

In the second week of classes, Alicia arrives at the classroom and finds that the Professor of Literature (Patricio Contreras) has been theatrically representing a historical text about the independence wars. The classroom is convulsed, and the students are euphoric. Alicia enters, the students calm down, the teacher is composed and when he leaves, he says: "Yeah, in the end, literature always meets history". This statement is the central key of the film as it conceives the narration of history as textual representation and gives a sense of truth to the alternative texts that begin to circulate in Alicia's life.

In the next class, the proposal acquires full magnitude. When Alicia interprets texts written by Mariano Moreno in 1820 about the need for freedom of the press in order to publish the truth, a student suggests that thinking like this could have cost the life of the national hero. A comment that taps on an historical event in which Moreno mysteriously died while sailing to Europe on a diplomatic mission, after disagreeing with the political direction towards which the new national Argentinian government was heading. With historical rigor, Alicia offers the explanations given by

the official history, minimising the obscurity of the alleged murder because of lack of evidence. At that moment, another student answers: "there is no evidence because history is written by the murderers" and Alicia clarifies: "this is a history class, not a debate" and orders the student to withdraw from the classroom, that is, to abandon the symbolic space of negotiation of truth. Although the focus is on Moreno, the exchange symbolically expresses the moment of re-democratisation in Argentina. The situation could be read as a synecdoche of the disputes that, at that point, dominated the public scene while the truth about state terrorism was being negotiated.[18] It should be noted that, if Alicia's argument was valid for Moreno's case, (that in the absence of evidence and witnesses there is no murder), then, the absence of bodies thrown into the sea, lakes or mass graves by the recent military repression, would disrespect attempts, made in democracy, to prove those disappearances. And in both cases there would be no crime or incorporation of these facts into *The Official Story*. Alicia's reaction exemplifies the way in which the bourgeois fetish is institutionally reproduced. It shows how national historiography, turned into a historical narrative taught in the institution of school, has served as the act of "remembering / forgetting" (Jelin, 2001, 15) with which the capitalist system of exploitation is narrativised.

Arriving at the next class, Alicia finds the blackboard covered with evidence about the recent disappearances of people: requested documents, photos, newspaper clippings, the "relevant documentation" that such authorised space claims to stabilise the words taught in that "house of truth". Against such circumstances, the protagonist orders the students to withdraw, omit, eliminate the evidence and, in the language of state terrorism, warns them: "everyone will pay for the jokes of a few". The symbolic importance of this scene is immense. The metaphor shown here is a counterpoint between image and sound: while Alicia is seen reprimanding the students, one of the students can be heard reading aloud a fragment of Moreno's text about the possibilities of exploitation and intellectual decadence that the concealment of truth causes. This type of contrast is used several times in the film, almost as its narrative style.

In one of the following scenes, Alicia is talking with her colleague, the literature teacher, in a car. She asks him: "Is it true what the newspapers are publishing?" And he replies with a sarcastic "no" because "for that to have happened there should have been a lot of complicity, many people turning a blind eye to it, even if they have it in plain sight". The teacher gets out of the car and the counterpoint shows a march in the street for the disappeared, chants and proclamations as the background to the confused face of the

protagonist in the foreground. The film legitimises the role of alternative textual manifestations to construct a historical narrative and Alicia, who personifies history, clashes with "the other history, from the others which, when told, becomes the living historical evidence of the truth about the past. The development of this sub-plot makes Alicia question all the truths told by the discourse of hegemonic power, personified in the role of her husband. Then Alicia lets her hair loose, walks fearlessly down the mobilised street, enters a bar and sits at the table already occupied by her colleague. The scene suggests the beginning of a romance not only between them but, allegorically, between history and literature through *Testimonio*.

Fictional orality, a simulation without sutures

In developing this new syntax of collective memory, the film asserts the idea that, if history is a text that comes close to literary conventions, these linguistic pacts can make room for the "other" version of history that the "agents of memory" (Jelin 2001) can tell. I suggest then that, under this interpretative framework, two testimonial simulations in the film are paratextual representations of cases published in transcribed testimonies and authorised as true by the official discourse: Ana's account and that of Gaby's grandmother.

The first resignifies the testimonies spread by the *Nunca Más* (Never Again, Report of CONADEP, National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, 1984), which legitimise the unpunished version of the system regarding the horror of repression. The second offers a humanised image and memory of the lives of the disappeared, very different from the "terrorist" portrait of the official version. In my opinion, the simulation within the cinematographic diegesis of the testimonial texts transcribed by the official bodies tries to take advantage of the utopian / political value that legitimised the neo-capitalist democratic discourse. In this way, the functional representation of these testimonies within the universe of meaning provided by the film recycles its possibilities of serving as a verification or proof of truth that certifies the history of "the other history".

The scene in which Alicia listens to Ana's story about her experience as a victim reproduces the tone of the testimonies published in Never Again. The exhibition presupposes the viewer's prior knowledge about CONADEP's performance, and Puenzo tries to connect these testimonies with the present reality. The familiarity without details in Ana's story about "the electric prod", "the submarine", rape, loss of sense of time and space, and, in general, everything related to the violence inflicted upon those that were

abducted, tortured and exterminated, is a film simulation of Testimonio's characteristic credibility and empathic effects of orality / truth conventions implied in "utopian writing". With this formula, the symbolic system of cinema incorporates the empathic and credible value of *Testimonio* itself. Moreover, this construction of narrative truth is reinforced once again by the logic of representation of the fiction film. Achúgar (1992, 63) calls it "the poetic faith" or "the willing suspension of disbelief": the viewer's state of credulity in which he accepts fiction as if it were "real" or "true", by being emotionally involved in the story.

If the discursive intention of The Official Story was to help spectators recover the guarantees that the regime had taken away from them in its ritualistic dynamic of abstract spectacularisation and its subsequent manipulation of the truth of the past, it succeeded in doing so, as the film simulation served as an exemplary counterhegemonic strategy. It did so because, in fiction, the oral enunciation of *Testimonio* seems to be placed at a time before transcription, that is to say, the moment it was being pronounced. This eliminates suspicions that the *Testimonio* has been manipulated by official instances of discursive authorisation to achieve other ends. Despite being presented as fiction, the simulation seems to become more real because orality - which testimonial literature simulates in writing - is a basic condition of the expressive means of cinema and is shown without the "seams" of writing. In this case, by appropriating the breadth of credibility and empathy that the testimonial text of *Never Again* had built for itself, this film also seizes the political / utopian potential of this effect to give truth to another history, that told by the victims. Therefore, the concern of this simulation is no longer the faithfulness between transcription and "truth". Nor is the ideological proposition that the appropriation of the individual voice can represent a collective. As a hyperreal text, *The Official Story* simulates the utopian / political reverberation of *Testimonio* and in this sense is ethically less problematic than the literary *Testimonio* itself. There lies its hyperreal force as a performative device in the construction of the real.

Zoom in on the "other" story: from black and white to colour

Towards the end, by the time the story of Gaby's grandmother is presented, the concatenation of all the texts already presented contributes meaning and strength to the "other" version of the truth. The film achieves a semantic rearrangement by weaving the sense of the past and the survival of its logic into a schizophrenic present. The use of parallel editing in the narration is the criterion which allows the narrator to develop several subplots as

narrative lines that converge and advance the action of the main plot. Thus, discussions in the classroom about the hegemonic historical text are generally presented after those of Alicia's conflicts to obtain from her husband the truth about Gaby's origin. By this means, the director constructs relationships that reveal the meaning of military mythology.

The same narrative logic is observed in the film regarding Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. At first, "Mothers" is depicted in the background, as a distant, marching, shapeless mass, from the point of view of an ordinary, uncomprehending pedestrian. Instead of presenting and describing the group, Puenzo presupposes society's previous knowledge. Its iconography is only incorporated in a long shot. The performative elements with which "Mothers" built their collective political identity on stage recurs throughout Alicia's movements around public territory. It works as a plot anticipation, as a parallel narrative that increasingly influences Alicia's case as she identifies with the group's cause. Insistence on the contextual presence of "Mothers" captivates both the pedestrians and the film viewers until an emotional identification is achieved that, in the end, will allow them to understand the "other" history: that of Gaby's grandmother.

The grandmother's story is similar to that of Ana's. However, while the latter reworks the testimonies of *Never Again*, the former manages to challenge the regime's depiction of the "Mothers" as a few "crazy old women" and "emotional terrorists". That is why the film presents an emotionally appealing story to the "guarantor audience", with which it makes audible those victims' traumatic testimonies that, up to now, have been a nuisance in the polished avenues of the democratisation project.

The Official Story implicitly represents the performative visibility strategies of the "Mothers", incorporated into the plot in such a way as to narrativize in the political unconscious the ideological textualisation that justifies their struggle for truth and justice. In contrast, fiction brings out the social hostility that hegemonic history, entrenched in common sense, had been preparing for them, and, thus, prompts the spectator's empathy towards the "Mothers". Frank Graziano (1992, 9) has observed that:

> Ritual that says by doing, and that, in the process, effects a change in its actors and audience, provides an inverted complement for those illocutionary speeches that, referred to as "performative", do by saying (…) performative statements do not describe an act but actually constitute it, provided that the context in which they are uttered is "felicitous".

This equation helps us understand the discursive struggle between the rite of domination, such as those used by military repression, especially through the disappearance of people, and the meaningful performance of resistance, like the marches of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, who, by speaking out, make public the disappearance of their children. In this spirit, the performance of "Mothers" systematically provides the counterpoint to the ritual of omnipotence and reorganisation of the real in the spaces of the symbolic representation of military mythology. Once this symbolic ritual is confronted, it unveils its myth as the mask which conceals the neoliberal paradigm. Therefore, as Graziano (1992, 74) says, if the system of disappearance was an abstract ritual of omnipotence to reorganize reality, we must then ask ourselves about the cultural instances that were conducive to justifying all stages of its execution.

The question leads us to inquire into the symbolic system through which the ritual rendered its truth omnipresent and omnipotent. Reading the work of Fernando Rojas (1981); Diana Taylor (1998 and 1994); Temma Kaplan (2004) and Graziano (1992) allowed me to identify three fundamental ideas. A) The exaltation of military rationality and word represented in the power of masculinity (exposure of phallic instruments of domination, such as weapons, equestrian monuments, uniforms). B) The exaltation of the infallible secret of disappearance that forced reality to update its myth. And, C) The irrefutability of the bourgeois "national state fetish"; through its institutions, it repressed the "sub-national subversive" that endangered it. These three symbolic tools with which military mythology reorganised reality were publicly deconstructed by the struggle of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.

To the first tool, the exaltation of masculine power, "Mothers" counterposed a show of weakness. This, as Taylor (1994, 281) states, "makes sense concerning the myth of castration, the lack of the phallus, that is to say, the lack of power, a lack that was made evident in the face of their political inexperience, the absence of their children and their impotence against the military apparatus". This identity construction of "Mothers" - which activates the spectacle of passivity and lack - benefits from the dictatorship's discourse, which embraces Christianity and the family institution, as it prevented them from being shot in public. Their power lies in presenting themselves as victims of the regime and not as their subversive opponent. The reaction to this is to discredit them as "crazy old women", which has some truth: "Mothers" were viewed as irrational people in the mythological reality of the regime. There is a key scene in *The Official Story* in this regard: when Alicia takes Gaby's grandmother to her house to introduce her to her

husband. There he, as the symbol of male and military rationality, says: "if you want to get rid of the little girl, you don't need to give her to the first crazy old woman you meet on the street". The film depicts a helpless and passive grandmother, who does not answer or argue, but clings to the banner that she carries in her bag. That is to say, even in alien territory, the banner and its entire strategy of visibility are present, and that strong proof of truth causes the man to leave the room. Therefore, the ritualistic exaltation of the infallible secret of disappearance is opposed by a performance that proves it and makes it visible because it explicitly discusses, via a symbolic code, the tacit forms with which the regime forces silence on a secret that is public knowledge.

From a theatrical point of view, that performance that makes disappearance visible is described as follows. The scenario: the Plaza de Mayo, is the perfect metaphorical location as it is the most public space in the history of the nation, linked to popular representation and the declaration of freedom. The costumes: the household clothes represent them as mothers and women from the private sphere; the use of white headscarves connotes their working social class, but their great iconic power is that they are, in fact, a replica of their children's cloth diapers. The movement on stage: the round as a circular repetition with which silent women, holding each other's hands, break the linear and direct project of the Process. That round choreographically suggests, at the same time, the insistence on unresolved issues, as when circling carrion birds indicate the presence of a corpse, something broken down in the system. The props: the photographs of their children on the banners that they hold up when they walk replace with their own bodies those that are missing. These oversized photos and the IDs around their necks provide evidence of those lives that the disappearance system has made intangible. The bodies of the mothers are the record of that ambiguity of presence-absence, of that spectrality to which their children were condemned and that "Mothers" make appear in their marches. As Richard (2000, 166) claims:

> The photo creates the visual paradox of the presence effect that is at the same time denied in its dead time detention. If the photograph contains in itself this chronological ambiguity of what it still is, and of what no longer is, (suspended between life and death, between appearing and disappearing), then, such ambiguity is overdramatized in the case of photographed portraits of missing people.

By incorporating the discursive strategies of "Mothers" into the narrative, the film prepares the spectator's emotional and cognitive terrain to empathically receive the testimony of Gaby's grandmother as a truth, which

is that of all the mothers because Gaby's grandmother is impregnated with the collective political identity of the movement. The simulation of their testimony in the film then becomes a fundamental contribution to social reparation for the victims and enables the configuration of an active memory by giving explanations about the political and economic reasons for the disappearance. In the scene in the cafeteria, when Alicia meets and talks with the grandmother, we learn about the living conditions of her missing son and wife, of their working-class position, of the solidarity ties among the factory workers, of her family's efforts to afford the construction of their house, of everyday and family life, of love. And, again, the story gains allegorical status because, as Richard (2000, 168) states:

> By pulling out these photos from their private rituality (…) it is also possible to verify that the "national" - simulated extension of the familiar - is but a parody made of injured bodies and disrupted identities. These photos, which biographically portray the disappeared, [are] the allegorical remains of a dissolved kinship ceremony that shows how "family" and "nation" are physically and symbolically disintegrated categories, which today lack reparative links of a solidary narrative.

In the scene, the grandmother's narrative occurs against a background of electronic game shots, which evoke the danger and violence of the past and, for both her and Alicia, of the present in which the truth is revealed. The story textualises the founding discourse of "Mothers" and, therefore, contradicts the recitation of the military myth that associated the disappeared with the enemies of the nation and of Christian values. On the contrary, in the fiction the grandmother talks about her children's commitment to equality and the strengthening of the social bases through the fight for their labour, school, family or community rights, as those are opposed to the logic of exploitation of capital that underlies the nature of the national state. Thus, the real reason for the disappearance is the disappearance of their social project.

As with Ana's story, the film re-simulates the oral / truth convention, but with a linguistic contribution taken from the singularity of the Mothers movement: the enlargement of the ID card photos of their children. According to Richard, on those banners each person portrayed is isolated from their identity and social environment, and each individual is the same but anonymous and repeated thousands of times. Thus, the identity portrait that normalizes and serializes the image of the photographed subject metonymically indicates the identity suppression device that made it disappear (2001, 166). This photographic enlargement forces us to accept the proof of their social and civic existence prior to their disappearance. The

photo, reproduced a thousand times, becomes a horrifying icon of the violence to which we are all subjected as members of the system and forces an identification among those not directly affected. The story uses the same emotional and symbolic resistance achieved in the public arena by the photographs.

On a macro level, I argue that the film's plot and aesthetic criteria consist of taking recorded cases from official files to stories of individuals with an emotional life. This allegorical resource of approximation of the general to the particular affectively reinforces the public images presented above as context. Thus, the camera shots that focus on Gaby's grandmother will first capture the whole group of "Mothers" then focuses on her with the march in the background. In the same way, the narrative removes us from the public and impersonal space to introduce us into the café conversation. There is no longer a single ID card photo, but family images of Gaby's parents. The coloured photos no longer highlight the spectrality, the empty tomb, but instead give them body, feelings and time; childhood and youth; they humanise the victims and tell us about a collective belonging that is also ours. "After the fire, there was nothing left," says the grandmother, "only these photos and our memory". This line of dialogue raises the aesthetic / political strategy of the group: the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo are the mothers of all the disappeared and speak for all, so that the collective memory is able to remember.

Reconstruction of the historical narrative: From alterity to identification

Elizabeth Jelin (2001, 86) points out that in order to narrate experiences of suffering it is necessary to have others' willingness to listen, another person with the ability to inquire and express curiosity about a painful past: "Alterity rather than identification is what helps most in this communication". Without discussing this statement, I think it is necessary to point out that *Testimonio* is precisely a communicative process that makes the listener-reader move from alterity to identification and there, finally, lies its utopian / political power. Achúgar (1992, 64) says that *Testimonio* works "when the receiver is the subject of ideological interpellation", when the other receives the testimony as part of a speech with which he identifies. In this sense, *Testimonio* builds community, generates the spectator's empathy with the witness and brings together both parties in the same ideological discourse.

Regarding the testimonies of repression given by the victims in this film, we could state that this task was already carried out by the CONADEP commission, and the testimonies published in the *Never Again* report. The final CONADEP report ensured the reader's identification because it purges social greed for materialising, judging, exorcising the secret that the people had tacitly contracted with the regime. However, it justifies the self-indulgence of an audience that continues to conceive of itself as passive spectators. It is evident that the official transcription of these testimonies made possible the simulation of their own political legitimation. In return, *The Official Story* set out to execute a transcript of the transcript, that is, to re-signify those testimonies that have been produced and authorised by the transcription of power within the interpretative framework that encompasses the ideological text of the "agents of memory". The stories of Ana and the grandmother are a second-degree simulation that appropriates the utopian / political aura of the testimonial convention of the official texts to reverse their discursive intentions. The film also satisfies the audience's need to purge the old and well-known tension with which the abstract spectacularisation of atrocity had turned the people into a "guarantor audience". But this story heals because it embraces the readers as part of the affected circle, reveals them as a victim or accomplice of the atrocity, and takes everyone into this world of meaning. This reorganisation of responsibilities aligns with the Mothers' discourse, which, unlike the official discourse, includes the public in the list of responsible parties.[19] There is a crucial moment in Ana's story, when Alicia asks if she had filed a torture complaint with the police, and Ana replies sarcastically: "What a good idea, it hadn't occurred to me! Who would you have filed the complaint with?" The phrase accounts for the absence of legal or institutional support within the terror state, but also refers to the fact that the whole of society was involved. That perspective returns Alicia and the spectator to membership of the guarantor group of the atrocity.

Ana's scene also tells how the film constantly explains its discourse strategies. At the end, Ana confesses to Alicia that, except for when she testified for "the commission" (CONADEP), she had never *told* this to anyone. This resource accounts for the monopolisation of official investigations into the stories of the victims, and criticises them as the concealment or sole representation of traumatic memory. At present, this serialised processing of information stirs emotional conflicts within the victims, because the context is not permeable to listening.

Although the *Never Again* report cancels the horrors in the past, the act of listening implies taking an active position, or at least raises one's awareness.

That is why Ana's reflection exceeds the time margins of the film, located in the transition of 1983, to criticise that two years later, when filmed, no institutional intervention had yet allowed the population to understand the costs of repression in the present. Instead of repairing the trauma, the published report was the continuity of a spectacularisation of violence that perpetuates the hegemonic text. This criticism is implied in the film, but it is a claim to the contexts in which these testimonies were used.

The film clearly does not cast doubt on *Testimonio* as a utopian discourse. As a "rewriting of history", it is a narrative that opposes the historiography of the bourgeois fetish, with its ability to concentrate hegemony in the postmodern setting. No, *The Official Story* insists on the revolutionary value of *Testimonio* as a "re-foundation of history" but with other narrativisation plans in the political unconscious. The viewer of the simulated testimonies in fiction is listening to the victim testifying and, by doing so, cooperates with the moral reparation that society owes the victims, guaranteeing the ethical condemnation of the regime. However, this listening is not that of the reader of the same testimony in *Never Again*. The film shows the difference, that this experience of the past affects the present life of both the victims and those around them, and that all of society has been affected in different ways.

Ana's story is not cancelled in the film, but in *Never Again*, because it forever affects the life of Alicia and her family. As in the domino effect, Ana's words deeply move Alicia, leading her to unravel the truth and return Gaby to her true family. In short, *The Official Story* proposes that narration of the traumatic experience should provide the opportunity to construct a collective memory, which can ultimately give way to an active memory, that is, something that can give back some kind of restorative and exemplary attitude. This project is the fundamental utopia of re-narrating the collective historical memory from an individual story. By rearticulating the syntax of memory, the film significantly modifies the conditions of social audibility to narrativise pain and loss because its re-narration manages to connect with the utopian impulses of the collective in the political unconscious of the spectator. That is why the film is crucial in the elaborative work of memory at the beginning of the Argentine post-dictatorial period.

Image – 03

"Fragmento 3"

Digital editing on *Ronda* by Alejandro Failla

CHAPTER II

A WALL OF SILENCE.
ON THE MELANCHOLY
OF THE UNREPRESENTABLE:
ALLEGORY IN THE PROCESS OF MOURNING

The need for mourning as an unavoidable process for collective memory construction was a particularly pertinent debate when *A Wall of Silence* (Lita Stantic, 1993) was made. At that time, the public practices of remembering/forgetting were completely detached from their condition as significant nexuses of pain and loss. The director sets the beginning of the movie in 1990 to describe a social state of "intersubjective oblivion" (Jelin, 2001, 2l) resulting from a complex repression of memory. On the one hand, with President Carlos Menem's pardons (of the previously condemned military elite responsible for human rights violations), violence was exercised over the interpretative frameworks of the past. On the other hand, the market drove the daily atomisation and exacerbation of consumerist individualism, as if in a collective numbness regarding the truth of the past in the present. The desire to forget the crimes committed, already tried and sentenced, only garnered complaints from sectors devoted to human rights. Meanwhile, that apparent atmosphere of openness and availability for listening that the "guarantor audience" (Graziano, 1992) showed in the 1980s manifested itself through "intersubjective oblivion" in the 90s in the form of apathy toward pardons and tolerance of the perversity of the current, almost consolidated, market system.

A Wall of Silence is located amid this context and presents a necessary and interesting debate. It is necessary because it warns, from an ethical perspective, about the dangers of forgetting and emphasises social complicity with past and present institutional abuses. It does so by becoming the narrative that legitimises the struggles of social movements comprising the "agents of memory" (Jelin, 2001). It is interesting because it was developed from a conviction of the need to produce a message in the hyperreal world, in the symbolic space where discourses of truth are

reproduced infinitely in a self-referential system whose signs replace the signs of the real and have such value. Following such logic, the movie will reveal the contradictions of the system that produces it in order to resist it ideologically. This is so since, at this post-dictatorial and postmodern moment, it is the direction that collective memory might take regarding the causes and consequences of the recent dictatorial past which could promote either a hegemonic concentration of market discourse or its counter hegemonic impulse. Hence, in the 1990s, "agents of memory" had to find more appropriate ways to express these discursive possibilities. In this respect, Nelly Richard (1993, 456-457) suggests developing a decolonisation strategy through the descriptive representation of postmodern discourse which, according to our analysis, would imply collectively developing an active or "exemplary" historical memory, if we follow Todorov (2000).

After the overload of information about horror in the 1980s, hegemonic power reinforced its omnipotent narrative with the institutional denial of truth during the 1990s. Such dynamic of indiscretion/denial of violence, in accordance with which the interpretative frameworks of the past were reorganised, is the same one that prescribed intersubjective oblivion. As Ricoeur (2000) claims, personal memories are embedded within collective narratives that are often reinforced in rituals and social commemorations. Therefore, by institutionally denying the traumatic experience, a breakdown in memory then takes place as a representation of individual experience, which must gain meaning within the current framework of interpretation. If this does not happen, one falls into a melancholic state, what Julia Kristeva (1997 [1978]) refers to as unprocessed mourning. Here, the melancholic-depressive effect comes not only from the sadness derived from the irretrievability of what is lost, but from a destructive alteration of significant nexuses; something that blocks the ability of representation. Obstruction makes the mourning process impossible because the lost object cannot be replaced by the representation of loss. In emergent melancholy there is only what Patricio Marchant (1979-1990) calls "the loss of speech" or "the traumatic suspension of speech due to multiple cracks of identity and representation".

In my opinion, the narrative proposal of *A Wall of Silence* is that of a melancholy of what is unrepresentable because it manifests the fundamental aesthetic/philosophical difficulty faced by post-dictatorship in constructing collective exemplary memory. Such a problem permeates Stantic's movie with respect to two essential issues: metalinguistics and morality. As for the first, as a cultural text the movie explores what can be done to reconstruct the meanings of historical interpretation frameworks that establish new

audibility conditions for the narration of traumatic experiences. That is to say, the movie inquires into its own possible semiotics: how to become a "word" to replace what has been lost. As for the second, the moral problem faced by this representation is explored as it presents itself as a "surface of inscription" (Richard, 2001, 13) to elaborate the loss, or to represent that specific victim's experience, whose trauma made it unrepresentable. In this sense, the movie narrates historical discontinuity because it questions whether an exemplary plural memory unifying the senses of individual fissured memories can be constructed.

Thus, *A Wall of Silence*'s cognitive map is presented as an indirect prescription for survival because, by its ideological expression, it emphasises narrativisation dynamics over those of its textualisation. The movie reveals this conflict of representation within its own expressive means, something Idelber Avelar describes as "the unrecoverable breakdown of representation" (2000, 25). However, the movie simultaneously provides another circuit of reference that gives meanings that remain alive or possible. As a symbolic act, it constitutes the artifice of figuration in the process of replacing what was lost, thus promoting the mourning process as a fundamental step for the development of collective memory.

Reconfiguring interpretation frames

A Wall of Silence tells the experiences of a group of people who, in 1990s Argentina, elaborate a mourning for the experiences of the 1970s. The trigger is the shooting of a movie that aims to "represent" what was experienced during the "Dirty War". Kate Benson (Vanessa Redgrave) is an English movie director, a leftist, who arrives in Buenos Aires to shoot a movie about the life of a couple, the husband having disappeared. Benson observes 1990s Argentina's dormant life and tries to work out how the intersubjective oblivion of everything that the country suffered was even possible. She believes that exposing these truths with her movie will prevent a repetition of the horror. Silvia Casini (Ofelia Medina), whose life story is the basis of Benson's movie, loses her first husband, survives the regime with her daughter and is now a writer who tries to rebuild her life by marrying a musician, Ernesto (Lorenzo Quinteros). However, her life is disrupted when she learns about the production of this movie, to the extent that she believe she has found her missing husband in the street. The screenwriter of the movie, Bruno Tealdi (Lautaro Murúa), is a leftist intellectual who was exiled during the dictatorship. He bases the script on the letters that Silvia sent him during his exile while her husband was

missing. Other characters are the actors who, in Benson's movie, represent Julio's disappearance story: Julio Chávez as Julio, a member of the armed left, and Ana (Soledad Villamil) as young Silvia Casini.

The metalinguistic problem

Both Marchant's concept of "word loss" (1979-1990) and what Jelin calls "the historical trauma paradox" (2000) are concepts that propose consequential relationships between interpretation frame alteration and representation breakdown, since words are no longer able to verbalise the catastrophe and the present does not give meaning to the past. That produces the crack, the gaps in memory; "that is the place where memory becomes solitary and incommunicable because it is no longer narratable" (Jelin, 2001, 29). At this level, continues the author, "oblivion is not absence, it is that presence of such absence, the representation of something that was there and is not there any longer" (Jelin, 2001, 29). The change in the interpretative framework when looking at the state terrorism project, between considering repression as human rights violations (1980's) and as "the reasonable measures taken during a Dirty War" (as the narrative of the 90's goes), leaves out the protagonist's trauma and allows us to ask whether Silvia is a victim or an instigator of repression. However, the question itself removes the need or significance of communicating her experience and this may be the reason for her silence.

The moral problem

Ernst Van Alphen (1997, 41-62), reflecting on narrating the Holocaust, wondered if what makes the narration of such extermination impossible is the extreme nature of the event, or if it is a consequence of language restrictions or the limitations of the available symbolic systems. In the case presented by Stantic, Casini writes in a dissident magazine. It has the language and an audience willing to listen, the "necessary symbolic system", but her silence is absolute. Perhaps her attitude reflects the search to reestablish her human dignity. As Jelin says: "if state terrorism and repression violated privacy and human bodies, identity reconstruction also requires the reconstruction of private spaces; redrawing and framing intimacy spaces that do not have to be exposed to others' eyes". (2001, 97). She adds that the concealment of one's traumatic experience "turns memories into literal, nontransferable memories, thus hindering the possibilities of reinterpretation and resignification of the experiences transmitted" (Jelin, 2001, 62). The traumatic narrative is not narratable and

direct victims involuntarily monopolise the memory of pain, blocking the necessary transfer channels for the social "elaborative work" of memory. Such is the paradox of historical trauma, which reveals the narrative's double gap: "the inability or impossibility to construct a narrative due to the dialogic vacuum; there is no subject and there is no listener, there is no listening" (Jelin, 2001, 84).

A Wall of Silence dealt with the scope of this paradox by expressing the post-dictatorial melancholic scene where "an irremediable breakdown of representation" (Avelar, 2000) has taken place, which reminds us of the Freudian distinction between mourning and melancholy and, later, presents us with the Benjaminian allegory as the only way to portray this ruin of meaning. Avelar says that "mourning is the process of overcoming the loss, one in which the separation between the self and the lost object can still take place. In melancholy, however, the identification with the lost object reaches such an extreme level that the same self is involved in, and transformed into, a part of the loss." (2000, 20). In Richard's words (2001, 105), the subject is "paralyzed by the sadness of a self-absorbed contemplation of what was lost, lacking enough energy to build transformative ways out of this drama without meaning". Richard (2001b) has stated that, by critically reflecting on the melancholic thought of post-dictatorship, she found in the Benjaminian allegory of the ruins a mode of expression that can account for the contemporary feeling of a disfigured totality: "the redeeming promise of a broken historicity that continues to vibrate in each fold of its fall was very useful" (104).

I understand that Stantic's movie is constructed as a Benjaminian allegory because it manages to expose the problem of the loss of interpretation frames and loss of the word, while also questioning the capacity of its own filmic text as the symbolic object suitable to give an account of this representation dilemma. *A Wall of Silence* is offered as a deep reflection about the ways in which symbolic mediation is introduced into the mechanisms and social processes of memory. This is: how to work on the resignification of these interpretive contexts in order to recover "the word"? Avelar answers: "the mourning process can only be carried out through the narration of a story, the survivor's dilemma resides in the immeasurable and irresolvable character of the mediation between narrative and experience" (2000, 282). That is why I suggest that the movie's reflection is deep since, when the body of its own language is investigated and put into question, is when it becomes a Benjaminian allegory.

When thinking about the meaning of narrating as a process of historical mourning, Richard (2001b, 107) approaches the core of this discussion:

> It is not enough to assemble any narrative from the past to perform the critical task of mourning. In order to be faithful to the   demands of a crisis of thought, it will be necessary to give an account of the ruins of the foundations of meaning completeness and plenitude in the textures themselves -in its filigrees- of the story that it narrates. We must then be careful not to erase the   negativity of a historical failure whose perforation of memory should continue being a nuisance to the substitutive and falsely reparative rhetoric of memory-order that officializes the transitional present.

 In my view, *A Wall of Silence*'s focus on this epistemological problem has positioned the movie as the cognitive map of the 1990s post-dictatorial critique scene in Argentina.

How the unrepresentable is represented?
A melancholic reflection of "us"

I propose that *A Wall of Silence* is constructed as a melancholic narration that, as a symbolic act, does not intend to resolve the "inescapable tension" between preserving the hurt memory so as not to betray the victims' memories and producing an expressive reconfiguration moving the traces of what has disappeared to "new inscription surfaces". Instead, it presents itself as a cryptic word: "the residual manifestation of the phantasmagorical persistence of unresolved mourning" (Avelar, 2000, 53).[20] In this sense, the movie works as an allegory to reveal the spectral atmosphere that results from resistance to the loss of figuration. It presents two modes of internalising the loss through the structure of its double fiction. Therefore, the movie's decoding unravels the cryptic labyrinths through which the viewer is expected to pass, to arrive at an elaborative mourning process.

In the first level of "realistic" movie fiction, Stantic portrays the traumatic object lodged within Silvia's being as an "invisible but omnipresent" body (Avelar citing Abraham-Torok, 2000). The problems related to "the mode of incorporation of the lost object" are developed there (Avelar, 2000, 54).

Meanwhile, in the second level of fiction, presented in the movie's "realistic" level, the movie that is being filmed will therefore represent the processes of "introjection" – the dialectical internalisation work of absorption-expulsion of the lost object, by which the libido is deposited in a substitute object. There, the likelihoods of ending the mourning are enhanced. Such possibility means, for Kristeva (1997 [1978]) to substitute

mechanisms whereby what is lost is replaced by the representation of the loss, together with transposition mechanisms that displace experience to figuration and with records of expression where such experience is redrawn through metaphor. I consider that there is the specific image with which the event would be represented, narrativising, in its texture, the problem of "substitution". Such substitution is not successful for the universe of the movie's first level because it only means for its characters the frustrated desire to make the loss visible. As they fail to transfer the life lesson out of their experience with meaning, I would say that a "transposition" is not accomplished. According to Richard—following Avelar— it is no longer possible to "fill those gaps of intelligibility, caused by the gaps of residual memory with the compensatory devices of a unified compensative memory discursiveness" (2001, 105). Thus, "the breakdown of representation (Avelar, 2000, 25) would be the rest of the melancholic state left by dialectics between these two narrative levels.

If narrating traumatic memory is impossible, what is Stantic's intention in conceiving this second movie as fiction? It is evident that she does not intend a resignification of the ideological text or the historical narrative to promote social mourning. This information has already been narrativised by other cultural objects with which this movie maintains an intertextual relationship; *The Official Story* by Luis Puenzo (1985), for instance. In addition, such tactic is no longer relevant because the signifying nexuses that gave them meaning have been broken. Therefore, what we try to review is the role of symbolic intervention in the dynamics of social mourning located in the logic of meaning breakdown. That is, we try to find out what happens to the movie's "real" characters when it is published as the "inscription surface" of their experience, how such representation of the past affects their current life, and the expected effect of the representation of these experiences in the social construction of memory. Therefore, the elaboration effect is assigned to the spectators so that they can become the subject of historical mourning.

As a result, the movie has a third, extra-narrative level, related to the status of simulation itself that its fictional narration acquires for the construction of reality in the logic of what is hyperreal. I refer to a sort of para-texts that, incorporated into fiction, constantly reveal the movie as fiction and, at the same time, with its value extracted from "the real", cooperate in the textual narrativisation of another range of referentiality: a centripetal force of the movie's message toward the elaboration of mourning that emerges from its value in what is hyperreal. I speak of the use of intertextuality with other filmic texts, the evocation of the political value of the actors themselves in

real life, and the active elaboration that the spectator has to undertake between the two levels, which are also the two elaboration modes of trauma.

To recapitulate, if, as Avelar says, the mourning process can only be carried out through narrating a story (Avelar, 2000) *A Wall of Silence* "retains the flaw" of that substitution, using it to narrate its story: the story of how we are all part of a melancholic state that has made it impossible to elaborate historical trauma. That is its way of promotion from its character as a symbolic act: as a reflection of melancholy and as a constitution of mourning. In this way, the movie, as a cultural text, prescribes the elaborative process of memory from an extradiegetic critical environment that surrounds the spectator as the subject that creates the memory and no longer as a guarantor audience. This memorisation strategy allows the movie to present itself as a "cognitive map" by being a "postmodern sublime" (Jameson, 1991). This sublime condition of its map in relation to the elaborative work of post dictatorial memory is achieved by operating as a Benjaminian allegory. This is, "with the ability to portray that breakdown of meaning by showing the cracks of the symbol, not disguise its cracks under the substitute or restitutive masks of a falsely integrated whole" (Richard quoting Avelar, 2001b, 104). The allegorical appeal would thus exhibit "the cracking of narration and stories without erasing the silent opacity of the wounded temporality that accompanies the symbol's fall" (Richard, 2001b, 105).

The distancing strategy as allegorical manifestation

This section will go further, beyond a previous statement about the allegorical status of Lita Stantic's movie when facing the melancholic trance of post-catastrophe, to considering that, in response to such schizophrenic moment, *A Wall of Silence* presents itself as a "cognitive map" which can be approached as a Benjaminian allegory. We are now trying to unravel the narrative structure that underpins this allegory, through which the "break of its symbol" (Richard, 2001, 104) is exhibited in its own text.

My suggestion, after considering the three levels proposed by this movie, is that its rhetorical dynamic works through a Brechtian distancing or alienation effect. If as Jelin (2001, 69) states, "elaborating trauma implies putting distance between the past and the present so that one can remember that something happened but, at the same time, recognise one's present life and future projects", the strategy of distancing or alienation effect is the proper way to represent this process. As such, the constant fragmentation of the syntagmatic chain of its narrative distances the receivers and forces them

to reflect upon the presented conflict, preventing them from being carried away by the advancing dramatic action. The discontinuity of the epic theater used in the movie to fragment narrative chronology promotes a process of trauma elaboration insofar as it manages to "return to the limit situation, but also to return from the limit situation" (Jelin, 2001, 95), moving, as Richard says, away from the "deadlock of memory" (2001b, l07). Therefore, if by Brecht's distancing strategy the spectator develops an inquisitive and critical attitude toward the represented object, I propose that Stantic's use of Brecht's epic theater tries to make the spectators aware of being alienated in melancholy in order to ignite an elaboration of mourning. In this sense, *A Wall of Silence* opposed the Aristotelian cathartic structure of traditional narration (the narratives of the *status quo*) by presenting itself as an anti-catharsis that eliminates the barriers between active narrator and passive listener. This is so because without the latter there would be no narration and because the narrator has "disappeared".

A Wall of Silence is the superposition of at least three narrations whose characters have almost the same leading force without an antagonistic relationship among them: the first, or "realistic" fiction level; the second or Benson's movie fiction level; and a third level, the product of a clash between the two previous narratives, or "third image". This third narration, as in Sergei Einstein's metaphorical montage (1949), reveals the conflict in the mind of the viewer who, from here on, is also an active part of the movie. The dramatic line of the movie, therefore, lies in the broken meaning achieved by using the Brechtian distancing effect in the two internal fictions as a symptomatic representation of the melancholic context. That is why the narration is allowed to fragment the syntagmatic chain of the narrative sequences at any time. What matters is to account for breaking the meaning contexts, the unsolvable problem of representation as an "inscription surface" of what was suffered to produce a full, complete and extensive narrative that replaces what was lost. This third narration, this "suprasensitive" surface of the allegory that Benjamin (1928) discusses, is what brings out the process of mourning elaboration in Stantic's text.

Second level of fiction: closing of the image in the representation of what was lost

The narrative forms that present the second level of fiction of *A Wall of Silence* constitute a figurative record in which the characters of the "realist" movie intend to expressively imprint the traumatic value of the limit situation on a tale of the past that, they hope, can become the emblematic

deposit of loss. In order for this to happen, as Kristeva (1997 [1978]) has
mentioned, symbolic equivalences [should be generated] to transform the
symptom of loss into words and images that recreate meaning. However,
this process depends on substitution and transposition, as we have already
seen. Here reappears the moral problem announced as one of the
fundamental discussions of the movie's argument: there is no substitution if
the substitution is a representation created by a third party (Bruno) about the
traumatic experience of another silenced by trauma (Silvia). It is not
possible to force the represented victim to find in this kind of substitute
image the exchanging figure to transpose her own experience. Here we also
find the metalinguistic problem that we are already dealing with: how can
the transposition of the traumatic experience into images - Benson's movie
–metaphorise, absorb and expel the literal memory (Silvia's), transposing it
onto a surface that inscribes it as an example, if the image itself specifically
means the closure of the memory? The problem of the image is, then, the
extra-problematic knot when it seals up the possibility of substituting the
concrete loss and transposing it to the exemplary memory.

To advance in this idea, I incorporate Sergio Rojas' contributions (2001) to
image analysis as a representation of the past in memory, especially about
its irreducible power to become the "how" of that past or testimony of "an
era". The author observes "each era fixes itself through images" (291),
moving toward the times ahead, as they represent the "how of what existed".
Therefore, continues Sergio Rojas (2001) "the image 'of' a body (or event)
becomes the body of the image" (29). Shortly after he adds, "It is only
possible to preserve the 'edited' event on journalistic photography and the
documentary movie of the time, there lies the image's power of availability
and shutdown regarding what would have had to 'appear' here" (290,
emphasis on the original). For the author, this reveals the irreducibility of
the image because it hosts a certain narrative believability with the
fortuitous, accidental event. Thus, he assures that "the density of the image
is or has to do with the fall of the universal into the specific" (S. Rojas, 2001,
289). For that reason, he argues that the image becomes "truth" if what we
regard as the past better fits the image of the past that has materialised as
the past. For Rojas, our being aware of this does not necessarily mean the
end or closure of our relationship with history. It is "another way of
'questioning' those materials that are revealed as inseparable forms of our
own experience with these images: because, in them, the impossible is
confused with a weak possibility of memory" (294, highlighted in the
original).

In my view, Stantic raises the distancing strategy of this fiction level as a way to deconstruct this process of memory subjectivisation analysed by Rojas. Stantic's rationale seems to be following this path: if the image is all we have to carry out the process of substitution/transposition of what is lost and this is, as stated by Sergio Rojas, its closure, at least we can reserve the possibility of establishing another experiential relationship with it. That is the function of the dialectics of this second level of fiction with the first "realistic" level of the movie. Its result performs the process of introjection or exit from mourning.

The narrative line that throughout the movie is responsible for telling the conflicts of Ana's life regarding her husband's disappearance in 1976 gradually becomes responsible for "filling" the gaps in the narrative memory of the general movie and it becomes "the how" or the "truth" of the past, in Sergio Rojas' terms. The resource allows Stantic to unveil the process in which images embody memory.

The first scene in Kate Benson's narrative is the strategic key to this type of narrative distancing. It presents a reunion between Ana and Julio at their house, where she expresses fear about her family because of his armed and clandestine militancy. This narrative-image of the past that "fills" the hole of the memory of what we do not know as truth - because it happened in the private space - is interrupted by the cut that the director (Benson) asks for. Just at that moment, we notice that we have been seeing actors in a rehearsal of a performance. The reverberant sound of the studio, a still unfinished set of what will represent the scenario of the couple's house, and the fixed camera shooting the scene in a theatrical long shot integrate another layer or diegetic scene. In fact, we are witnessing a movie set where the actors and the director discuss the motivations of the acting regarding the conflict they are representing. This debate is fundamental to counteracting hegemonic narratives about "subversives". The content of this conversation humanises the characters: why did Julio join the armed fight? What was the repression like? This breakdown in fiction that halts the dramatic action opens a space of exclusive attention for the spectator, who is fundamental in the construction of this image as an exemplary visualisation of the past. This is so because the debate about the acting motivation becomes a critical analysis of the way in which the hegemonic narrative tried to "glorify", according to S. Rojas (2001), the meanings of the past in subjectivities. The scene provides one of the many possible images through which to represent the past. It introduces the spectators' situation of participant observation, the ubiquity that it requires to follow the dramatic unfolding of events with an eye off the text, because now they are aware of its fictional status, its

status as an image built on the past that seals up its image of the past with its own representation.

However, Stantic's narrative will be able to seduce us with other scenes from the couple's past life in which the traces of fictionalisation have been erased, replaced by complete scenes using traditional dramatic language. They become autonomous and generate empathy in the spectators, who gradually abandon their analytical position. Thus, Benson's movie representation, as flashbacks, is intermingled with the moments in which Silvia's "real" character - self-absorbed, reflective - evokes her memories. The images, then, are open to ambiguity or ambivalence, as an artifice and as a possibility of memory representation. The most palpable example of ambivalence can be seen in the last scene of Benson's movie: by means of all the tools of traditional narration, we see the couple's farewell at a bar table. Julio is kidnapped and Ana remains sitting, helpless. The emotional force is enhanced when Benson asks for the cut, after which the film set is shown. Silvia's daughter is there, and here is the relationship with the images that are "inseparable from our own experience" (as expressed by S. Rojas, 2001): for the little girl, this image is a literal figure - substitution - that fills the gap in her memory regarding what happened to her parents 13 years ago. Externally, spectators are presented again with the distancing effect, which invites them to become aware of their own memorisation process. In this shift of meaning, from the literal to the exemplary image, irremediably intervened by the particularity of the image, the distancing strategy offers us a less absolute way of dealing with the moral and metalinguistic problem because the spectator takes part in such substitution and agrees to become an actor in the process of transposing what was lost.

First "realistic" level: allegory as awareness of the finitude of its language

As we anticipated, Stantic's first level of fiction depicts the conflicts of representation that in post-dictatorship make experience unrepresentable, because the loss is encapsulated in the victim's being and because the significant contexts that would have made the experience narratable have disappeared. Thus, the means for the elaboration of mourning are blocked, creating a melancholic state. At this level, we will work on the aspects of this unresolvable tension: Silvia's need to protect herself from her memory and Kate's and Bruno's urgent request to represent the past in order to promote a collective memory. Stantic is interested in representing the impossibility of that resolution. She does not resolve it. That is why the

movie is constructed as a Benjaminian allegory, which in Avelard's words is "the manifestation of the crypt where the lost object is housed" (2000, 20).

A Wall of Silence is an example of this type of tale because its narrative traces "the sign or the symptom of what is lost, of the non-fulfillment; a lack in language if it is viewed in the instrumental 'wanting to say' way" (Sergio Rojas, 2001, 291). Thus, the characters – in their eagerness to represent the past – make use of a "finitude" of language to represent the loss, and this is the allegory: "a disturbing signifier of a materiality that simultaneously drives the material, political, and epochal conditions of 'interpretation'"(S. Rojas, 2001, 291). It is an allegory because it relates to language itself, within "the body of language" Benjamin (1928) would say. Quoting Severo Sarduy, Sergio Rojas (2001, 291) refers to the allegorical performance as "a language that, due to its complexity, no longer denotes things, but other denoters of things, signifiers that involve other signifiers in a signification mechanism that ends up designating itself".[21] Such is Benjamin's conception of allegory, an image crossed by that significant density characteristic of the Baroque that simultaneously shows its own grammar, the models of that grammar and its generation within the universe of words.

Precisely this idea of *mise en abyme* of language is signed in the self-referentiality of this movie's expression. As such, this is a film that questions, within its own narrative, the possibilities of representation a movie can have facing social and personal trauma. Also, this film's scenes refer intertextually to other films; the scene where the protagonist is bathing the daughter raises the same situation portrayed in *The Official Story,* for instance. Thus, the allegory becomes a figure that, by continuously referring back to itself, "loses" the event that it represents. In giving an account of destruction, it represents the loss and manifests in its body what is missing. Such endless signifying mechanism is this movie's conflict of representation, which tries all the impossible ways of denoting what is undenotable. As Benjamin (2008, [1935], 180) states "the allegory is to the domain of thought what ruins are to the realm of things". However, is any system of self-referentiality or hyperreal simulation a Benjaminian allegory? Avelar (2000, 316) would answer: "allegorisation takes place when what is most familiar is revealed as strange (...) when the most usual is interpreted as a ruin. (...) The most familiar cultural documents become allegorical once we refer to the barbarism that lies at their origin". That is why we identify the referents of loss at this "realistic" level: representations or scenes that once belonged to an organic universe of meaning and that, because of this breakdown of meaning, have exhausted their ability to

represent. The allegory of the horror is, thus, the very convergence of these outdated words into the tension of the movie, words that become gloomy when accounting for the impossibility of reconstructing what was lost.

Kate in the ruins of the domain of things

According to Avelar (2000, 18-22) "The post-dictatorship stages a symbol turned into allegory". (...) "What had been a symbol in an organic totality becomes an allegorical ruin of decay" (...) (Hence) "the allegory flourishes in a world abandoned by gods, a world that, nevertheless, preserves the memory of that abandonment and has not yet surrendered to oblivion. The allegory is the crypt turned into reminiscent residue". These considerations align with the tone acquired by all the texts that, at the level of the "realist" movie, try to account for the past, for destruction, and for memory. The ruinous atmosphere that the English director walks through, the texts she interrogates in her eagerness to understand what happened, are reminiscences, archaeological traces of another civilisation that will not offer a satisfactory explanation to the contingencies of the present forgetting. We can see in her character's look the archaeologist's alterity or the anthropologist's participant observation, and by following it, we are presented with those inscriptions of the past that refer to ancient symbols, "totalities now broken" (Avelar, 2000, 22). They are not divine symbols, but belong to the universe of meaning that joined political ideals with collective commitment and action, and, in the movie's allegorical narrative, this exposition, stripped of its symbolic impotence, "rewrites them in the transience of historical time, reads them as corpses" (Avelar, 2000, 22). That is why Benson's research is a catabasis (a descent into hell) where she will find all the impossibilities of approaching the past. Thus, guided by a metaphorical Virgil (Bruno, the screenwriter) they will visit the ruins of the clandestine detention centres. The allegorical value of this image lies in that their tour is taken in the present, when such places already constitute a monument of the memory of repression. It is a familiar setting for documentary and fictional representations of torture centres. Finally, it is the material and symbolic referent of the destruction of all meanings. In another scene both participate in one of the meetings of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. There only a few mothers are shown, as if they, and their struggle, had been forgotten, and, as if their meaning had been broken when the interpretive framework that regarded those responsible for the genocide as criminals was shattered.[22] Their cry has become inaudible, becoming another impossible representation of what has been lost.

Kate enquires of Bruno about that revolutionary time, and the old leftist intellectual recalls the reasons for the old ideological tensions between intellectuality and the armed militancy. This statement opens up the internal contradictions of dissidence for the spectator and, in some way, demystifies the "glory of meanings" (S. Rojas, 2001, 296) with which the basic internal fractures have been organised and it is intended to explain the failure of the political struggle. Thus, the movie presents discourses that were previously symbols of organic totalities and, with their nexuses of meaning fractured, become a crypt.

Another sequence shows Kate and Bruno reviewing documentary movies from the most vehement times for social struggle. The first one explains the circumstances under which the "Cordobazo" took place in 1968. Agustín Tosco, leader at the time, speaks. The images depict the unruly people of Córdoba, taking to the streets, and the police repression – a homogeneous discourse that offers an image of a golden past of social fight. The second documentary explains the force of these struggles up until Perón's return to government in l973. They are images of euphoric, courageous and determined people, and security forces in retreat. Kate is amazed. She believes that Argentine people are capable of modifying their social conditions through public protest. However, when Kate and Bruno later go to the street, "what is familiar becomes strange" (Avelar, 2000). She asks Bruno about the fall of ideals: why those same people are not on the streets protesting right now about presidential pardons to the perpetrators of human rights violations. Bruno answers: "if Argentina is part of the world, why would that be different here?" Kate is left alone, against a backdrop of twinkling lights in a gambling house. Thus, the walk becomes an allegory of the destruction of the meaning struggles that could not prevent the establishment of global capitalism, and it is then "when what is the most usual is interpreted as a ruin" (Avelar, 2000, 316).

Silvia in the crypt

Let us remember that the story *A Wall of Silence* tells is based on testimony: the letters that Silvia sent to Bruno about the repression in the 1970's. In this movie the letters are the performative object, symbolising the breakdown of representation that it tries to reflect. On the one hand, they remained unpublished due to the lack of audibility within the interpretative frameworks of the regime and its subsequent re-democratisation. At the same time, they are the private word that continues to demand confidentiality even though it was intended as a testimony. Bruno, the scriptwriter, aims to convert the literal memory of these letters into exemplary memory from

their transcription to fiction and, thus, stimulate the elaborative work of collective memory. This simulation appropriates the value of the referent's "real reference" to accommodate the discursive intentions of its transcription under its utopian/political effect. There is a moral dilemma, though, between the intentions and consequences of that transcription for the witness or referent of that simulation as a particular case and not as an exemplary expression of the collective. That is, even though they are Silvia's testimony in the past, in the present she is no longer willing to reveal that information. Moreover, she has that right. When transcribing the testimony into fiction, Bruno takes for himself the legitimising value of the testimonial compiler, the authorised transcriber, to expose these traces of the past in the space of symbolic mediations and to promote the mourning process. Bruno, the movie itself and the director represent the stance of the "agents of memory", who are willing to show the risks that society takes when the possibility of memory transfer is denied. This is because the meaning of the past, which is being fought for, is, at the same time, the demand for justice in the present. However, Silvia now wants to keep the past safe from memory. In the development of the story, it can be observed how such an attempt not to remember, that "evasive forgetting", entails effects "that will pass to other spaces where the subject cannot dominate" (Paul Ricouer in Jelin, 2001, 68).

Let us recall that according to Sergio Rojas (2001) the image seals up history because it gives body to a past that, from that moment, becomes "the image" of the past, but he admitted that the meaning of these images also depends on how they are questioned in the subjective relationship with our experience. The use of photographs aims at representing the subjective value that these frozen images acquire for each of the realistic characters. Finally, it is a reflection on the intersubjective dimension of collective memory. The series of black and white photos showing the filming of Kate's movie circulates through the hands of almost all the "realistic" characters, reconstructing for each one a particular image of the past because they relate to individual experiences. They acquire dramatic relevance by linking two historical moments. They reveal in the latent conflict of the present the spectral existence of unresolved mourning. When Silvia receives the photos and a copy of the script from Bruno, a censored memory pops up, one that, in the present, jeopardizes her happiness.

For Kate, the photos are the only thing she has of Ana, her character, since she still does not know Silvia, her "real" counterpart. Just at the end of the movie, Kate finds a picture of the young Silvia by chance, and this eases her anxiety to be filming a story without knowing her. This is where the

narration shows its allegorical nature; the moment in which the materials (the letters, the photos, and the witness) question their materiality (their representability as a transposition of experience). At the same time, they reveal again the artificiality of that representation and demonstrate their potential effectiveness. This sequence in Bruno's studio, the place from where he created the representation from the reference materials, reveals the absorbing/expelling of the traumatic experience by transferring it onto a new "inscription surface". In that scene, we can find different appropriation levels of the "real reference": first, Kate finds Silvia's photograph, the appropriation of the aura in a Benjaminian sense. Then, the letters appear as real elements, which we can hear, and this is the appropriation of Silvia's word. The crescendo in the level of appropriation/absorption of "the other's" voice reaches an extreme when Silvia finally arrives at Bruno's door in the middle of an emotional crisis. We can also argue that the appropriation of the other's voice serves as a performative movement/expulsion, as a mirror image with which the symbolic act reflects the referent. By returning her reflection to Silvia, Silvia passes from thinking she has seen her disappeared husband in the street – resisting introjection – to accepting "a displacement of her experience in the metaphorical artifice" –, finally recognising the trauma of the loss.

For Silvia's daughter, the photos are the fragments with which she will reconstruct an unknown past. The movie shows tacitly that the little girl has returned to visit her paternal grandmother, member of *Mothers of Plaza de Mayo*, to collect photos of her father – the representation of the loss – and to know about the facts of his disappearance – a substitution process. For Ernesto, Silvia's husband, the photos reconstruct her past and are words that defy the agreed silence. The coexistence of the whole family with these photos, the intersection of subjectivities, makes the allegorical images appear. There is a particular scene where Ernesto, the stepfather who is a pianist, and Silvia's daughter, a flute student, practice their instrumental duo. Suddenly, a picture of a scene from Kate's movie, already presented to us as audience, falls from the girls' music sheets. In the photo, we can see Ana's character and the character of her three-year-old daughter both imprisoned. In that picture, Ana covers the ears of the character of the child so that she cannot hear how they are torturing her father in an adjoining room. The falling photo in the scene in the "realistic" realm combines the referentiality of that other fiction level by bringing back the emotions that such scene had stirred and by re-signifying the meanings of that present. The innocent scene of the step-father and the girl sharing music is hijacked by the torture and disappearance of the father. Therefore, even though we continue listening to the music they play, now we seem to be missing the

father's screams. This predominantly sound resource has made visible the spectre of absence and awakened the latent conflict in the family's life and that can also be read as an allegory of the national: the conflict of a socially unresolved mourning. As such, the silence of the photograph has turned into a Benjaminian device which concentrates all the fatality of the representation breakdown. In a photo, which is, by default, silent, a character covers the other's ears so that the latter cannot hear the screams of another character, no longer in the image, but whose ghost and painful sound shocks what is visible. The photo is an image permeated by a "significant density" that quite resembles Jameson's analysis (1991) of the 1893 painting by Edvard Munch, *The Scream.* For Jameson, *The Scream* is the subtle but very elaborate deconstruction of his own aesthetic expression, which remains still imprisoned inside him. The painting's gestural content, states Jameson, "underscores its own failure since the domain of sound, the scream, the disembodied vibrations of the human voice, are incompatible with the means (which is highlighted by the lack of ears of the represented homunculus)". Therefore, continues the author, "this absent scream places us before the even more inaudible experience of the atrocious loneliness and anxiety that the scream should express" (Jameson, 1991, 35). In my perspective, Munch's allegory is incorporated into this scene with all of its expressive fatality because the photo "reveals" the representation of the unrepresentable: the sound, stressed by the mother's act to cover the girl's ears. This is the spectre of what was lost, someone screaming behind the "wall of silence". This is one of the most accurate uses of the Brechtian distancing effect as expressive device that shows the symbol's cracks to take on allegorically, the fracture of representation.

A similar device can be seen featuring Benson's movie actor who represents "Julio" after the rehearsal of the scene in which his character sees Ana for the last time. The actor and the director have been talking about how to act the part of someone who knows they will die. After they finish, the actor heads off without an answer toward the street, and before leaving he stops to look at his own photo on a banner, probably part of the props used to represent a manifestation of "Mothers" in the movie (to represent his character's disappearance). His lack of reaction reveals the shot as created for the spectator's critical decoding, who sees in this actor a fellow man randomly portrayed in the images of disappearance. Such narrative construction humanises the images of those who disappeared, those that in the present have worn away their power to represent the catastrophe and have become crypts. This hyperreal distancing strategy, in which the film's image constructs a photographic simulation of an iconic representation of disappearance denouncement, embodies the idea of spectral existence. It

seems a good example of how hyperreality – in reference to "the barbarism that lies at its origin" (Avelar, 2000) – can also be an allegorical writing. A baroque language that, "by continuously referring back to itself", loses the object it represents and, therefore, becomes the only perfect representation of the loss.

The reconstruction of the historical narrative: Antigone and the necessity of mourning in the hyperreal era

To understand the reconstruction value of the historical narrative that is this movie's cognitive map in the larger scheme of social memorialisation, we analysed how narrative deconstruction – which it proposes from the double fiction – could be dealt with by means of the distancing effect. This is how the story (as a symbolic totality) has been fragmented to narratively express the moral conflict of its significant decadence. *A Wall of Silence* reveals the unproductive struggle for the meaning of discourses that fall into the melancholic abyss left by the representation breakdown. Its reconstruction, its critical reassembly in the movie's language body, constitutes the "suprasensitive" horizon (Benjamin) that only exists in the subjective process of decoding undergone by the spectator. Indeed, it is in this reading, at the third narrative level of the movie that the cognitive map appears as a mourning allegory, and where observation and reflection are guided toward the process of elaborating trauma.

If we return to Kristeva's suggestion (1997 [1978], 40) to look for the possibilities of mourning through transposition mechanisms that can help redraw experience into a metaphorical artifice, we have to recognise the relevance of her clarification about the etymological origin of the word "transpose". Reviewing such root: transpose -from Greek *méiaphorein,* to transport- a question arises for *A Wall of Silence*: is the recurrent representation of the female subject – as both an inhabitant of the hegemonic historical narrative and a carrier of the alternative narratives of collective memory – the textual means to narratively "transport" the imperative need for historical mourning to the surface of memory? Probably the allegorical value of the movie is, then, close to what Avelar proposes as "the Antigonal struggle to erect civic symbols where the necessity of mourning could be sanctioned in the polis, i.e., metaphorised" (2000, 21).

With the representation of women as "the agents [and victims] of memory", the movie authorizes this battle of Antigone for the irreducibility of mourning in the polis.[23] This is so since, in the beginning of post-

dictatorship, the sociopolitical institutions were a fully androcentric space where decisions over recent history's official narratives came from. Facing that scenario, this films highlights women making the narratives of memory endure through non-institutional channels. In this regard, Jelin (2001, 111) confirms that one way of thinking about the gender dimension in memory is the perspective that follows the traditional approach of feminism and testimony that is "making the invisible visible" or "giving voice to those who do not have it". This legitimises and recognises other experiences as well as the dominant. In the public expression of memory, continues Jelin, women have a central role, as narrators, as mediators or as analysts. Their performativity and their symbolic role also have an ethical, significant load that pushes the limits of political negotiation by asking for the impossible (115).

Among the characters of *A Wall of Silence* are female voices directly linked to social groups actively committed to this "elaborative process of memory". Silvia's mother-in-law is an active member of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. Kate represents a human rights activist cinematographic current. Silvia and her business partner, Paula, are writers in an anti-neoliberalist journal. María Elisa, Silvia's daughter, could have then integrated another important "agent of memory" group, HIJOS (the Children of the disappeared). That is to say, Lita Stantic's movie is marked by a female sensitivity without vengefulness. Indeed, in 1995, the director of *A Wall of Silence* expressed: "I try to show thinking women, something that I do not see in the movies made by men in the 1980s". In this sense, the female characters allegorically embody the Antigonal figure of the struggle for introducing mourning into the "writing" of memory. The "necessity of mourning" poses on Stantic the challenge of recovering that "lost word" from broken networks of significance. Her resource resembles Richard's thoughts on memory, in which she suggests that a possible way to rescue the word from its melancholic prison is to break the self-referential circle of the negativity of loss indefinitely turned onto itself, that is, performing "the mourning of mourning" (2001, 105). For this author this mode generates other significant articulations, another referential system that liberates the mourning memory "from the shipwreck of the unspeakable" (Richard, 2001, 108). This explains the multilayered scenes and their endless resignification presented in her Baroque-like movie.

Many of the "other significant articulations and referential system[s]" are built for an external deciphering of this movie. For instance, at the beginning of the movie (realist level), a journalist asks Benson if it is not difficult for a foreign director to understand what happened in Argentina. Her answer

allows us to understand Stanic's intention of representation: Benson says that, using what we know as the concept of Holocaust globalisation, "in Europe there were also many concentration camps". This statement echoes the discourse of solidarity of international intellectuality, which in movie productions and in other symbolic means "are incorporated into the tracing of the mourning process as a post-dictatorial imperative" (Avelar, 2000, 290). Such international endeavours support authors such as the character of Bruno Tealdi. The recirculation in extra-filmic political dynamics of international solidarity becomes evident, for instance, by considering the actor playing Bruno, who, in real life, is a political activist. It is no coincidence that this movie casts actors that are associated with the left and the defense of human rights' polices. Thus, its actors convey, in addition to a political extra-signification, credibility, which reinforces the political discourse of the movie. This has been thought of within the international logic of co-production of this movie. While Lautaro Murúa (Bruno) or Lorenzo Quinteros (Ernesto) are referents of dissidence and the left in Argentina, and Vanessa Redgrave (Kate) is a political figure and a political documentary maker for the European world. Ofelia Medina (Silvia) played Frida, Trotsky's lover in *Frida, Living Nature* by Paul Leduc in 1986. Lita Stantic is also a hyperreal artistic-political figure, an Antigone raising symbols that metaphorise the loss (personal and collective) in a world "abandoned by the gods" (Avelar, 2000, p. 22).

In the movie's final scene there is a strong example of what was claimed as necessary for the generation of another referential system capable of liberating mourning memory "from the shipwreck of the unspeakable" (Richard, 2001, 108). Here Silvia and her daughter are standing in front of the ruins of the clandestine detention center that we saw at the beginning of the movie. The girl then asks her mother the same question that Kate Benson asked Bruno in the opening sequence of this movie: "Did people know what was going on here?" "Everyone knew," the mother replied. The young girl looks at the camera, the image stops and, through direct cuts, the shot closes in until reaching a close-up of María Elisa in silence, with her eyes fixed on the camera-spectator, challenging us for the shared responsibilities and making us the protagonist of mourning. As Sergio Rojas says, "allegory could be thought of as a strategy to interrogate once more the images that come to us from a narrative that never ceases to take our word away" (2001, 297).

Image – 04

"Fragmento 4"

Digital editing on *Ronda* by Alejandro Failla

CHAPTER III

MÖBIUS:
VIOLENCE OF REPRESENTATION AND REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE
BUENOS AIRES VICE VERSA
AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF POLITICAL PERFORMATIVITY OF THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC TEXT

When reading post-dictatorial Argentinian movies as cultural texts, one can realize that such works have not only fulfilled the function of *reflecting* the dictatorial past, but also *constituting* collective memory as an image of the past in terms of the discursive coordinates of the present. I argue that, by thinking of them as "symbolic acts" (Fredric Jameson, 1981), we can define these cinematic interventions as performative of the cultural fields where the historical/political narratives of the past are negotiated. Their manifestations are the raw material of a new historical narrative by approaching them as acts that constitute it. Thus, they create a political performative force *per se*.

I will try to verify this thesis through an analysis of the movie *Buenos Aires Vice versa* (Alejandro Agresti, 1996). I argue that this movie mediates in the hyperreal dynamics of reality construction at the same level and language which the hyperreal symbolic systems of dominant discourse used to manipulate meanings of the past. Using this same logic of construction of the truth, Agresti's movie restores a favorable framework that allows us to interpret this story about post-dictatorship life as the representation of another larger narrative present in the political unconscious: the history of collective utopias.

Returning to Nestor Garcia Canclini (1999, 63):

> The cultural encompasses the set of processes through which we imaginarily represent and institute the social. We conceive and manage relationships

with others (that is, the differences), and we order their dispersion and their incommensurability through a delimitation that fluctuates between order, which makes the functioning of society (local and global) possible, and the actors, who open it up to the possible.

This statement carries fundamental importance for globalisation because, "if globalisation is presented as an elusive and unmanageable object, those who manage it also tell it, with narratives and metaphors. That is why it is necessary to analyse "the stories and images that try to name their designs" (García Canclini, 1999, 63).

For Jameson (1991), the moment in which cultural production is fully incorporated into economic production, as occurs, according to the author in postmodernity, and for us, in this post-dictatorial stage of representation and institution of social imaginaries, makes possible cultural policies that intervene in the economic sphere. His perspective moves away from the Frankfurt School, which considered the end of art's autonomy in the transition from art to the market. The author conceives this moment as the post-modern, and, within this framework, the function of culture is to try to compensate, with a "cognitive map", the "unrepresentability" of the particular situation of subjects conditioned by globality. The Jamesonian cognitive map allows us to view cinema as a form of history insofar as history can explain individual relationships with the world system.[24] In *Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992), Jameson upholds the principle that all thought today is, includes an attempt to think about the world system as such. That is why he observes the narrative figurations whose very structure encourages an absorption of ideas that remain in the air and questions an image for its "representability", that is, for its social, technological and symbolic capacity to represent the social totality in the global.

Jameson (1992) finds in the allegory of conspiracy the narrative solution to the unrepresentability of postmodernism because, on a global scale, this allegory allows for the most distant and isolated to become a landscape that functions as the "figuration machinery" of the most serious dilemmas of the collective. He assures that…

> "(…) the cognitive or allegorical investment in this representation will be for the most part an unconscious one, for it is only at that deeper level of our collective fantasy that we think about the social system all the time, a deeper level that also allows us to slip our political thoughts past a liberal and anti-political censorship" (9).

Jameson observes that, if the world system of late capitalism is inconceivable without computerised technology, information technology virtually becomes the representative solution and problem of this cognitive map of the world system. His cognitive map would then be an epistemological description of the world system in the collective imagination, whose allegorical representation includes technological communication as a conspiracy. Thus, in the here and now, the absent can be represented as the totality.

In the Argentinian context of the second half of the 1990s, the allegory of technological communication represented as a conspiracy best describes the situation in which subjects have been left in relation to capitalist totality, due to their ability to refer to "ideas that remain in the air." This is twofold: as a representation of that unrepresentable cultural condition, omnipresent in the atmosphere of individuals, and as an unmasking of those representations that – transported by air through technological and communication systems – will culturally impact the everyday atmosphere of individuals.

Buenos Aires Vice versa uses the Jamesonian allegory of conspiracy to let our collective fantasies of justice and freedom "escape" from the political unconscious, which had been pushed by the dictatorial and re-democratic neoliberal narrative toward the most censored areas of collective thought. I contend that this movie gives back to the spectators the tools that allow them to map their position in relation to the global by giving them participation in the very discursive moment in which reality is written, consequently freeing them from their role as guarantor of the hegemonic discursivity that manipulates them. In order to do this, *Buenos Aires Vice Versa* is designed to make visible the discursive mechanism of the market that, around 1995, and seeking to perpetuate itself in power, made its hyperreal manipulation strategies more complex to clean up its relationship with past and present abuses. The movie is thought of as a story representing the social catastrophe and as a performative actor that intervenes in social negotiations about the causes and consequences of this damage. Its director, Alejandro Agresti, portrays the present as a post-dictatorial remainder, where the dynamics of reality manipulation are imposed as the dialectical dimension whose hermeneutic machinery represents that same dynamic of intensification of information and communication.

The director recognises that memory, as a manifestation of political consciousness is, in the 1990s more than ever, a discursive struggle taking place in the dynamics of the hyperreal.[25] That is why this movie introduces the critical representation of hegemonic media's discourse as "the stories and images that try to name their designs" (García Canclini, 1999, 63) while

using a language that is manifested through its communication dynamics. Thus, Agresti's movie also redefines grammars and signs that have been narrativised in the political unconscious as a symbolic discourse of capitalism to present through them a metaphor of its own violence. Then, its cognitive map is presented as an allegory of the individuals' inability to recognise their imaginary relationship with their real conditions of existence that, under the circumstances of the schizophrenic context and the meaninglessness of post-dictatorial Argentina, assimilate the past within the present, and recalls it in its profound historical sense as a fundamental condition of the present.

The plot of a larger story

"Dany" (Vera Fowill), the 19-year-old daughter of a couple who disappeared during the military regime, is hired by an elderly couple to record video images of the streets of Buenos Aires that will help them to find out what is happening "out there." They no longer go out, disillusioned by the disappearance of their granddaughter and the subsequent exile of their daughter. The conflict arises when Dany returns with images of the city centre that show alarming levels of poverty and social neglect. The elderly couple consider them fake and accuse her of having invented them to "shock" them. They ask her to look for the beauty of the city. Back on the street, Dany meets "Bocha" (Nazareno Casero), a homeless boy who lives on the street and who, paradoxically, joins her at work. The duo calls our attention because both are material traces of the violence with which the dominant system has been established over time.

Dany lives with her uncle and aunt and clashes with them. She also has communication problems with her boyfriend (Fernán Mirás). He is a wealthy young man who does not understand Dany's trauma and helplessness, unable to make social sense of the loss. The subtext of their discussions is that "he is normal and she is not", which represents the voice of common sense: if the values and ideals that their parents fought for have disappeared along with their bodies, and if the whole of society guarantees this disappearance in the political and historical scene, then, the parameters of normality have come to be measured with another yardstick. However, Dany's boyfriend is also alone and disoriented. Their dialogues hint at the idea that he could also be an appropriated son of disappeared parents, but he does not know it or want to admit it.

Loneliness and collective catastrophe are also manifested throughout the movie in other characters and stories. This multiplicity of characters works

as "analogue" (Jameson, 1992) for the aesthetic and epistemological closure of totality, expressed metaphorically in the technological and communicational, referring to how the "violence of representation" of the media and dominant discourses have shaped the psychic life of the characters. An example is the character of a television addict (Mirta Busnelli). She is obsessed with a news broadcaster (Lorenzo Quinteros) to the point of serving him food on a dish that she places just below the receiver device which shows him, using a medium shot, so that his body appears in the same proportions that it would if he was actually sitting at the table. Such parody of confusing communicating as if dining with her family with the TV news – the idea of communicating nationally and worldwide – is a metaphor for how television language has eliminated the distance between the viewer and what is represented, between the world and representation, between the individual and the global. It is the paradigm of the hyperreal construction of reality throughout the movie.

Damián (Nicolas Pauls) is 20 years old. He has found a job as a receptionist at a couples' hotel. He installs a microphone system in the rooms, which he uses voyeuristically to get inspiration to write, his calling. He is part of a lower-middle-class family to whom he has no connection through strong ties of belonging and he lives with an uncle. He has communication problems with his girlfriend and generally shows a discouraged attitude toward life. One day, his uncle arrives at the hotel with a blind woman, whom he leads to a room that he pretends is his flat. Once inside, between mirrors and a dim red light, the uncle psychologically abuses the young woman. The power of the scene is that, with the sadistic game of taking her cane and disorienting her, the man reveals that he was a torturer, that he raped other young "lefties" such as her and that his nephew is the son of one of those victims. This is how the young man discovers his identity.

In the last sequence of the movie, all the characters meet in a shopping centre, doing different things. Dany and Bocha are in a music shop. At a given moment, Dany gets distracted, and Bocha escapes and steals a video camera from a store. He tries to run away from the security officer, who is Damián's uncle, but the latter, with everyone as spectators, shoots him dead in cold blood. Devastated, Dany leaves and walks down the street. She walks into a public restroom and cries desperately for Bocha, for his parents, for a woman who is being murdered nearby. Damián hears her crying and without knowing her, he enters, hugs her and tries to calm her down. Both share the past, the helplessness. They are the traces of the destruction. They understand each other. They are "the H.I.J.O.S."

The last scene depicts the next day's broadcast. The TV has already "reorganised" the facts to exonerate the security officer and accuse someone who actually tried to stop him. The CCTV images of the shopping centre are edited to disguise the shot as accidental and eliminate the image of the child's death. Likewise, Bocha has no one to claim the truth of his death and refute that version. However, the woman addicted to TV argues for the first time with the television set. The illusion of communication collapses because the discussion, presented in this way, does not change the course of the transmission even though she had been a witness and co-participant of the violence with which trauma is actualised in the present. She turns off the television and goes outside. That is to say, she abandons her place as a guarantor audience to take a position as a social actor in real life

If Agresti's narrative is an allegorical structure, we assume that both the indications of the characters and the plot mean something extra. For this, we will present the context linked to the narrative construction, its characters, its language and the treatment of the conflict in the allegory of the conspiracy. The sociocultural framework, involving the role of the mass media and that of social subjects in the discursive struggles regarding a narrative of the past, constitutes the link with the real that has been incorporated and processed into the language of the movie itself. It is a strong representational aesthetics aimed at making the viewer feel present in the scene that they witness, hear and find the secrets of that conspiracy of capital that determines their existence at the moment in which it manifests itself. Sharing this moment should allow the viewers to observe themselves as a subject or actor in a larger, invisible story, both in its reality and in the text, because it is a story that has disappeared in the discursive dynamics of the market and that *Buenos Aires Vice Versa*– with its allegory of the conspiracy – brings back to us: the history of the utopias of the collective.

Reinterpretation of the frames: the ideas that remain in the air. Violence and "break" of representation: The role of the mass media

The post-dictatorship discourse was characterised, among others, by the multiplicity of auxiliary memory discourses that were enacted during this first decade as social memorisation. A version of the dictatorial past was negotiated in all of them that could be established as the history of civil society during the dictatorship. For the *de facto* government, these were an extension of the strategies of "reorganisation of reality" (Frank Graziano, 1992), which could render the past devoid of its political meaning in

memory, turning it into a horror spectacle for mass consumption. The mechanism continued to be verified in the 1990s by spectacularising the dissemination of repressive acts as a new stage in the evolution of the market.

During the decade when Carlos Menem was Argentina's president, the media discourse tried to spread a version of past repression detached from its social consequences in that present. Uninterested in the "residues from the past" (Idelber Avelar, 2000, 285), such television representation intended to address the memory of the repressive policies of disappearance as devoid of their political meaning. The result of this manipulation of present and past reality is what Elizabeth Jelin (2001) calls "intersubjective forgetting", which occurs when, "due to political conditions, ritualisation, repetition, deformation or distortion, silence or lies prevail in collective practice, and this is what entails the breakdown in intergenerational transmission" (34).

Claudia Feld (2000) describes two moments of memory recovery from television. The first stage associates memory with justice and occurs during the transition to democracy, when the military juntas are investigated and prosecuted. The journalistic accounts revealed or allowed us to think that the disclosure of the truth served to punish the guilty. However, after the "Full Stop" and "Due Obedience" laws and the Pardons, the media gradually abandoned the issue and remained partly silent about the repression. Memory re-emerges, Feld says, in 1995, when an ex-marine, Adolfo Francisco Scilingo, admitted on live television that he had thrown 30 disappeared prisoners alive from a plane into the sea, and stated that this was the repressive system for eliminating people. Feld says that "'memory' once again had a rating but now television had changed its role, the stories had changed their content" (80). That is, instead of accompanying the legal truth, TV itself engendered the very fact that it reported by putting a military officer "live" before the audience. Clearly, the simulation of an event, embedded within the chains of hyperreal signification, can build another idea of truth. The discourse of the repressors is now that they had acted in a "war", that they had not committed any crime. Such reconstruction of the past allows TV to cover up the lack of punishment for all the culprits and celebrate the well-known ritual of "reorganisation of reality" (Graziano, 1992), which, in turn, justifies Menem's re-election in 1995 – despite the delegitimisation of Pardons – and, with it, the consolidation of the market policy.

To the malice of presenting the repressor, free, in front of the camera, confessing a crime which he does not regret and for which he will not be punished, society adds the conviction that there is only one possible – or visible – horizon of life. Then it plays its role again as a guarantor audience in the face of the tacit threat of any form of social protest. The hegemonic discourse of this new act of violent spectacularisation says: "if the disappeared were victims of the repressive system, it was in their capacity as political actors, bearers of political projects that, in their various manifestations and modalities, have been erased along with their existence" (Feld, 2000, 83). Thus, and paraphrasing Feld (2000, 84) , the memory of the horror of the 1970s presented in democracy has been emptied of political responsibilities and has thus lost the performative impulse that would have contributed to rethinking reality. Thus, the problem was taken to the media scene, where horror became the raw material for TV ratings. Then, memory was absorbed by the ephemeral nature of the genre.

Beatriz Sarlo (1994) states that, in a vision-based culture, images have the reliability of probative force through the use of direct recording. With such a resource, "television can be more transparent and, in such dynamic, it answers a call for speed, efficiency, personalised intervention, attention to manifestations of subjectivity and particularism that its audience cannot find elsewhere" (84). Thus, Sarlo explains, TV builds imaginary communities which provide a space for claims and symbolic reparations. Such is the television paternalism that constitutes the mediation between its faithful – the viewers – and the institutions (84). Such illusion of a democratic community of consumers created by television supposedly satisfies the fantasies of justice and freedom generated among citizens by the pardons. Thus, TV invests itself with an authority that traditional institutions no longer have, although that confession no longer has any real consequence. Therefore, the truth is no longer associated with justice, but with the cathartic reparation that television offers to its followers. The power to elaborate reality is transferred to the system of symbolic proximity of live television:

> In the direct recording related to television live transmissions, what happens for the camera also happens for the spectators. Thus, the illusion is generated that what I see is what it is, at the very moment that I see it, I see without anyone telling me how I should see what I see. That real time cancels the spatial distance, I see as if I were there. (...) The illusion of truth of the discourse of direct recording is the strongest strategy of production, reproduction, presentation and representation of "the real". One gets the impression that there is nothing between the image and its material referent,

and this overrides the centuries-old debate between the world and representation. (Sarlo, 1994, 78)

The two moments of memory on television that Feld described make up the temporal and discursive framework within which the decade after *The Official Story* in Argentinian cinema begins and ends. The three movies analysed in this book are permeated by this context of media creation, which determines not only their ideological approaches to the problems of the past, but also their narrative and aesthetic possibilities insofar as their context is the discursive agent that intervenes, modifies and delegitimises the truth instituted by the channels of reproduction of its hegemonic system. In this sense, the cinema analysed here addresses the discourse of the media as a condition of reality that must be dealt with, as a form of violence that is part of the violence of the system that filmmakers criticise and try to modify. *The Official Story* confronted the imaginaries of the cultural politics of the transition that associated the revelation of the truth as a way of obtaining justice. It demonstrated that the truth constructed by democracy was essentially unfair because it omitted the economic-political responsibilities of neoliberalism with military repression and ignored the obvious complicity of the social in guaranteeing horror. *A Wall of Silence* discussed the construction of the social frameworks that had prescribed forgetting and silence, proposing a new media referentiality inserted in the ways of hyperreality to re-establish the significant links that allow narration of what happened.

Once the market was consolidated, the aesthetic-discursive work of *Buenos Aires Vice Versa* addressed in depth the challenge of elaborating memory, that is, revealing for the present day its meaning about the lost social project that the repressive system "disappeared" together with the bodies. The movie confronts, then, the "violence of representation": it will account for the way in which it intends to rewrite the experience in the past, how its founding values are distorted to cancel, in that past, the responsibilities for the horror, and how a still threatening atmosphere is taken back to the present. Agresti's movie shows us how disappointment and loneliness – naturalised phenomena and inherent to the neoliberal system – characterise the cultural space subjected to a "violence of representation" that suppressed the possibility of collectively elaborating active mourning.

This process began with the violence of the conciliatory political language of the post-dictatorship, and that of its cultural objects that reflect and reinforce it from the symbolic realm. When this language became messages of all sorts – news, commercials, entertainment shows, and commercial

cinema – it took back the most powerful space for the social construction of reality with a misappropriated image of the "real". Consequently, the "violence of representation" occurs when the role of representation is distorted, and the meanings that history had for those who can no longer tell it are corrupted. Therefore, this false representation tries to fill in with pseudo values the empty space left by the absent generation. In this way, when their lives, experiences and ideas are represented, values are offered on their behalf according to the hegemonic discourse that fictitiously articulates the past and the present. The tragedy of torture and death is presented as encapsulated in the past through a violent representation, which exposes it in detail, without explanations. Thus, observers cannot experience, cannot anchor the horror of the past in the present. They remember, but they do not elaborate. Moreover, by doing so – intentionally or unintentionally – they come to confirm the neoliberal discourse that places the past in museums of forgetting.

Such is the violence of this representation: resurrecting terror and not opening a door for active mourning. If the truth of the past no longer modifies or conditions our present, and if the past is so harmless and insignificant, then everything counts as truth as long as it is represented as such, as a spectacle. This has been the strategy of the cultural policy of the post-dictatorship, from which cinema is not completely exempt.

I propose, then, that *Buenos Aires Vice versa* found perhaps the most honest path towards talking about the past by choosing to represent those living who can question that representation. Talking about their meanings, values, experiences and ideas in the present renders these survivors a living document, testimony of the others, the mark of the past.

H.I.J.O.S. (the children) and the recovery of the word: discursive struggles in the social arena

If the direct victims hold exclusive legitimacy to spread the memory of traumatic events but presently cannot or will not share it, and, if those who want and can share it lack the legitimacy to narrate such story because they were not direct victims, the problem resembles a chess stalemate. The impossibility of narrating allows the hegemonic discourse to prescribe forgetting. For this reason, the debate could only be reopened in the second half of the 1990s, when other living testimonies of horror emerged, to whom the meaning of the past was a configuring element of the present and to whom, therefore, a public discussion of memory was urgently needed. For

the children of disappeared people, memory was the only thing capable of alleviating the pain of their parents' forced disappearance and the way to construct meaningful subjectivity. The political "appearance" of H.I.J.O.S on the public stage in 1995 was a determining factor: a new battle flank was emerging.

The political figure of the children of a disappeared person combined the two previously dissociated positions, because, if, on the one hand, they have the legitimacy of direct loss, on the other, they assume themselves as a new generation that needs to reinterpret history in their own terms and circumstances. Their social performance re-integrates the private practices of memory into a public (re)interpretation of the past, and through their performative procedures they manage to reconstruct the significant links to legitimise a memory that grounds their claims for justice in the present. This is where their strength and coherence lie: the witness-victim is living proof of the atrocity and, at the same time, a mediator, translator, transmitter, and reconstructor of the interpretative framework of memory. Their mere presence is proof of truth against any misappropriation of the meaning of the past sought by "the violence of representation." Thus, the significant frameworks in the collective memory are reconstructed. They are bearers of a stolen childhood and now, at the age of questioning and manifesting, they put their rebellion to work in a field where adults – guarantor witnesses of the atrocity – have no moral authority to silence them. Furthermore, their legitimacy is based on the fact that they cannot be accused of terrorism. With a clean record, they suspect and demand justice with a voice of extraordinary emotional, historical and moral force.

H.I.J.O.S relates to *Buenos Aires Vice Versa* both at the level of its ideological textualisation and the narrativisation of that text in the political unconscious. Moreover, the children, by making the traces of their parents' destroyed project reappear as positive ideals of society, realise that this loss is a social injury, a collective failure that shut down the search for freedom and social justice. They themselves are the traces of the social shipwreck that reveals the past, present and future responsibilities of neoliberalism.

The discovery – if it occurs – of their status as children of the disappeared reveals a heterogeneous network. There are those who know because they were located by the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo or because they were left in the care of relatives, but others discover their identity after being raised by families attached to the military regime. Other appropriated children might never find their history.

As a group, H.I.J.O.S allowed these victims to share their experiences – it was cathartic. They then decided to make known who their parents were. If the dictatorship denigrated their parents as subversive guerrillas, they were there to explain who their parents were, that they had ideals, dreams, utopias and objectives for a different country.

Scilingo's confession on television revealed the numbness and passivity of the public, so H.I.J.O.S had to find a way to make an impact if they wanted to be heard. Such a way was the "*escrache*" (tumultuous exposure protest) strategy. The *escrache* is a performance that elaborates other visibility strategies already used in the public arena, such as the public trials of "Mothers", the strategies of incorporating the audience as guarantee of the truth used by the market system and the dynamics of manipulation of the truth typical of media rhetoric. H.I.J.O.S uses the *escrache* as a form of guerrilla performance to publicly unmask the unpunished torturers of their parents. They seek to shame military leaders, members of intelligence services, sympathetic soldiers, those who appropriated the assets of the victims, and doctors who collaborated in the concentration camps. The struggle of H.I.J.O.S gives the cause of the Mothers and Grandmothers the necessary continuity for it to be understood as a long-term strategy of struggle.

It is discursively very important that these young people have the same age and the same appearance that their parents had when they disappeared because, as Diana Taylor (2002) observes, with this visibility strategy they somehow resurrect their parents and their project through physical inheritance and politics. Protected by the fetish of freedom that allows for free opinion in democracy, H.I.J.O.S can occupy the public space and confront it with banners that say "If there is no justice, there is *escrache*". Temma Kaplan (2004) notices the change in tone between "Mothers" and "Grandmothers" with respect to H.I.J.O.S. The author says that H.I.J.O.S practises farce more than melodrama. The farcical rhetoric uses essential parodic elements such as giant puppets, dolls of soldiers/pigs mounted on wheels, and banners with photos of the disappeared. In a democracy that is a farce, there is no better way to expose the truth than to parody the fetish that gives meaning to, and that is also part of, the social jargon.

The performance of H.I.J.O.S takes the discourse of the show from the logic of the media. Sarlo (1994) states that "TV listens to what the public has seen on the screen, to re-record it, generalise it and propose it in a new listening, and so on in a hermeneutic and productive circle in which it is difficult to find the truly original point" (87). Thus, H.I.J.O.S intervene by recycling

what has already been heard and seen on TV, such as Scilingo's statement, to propose a "new listening" within their own hermeneutic circle. Such strategy is aware that this system of self-referentiality is "an indication of closeness, which makes the game of complicity between television and the public possible [...] All viewers trained on television are prepared to recognise their quotations" (Sarlo, 1994, 100) because they are united by a cultural bond with the medium. Through quotation and parody, H.I.J.O.S appropriates and uses the "plus of meaning" (Sarlo, 1994, 100) with which TV recycles itself and makes its own the only discursive horizon to introduce new readings that will be narrativised as truth in the audience, as they are supported by the same discursive horizon or cultural bond of the spectator. The meaning of the previous *escrache*, surrounding a neighborhood, spreading the word and asking the residents if they know that one of them was a torturer, responds to the logic of the quotes used on TV. It is the audio-visual appearance that sets the pattern that is later parodied, as Sarlo observes, and that adds those who are sensitised by proximity to the political violence in which they live without knowing. Thus, I believe they produce a "live and direct" show, like TV, and legitimise themselves by building credibility, just as TV does. They then go to the residences of the former torturers or to former torture centres, and paint the floor with red paint to expose the crimes that this person committed. They leave the imprint of the hyperreally constructed truth on reality. The *escrache* aims at the idea that the former repressors would live isolated, hidden, although in full legal freedom, because repudiation denies them as social individuals, they lose their dignity, they are public disappeared people, because, as Kaplan (2004, 175) says: "Making visible what is invisible is the axis of incorporating memory of the atrocities into collective consciousness. Even more importantly, it is in the streets, which become open arenas for debate, that the possibilities for participatory democracy can really take hold".

The glance of others at their performances is no longer that of the "guarantor audience of the truth." In each *escrache* they put on record the collective, familiar and social trauma, in a country whose inhabitants are victims. Taylor (2002) on the readings of Caruth, Felman and Laub, says that performances convey traumatic memory because they update the trauma in the spectator's present.

> Traumatic memory often relies on live, interactive performances for transmission. Even studies that emphasise the link between trauma and narrative, or witnessing and literature, make evident in the analysis itself that the transmission of traumatic memory from victim to witness involves the shared and participatory act of telling and listening associated with live

performance. Bearing witness is a live process, an event that takes place in real time, before a listener who comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event. (153)

Representation of the allegory of power, subjects and the Market. Living testimony and "live" testimony, to see, hear and find the secrets of the conspiracy

A movie about H.I.J.O.S testifies that the significance of the horror of the past subsists in the present. However, this testimonial incorporation presented by Agresti undertakes a more complex discursive form than that of the previously analysed movies. The movie re-elaborates the testimony in accordance with coordinates from the present, without losing the focus on questioning the truth of the past because it is a testimony of that past in the present. What Tomás Moulian (1997) claims to be Chile's case is also valid for Argentina: "the simple image of a society created with the "materials" of dictatorial Chile could not be anything other than a photograph of it a few years later" (15).

The most complex dimension of such re-elaboration of the testimony is the result of the movie incorporating into its language the dynamics of transmission of trauma that are characteristic of the testimonial genre. For this reason, in the representation of the movie, the testimony is a discursive construction penetrating even its textures. It is a simulation of testimony enhancing the simulation itself – it is hyperreal.

Buenos Aires Vice Versa introduces us to H.I.J.O.S as characters with their own voice, who imprint their own performative strategies on the narrative aesthetics of the movie.[26] That is why, in cinematographic language, Agresti not only gets involved with the cause and figure of H.I.J.O.S at the level of ideological textualisation, but also narrativises their message in the political unconscious.

The movie recovers the political/performative strategy used by H.I.J.O.S in their live *escraches* to convey trauma with a two-fold objective. The first one is to introduce an exaggeratedly present position that shows, as immediate and urgent, the collective trauma. At the same time, it gives the viewer the feeling of witnessing the very symptomatic moment of the trauma, inviting them to be a "live" listener, a partner in the moment in which trauma manifests itself in everyday life. For this reason, it is unnecessary to narrate the horror of the past, as the sordid inevitably filters through the silence and forgetting of the present – that is, it lives with us.

Agresti intends to capture through this "live" aesthetics the spectral presence of that loss, expressed in the remains of destruction. It accentuates the public rather than private repercussion of violent loss and is, therefore, an "agent of memory" in the sense that it conveys the experience of the past resignified within the reality of the present. In this way, it is a text that "must trace the scars, in many cases still open, that the past leaves in the present, the debts that the present has with the injustices of the past, where there are duties, rights and obligations that the present must carry out" (Sarlo, 1994, 195).

The second objective of using the "live" resource responds to the movie's narrative need to give semantic expression to the allegory of the conspiracy of power, which allows us to understand the relationships between the subjects and the market. Aesthetics, then, invokes allegory insofar as it exists to represent what is unrepresentable in the system, which Sarlo (1994) describes as follows:

> The loss of meaning does not only have to do with the present outburst but with the shadow that accompanies it: the forgetting of history and the experience of a time that "has ceased to be historical time". Consequently, it does not maintain ties with the past nor does it make promises of future continuity. In the dissemination of meanings and the fragmentation of collective identities, not only is the authority of tradition shipwrecked: the anchors that allow us to live the present are also lost, not only as an instant that will be followed by another instant that we will also call "present", but as a project. The past, as the philosopher wanted, no longer weighs on us. On the contrary, it has become so light that it prevents us from imagining the continuity of our own history. (194)

The "live" aesthetics used in the movie unmasks the media image that produces the unrepresentative meaning of the past in the present, and mutilates the present's possibility of being a project of our history. The aesthetics of the immediate metaphorises the apotheosis of this logic because, if the hyperreal seemed to manipulate the historical past or memory, today that manipulation is of what we have just witnessed and, thus, our own interpretation of the present is disrupted. This deprives us of the possibility of thinking of it as our own history because the subject who is aware of this manipulation does not have the means to represent their own spatial and temporal disorientation, and they walk blindly, confused, in relation to the coordinates of their oppressor. It happens, as García Canclini (1999, 11) says, that "David no longer knows where Goliath is".

The two spaces of the text as a symbolic act, that of reflection – its semantic expression – and that of constitution – its syntactic expression – found the dialectical dimension whose hermeneutic machinery operates as the representation of and through the intensification of information and communication. By including the representation of the media within its own narrative, the movie can denounce the fundamental function of the media in the construction of reality. In doing so, it takes out the legitimacy and credibility of media discourses, to introduce its own words to make the trauma narratable because it has now obtained a space for interpretation. Therein, in the ambivalence that the use of "live" aesthetics implies, lies its complexity as a cognitive map or performative cultural text in the post-dictatorship.

The representation of violence with which the representation of violence is violated

This phrase is more than a play on words. It describes the way in which the movie expresses the purpose of its narration within the logic of its own cognitive map: if television – and the hyperreal networks of the hegemonic discourse in general – make us the "guarantor audience" of "the violence of representation" with which the traces of the system's violence are erased in reality, this movie makes the viewer participate in the "representation" of that violence. That is why these two instances make up the vice versa relationship, which is the epistemological knot and the conflict that advances the action of the movie's story.

This vice versa relationship between "violence of representation" and "representation of violence" is made evident throughout the movie. There are, however, two sequences that, in my opinion, preserve the essence of these paradoxical terms, which imply the disappearance of the dialectical relationship. This identically contrary logic is the implosion of the discourses in which the struggle for parity of the rival forces is neutralised. None of the sequences represent contrasting situations, but rather the two points in a Möbius strip. It is a closed system that exhausts itself and that in any segment of its endless loop can find the allegory that explains the conspiracy of capital over subjects.

I chose to analyse the sequences that narrate the former repressor's harassment of the young blind woman at the couples' hotel, and that of Bocha's murder in the shopping centre. Both give an account of that sordid darkness that underlies the smoothness and brilliance of neoliberalism. Both

are a photograph of the repression "some years later." Both use technology and communication as a metaphorical intensification of the conspiracy, and both tell us about the responsibility of the dominant system in the irreparable frustration of our collective fantasies of freedom and justice.

About what the blind can see and those who look without seeing

The couples' hotel scene sets this conspiracy in the couple's privacy in a room that generally houses the illegal and forbidden, but which exists because there is a market for it. This is the first secret level of this testimony. As it is a private space and the woman is blind, the movie reveals the horror that is expected not to come out – things happen without shame, explicitly and directly. The dim light of the room, the sound of running water in the bathroom, the reverberation of footsteps and voices in the empty room, in the defenselessness of the blind woman – all those aspects considered, our imaginary recognises the act of torture of those blindfolded victims who, even if they survived, would never be able to recognise their torturer in the streets. In a way, the blind woman's position is that of all the spectators who had witnessed Scilingo's statement on camera, who received impunity for the testimony. This spectacularisation of violence also functions as psychological torture that disorients viewers, preventing them from seeing their role as individuals in the global system. In this context, it is paradoxical – or organic to the idea of vice versa – that the one who sees is the blind woman. The idea of producing testimony in an enclosed space is comparable to the logic of the media that, although it spreads the message, it makes it circulate through a closed hermeneutic system because it is self-reflexive, that is, its word cannot be permeated by any external force – it is locked. Even so, the voyeuristic listening of the nephew who discovers his identity through the microphones, turns him into an H.I.J.O, a direct victim of that repressive system that his uncle revives with his farce. In the present, the nephew's predicament is to continue being a member of the "guarantor audience" of the abuse of power, or to look for an external alternative to the hermeneutics of power.

The second sequence analysed takes place in a public space, a shopping centre, with everyone as witnesses. In this case, it is the space itself that establishes the legality of the perversion. However, both in that and in this scene, with opposite spatial visibility, the story of violence is the same because it continues within the closed circuit prescribed by the same logic of representation of the dominant system.

Sarlo (1994) states that the architectural organisation of the shopping
centers that have invaded the public space since the 1990s is a metaphor for
the system itself, a simulation of a miniature city of services that eliminates
the extremes of the urban and its traces in time. It is a uniform space
populated by brands and merchandise, in whose social interweavings the
small collective economic exchanges of the lower middle class are absent:
trades, service businesses, family businesses – all now impoverished by
multinationals. Like the neoliberal system itself, the mall responds "to a
total order" that conveys the idea of "free movement" (6). The author (16-
19) argues that the treatment of such space is the same as that of the past in
memory: places without an urban past or places that usurp spaces marked
by the past using them only as decoration, so that urban geography and
history disappear. A fact of crucial relevance to this movie sequence is the
type of building belonging to an old civilisation appropriated by the
shopping centre (as a symbolic entity). It was customary in the 1990s to turn
19th-century school buildings into functionalised shopping centres of
several storeys. The reconversion of new-national-state modern lay public
schools into shopping centres speaks of the decline of the idea of the
"sovereign" (the common people), which bannered the national
foundational narratives of the country. The ideals of freedom, justice and
equality upheld by the national educational system engage – through this
appropriation and just as the country does – in a symbolic battle won by the
messages and goods of the Market. "The shopping centre constitutes the
mirror of the crisis of a public space where it is difficult to construct
meanings," said Sarlo (1994, 23).

Let us go back to *Buenos Aires Vice Versa*'s scene when Bocha steals the
camera from a shopping centre. He is unaware that this simulated city is
surveilled by CCTV – by a system that observes and centralises the "free
movement" of passers by – and patrolled by a squad of security employees,
armed and authorised to shoot. When one of them murders the child in cold
blood, all the glitter, perfection and sensuality of the market as illustrated
by display windows and sales, all the fantasy of personal contact and
warmth will be revealed as "the emperor's new clothes", laying bare the
horrifying system that produces them. While Bocha falls to the ground in
slow motion, all the viewer's senses are rearranged in just a second.

I want to recall one of Sarlo's thoughts that are central to my analysis: "If
citizenship [today] is built around the market, [then] shopping centers can
be seen as the monuments of a new civility, agora, temple and market as in
the forums of Roman Ancient Italy" (18). Also. "the objects of the market
are our icons because they can create an imaginary (symbolic) community

of consumers, whose sacred book is advert, their rituals the shopping spree and fashion their civil code" (30).

The structural alternative to the allegory that we are following proposes that technological objects are endowed with symbolic power that must be expected to fall on objects whose very function generates the narrative and produces the conspiracy. In this sense, the object stolen by Bocha is not just any object – it is a video camera. It is the icon with which the system reproduces its legitimacy by generating the image of reality. This symbolic power makes the object sacred to the market. For a subaltern subject like Bocha, his appropriation of it is equivalent to his symbolic emancipation because he would possess the instrument with which to produce his own representation and, with it, his victory over the "violence of representation" which infinitely produces and reproduces his subalternity, which is erased. The camera is, from this point of view, the object of fetishistic adoration of libertarian neoliberalism and the very tool for emancipation. Let us now return to the traces of the absent space in which the scene is set. The murder takes place in a shopping centre, a symbolic space that has appropriated another significant space: a school.[27] The idea of this moment in the movie has a temporal dimension: with Bocha falling, the fantasies of the national state and freedom in democracy collapse. The possible rationale is that in the past, in these kind of buildings, children such as Bocha obtained the tools of knowledge and self-esteem (based in equality, freedom and justice) which allowed them to survive the system to become the future of our society today. However, as the present as a project of our history disappears, a tool of the new system, the weapon wielded by a private security guard, now distorted, teaches that in this system there are no chances of survival for these children.

That is the semantic framework with which we reread the scene: the shopping centre is the perfect symbolic location of totality as a conspiracy. Bocha's murder is the market's ritual of omnipotence that verifies the myth of neoliberal democracy in a commercial temple and under its sacred laws of defence of private property. The sacrificial shaman is precisely a former repressor whom the same democratic myth liberated, appointed to watch its sacred icon and legitimised by giving him weapons to reproduce – ritually and spectacularly – its power. This violence is omitted in the television representation of the following day, in which the host/pastor exposes before his viewers/faithful a distorted version of what happened, which safeguards the smoothness and candour of the market system. In the eyes of eyewitnesses, the misrepresentation disorients them, but they feel the weight of power in a world order in which they have no place.

Reconstruction of the map, conspiracy and recovery of the collective utopia

With the former repressor's unpunished declaration in private and with Bocha's murder in public, the allegory of the conspiracy has completed the epistemological circle. Both situations reflect the way in which the dictatorial past is imprinted as a latent image on collective memory, a determining condition with which the dismantling of our desires for freedom and future projects in neoliberal democracy is represented and reproduced.

Buenos Aires Vice Versa can be viewed as the representation of a nihilistic allegory, which expresses the way in which the market has turned the subjects of social change into "the silent majorities" (Jean Baudrillard).[28] Within this framework, the diegetic universe of the movie reflects the process by which the proliferation of information and the media generate an inertia or "black hole" that absorbs all messages and all meanings, only to render them meaningless. In this way, the simulation is the "black hole that swallows the social" (Baudrillard, 1994, 1-4). Now, the structure of the vice versa relationship that narratively organises the movie, has dealt with this exhaustion, this implosion of meanings, such as a Möbius loop. Its entire structure is reduced to a system of dichotomies that, in the end, is only the front and back of its own centrifugal discourse. In this sense, this movie can be interpreted as a Baudrillardian nihilistic glance that has stopped believing in the fantasies of meaning, because, as Douglas Kellner (1997) observes, "it privileges this point of inertia and an analysis of irreversibility of the systems, to the point of no return" (247). As in a Möbius loop, any scene in the movie can demonstrate such inertia of "implosion of meaning in the media, of the implosion of the social in the masses, of that mass implosion in the black hole of nihilism and loss of meaning" (Kellner, 1997, 237). Thus, the movie clearly exposes the way in which, on a daily basis, we are not only hindered from representing the frustration of "no return" – of meaning and of those who disappeared in the name of those meanings –, but, with the naturalisation of this barrier, it becomes impossible for us to imagine "the continuity of our own history" (Sarlo, 1994, 194). The possibility of being the subjects of history is taken away from us.

However, if we approach the movie as a fact that is part of the configuring dynamics of the idea of present and past reality, it is possible to understand its dialectical dimension. It accounts for the centralised control of technology and communication, but it also narrates by their means. The metaphorical use of technology and "live" aesthetics prevails as the

allegorical narration that shows viewers that they are witnessing here and now the conspiracy of the hegemonic system as a violence of representation of the relationships between the subjects and the overall system.

Simultaneously, this metaphor makes it clear that the elements of the whole are a form of expression of the phenomenon, that is to say, it is possible to determine the structure by considering its effects because it is presented as the immanent cause in them (Louis Althusser, 1965).[29] By interpreting the events and characters narrated in terms of the effects of a structural causality, the ultimate allegorical narration of the collective utopia appears. This fundamental allegory brings Agresti's movie together with other texts and real events that can be read as episodes, that is, as human conflicts within a great story that collectively shares its fundamental theme or plot. *Buenos Aires Vice Versa* thus becomes a word in the great discourse of collective utopia. In this way, the symbolic universe of the movie is integrated into a larger structure: the project of a work of art that is no longer the individual and isolated manifestation that the individualistic aesthetics inherent to capitalism prescribes, but part of a semantic community where its meanings come together in a plural message. Under Jameson's interpretative horizon, we can state that this movie would become an "ideologeme" (1981, 76). That is why Agresti's narration is open-ended, like a chapter or scene of a major act. The complete scenes are never presented to us – we see fragments of every moment of the action, we do not know the fate of its characters, we are not provided with a dramatic closure.

This allegorical structure refers to the characters as "off-centered effects" (Jameson, 1981, 72-74) or parts of a single figure capable of representing the unit or "structure": the character of the community. Thus, he justifies the incorporation into its plot and its language of the image and visibility strategies of subjects that are both the remnants of defeat and the inheritance of the utopia. H.I.J.O.S and the social trauma are represented as "material and symbolic traces" of that utopia in time, which materialises the idea of continuity of this plot in history. Both become a significant context that allows one to imagine (to put into images), to see and hear, this continuity of collective history that, although it has disappeared from the discursive agendas of the hegemonic narrative, the movie rewrites in the viewer's political unconscious.

In this way, *Buenos Aires Vice versa* restores to the surface of the text what is repressed and buried in that fundamental history The allegory of the conspiracy becomes the cognitive map by breaking up the inertia of the

closed circle, exceeding the limits of meaninglessness and assuming an extra-diegetic significance. This narrative form generates an extraordinary antithetical force: it resembles a type of narration that obeys the logic of television zapping that would have taken another master discursivity for its hyperreal reproduction. Moreover, this could be as powerful a weapon as the discursive conspiracy of the global capitalism networks.

Image – 05

"Fragmento 5"

Digital editing on *Ronda* by Alejandro Failla

CONCLUSION

A SEMANTIC COMMUNITY

> The most unpleasant thing about Hook (next to the iron claw) was his politeness: the more dangerous he was, the politer he grew. And there was only one thing on earth of which he was afraid – that was, the sight of his own blood. (James Matthew Barrie, 1911, 76)

In the Argentinian post-dictatorial context of the first decade, the discourse of power attempted to erase the political practice of democracy, obliterating its historical responsibilities concerning the horror implemented during the bourgeois military repression (1976-1983). The strategies of spectacularisation of indiscretion/violence denial that prevailed in this period must be viewed as their efforts to preserve the bourgeois discourse of the National State project in which the economic sphere has nothing to do with the political. For this reason, the dynamics of simulated power in the re-democratisation period has focused especially on the production of a passive collective memory, which eradicates reference to the motives of these events from history. The consequences – trauma, atomisation, the disappeared and survivors of the catastrophe – were not read as historical marks of these events because their presence in the historical narration would reveal the disguise of the project, ultimately, the founding myth of the market. Let us now recapitulate the ways in which the cinematographic works analysed here have put an image to this euphemism.

In the cinematographic texts analysed, as examples of renarrative cognitive maps of this period's collective memory, we delved into their threefold capacity to *reinterpret*, *represent* and *reconstruct* the historical narrative. This examination adopted a synchronous modality, that is, it observed how this discursive framework underlies each particular movie. Each of the approaches emphasised one of these aspects. Thus, we noted that *The Official Story* focused on the aspects of reformulation of the interpretative frameworks of memory. *A Wall of Silence* examined the problems of the representation of that memory. Finally, *Buenos Aires Vice versa* dealt with the conditions of political performativity that its text offers to the construction of social memory. It is worth emphasising that the cases analysed were observed as "symbolic acts" that reflected a present problem

regarding the social treatment of memory, while they were also dialectically embedded within the hyperreal discursive dynamics of truth construction of the dictatorial past.

This symbolic movement with which this cinema presents itself in the form of a circulating simulacrum of truth in the same discursive dynamics of power constitutes the cognitive map with which cinema intervened in the construction of a new narrative of truth, and this enabled its political performativity. The choice to highlight in each chapter one of the three axes of the map was not made at random. Instead, it responded to the discursive urgencies to which this aspect had contributed in their respective moments of production. Thus, in 1985, Puenzo's movie provided an answer to the call for a reformulation of the interpretative framework used to understand the past *vis à vis* the one provided by re-democratisation policies. Therefore, it was necessary to recognise the relevance of a utopian/political simulation of a new field of truth to accommodate that "other history" that the hegemonic discourse tried to put aside.

On the other hand, Stantic's movie has been presented as the response to the melancholic state that the granting of pardons left as a residue in those traumatic memories that – seeing their significant nexuses fragmented – had "lost the word". If the cinematographic text's cultural role was to provide "a surface of inscription", Agresti's movie is a great example. It is so, since *Buenos Aires Vice Versa* was made contemporaneously with the public and political emergence of H.I.J.O.S, a social movement that set out to resolve the dichotomies of authority between the victims of pain, monopolising their own memory, and those memory agents who were not direct victims of the destruction but advocated for the intergenerational transference of memory to active memory. The great value of this movie's perspective was that it managed to reveal the aesthetic/political influences that this social group imprinted on their language. This movie made it clear that, by the end of this decade (1985-1996), it was no longer necessary, as Richard says, to represent "the past as the past". It was enough to represent "the past in the past". By putting our immediate present in front of the cameras, we had an image of dictatorial Argentina "some years later" (As Moulian proposed when looking at the Chilean case).

Having reviewed the fundamental aims of the synchronous analysis of each chapter, it is necessary to reflect on a diachronic reading of each of these axes through the three movies, in order to recognise their intertextual marks, with which, I believe, a semantic community has been built, that is, a new hermeneutic field that could coincide with the concept of "post-dictatorship

poetics" presented by Tomás Moulian (1997). In this new symbolic universe, three fundamental figures are represented and assimilated by this intertextual language: the testimony, the figure of the child of the disappeared and the allegory. As a result of the chronological deduction made about this movie trilogy, the figures of this semantic community are revealed to be the ideological and representational reference for the new cinematographic generation that came after it, at the end of the 1990s, where the stories are built from the remnants of that past observed in the present at the end of the millennium. It is in the importance of these representations for the next cultural decade that the performative possibilities of the cognitive map are verified in the post-dictatorial and postmodern Argentinian scene as a re-narration of collective historical memory.

On the testimony in the vector that reconfigures the interpretative frameworks

The new historical narrative formulated by *The Official Story* as a utopian narrativisation of the ideological text of the "agents of memory" was incorporated in a dialectical way into the hyperreal dynamics of the dominant discourse. This occurred on the basis of a reformulation of the founding interpretive frameworks of the hegemonic historiographical criteria, with which it was possible to provide a context in which to articulate and recognise the horrors of the dictatorial past. After this movie was analysed, such hegemonic historiographical criteria can be understood as the implementation of the strategy of neoliberal logic as well as the pattern of long-term domination, whose power is still felt under the democratic guise. This intervention in the construction of collective memory is achieved especially through the simulation of a new significant framework to locate those testimonies about repression that the discourse of official history of re-democracy overlooked. This reconstruction of the historical narrative is, simultaneously, a counter-hegemonic project because it helps the viewer to identify (directly or indirectly) with those affected by this horror. In creating this connection, the viewers are unbound from their condition of "guarantor audience" (Graziano, 1992), both of the atrocities of the past and of their justification in the hegemonic discourse of the present.

What was the evolution of the reconstruction of interpretation related to simulated testimony as an instrument of this operation in the other two movies analysed? In *A Wall of Silence,* it was no longer a question of a literal integration of real testimonies that in the fictional text will find a new

exemplary interpretation, as in *The Official Story*. Stantic's movie discusses that political/utopian simulation of testimony, that is, the very root of its discursive construction as a legitimate representation of the victim's experience is problematised. The need for analysis of this epistemological and moral conflict involved a distancing of this simulation. Testimony had to be separated from the "realistic" diegetic context of the movie and placed in a fictional background. With this, its rhetorical use within the narrative acknowledges its status as a simulation (as fiction within fiction) and as a representational aporia, while keeping its convenient effects of credibility and empathy in order to be able to tell a twofold story. One, in the second fiction level, is telling the story of the past as past, and the other, in the first level of the movie, is narrating the story of past in the past. The effect that spectators receive from this twofold testimonial simulation requires a deep elaboration of mourning in order to reconstruct the frames of signification that the movie has revealed to be irretrievably broken. The problematisation of the testimony in this case also involves the role of the spectator as a third subject in the reconstruction of memory. In *Buenos Aires Vice Versa*, the problem of testimonial simulation constitutes the very basis of its language, that is, the testimony has turned its dynamics of discursive construction into the body of the movie. The aspects of transmission of trauma in a "live" context and the need to return to the listener part of the witnessed conflict become the narrative and aesthetic drives of the movie. This is where the simulation remains as a discursive construction. The testimony provided by the movie aims at returning to the present and its inhabitants to make them witnesses of this social catastrophe, and, based on its narrative configuration, it brings to the text surface the moments of manifestation of such trauma in all the present textures of the social.

This reinterpretation of the truth, built on the basis of these three movies, manages to amplify the interpretative limits of destruction. Firstly, in a temporal sense, because these movies reveal how the horror of the past that the official discourse wanted to cancel exhibited its wounds and remains in the present. Secondly, in a spatial sense, because the scope of this trauma is no longer restricted to the directly affected victims, but society as a whole has also been involved in the catastrophe. Finally, in a causal sense, because its narrative links the violence of the dictatorship with the lack of justice and social and institutional support of democracy. This narrative proves the responsibilities of the economic/political program of neoliberalism with the acts of state terrorism during the dictatorship and political corruption during democracy.

This is the new version of truth, narrativised in the collective memory through its intertextual dynamics, whose common thread was, during this decade, the recurring figure of testimony as evidence to confront the empiricist discourse of the official history. It was also presented as an epistemological problem in the transmission of traumatic memory and, eventually, as a discursive dynamic capable of penetrating the filmic language to propose itself as the expression of a greater structural causality: the recovery of collective utopias. At this level, the analysed movies manage to reconstitute – within the social interpretative frameworks – the sense of belonging to the collective and the ideals of social change that the discourse of power had made disappear.

On the allegory in the axis of representation

If the historical re-narration of memory depended, to a great extent, on the deconstruction and intervention that cinema could exercise on the hegemonic historical narrative – and in circumstances where the latter was discursively authorised through hyperreal hegemonic channels – it is necessary to devote a few words to observations on the strategies used by these movies to venture into the institutionalisation of the truth. These aspects refer to the representation in and of the hyperreal dynamics of construction of the reality of history. We say "of" because it reveals in its narration the mechanics of hyperreal construction, that is, the discursive engineering with which certain texts are presented as realities or truths, which has to do with representation. We say "in" because it relies on the credibility that the texts of power carry within hyperreality, to be incorporated into this construction of reality with their own narrative of truth or ideological textualisation. This is what is understood in its strategies of narrativisation in the unconscious and its performativity.

The re-narration that this axis offers constitutes a problem of meta-intertextuality, and in all three cases the conflict is resolved by assuming an allegorical structure. Even though with different tones that go from utopia to nihilism, going through a melancholic state, allegory is presented as the appropriate organisation in each historical moment to account for this twofold game of the language of and in the construction of truth. Such processes correspond to the instances of textualisation and narrativisation of that truth in the political unconscious, while they account for the ideological representation of the hyperreal and its political intervention in the real. The allegory has been presented, then, as the ubiquitous strategy to generate an active memory that, in turn, could manage to overcome the

behavioural patterns of the spectators, that of an audience guaranteeing the atrocity. Consequently the movie stories increasingly impel the viewer to adopt the role of memory-builder, as they progressively oppose the cathartic stories of power which have always reproduced their condition as audience. The allegorical operation used by the movies here analysed was observed in a twofold way: the nature of the hyperreal texts that these movies questioned in their different moments of primacy, and how they did so inside and outside their diegesis.

Puenzo's movie had to confront the legal, media and political discourses that legitimised the official history. *A Wall of Silence* did the same against the political discourse of neoliberalism of the 1990s. It does not confront the media because at that time the journalistic scene was silent, instead, it confronted what the media and all society were not saying. *Buenos Aires Vice Versa* had to face up to the media's "violence of representation", which rendered the memory of the repression devoid of its political meaning, while updating fear and counting again on the audiences' guarantee. The "how" of this representation is also organic to the social scene that it addresses, that is, to the symbolic systems available at each moment to construct the allegory. In *The Official Story*, the allegorical structure is based on emblematic individual characters, who represent the social groups intervening in the negotiations of the realities of the past. On a second level, it places the sub-plot of Alicia's relationship with her students in order to metaphorise the negotiation in the political arena of the interpretative frameworks of the truth of the past. In terms of its political performative capacity, its allegory is utopian because an exemplary story lies behind the negotiations that it represents: that, with an individual story, all history can be re-narrated in the collective memory.

The use of allegory in *A Wall of Silence* addresses the conflicts that the breakdown of representation itself has left behind in symbolic languages and in the experience of reality. Stantic's movie presents itself as a Benjaminian allegory that reflects the conflict of representation between the breakdown of signifying frames and the loss of the word, on the basis of a representation that assumes that its own language has also been affected by this symbolic powerlessness. These two narrative levels reveal a melancholic state with no way out, but the allegory of the movie has an extra-diegetic dimension that is configured in the suprasensitive reading required of the viewer. This is where allegory ceases to be a melancholic abyss and becomes a textual narrativisation of another range of extra-narrative political referentiality that drives mourning.

In *Buenos Aires Vice Versa*, allegory resides in the unveiling of the conspiracy of market discourses to disorient the individual and make the inequity of power existing between the global order and the subjects fall on the individual. Here, too, there is an exhibition of two members, but these are not divided into levels in a dialectical way – as in the other two movies –, but are integrated into the story in the plot and aesthetics in a vice versa relationship. In this way, the allegory of conspiracy has a compact dimension, whose hermeneutic machinery is the representation of and through that same intensification dynamic of information and communication that it intends to criticise. Its story is built as a closed circuit of meanings that quote themselves so much that all meanings implode. For this reason, it may appear as a nihilistic story, but we must notice – as we did with the other two cases – that the allegory is the semantic expression of the cognitive map of re-narration of collective historical memory. Thus, it is still necessary to access the last level of the map, which embraces the issues related to the repercussions and exchanges between these stories and the social, that is, the syntactic organisation of this re-narration: that which has to do with the dialectical dimension outside the text to access the negotiations of the real.

H.I.J.O.S and the social cinema project from the perspective of the political performativity of the map

In its eagerness to reconstruct the interpretation frameworks for memory that connect what happened during the dictatorship to the post-dictatorial experiential present, this cinema has revealed certain aesthetic/political legacies of the art project of social commitment prior to the dictatorial outrage. The recovery of this aesthetic project is, for the group of movies analysed, the symbolic way of articulating the present with the utopian sense of the past. At the same time, using its narrative strategies, it confronts the discursive rupture of the signification of meanings of the past operated by the infinitely reproduced referentiality of power.

The three movies – in their intradiegetic allegorical presentation (utopian, melancholic and nihilistic) – could well appear in their intertextual dimension as exponents of a narration of the "end of history". The allegorical use of individual characters that always allude to political groups and social attitudes of solidarity and the reorganisation of the interpretative framework that expanded the boundaries of the catastrophe temporally, spatially and causally, draw attention to its possible intertextual relationship. The three belong to a semantic community where the cinematographic text is read as

an apparatus of hegemonic struggle or ideologemes of the utopian discourse of the collective.

The universe of meaning of post-dictatorship cinema continues to abide by the project of New Latin American Cinema in the 1960s. This emerged as a unified discourse that proposed – from an anti-historicist and anti-imperialist philosophical standpoint – to narrate the events of the past and present it within "the great collective history". In those years, greatly influenced by the Cuban Revolution, Latin American cinema began to show that if the traditional cinematographic narration codes had been used to affirm the idea of neo-colonialism, to invert the narrative codes of the hegemonic system would be a revolutionary strategy. Thus, New Latin American Cinema proposed itself as a restitution of the voice of popular culture because its works revealed the polemics with which the singularising voice of the hegemonic class had discursively appropriated its hermeneutics. In this sense, I can conclude that the group of post-dictatorship movies that I analyse can be included within those that were able to continue this project. I draw such conclusion even though during the post-dictatorial period they resorted to the allegorical form as a means to explain these dynamics, given that such dynamics could no longer be represented openly because what previously embraced these projects had disappeared. That is why I argue that the movies by Puenzo, Stantic and Agresti join efforts to construct the historical narrative in the political unconscious by sharing narrative/ideological aspects as they are ideologemes – their dimension of textualisation – and they can also be found in allegorical representation, which is their narrativisation strategy. That is how their cognitive map combines the ideological (textualisation) and the utopian (narrativisation), to provide a prescription of how postmodern reality is constructed.

This revelation of the controversies with which the singularising voice of the hegemonic class had discursively appropriated the hermeneutics of the popular class implied – in the beginnings of the New Latin American Cinema movement – the use of aesthetic violence. This was their strategy to account for the violence of exploitation, which involved exposing the crude and real document of hunger and misery. Glauber Rocha (1965, 59) said at the time: "only a culture of hunger, awakening all of its structures, can surpass itself qualitatively. The noblest cultural manifestation of hunger is violence". In the post-dictatorship movies analysed, another link in the discursive chain of hermeneutics appropriation has been added to the context of exploitation in which the directors find themselves: the "violence of representation" with which reality is portrayed, which gives back an image that has made disappear the traces of the violence of the system itself.

This is the violence of hyperreality that these three movies had to confront in an increasingly pronounced way. To represent with violence – in the best Cinema Novo style – means to represent with violence the violence of representation. For the three filmmakers studied, this implied increasingly attacking the codes and signs with which hyperreality assaults us misappropriating the real. It also implied reproducing another referentiality, that is, simulating another signification context that could be multiplied within the same plots of its semantic community, to reproduce meanings in a movement contrary to the implosion of meanings in post-modernity.

We agree that, by preserving the ideals of the collective over the individual, social change over exploitation, representation of violence over the violence of representation, the ideological agenda of the first post-dictatorial cinema continued the social cinema project of New Latin American Cinema. However, it becomes evident that it gradually detached itself from the place of spokesperson cinema, moving away from the panopticon relationship of the intellectual/artist who did not question their "legitimate" right to represent the subaltern. As such, in the cinema we are analysing, a deconstruction of this position occurs. *The Official Story* contests it alongside its own discussion of hegemonic history; *A Wall of Silence* makes this conflict irresolvable, it becomes the very theme of the movie, and *Buenos Aires Vice Versa* takes it to the point in which reality penetrates its own voice, that is, the conflicts of the real take over aesthetically those of representation.

In this way, these three movies share, at the level of their political performativity, the sense of belonging to the symbolic entity that unites them politically, ideologically, aesthetically and historically. Within the body of this new hermeneutic system images begin to appear, intertextual characters that, as symbols or representations of sectors and groups operating in social life, render the movie and its characters members of a collective discourse. The children of the disappeared become the material and symbolic trace of the memory of the exhaustion of that collective utopia. The representation of the child has served as a way of rewriting these movies in the logic of the ideologeme, that is to say, the child is revealed to be the unifying element that has intimately connected them.

With the figure of the child, the three movies engage in an intertextual narrative dialogue, where each movie leaves the conflict of memory unresolved as an open door for the next one to take up. Thus, *The Official Story*, set in 1983, concludes its story with a full shot of Gaby: the five-year-old girl rocking in the hammock and singing María Elena Walsh's song *In*

the country of "I don't remember". The image in penumbra, the girl's murmur, and the repetitive and incessant back-and-forth movement of the rocking chair suggest to the viewer the persistence of the conflict, which poses the question of what had happened to that generation. In 1993, *A Wall of Silence* is exhibited, which, set in 1990, presents another character from that generation, a 16-year-old adolescent whose father has been disappeared, and who is rebuilding or negotiating, together with the other characters, the fragments of the past with which to build the memory of what happened. At the end of the movie, the girl, at the door of one of the former clandestine detention camps, asks her mother if people knew what was happening. The mother replies that they all knew. At that moment, the girl looks at the camera, that is, directly at the viewer. The image freezes on that gaze with which the movie concludes. The child's gaze appears here as if urging a response from the viewer, from society as a whole, about the past and about the present. In 1996, *Buenos Aires Vice Versa* proposes a story that presents this generation as survivors or as marks of the social struggles of the past. The protagonist is now a 19-year-old girl, who knows about her condition: she has been adopted by her relatives and has spent her life thinking about her parents, feeling the need to meet them. The young woman's name is Daniela and, when looking at her, we cannot help but think of the little girl from *The Official Story*. There are many visual elements that suggest this connection: the almost childlike image of Dany in her clothes and with her braids, the similarity of their names – Gaby and Dany –, and the appearance of other secondary characters from *The Official Story* who, by reinscribing their image in Agresti's movie, remind the viewer's unconscious of that world of meaning. Let us remember that, at the end of Puenzo's movie, it is not known whether the little girl will be restored to her original family. It is quite possible that this did happen, that she was restored to her family and adopted by her uncle and aunt. It is worth establishing a relationship between these two characters not to impose this meaning on *Buenos Aires Vice Versa*'s author, but to recognise that this resource somehow enables closure in the counter-hegemonic discourse of the cinema after a decade of negotiations with memory. This is a gesture from self-referentiality that its own intertextual relations have created. From this universe of virtual signification, which is now part of Argentinian history, Agresti's movie reuses the utopian and mnemic trace that *The Official Story* left on the audience, when its allegory proposed that knowledge and acceptance of the truth were a step toward justice. Thirteen years later, on the apathetic and amnesic stage of sociability, after not only the crimes but also the pardons have been forgotten, Agresti's intertextual call is a sarcastic and painful gesture. The director shows the viewer, in a

rather violent way, the girl's fate and that of society after the frustrated fantasies of freedom and justice that re-democratisation wanted to promote and capitalist consolidation dismantled forever. It is her, the daughter of destruction, Gaby-Dany, that is entrusted with the job of representing the streets of neoliberal democracy. What else could have returned from this mythological market citadel other than "the image of its own blood"?

NOTES

Prologue

1- References are: Zizek, Slavoj. *Mirando al sesgo. Una introducción a Jacques Lacan a través de la cultura popula*r, (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2000 [1991]).

2- When in the 1980s and 1990s, *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of "Plaza de Mayo") claimed, even against all evidence, "Aparición con Vida" (Alive Return), they were not "asking for the impossible", but in reality they were making the persistence of such absence explicit, in an ethical dimension, making explicit the debt that could only be paid with the live return of those who are disappeared. As such, their demand ended with a phrase that brought out the political dimension of the claim: "and punishment to the guilty."

3- In other publications, I have pointed out the need to understand the prefix "post-" as a "critical reflection on" and not so much as a temporal reference, as Walter Mignolo suggests in relation to other terms using the same prefix.

4- Laws were repealed by the Argentine Parliament on August 12, 2003, and ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Justice on June 14, 2005.

5- On March 24, 2004, president Néstor Kirchner ordered Roberto Bendini, Head of the Army, to take down the pictures of Videla and Bignone from the walls of the hall of principals of the Argentine Military Academy.

6- We are aware of the particular characteristics of each historical process.

7- Foster, William. *Contemporary Argentine Cinema*, (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1992); King, John. *Magical Reels: a History of Cinema in Latin America*, (London: Verso, 1990)

Introduction

8-   The author quotes from Maurice Halbwachs, *The collective memory*
     (New York, Harper & Row Colophon Books, 1980), and by Gérard
     Namer. *Mémoire et société*. (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1987).

9-   I want to emphasise this concept as it is an important part of our
     reflection. The Lacanian conception of "signifying chain" presupposes
     Ferdinand de Saussure's thesis that meaning is not a linear relationship
     between the signifier and the signified, between the language
     materiality (a word, a name) and a concept or referent. Meaning is born
     out of the relation that a signifier establishes with another signifier.
     What we generally call meaning – an enunciation's conceptual content
     – now becomes a meaning effect, such as the objective reflection of the
     signification generated and projected by signifiers among themselves.
     If this relation is broken, if the link between the signifiers of the chain
     is fractured, that leads to schizophrenia, in the form of an amalgam of
     different unrelated signifiers.

10- Here Baudrillard refers to the process of abstraction of exchange value
     and use value. According to the author, it is not just that the simulation
     turns against capital, but also that, in its attempt to stop it, capital
     multiplies its signs and accelerates simulation, which, in turn,
     dismantles power, turning it into power simulation.

11- Analysts such as the authors of the Critical Scene with Nelly Richard,
     Alberto Moreiras, Idelber Avelar and Tomás Moulian, as well as
     Elizabeth Jelin and Beatriz Sarlo in Argentina, have agreed with this
     perspective also essayed by Nestor García Canclini, George Yúdice,
     John Beverley, Fredic Jameson and Jesús Martín Barbero, among
     others.

12- Torres Rivas (1981, 87-132) refers to the dialectic relationship between
     the concepts of nation and state for the configuration of bourgeois
     reality. He unveils how the global bourgeoisie chooses a national form
     to give the universality of its interests a national shape, and from then
     on, the national state emerges as a political expression of a
     generalisation. In this sense, we could understand the idea of
     nationalism as the popular illusion that the bourgeois project supports,
     that is, the representation of the national state as an ahistorical vehicle

of power, as an instrument of government with autonomy in capitalist social relationships.

13- The phrases that are shown between commas correspond to expressions from the rhetoric of the military regime: words narrativised within common sense by media and official press releases.

14- The system of forced disappearances had been designed based on the bipolar rhetoric of the Christ-Antichrist Catholic myth and the Cold War's order-chaos myth. In this way, dissident groups were referred to in a particular way: trade unions were "the industrial front", high school and university students were "subversion in the educational field" and, in cultural activities, "the subversive message is expressed in its most innocent way." As a result of the Dirty War, as the official discourse called it, most disappeared people were between 20 and 30 years of age, the "infiltrated youth", as they made up 70% of the total. This explains why organic dissidence came from the mothers and grandmothers of those disappeared youngsters.

15- The system itself exerts institutional violence by denying the knowledge or responsibility of the evidence of the disappearance, either through judicial bureaucracy, the double standards of the Catholic Church, the messages from the media that showed alleged confrontations, among others. Finally, this shaped a common sense that led to public identification with the repressors and gave rise to sentences such as "there must be a reason for this", or "they must have done something", which helped build psychological comfort so as to face terror and restore meaning to a confusing context.

16- *Gatillo fácil* or "trigger-happy", is the term used by the media for illegal acts of abuse of police power where shots are fired at will in the name of security policies such as "zero tolerance" from Menem's era. In many cases, the victims were subjects marginalised by the system and by Market policies themselves, subjects for whom criminality was their last chance of survival.

17- We will elaborate on Mothers of Plaza de Mayo's performance when discussing Chapter I

Chapter I

18- It is worth recalling that Madres de Plaza de Mayo were excluded from political negotiations carried out during the multi-party meetings of the democratic transition, because they demanded that the search for the truth about political disappearances were disregarded as part of political negotiations, and so this directly compromised the neoliberal economic system.

19- For "Mothers", culprits are whoever did it, whoever participated, whoever could have prevented it but did not, whoever could have helped but did not. From this perspective, historical responsibility and guilt extends to politicians, trade unionists and journalists, as they were people in charge of groups with the capacity to question the decisions of those in power.

Chapter II

20- We refer to Avelar's proposal, when he incorporates in his analysis the studies of Nicolás Abraham and Maria Torok on cryptonymy en Yassa, M. (2002). Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok—the inner crypt. *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review*, *25*(2), 82-91.
DOI: 10.1080/01062301.2002.10592734

21- The author quotes from Severo Sarduy, *Ensayos generales sobre el barroco*. (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987)

22- In this scene, it is clear what a speech by the Madres is like: that which, with shouts, denounces the events of the military repression to be part of the economic program that today continues in democratic times and which boasts its omnipotence through the impunity of the pardons.

23- We refer to Ancient Greece, when grieving women took the public space to mourn, whereby, metaphorically, they established the irreducibility of mourning in the polis and forced the state to acknowledge it.

Chapter III

24- Let us remember that, in Jameson's view, the cognitive map is the metaphor of the process of the political unconscious, it is the model of

how subjects are prevented from recognising their imaginary relationship with their actual conditions of existence. In this way, the map works as a simulation, as a prosthesis, to understand what we would be unable to represent without it.

25- I refer to the cinematographic, art, dramatic and musical production, as much as to entities such as *Madres* and *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, H.I.J.O.S, and, in general, to those devoted to the defense of human rights.

26- This film appears the year after H.I.J.O.S was created, who had already been publicly introduced by the *Madres* and *Abuelas* discourse, and in the language of fiction in the movies that we have analysed, among others, where they were the topic of conflict.

27- Strictly speaking, this is not the case of all shopping centres, but it must be accepted that this subtext remains in the collective unconscious, if we make an epochal connection between the disappearance of the public school and the simultaneous appearance of the private space for exhibition and sale of private products, which, in turn and ultimately, has displaced public school as a symbolic space of transmission of civic values.

28- Silent majority is a concept from sociology and politics. It refers to that sector of the population that does not express their opinions in public. The concept is used by political leaders to express their own legitimacy, and that of their decisions in the face of mass protests against them, alleging that the majority of people, although they do not join the demonstrations, express their agreement with their silence.

29- In *Althusser and his contemporaries: Philosophy's perpetual war*. Duke University Press, 2013. Warren Montag states that, for Althusser, "ideology has a material essence", which is consubstantial with prescribed apparatuses, practices, rituals and discourses, where it is said to be expressed. This set of problems led him to formulate the concept of "structural causality", keeping the notion of structure, but only as a structure that is, strictly speaking, absent as it only exists by virtue of its effects. To a large extent, this concept derives from Althusser's reading on Spinoza's idea of immanent cause.

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